

160 | PRESS RELEASE

DAVID CLAERBOUT The woodcarver and the forest

5 February – 21 March 2026

Annet Gelink Gallery is pleased to present the third solo show by David Claerbout at the gallery. At the heart of the exhibition is Claerbout's newest video work, *The woodcarver and the forest* (2025).



The woodcarver and the forest unfolds around two central figures: a solitary woodcarver and the forest that surrounds him. Set in a large house deep in the woods, the film follows a man who spends his days ceaselessly carving wooden spoons, recalling craft practices often embraced as analogue antidotes to screen fatigue and as ways of reconnecting with nature. The slow, repetitive gestures of carving and the soft yet sharp sounds they produce evoke a sense of calm and focused attention, while introducing a subtle irony into the work as it questions comfort, attention, and the mechanisms through which contemporary art seeks to engage its audience. Over the course of the film, which represents two different days in the timespan of 13 years, there is a quiet and constant shift between inside and outside, until it becomes apparent that the forest has almost entirely disappeared. The final day of the 13 years is represented in black and white photographs.

Originally trained in painting and drawing, David Claerbout works across photography, video, digital technology, and sound. His practice centers on questions of temporality and duration, producing images that invite an experience of dilated time, perception, and memory. In *The woodcarver and the forest*, the forest is presented less as a concrete ecosystem than as an image — an idea of nature rather than a dense, living environment — evoking a dreamlike atmosphere that feels at once calm and strangely hollow. Framed by the architecture of the house, the forest becomes a staged backdrop, an idealized scene held at a distance, available for contemplation and consumption. This dichotomy is central to the work, as the woodcarver's engagement with nature remains indirect and carefully controlled. He seemingly never ventures outside to gather wood; logs appear ready for use, suggesting an unseen network of labour that supports his retreat. The spoons he carves are never used but accumulated and hung, detached from function. What initially appears as a meditative devotion gradually reveals itself as a paradoxical form of withdrawal that depends on infrastructure, resources, and social organization.

As the forest subtly thins and eventually vanishes, the film unsettles the promise of a simple “return to nature,” constructing a retreat that is sealed off from the natural world it claims to reconnect with, ultimately exhausting it instead. Nature is not encountered directly but through an already culturally produced representation, filtered by aesthetics and systems of production, a distance enforced by the glass offering panoramic views of the forest. As the man devotes himself entirely to woodcarving as a self-fulfilling pursuit, the film points to the conditions that make such a lifestyle possible. His apparent solitude is not outside society but deeply embedded within it, supported by invisible forms of work and care.

Through its restrained pacing and carefully composed imagery, *The woodcarver and the forest* offers a quiet reflection on contemporary desires for escape, sustainability, and self-sufficiency. Rather than presenting retreat as a refusal of society, the work reveals how such fantasies remain shaped and ultimately sustained by the economic, technological, and cultural structures they seek to step away from.

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David Claerbout (1969, Kortrijk, Belgium) lives and works in Antwerp. He has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions internationally, including: the cloud collection, Nanjing (2025); Korschthal Esch, Luxemburg (2025); Kasteel van Gaasbeek, Gaasbeek (2025); Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris (2025); Centraal Museum, Utrecht (2024); Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei City (2023); Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee (2022); De Pont Museum, Tilburg (2021, 2016, 2009); Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2021); Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide (2020) and Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague (2020); Kunst Museum Winterthur, Winterthur (2020); Les Abattoirs, Toulouse (2018); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz (2018); Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh (2018); Pinacoteca de São Paulo, Sao Paulo (2017), Schaulager, Basel, Switzerland (2017); Parasol Unit, London (2012). Claerbout's work is included in major public collections, including: Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; The Museum of Modern Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Margulies Collection, Miami; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Galerie Neue Meister, Dresden; GAM – Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin; De Pont Museum, Tilburg; M HKA – Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp; S.M.A.K., Ghent; Collection François Pinault; and Fondation Louis Vuitton.