

Flat Rate Contemporary 18 (2024)

“To the Pigeons”  
by Andy Demczuk

Katherine Hayles declares in her pivotal work *Writing Machines* that, “Literature was never only words, never merely immaterial verbal constructions. Literary texts, like us, have bodies, and actuality necessitating that their materiality and meanings are deeply interwoven into each other.” The connection between literature and the corporeal is an enduring theme that threads through art, music, writing, and the rhetorical mode of Invention.

I thought of Roland Barthes’ *the Pleasure of the Text*, how, for him, reading is an all-encompassing experience that involves pleasure, pain, and jouissance. In an interview, Barthes speaks of how every text he has ever written was in some way, bodily sacrifice—his back ached, his arm fatigued from writing, etc. At one point he mentions an organ that he had to have taken out. He kept it in a napkin on some shelf, and years later, he unraveled it out of his window while cleaning his Parisian apartment, muttering in baritone French, *there goes another text to the pigeons*.

*Flat Rate Contemporary 18* is an online exhibition featuring nine artists from all over the world. In it, we travel and see the physical traces left by a group of vivid story tellers. *How about here and here and here?*—they all seem to ask of us, questions to contemplate and relish in. And each image is a testament to the movements these artists make with their bodies and minds each day—much like dancers, their marks are drawn with music of hand and arm. I hear with my eyes, stories sung in 2D, and I am one content pigeon.

As a words-person, one of the first things I noticed when navigating this exhibition was the titles, when read together, they create a surreal collage poem:

*Wishing Pools 1, 2, 3*  
*A Reef, A Desert, A Mountain*  
*Figures in Fractals Free Standing*  
*Sun Kizz Showers Untitled*  
*Ángel Gris Diablo Infierno,*  
*Make the devil bite the angel dust,*  
*she texted me her dream last night*  
*my wife bought me nike shoes for only 40 Euros*  
*Ace of Wands Past Moons Light A Dream*  
*New Feeling, Etcetera Etcetera,*  
*Grazers Springtime*  
*Seneca Shadows, A Harbinger’s Song.*

(Titles in order by Casey Sayer Brooks, Eleanor Mahin Thorp, Gemma Carson, Iván Reyes, Jiacun Li, Julieta Feresin, Lauren Kolesinskas, Naomi Basu, Noah Hook.)

What are these *New Feelings*?

I see the text-as-body resurfacing in every work—images where viewers are invited to decipher the intricate connections between the physical self, the metaphysical geometry of imagined realms, and the narratives that these spaces-between-realities presents. From the bowels of the underworld to serene micro moments in a cell of an organism, this show has a lot to offer.



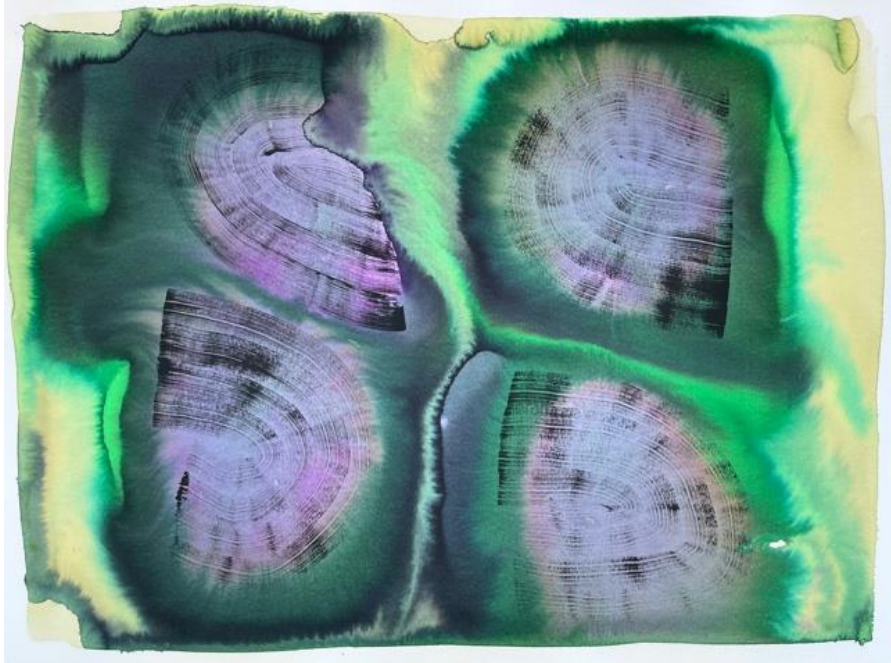
Eleanor Mahin Thorp's *Figures of Fractals* rides the line of void and light, exposure and decay. A triad chord of grey, black, and white creates a chiaroscuro effect that glows from the screen. Forms of faces, legs, noses, flowers, and animals mélangé together in the upper third before a deep shadow takes control as the eye travels downward. The middle of the image displays a coral-like structure, that appears to be a collection of thin bones or vertebrae receding into the dark. Heads of horses and majestic insects can be interpreted in the bottom left quadrant. Viewing this piece is like peering into a pond that is endlessly interesting.



Iván Reyes' *Infierno* is a nightmare cosmic-horror adventure, populated by demons reminiscent of Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Vasquez's *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac*. Dwelling in this space is unsettling, but also one can't help but admire the attention to detail and the repetitive labor of the background made entirely of short sketch marks densely layered, as if the drawing etched itself into being. The piece is framed with stacked geometric lines—crucifixes morphing into swords—as our eye reaches the top middle sun shape, we are met with an explosion of sharp objects which draws the gaze back to the center spiral. Lost in a space full of scratches, possessed. If we stay long enough, we might notice the ground that consists of faces looking upward as if the cobble stones of hell were paved of them—muscular necks attached to each stone. This is an itchy drawing.



*Showers* by Gemma Carson entrances the viewer by choice of medium, intuitive color arranging, figurative forms, and sketch-like line work. Surface cracks mimic city roadways, while a central face dominates, casting shadows of other faceless figures upon itself. They move about in plumes. On the left side, an elegant leg frames the face, the slightly bent knee creates a subtle pose frozen in time. The lines of the main face appear to be originating out of its nostril—an embodiment of smell. This could be someone drawing with an incense stick. I enjoy paintings where the eye can follow the lines like in a Zen meditation, RIP Brice Marden. *Showers* is smokey and ephemeral, yet painted on ceramic, one of the most permanent of mediums.



The vibrant *Wishing Pools* of Casey Sayer Brooks exhibit a masterclass in balanced saturation. Vapor-wave-all-day-long, the pattern of four swashes of lavender is framed by a green chroma so high in intensity one could confuse it for the aura borealis. The watercolor blooms create a cloud-wave that is in mid curl. A center line tilts upward and to the right at a mythic crossroads. Don't forget your surfboard with this painting. I feel it in my chest.



As if something out of a Yorgos Lanthimos film, *Grazers* by Naomi Basu takes us into a Hindu inspired dream, ripe with inner logic and lore. The mise-en-scène features a cow wearing high heels, on a chair, smoking a cigarette, with large explanatory hands, like a 1960s French philosopher being interviewed. Four figures seem to be entranced by the cow's teachings. The woman on the left is presumably getting her palm read or receiving some divine energy. The middle figure has plant matter coming out of her mouth—she is in the position of a cow, eyes closed and enlightened. On the right, a figure is sitting with hands flat in a contemplative pose. The background consists of a tastefully rendered monstera plant and a fourth humanoid sporting a moustache peering in from the outside—a voyeur seeking transcendence. Transspecies.



When viewing art in 2023, the state of the world is omnipresent—the destruction of our environment has reached a point of no return. There is no serious regard for the insects, plants, roots, microorganisms, that keeps the biosphere in balance. Artists often feel that what they do is not helping the actual problems of climate change and habitat destruction. They ask, *what can we really do with such complex, scientific and political issues?* I offer no answers, but what I've seen here is a great example that artists can plant seeds in the minds of other creatives. And choose not to participate in humanities' profit-driven onward strut—mindlessly high-heeling into oblivion. *Oops*. A zig-zag comic graphic cloud appears over the word, as chaos develops underneath. A shoe breaks and no one can fix it. The worms are unsettled—the nameless stars of this scene from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

HAMLET A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

CLAUDIUS What dost thou mean by this?

HAMLET Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.

With *FRC18*, the body of this assemblage exists as a *text vitale*, traveling from the beginnings of a thought in the mind of the artists through the ethers of the internet. And they are etched with hauntings and stories of interconnectivity but also beauty and stillness. Just as Barthes released his dried organ dust from his window, these artists share their creations to the world, woven with their own materiality and meaning. Through each piece, the exhibition echoes Katherine Hayles' assertion: words, like art, are more than mere constructs—they are living, breathing entities, entwined with life as we consume or move through them.