

APRÈS COUP

TRANSFORMING TRAUMA INTO ART

March 19-May 3, 2018

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SAMIRA ABBASSY

SUSAN ERONY

JOUMANA JABER

MIRIAM KATIN

jc lenochan

LANCE LETSCHER

RUTH LIBERMAN

TYSON ROBERTSON

STEPHANIE SERPICK

Curated by HALLIE COHEN

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Après Coup: Transforming Trauma into Art is an exhibition conceived and presented in tandem with the conference, *Translating Trauma into Art and Literature*.

Iranian born and UK educated, *Samira Abbassy's* colorful and culturally resonant paintings explore intergenerational trauma through a personal and mythological lens. *Susan Erony's* "Tower of Babel" series was created in direct response to the Nazi's efforts at racial profiling as a justification for genocide. *Joumana Jaber's* photographs reflect her experience with chemotherapy, juxtaposing it with the chemical attacks on citizens in her homeland of Syria. The graphic novels of the Hungarian-born artist, *Miriam Katin*, are drawn from her experiences as a Holocaust survivor and a mother whose grown son chooses to live in Germany. *jc lenochan's* hand-crafted chalk drawings and fabricated objects reveal a sophisticated critique of the ways and means of confronting cultural bias, while the relentless accumulation of materials in *Lance Letscher's* collages attest to the memory and history of childhood trauma. *Ruth Liberman*, born in Frankfurt, Germany, presents a wall of captions in which the accompanying photographs of atrocities from concentration camps are hauntingly absent. Her nose drawings are comprised of diarized testimonies by survivors. *Tyson Robertson's* search for the alcoholic father he never met is documented in an ironic photo album format. The aftermath of personal and political anguish is recorded in *Stephanie Serpick's* series of hyper-realistically executed oil paintings.

The work of these artists is characterized by a shared commitment to creating in the face of adversity.

Hallie Cohen, Professor of Art, Director of the Hewitt Gallery

TRAUMA AND INSIGHT

By Francis Levy

Alongside the scars and distortions produced by terrible childhoods there are some strengthening effects: some survivors appear to have derived from their experiences adaptive powers and talents that helped them survive... This enhancement of certain gifts is analogous to what has been observed in those who have survived wars and concentration camps.

– Leonard Shengold, M.D., *Soul Murder*

The psychoanalytic term “après-coup” refers to the latent effects of childhood trauma. The Hewitt Gallery exhibition *Après Coup* deals with individual as well as collective trauma and is comprised of work by artists dealing with themes as varied as genocide and war to racial stigmatization and addiction.

In her paper “Après-coup” (*International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, February 2005) the psychoanalyst Haydée Faimberg cites Jean Laplanche thusly, “The notion of *après-coup* is important for the psychoanalytical concept of temporality. It establishes a complex and reciprocal relationship between a significant event and its resignification in afterwardsness, whereby the event acquires a new psychic efficiency.”

Victims of either familial or societally induced trauma exhibit a wide span of behaviors from sociopathy to a kind of altruism that has proved beneficial to those who have endured similar experiences. The painters van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec, and writers Chekhov and Dickens, suffered greatly as children but channeled their pain into art. Primo Levi imprisoned by the Nazis went on to become a great writer, though he would later succumb to suicide.

Harnessing painful experiences into creative expression is a little like alchemy to the extent that it turns the worthless legacy of human destruction into the gold of insight and empathy. The various forms of art (painting, photography, sculpture, and writing) can provide coping mechanisms, which allow victims to translate negative emotions and memories into a visual or written language.

Après Coup will also examine the response to trauma on an intergenerational basis, presenting the works of artists whose parents or ancestors suffered an earlier personal or historical trauma. The challenge of curating this exhibition therefore lies in balancing aesthetic and creative criteria against the stark realities of pain and suffering, out of which many of the works were conceived.

Francis Levy, who was co-founder and co-director of The Philoctetes Center, is a novelist and critic.

SAMIRA ABBASSY

The subject of my work in general is how to reveal the figure as a whole human being with all of its psycho/emotional parts. The challenge is how to depict "a state of being" rather than making an objective portrait of the figure, and incorporating the incorporeal aspect of our human state. My work can be described as autobiographical, and perhaps even confessional. The canvas becomes a place of self-examination "a mirror of inclusion," a place to contextualize the Self and establish an identity. The central figure appears as an archetype rather than a literal attempt at self-portraiture, as if attempting to depict myself from the inside out, starting with how it feels to be me, or rather, how it feels to be human.

The figure takes on various avatars evoking archetypes from various traditions; Greek myths, Old Testament stories, Hindu deities and Muslim folklore. The titles offer clues to their source of intellectual, cultural, mental, spiritual and emotional dilemmas, with which we all struggle. By excavating the art of cultures that were considered to be outside the "Western Canon" (Indian, Persian, Tibetan, Hindu/ Muslim/ Buddhist etc.), I concoct fictional or mythological histories. By fusing together disparate languages, conventions and myths, I'm seeking an iconography of hybridism, where their underlying common threads can be found. My work attempts to transcend cultural boundaries by proving the porous nature of cultural influence through migration, both historically and currently.



By the Third of Her Generation • Oil on Gesso Panel, 48" X 36", 2016



Reincarnated Fears • Oil on Gesso Panel, 48" X 36", 2016



Detail

SUSAN ERONY

I became interested in eugenics in 1990 while researching European genocide and American racism. Going back to the roots of eugenical thinking in the Enlightenment was the key that focused my curiosity on how societies legitimize and institutionalize discrimination and worse. Enlightenment thinkers, humanist and often anti-slavery, prized order and ideal beauty, and sought to understand how living beings are related in a comprehensible scheme. Many believed humans came from one common ancestor, that external appearance reflected internal intellectual and moral worth, and that the laws governing the world could be discovered by scientific observation and reasoning.

The Holocaust provides a glaring case study of the transformation of eugenical ideas from their Enlightenment roots to those of the 20th century. Though the National Socialists based policies on American models and had no monopoly on dehumanization, the overt nature, high involvement of professionals, and extreme level of documentation made it so. I chose, in two pieces for the current exhibition, to focus on such documentation, and in one to focus on those who suffered because of those documents. To an unprecedented extent, German science crossed the line from observation to manipulation in the sense in which it is used in art, and entered the realm of myth. The dangers in doing so were the thoughts behind the three pieces for this exhibit.



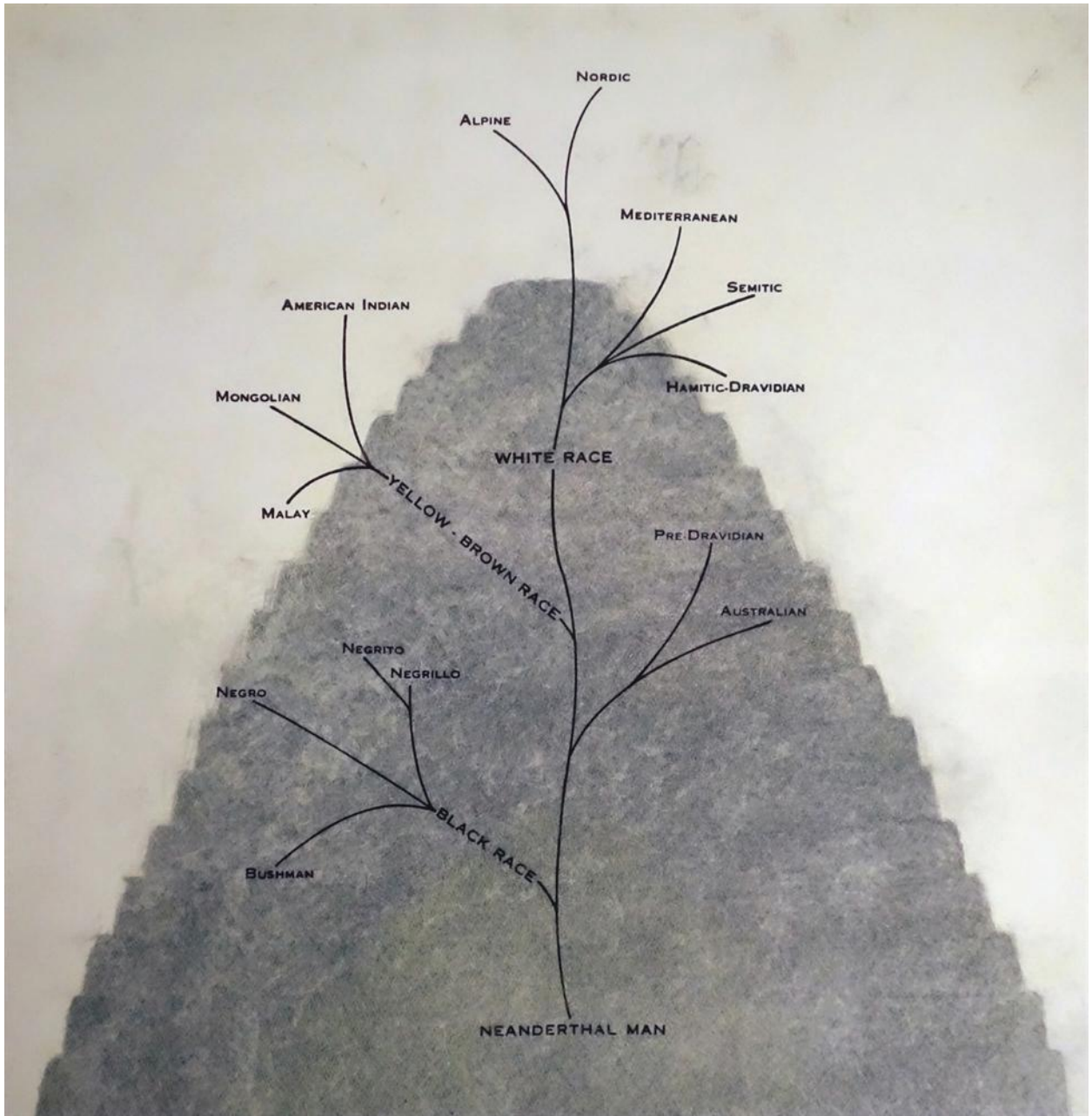
BERLIN ... 1. Sept. 1939.

Reichsleiter B o u h l e r u n d
D r . m e d . B r a n d t

s i n d u n t e r V e r a n t w o r t u n g b e a u f t r a g t , d i e B e f u g -
n i s s e n a m e n t l i c h z u b e s t i m m e n d e r A r z t e s o z u e r -
w e i t e r n , d a s s n a c h m e n s c h l i c h e m E r m e s s e n u m h e i l t a r
K r a n k e n b e i k r i t i s c h s t e r B e u r t e i l u n g i h r e s K r a n k -
h e i t z s t a n d e s d e r G r a d e n t o d g e w i h r t e r d e n k a n n .

H. Himmler

*Von Buehler mit
übergeben am 29.8.40
Dr. Gietner*



Tower of Babel: Tree of Races • Inkjet print on paper, 22.7" x 22", 2016



Tower of Babel: Useless Eaters • Inkjet print on paper, 22.7" x 22", 2016

JOUMANA JABER

These photographs reflect my experience with chemotherapy and the chemical weapons being used in Syria. The feelings and memories that I have from the chemotherapy have been stuck in my soul for a very long time. I have become healthier after the treatment, but recently the chemical weapons that have been used on my people/country has brought back that pain and trauma. This brought me to the idea of how chemicals can both treat and kill people.

Jumana Jaber is an established interdisciplinary professor of the arts whose portfolio spans art and design. Born in Syria, Dr. Jaber received her doctorate in Poland, where she lived for seven years. That enabled her to interact with Polish artist and art. Returning to Syria, she established one of the first theater and design undergraduate degree programs at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus. Additionally, she restored a number of traditional buildings that are hundreds of years old and which represent the unique architecture of Damascus and AL-Sewaida. As the violence in Syria escalated, Dr. Jaber sought urgent assistance from the IIE, (Institute of International Education) helping educators leave areas of conflict.



Chemo Therapy and Chemical Weapons 1 • Digital photograph, 15" x 15", 2017



Chemo Therapy and Chemical Weapons 3 • Digital photograph, 15" x 15", 2017



Chemo Therapy and Chemical Weapons 5 • Digital photograph, 31" x 22", 2018

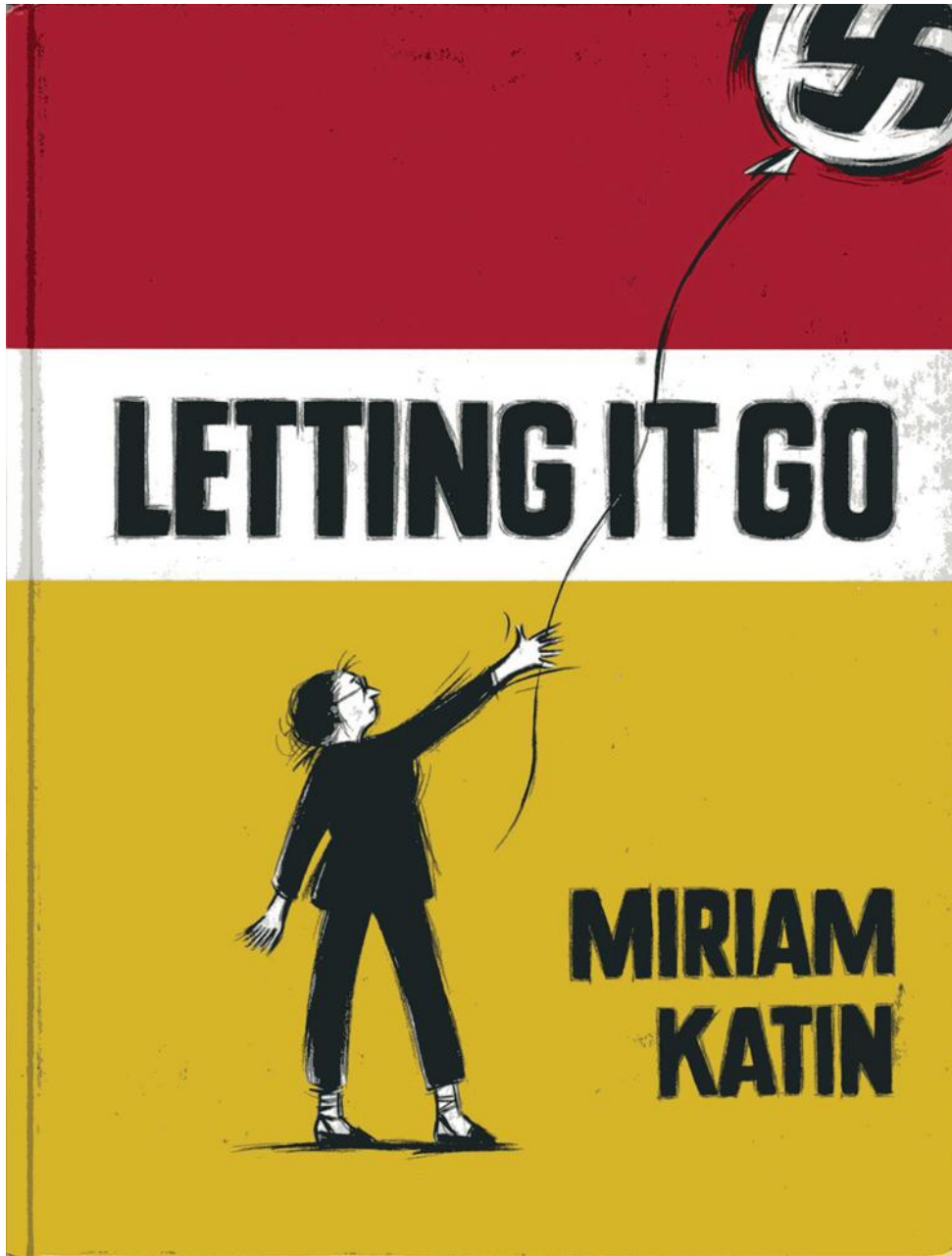
MIRIAM KATIN

I was born in Hungary during WWII. As far as I can remember there just seemed to have been a war which reminded people of other wars or that war was imminent. A revolution expected, happened, was over... what is next... This made for strange behavior with warped sentiments and scruples all around. While one is swimming as well as one can in this murky environment things do puzzle. In pictures and few words I am trying to find the line connecting events, people, causes and results. There is also of course the pleasure of just looking on...

WE ARE ON OUR OWN



A MEMOIR BY MIRIAM KATIN



Letting It Go • Drawn & Quarterly (a client publisher of Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 2013

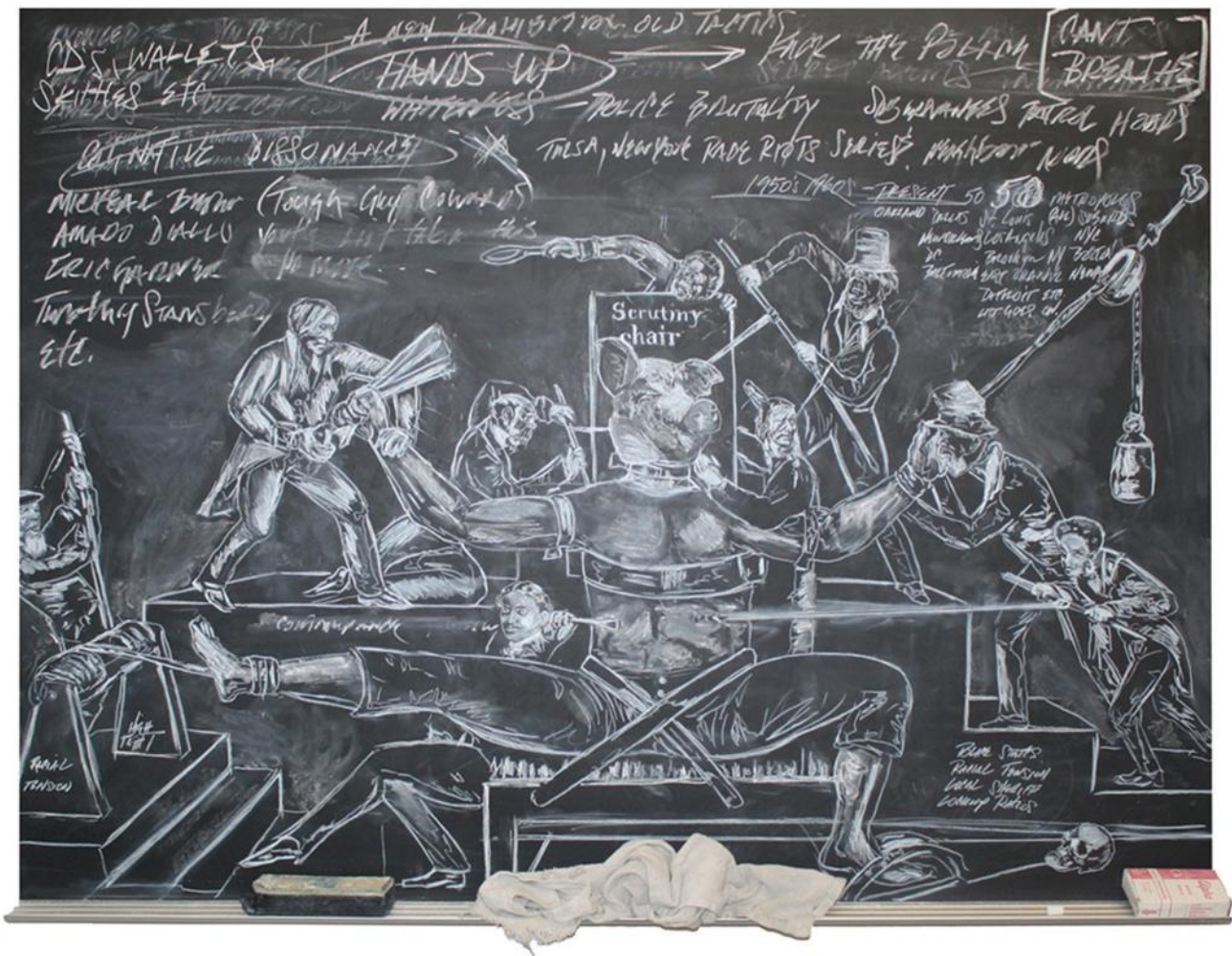


jc lenochan

The work is a critique of epistemology through the process of deconstructing objects and de-circulating institutional relics. Through investigative research, drawing, riffs on traditional sculpture and performance-based installations, my interests and concerns pursue ideas of re-appropriation and misrepresentation of images, text or forms that already exist. Personal/historical narratives embodying Socratic methods of questioning and humor as a post-colonial pedagogical dialogue on manipulating perspective of the dominant ideology, confronting cultural bias, perceptions of otherness and racial fabrications are an ongoing subject of my art.



Unfinished business: this civil question of slavery being dead • Chalk on Paper, 32" x 40", 2012-present



Unfinished business: the scrutiny of knowing too much too little too late • White chalk on chalkboard with rag and eraser, 36"x48", 2014-2015



psychological injury that plagues our youth • 23" high

LANCE LETSCHER

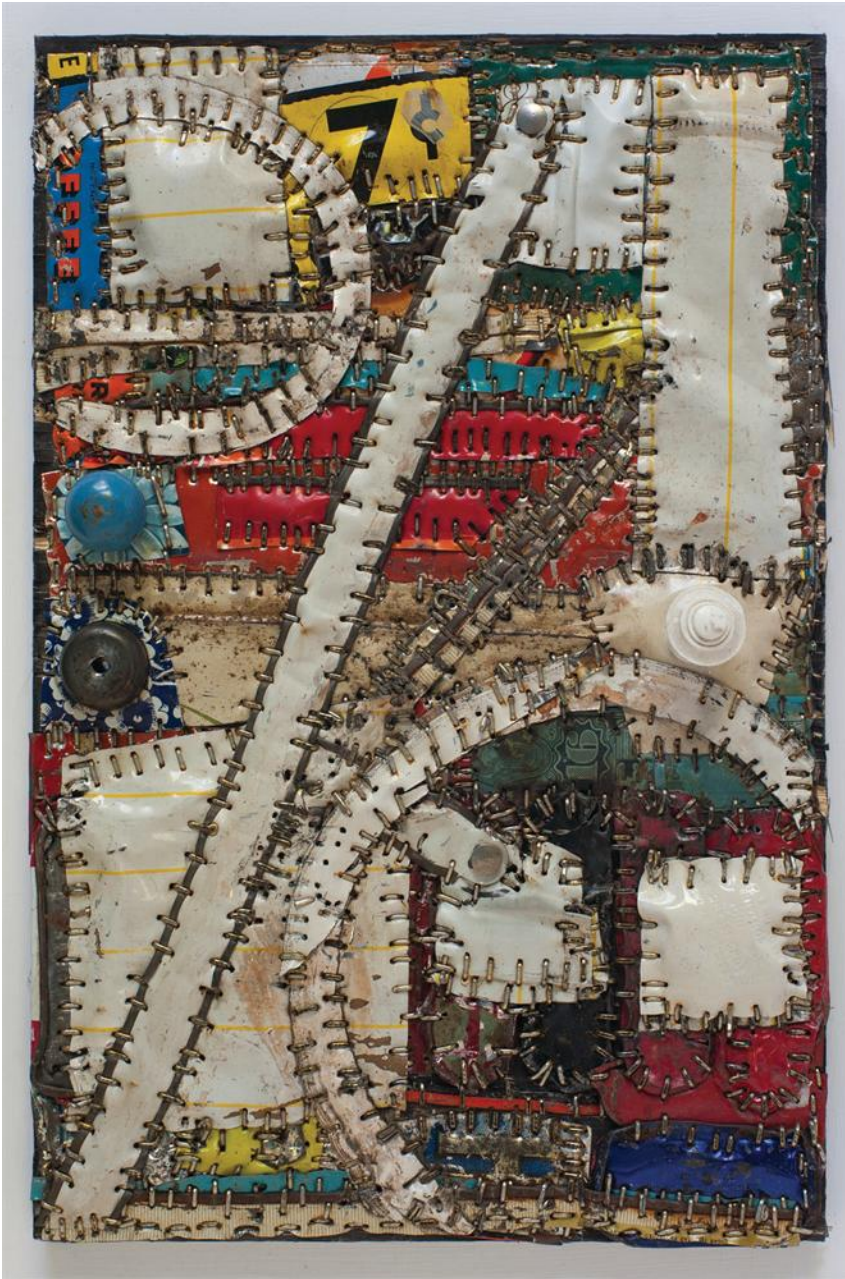
It's not a premeditated decision to pursue the work in a certain emotional tone or psychological tone or thematic direction. It's more guided by intuition and availability of materials. I'll just start out cold without an idea and the materials will start to dictate the direction of the piece and as I see something becoming realized, then I push it.

- LL

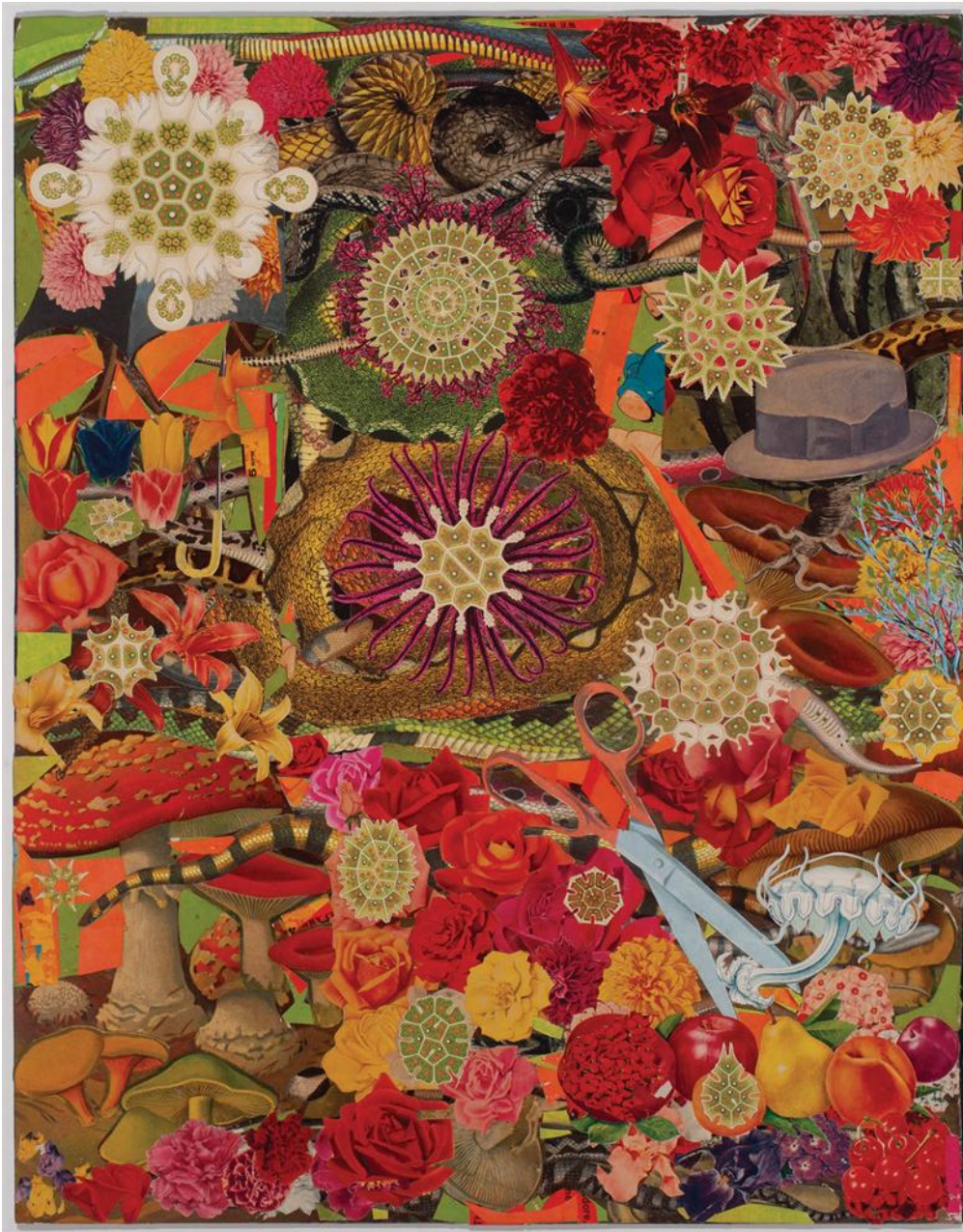
From a reservoir of largely vintage ephemera, Letscher creates a dense pictorial space in which words, images, colors and shapes tell a story about the world we imagined for ourselves as children and the often-painful real world we experience as adults.

-Pavel Zoubok Gallery

Images courtesy of the artist and Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York



One Percent • Metal and Staples, 12" x 8", 2017



Little Garden • Collage, 22.5" x 17.5", 2017



Corner Cabinet • Collage, 22" x 17", 2017

RUTH LIBERMAN

In the series "Nose drawings," the text, partially covering a pencil drawing of a nose, is produced by writing with a fine dental instrument over typewriter film ribbon pressed against the paper. An imprint of the text is left on the paper, randomly covering writing with writing. The texts were transcribed from various diaries written by Jews in different locations all over Europe between 1939 and 1944. The diarists all survived the war. Each drawing contains one day of a diary.

Some news photographs have stirred the world and entered the public consciousness of the time and beyond. One such image, taken a few days after the liberation of the German concentration camp Buchenwald, shows American soldiers watching German civilians looking at a wagon loaded with corpses. It was the practice of American troops to force local Germans to witness the atrocities committed in their neighborhood and in their name. *Released (April 16, 1945)* does not show the photograph. In its stead are photographic enlargements of different captions that accompanied the same picture in various publications, published in different newspapers at the time as well as in a 1985 publication and a book from 1998.



Dresden, 16 and 17 September 1935 • Pencil and typewriter film carbon on paper, 12 x 9" (22 x 18.5" framed with glass), 1998



Released (April 16, 1945) • Installation, 14.5" x 250" x 2", 2000



sch mit Leichen beladenen Wagen.

When 3rd Army troops had occupied Buchenwald two days before, that tough old soldier, General Patton, had been so incensed at what he saw that he ordered his police to go through Weimar, of which Buchenwald is a suburb, and bring back one thousand civilians to make them see with their own eyes what their leaders had done. The MP's were so enraged that they brought back two thousand.

—Margaret Bourke White



CONFRONTED WITH THE EVIDENCE.

of Weimar forced to stand and look at truckload of dead prisoners.

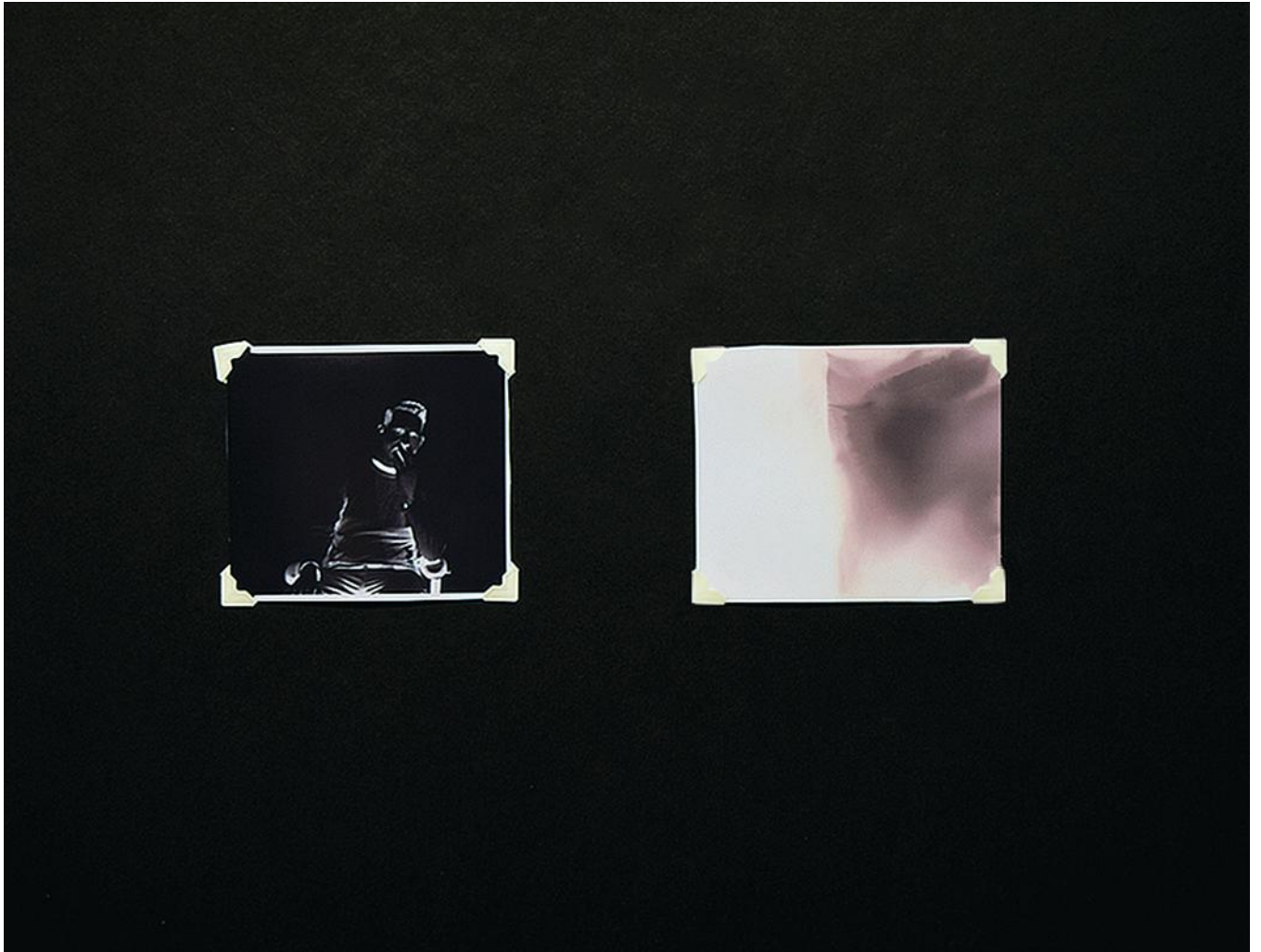
TYSON ROBERTSON

At the age of 30 I began to try and find my father who I had never met. I was unsuccessful but did manage to locate family members who knew him and provided me with images of him.

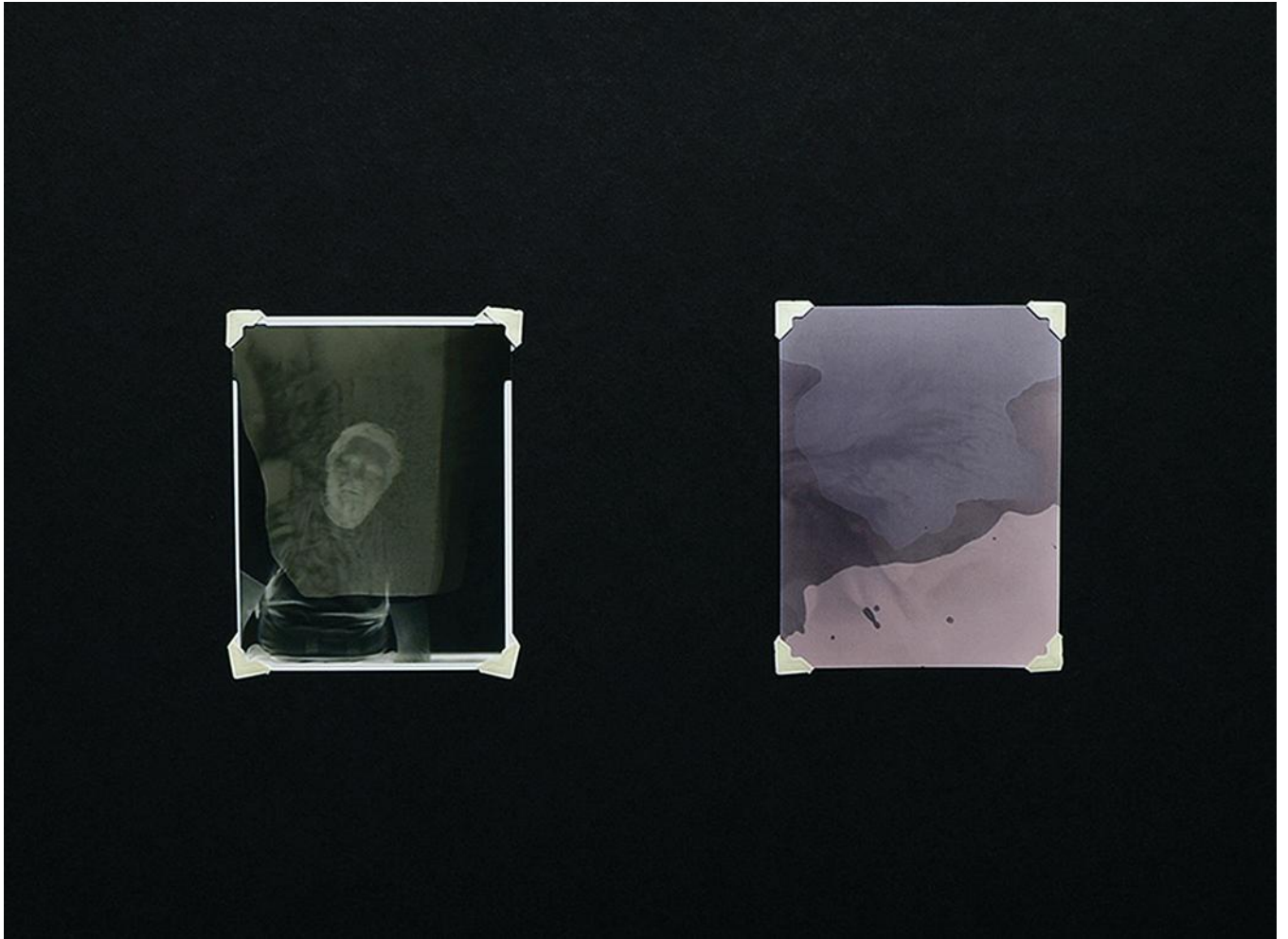
After seeing pictures of my father for the first time I came to find much of what I thought was unique to me was merely a facsimile of someone else. Looking at a face, a body language, and a person that is both familiar but strangely different I question my own perception of myself.

The relationship between a father and son is complicated, whether they have met in person, or if they only pose a memory that flows in the mind like water in a river. To represent this profound experience, one of seeing a face that was my own but wasn't, to know my DNA tied me so directly to a person I had never met, I created a series of self-portraits using paper negatives in a 4x5 camera.

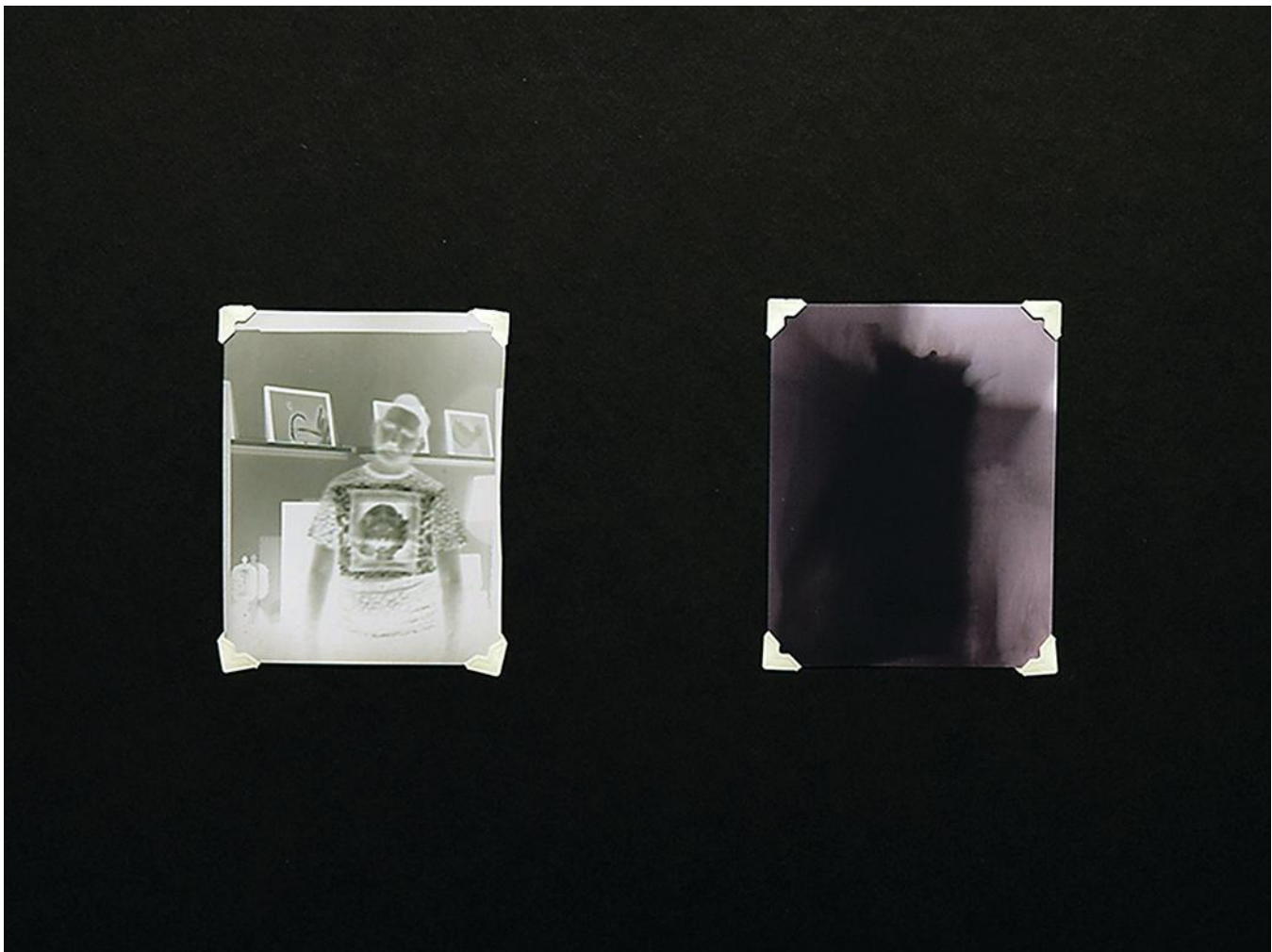
I have also made a series of photograms to accompany the portraits. These photograms are made from pouring malt liquor onto black and white photo paper to make exposures and are a response to my father's alcoholism and his disappearance in my life as a result of it.



Untitled 5 (I never knew/I always knew) • Black and white paper negative and black paper, 12" x 18", 2017



Untitled 9 (I never knew/I always knew) • Black and white paper negative and black paper, 12" x 18", 2017



Untitled 8 (I never knew/I always knew) • Black and white paper negative and black paper, 12" x 18", 2017

STEPHANIE SERPICK

My most recent paintings, the series *A New Fall*, are an expression of feeling in dealing with personal issues over the past year or so. These are intimate paintings represented by unmade beds and tossed sheets, absent of any human evidence, on intentionally blank, somewhat rough backgrounds. The empty bed in these paintings represents a place for grief, depression or isolation. As such, the work speaks to our shared feeling of grief, with the understanding that while we all suffer in our individual ways, suffering is universal.

Source materials for this work are photographs I have both taken and found, and the intimate size of the paintings references the intimate nature of the subject matter. The backgrounds of the paintings are repeatedly painted and sanded, to create a frame and backdrop for the bedding that is flat, yet rough with work and time. The bedding itself is seen from different perspectives, but still indicates a scene of desolation and despair.



A New Fall #14 • Oil on panel, 16" x 20", 2018



A New Fall #13 • Oil on panel, 16" x 20", 2018



A New Fall #7 • Oil on panel, 16" x 20", 2017

**APRÈS
COUP**

ABOUT THE HEWITT GALLERY

The Hewitt Gallery of Art, located in the main esplanade and adjacent Black and White galleries, is a laboratory for and an extension of the pedagogy of the Art and Art History Department. In addition, it is an alternative exhibition space for contemporary art of emerging, mid-career, and established artists displaying a wide variety of media and styles. The Gallery provides opportunities for art majors and minors to gain first-hand experience in exhibiting their capstone and junior work, for students to curate and organize shows in conjunction with the Gallery Director and for faculty and alumni to present current work to the community.

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The Hewitt Gallery of Art • 221 E. 71st St. New York, NY 10021 • art@mmm.edu • www.mmm.edu



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