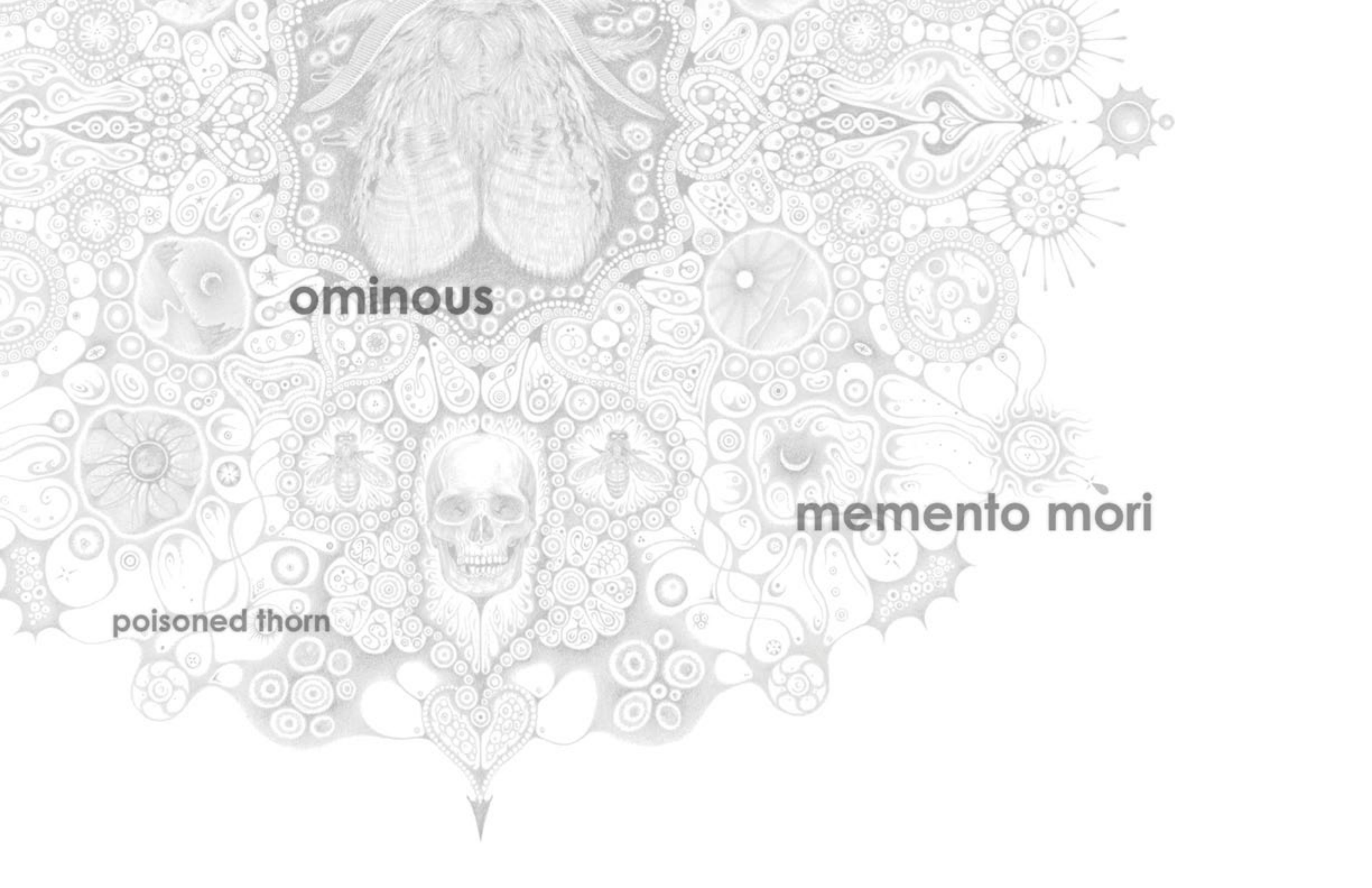


D A R K A N D S T O R M Y N I G H T

Lehman College Art Gallery



D A R K A N D S T O R M Y N I G H T



ominous

memento mori

poisoned thorn

DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

Gothic Influence in Contemporary Art

Lehman College Art Gallery



LEHMAN COLLEGE ART GALLERY—Always free to the public, Lehman College Art Gallery has been serving the interests of our diverse audience from the Bronx and greater New York City since 1984. The gallery specializes in thematic group exhibitions that bring together famous artists with emerging talents. Education is an integral component of the Gallery’s programming and provides the basis of community outreach—from young students to senior citizens.

This catalog is published on the occasion of the exhibition *Dark and Stormy Night: Gothic Influence in Contemporary Art* October 28, 2017 to February 10, 2018
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Covers

Front Adrien Broom. *Forest of Columns*, 2016, detail. Courtesy of the artist
Back Isabelle Menin. *I’m Made of Rain 17*, 2014-2016, detail. Courtesy of the Muriel Guépin Gallery

Pages 5,6 Michiyo Ihara. *Snowflakes 115 Fascination*, 2014, detail
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Pages 107,108 Michiyo Ihara. *Snowflakes #84, Forester*, 2011, detail



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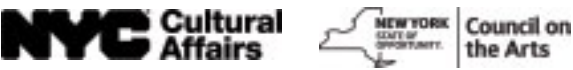
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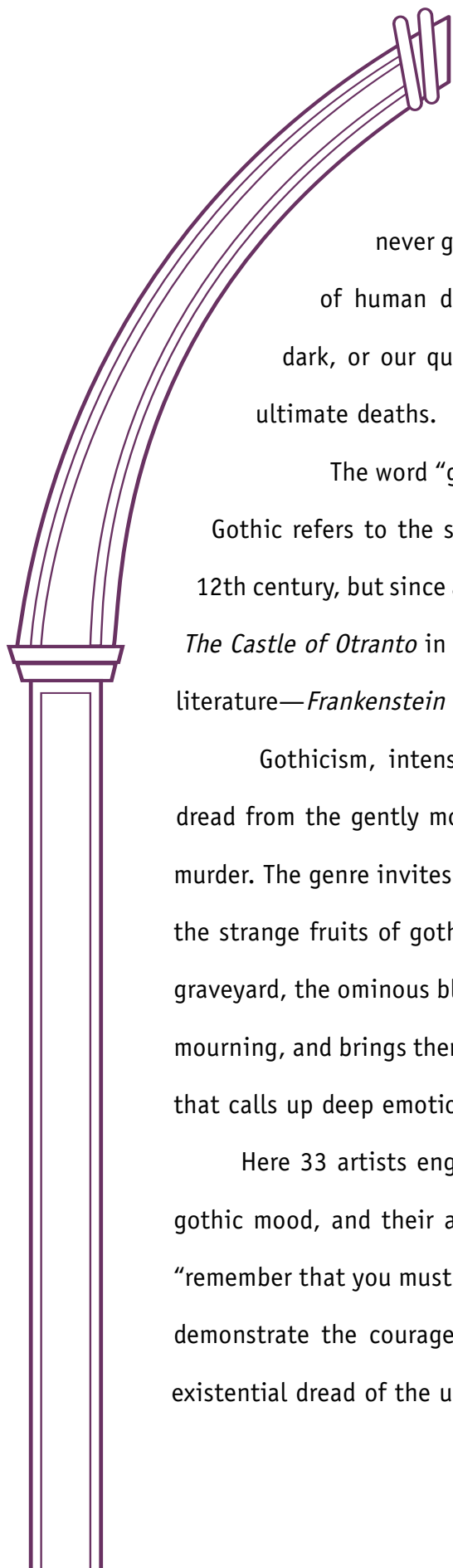
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Gothic Sensibility

Gothic sensibility sends shivers down the spine. It is the essence of foreboding, never going out of style, it unveils the eternal moments of human dread—our fear of the unseen monster in the dark, or our quieter brooding on time’s passing and our own ultimate deaths.

The word “gothic” carries double meaning. In architecture Gothic refers to the soaring medieval churches that emerged in the 12th century, but since art historian Horace Walpole published his novel *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, gothic has been associated with sinister literature—*Frankenstein* to *Dracula*—stories that show lurking evil.

Gothicism, intensely popular in 19th-century fiction, betokens dread from the gently moody and melancholic to fearsome mystery and murder. The genre invites pastiche, but visual artists today have adapted the strange fruits of gothic literature: the haunted castle, the deserted graveyard, the ominous black-feathered bird, the lone woman in desolate mourning, and brings them to us in recognizable and powerful vocabulary that calls up deep emotion.

Here 33 artists engage in a contemporary take on the traditional gothic mood, and their art, in varying degrees, acts as *memento mori*, “remember that you must die.” These works reflect our mortality and also demonstrate the courage of the creative act as a weapon against the existential dread of the unknown.

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Curator

Bartholomew F. Bland, Executive Director, Lehman College Art Gallery



Stolen from The Cleveland Museum of Art
Peregrine Falcons by John James Audubon, 2016
 Collage of dry paint on sheetrock, 37 1/2 x 48 1/2 inches
 Courtesy of the artist and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery

Right, detail



PAVEL ACOSTA

Stolen is based on *Peregrine Falcons (Falco Peregrinus)*, a painting in the Cleveland Museum of Art by famed avian illustrator John James Audubon. Acosta's collage shows a pair of predatory birds with their duck prey. The stormy sky created from a series of lines and drained of the striking colors of Audubon's work gives Acosta's collage a decidedly darker cast, creating an ominous atmosphere that underscores the anthropomorphized gothic morality tale of "the strong destroying the weak."

Acosta grew up in Havana, Cuba and began making art with dry paint chips that he stole from the crumbling walls of his city because he lacked affordable art supplies. From these paint chips, the artist created collages he called *Stolen Paintings* because, mounted on sheetrock, they appear cut from museum walls, and so "stolen."



Vatican City Memoirs, 2015
 Site-specific installation
 Video: *Vatican City II - Beatrice & The Ghost of Prince David*
 Directed by Jeffrey Ampratwum and Severe Jones
 Filmed by Severe Jones
 Sculpture: *Untitled*, Acrylic and flexy paint on silk and lace dress, 100 x 80 inches
 Song: *Vatican City II - Beatrice & The Ghost of Prince David*
 Performed by Jeffrey Ampratwum, with added vocals by Severe Jones
 Song contains samples and excerpts from "Wolf" by Trophy Wife
 Model: Jonacel DeJesus
 Collection of the artist
 Right, detail



JEFFREY AMPRATWUM

The apparition of a woman's wedding dress turned black seems to float in *Vatican City Memoirs*. In its slightly sinister landscape is a lone woman, moody and contemplative, a common device of the gothic in literature and the visual arts. Designer and artist Ampratwum, who created this gothic-inspired story of a fictional 19th-century royal family, touches on themes of lust, murder, betrayal, and deception. The wedding gown is worn by a character named Beatrice, niece of the queen, who is raped by an evil prince. After this tragic event, Beatrice becomes bleak and cold-hearted, and her white lace dress, transformed to black, symbolizes her own emotional transformation, just as the shattered drinking glasses and empty wine bottles that surround the dress signal her despair.



The Parlor, 2017
 Sublimated metal art print, 20 x 30 inches
 Collection of the artist
 Above, detail

ADRIEN BROOM

“Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again,” is the famous opening line of the novel *Rebecca*, Daphne du Maurier’s 1938 gothic-influenced story that centers around an English country house, a palpably sinister presence in the life of the book’s unnamed heroine.

Broom captures a similarly eerie atmosphere in photographs she made of Wentworth Woodhouse, an 18th-century English home in the Yorkshire countryside and the parlor of the historic house at the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme, Connecticut. With panache this artist maximizes the dramatic in *The Parlor*, showing us a mysterious woman in Victorian dress playing the organ—an instrument often associated with doleful sound. Sleepwalking figures and seemingly phosphorescent spirits inhabit *The Forest of Columns* in a home where time has stopped. In *The Marble Hall II*, fog drifting through its door threatens to possess the woman within its walls, a popular gothic motif in works like Charlotte Brontë’s 19th-century gothic novel *Jane Eyre*.

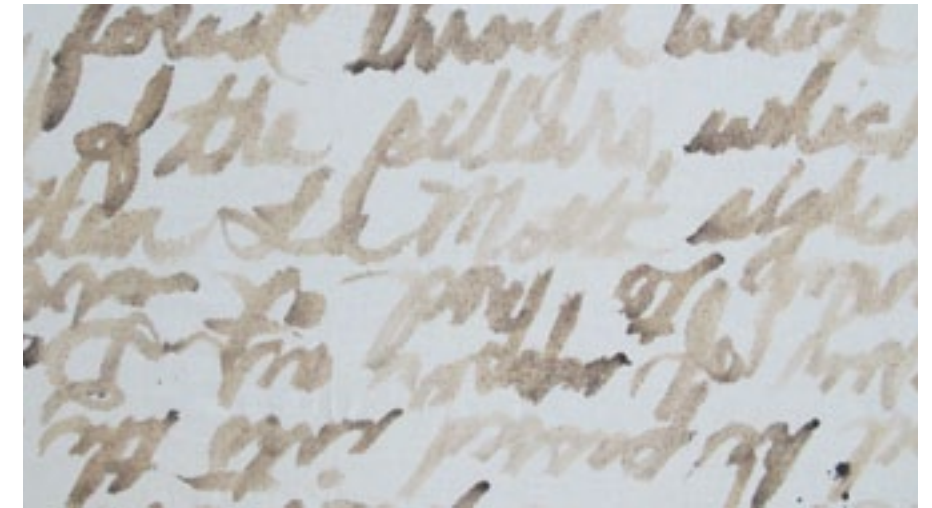


The Marble Hall II, 2016
13 x 20 inches
Upper Right
The Dining Room, 2016
40 x 60 inches
Bottom Right
The Forest of Columns, 2016
30 x 45 inches
Sublimated metal art prints
Collection of the artist





Amidst Thy Glooms Profound, 2017
 Rotunda site-specific installation: rust, muslin, and steel wool, Diameter: 36 feet
 Courtesy of the artist
 Right, detail

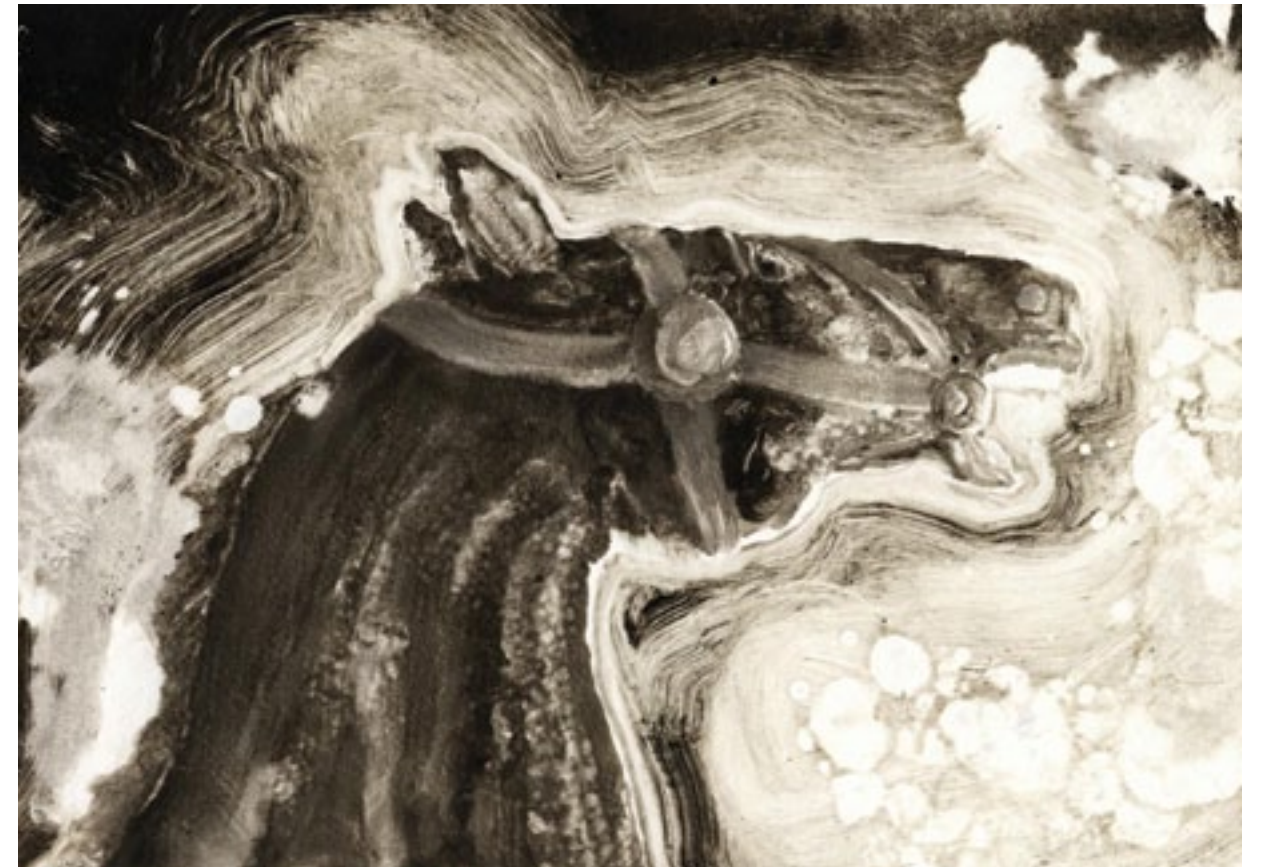


ALISON COLLINS

Collins creates an installation of 42 gothic arches that counterposes the sleek and soaring diagonal lines of famed Modernist architect Marcel Breuer's 1960 building, today the home of Lehman College Art Gallery. The contrast of traditional and modernist architectural forms makes a mysterious space for *Amidst Thy Glooms Profound*, in turn inspired by the gothic novel *The Romance of the Forest*, which Ann Radcliffe wrote in 1791. Radcliffe's text, typical of this genre, describes abbeys standing in isolation on the land; dilapidated structures; frightening forests; skeletons; and, suspenseful scenes in dark and dank places. Of note in her novel is the discovery of a scroll on which fading text appears, as well as a rusty blade found nearby. Embracing themes of decay, nature, decoration, and transformation, Collins uses dye she makes from the rust of her own decaying artworks to write messages on muslin that portray the meaning of passages from *The Romance of the Forest*.



Carousel VIII, 2011
10 x 7 1/4 inches
Right
Carousel VI, 2011
7 1/4 x 10 inches
Monotypes
Collection of the artist



DONNA DIAMOND

Diamond pulls the faces of carousel horses into grimaces of fear that approach the horror of Expressionist artist Edvard Munch's famous composition *The Scream* (1893-1910), in which the agonized features of a figure express its inner anguish. Diamond's black-and-white imagery, drained of the bright colors of a traditional carousel, focuses on the shape of the horses' heads, their mouths cut by sharp bits and pulled by bridles. Her use of extreme angles gives her monotypes the look of a still photograph from a 1940s horror film. The sculpted and painted horses are frozen in terror as they travel an endless circle, a repetitive journey that mirrors the nightmares and daytime activities that frighten children, even those designed for them to enjoy. Diamond says, "There is value in visiting the dark and untamed parts of our thoughts."



Carousel Horse in Armor, 2011
 Linoleum cut, 22 x 16 inches
 Collection of the artist



Carousel II, 2011
 Monotype, 9 1/2 x 5 3/4 inches
 Collection of the artist



A Small Collection, 2015
Shells, wood, rubber, 61 x 26 x 12 inches
Courtesy of Claire Oliver Gallery

LAUREN FENSTERSTOCK

Shells, paper, rubber, wood, and tar-black paint are the materials Fensterstock uses to create the delicate and dark floral-like patterns of her sculpture *A Small Collection*. Showcasing a “cabinet of curiosities”—objects from nature, once outdoors but now entombed—she subtly references beautiful shells as the skeletal remains of sea creatures that once resided within them. The sculpture appears to drip from the gallery wall, as if the shells are melting, or as a growing stalactite that forms a funereal floral tribute. The artist coats her shells in mournful black to force the eye from the usual washed out colors of these husks to the form of their ridges, lines, and patterns. The deep shadows within the box prompt us to contemplate that every treasured group of objects, carefully collected, must finally meet destruction.



Untitled, 2014
Stainless steel and quartz crystals, 7 x 12 x 14 inches
Courtesy of Galerie Lelong

ANGELO FILOMENO

The line between gothic and horror is a blurry one, and Filomeno skirts it with great flair. In *Untitled*, the artist creates an object arresting in its glinting surface beauty and deeply unsettling in its implications. As we look at this skull, we see something wrong—its fangs imply a monstrous creature or zombie, and, perhaps, the death of the monster of our dreams. Is this the image of an ancient death deep in a cave, or death by a recent act of violence? The skull appears made of melting metal or pooling mercury, as it mysteriously provides fodder for growing crystals. What was in this brain to make such a fertile bed?

This Italian-born artist started as a designer, tailor, and professional costumer in Milan before creating his first work of art with a sewing machine, and his exquisitely detailed embroideries suggest something of the visual decadence of the designer Gianni Versace. Filomeno now creates blown-glass sculptures and paintings, which he calls “embroidery painting,” combining painting and embroidery to emphasize the theme of mortality. He describes his works as “very beautiful things depicting very bad psychological subject matter.”



Left

Laughing Philosopher, 2010

Right

Laughing Philosopher (frontal), 2010

Embroidery on silk moiré stretched over linen, 100 x 51 inches

Courtesy of Galerie Lelong

Opposite, *Laughing Philosopher (frontal)*, detail



Filomeno strips away the mask of sanity. With wild hair and baring fangs, the revered reasoning of the philosopher gives way to rabid madness. The serene calmness of Rembrandt's famed *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* (1653), opens instead to lunacy. The artist suggests that attempts towards reason are ultimately pointless, emphasizing the gothic concept of emotion triumphing over rationality.



Left
Memento VII, 2014

Right
Memento IV, 2013-2014

Oil on mother-of-pearl, 16 x 10 x 6 inches
Courtesy of Nancy Hoffman Gallery



GREGORY HALILI

Halili creates objects of exquisite beauty on the surfaces of iridescent shells. His objects are skulls, and although they serve as powerful *memento mori*, to paint the image of a skull within a shell is unexpected, and possibly grotesque. The skull's honest form, though, contained so completely within housing yielded by the natural world, projects a formal grandeur and a strange containment that speaks to the vagaries of life and death. Just as a mollusk can snap closed its carapace, our own existences can quickly close to a permanent end. Using seashells as his canvas, this artist draws another parallel—the human skull is the protective shell for our consciousness and humanity.



Incendiary Nocturne with Stormy Sea (Mass MoCA #253), 2016
Polished oil on canvas, 48 x 49 inches
Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery

STEPHEN HANNOCK

Rockets shoot into the sky in this fiery nocturne that epitomizes the “dark and stormy night” of gothic imagination. This artist is deeply influenced by American landscape painters of the 19th-century, such as Thomas Cole who is considered the founder of the Hudson River School, our nation’s first major art movement. Here Hannock draws inspiration from the works of another 19th-century American artist James McNeill Whistler, who painted similar nocturnes of fireworks over London’s Thames River in the 1870s. Hannock captures the stream of light trailing the rockets as they soar through the dark, and the swirling excitement of the bursts of fire that punctuate the black night.



James Otis Purdy, 1914-2009, 2014

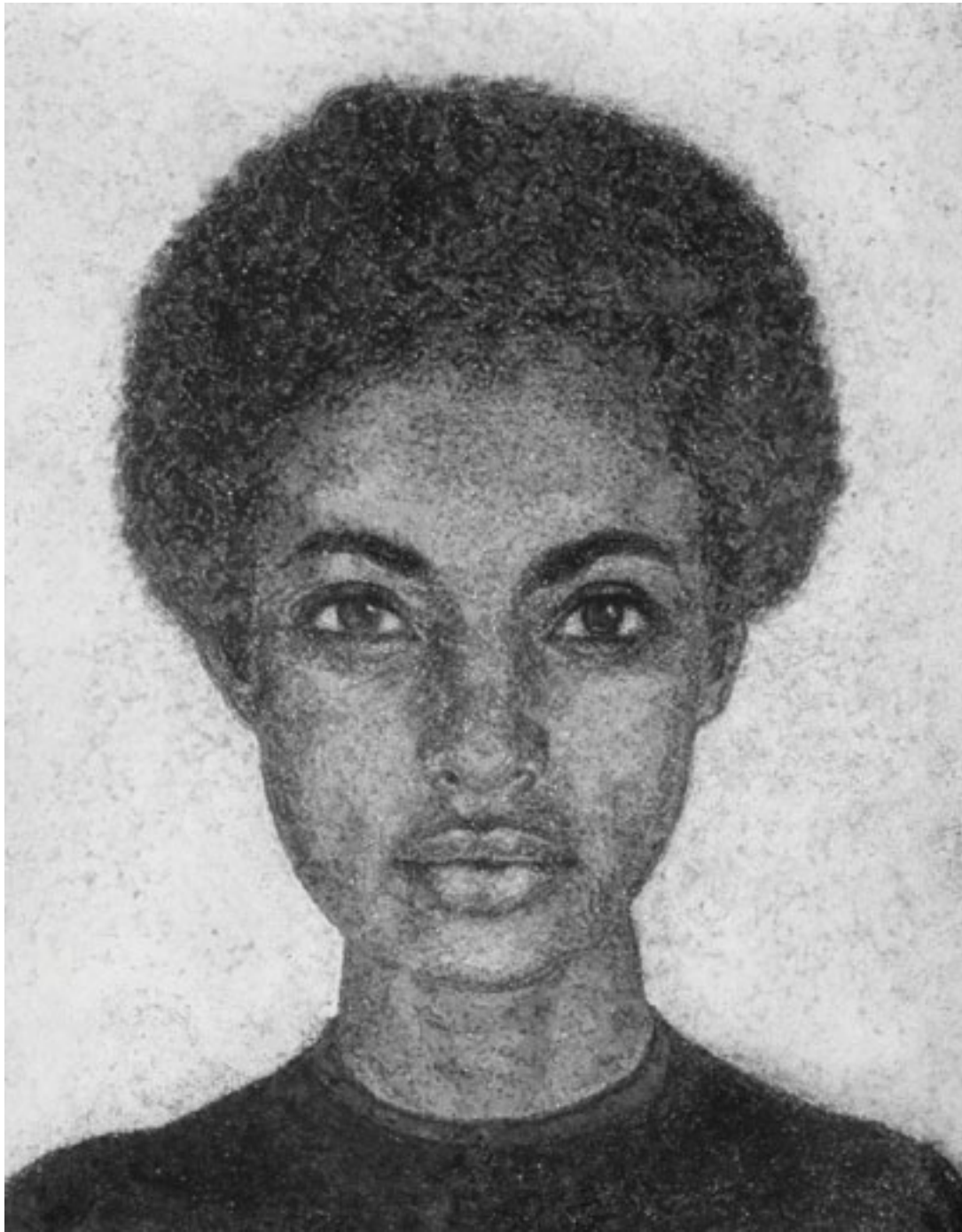
Wooden shadow box, 11 x 14 inches

Mosaic of human ash particles, birch coal, white marble dust on beeswax, and wood

Courtesy of the artist and Ubu Gallery

HEIDE HATRY

What are these pleasant looking portraits of people doing in an exhibition devoted to the gothic? They are here because of the material the artist uses—human ash particles of the people portrayed— the ultimate *memento mori*. Hatry says she wants to “. . . reintegrate life and death: to touch death, work with death, to be an artist of and for death, to let it speak in its mundanity, its grandeur, its familiarity and its mystery, its uniqueness and its universality, to redeem it from oblivion, to give it its own life again My portraits genuinely embody a secret: the secret truth of life. Not that we die, not that life is merely the unfolding of death, or that in death nothing remains, but that death is the relationship in which we stand or will stand to everything that is important to us, a relationship of memory, of transformation, of reintegration, and of art, which are in fact the only modes of immortality that we know. Death is our secret, and the way we keep it, the way we are true to it, is art.”



Tasia Brown, 1982-2012, 2012
Wooden shadow box, 11 x 14 inches
Mosaic of human ash particles, birch coal, white marble dust on beeswax and wood
Courtesy of the artist and Ubu Gallery



Yoko Sato, 1968-1999, 2016
Wooden shadow box, 11 x 14 inches
Mosaic of human ash particles, birch coal, white marble dust on beeswax and wood
Courtesy of the artist and Ubu Gallery



Poe Crossing the Concourse, 2014
Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 inches
Collection of the artist
Right, detail



DANIEL HAUBEN

Hauben, known for his bustling scenes of New York City's borough of the Bronx, depicts a busy urban intersection there. Left in the painting is the distinctive white-columned porch of the Edgar Allan Poe Cottage at Kingsbridge Road and the Grand Concourse, where the American author lived between 1846 and 1849. In a humorous moment, Hauben shows Poe in period 19th-century garb crossing the Concourse today, and clothed in black Poe draws the eye to himself, a spot of darkness on a canvas filled with bright hues. While living at this home, Poe wrote some of his greatest gothic works, such as his last complete poem, *Annabel Lee*, in which he mourns the death of a beautiful woman.

• • •

*For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee:
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea—
In her tomb by the sounding sea.*

Edgar Allan Poe
Annabelle Lee, (1849)



Pre-Occupied 76, 2017

Graphite on flax paper sized with persimmon juice, 29 x 21 inches

Courtesy of the artist

JEANNE HEIFETZ

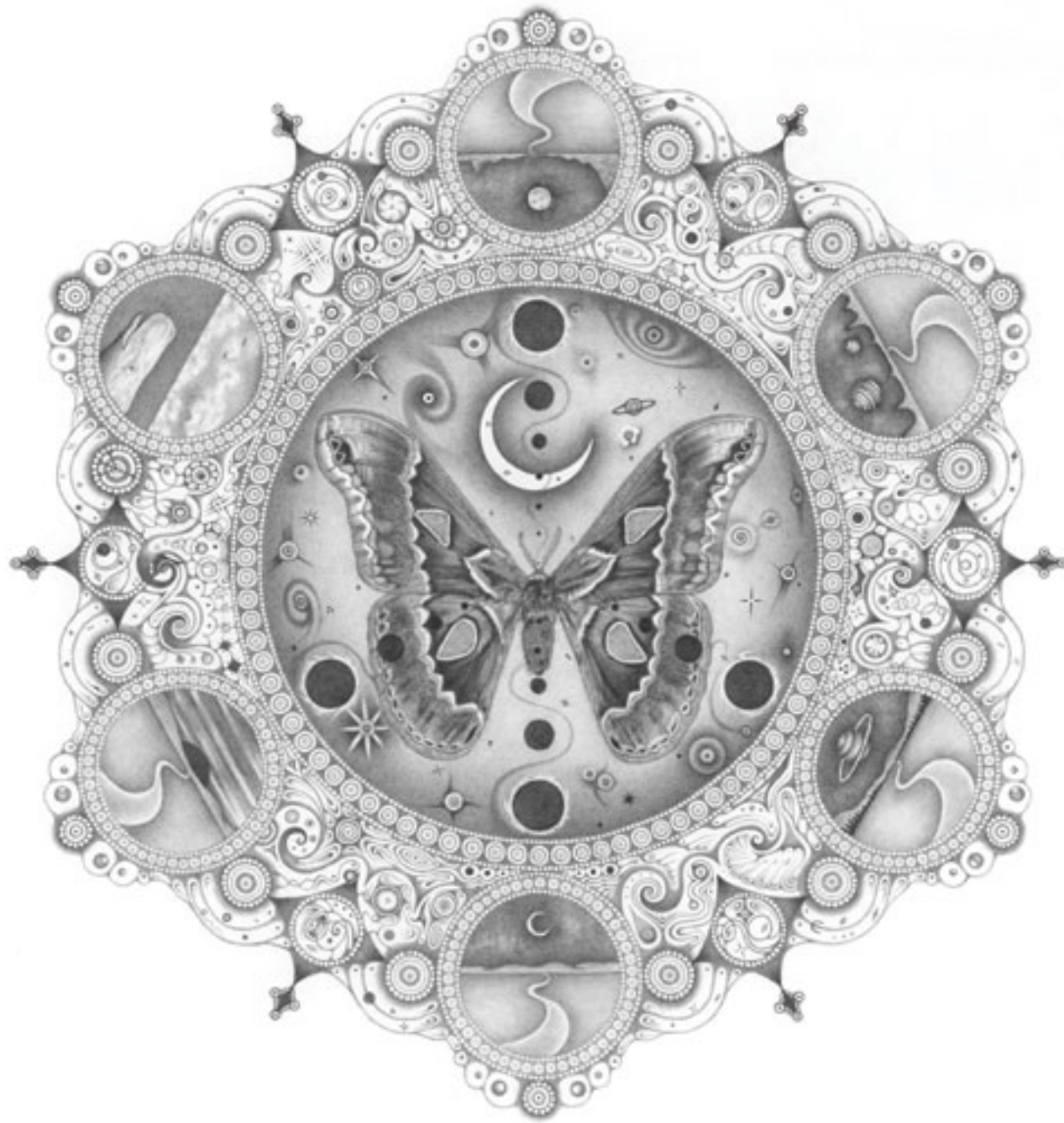
Heifetz, who has had death panics since she was eight years old, created this series of images of Jewish cemeteries to challenge her fear. The cemetery plots first appear as geometric lines, perhaps schematics of crop circles or plans for parking lots. She says, “Ironically, the only real estate I am ever likely to own is a parcel of eight cemetery plots I inherited from my grandfather. The deed to the plots came with a map of the cemetery. . . . I can’t claim that drawing the maps allays my panic. Death remains entirely unknowable terrain: the map can never be the territory. And yet, stripped of identifying text, the cemeteries’ abstract forms are mysteriously compelling, grounding me in the universal human drive to create beauty, order, and ritual in the face of our own mortality.”



Pre-Occupied 16, 2016
Silver graphite on flax paper tinted with iron oxide, 21 x 29 inches
Courtesy of the artist



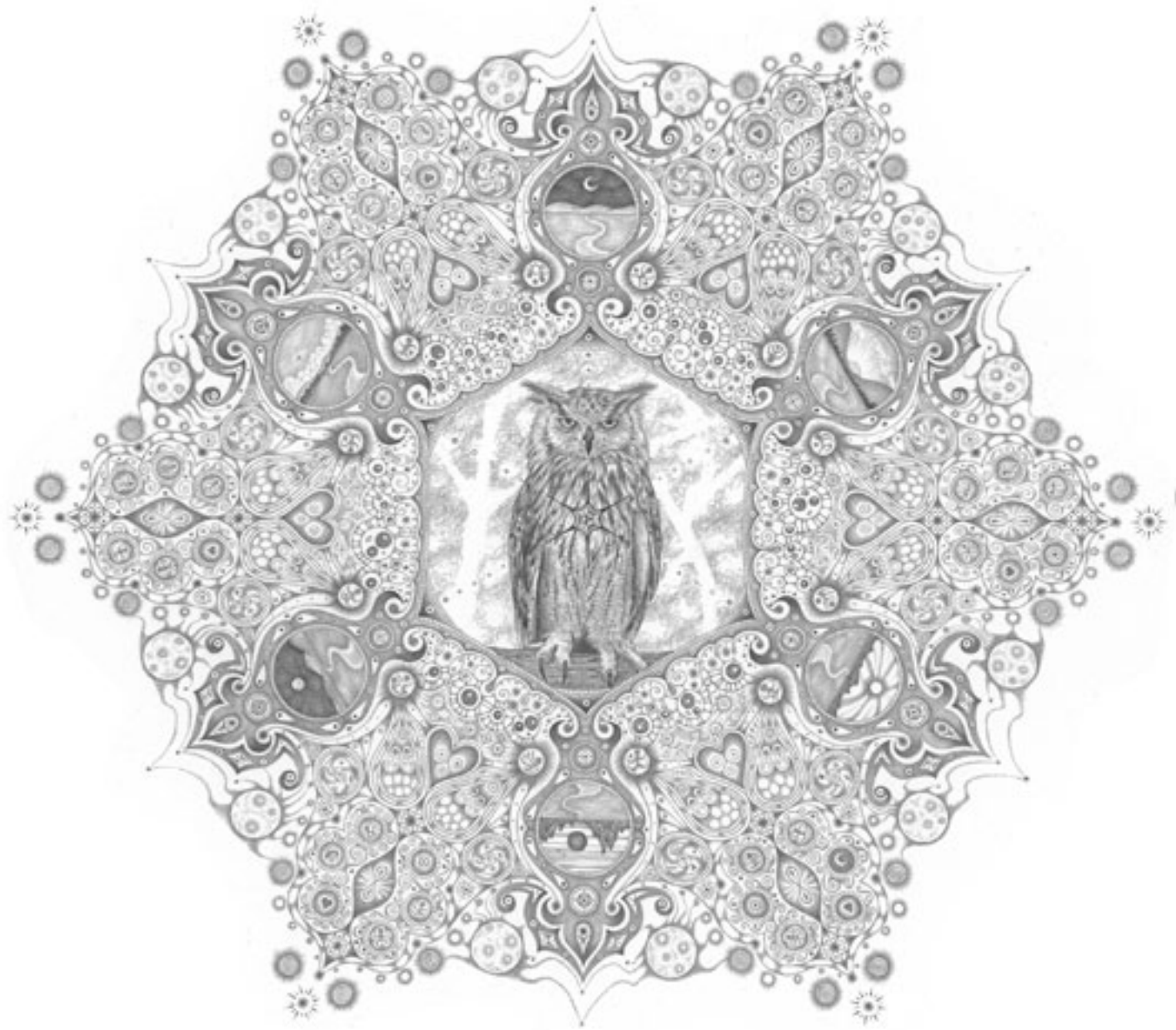
Pre-Occupied 72, 2017
Graphite on flax paper tinted with iron oxide, 21 x 29 inches
Courtesy of the artist



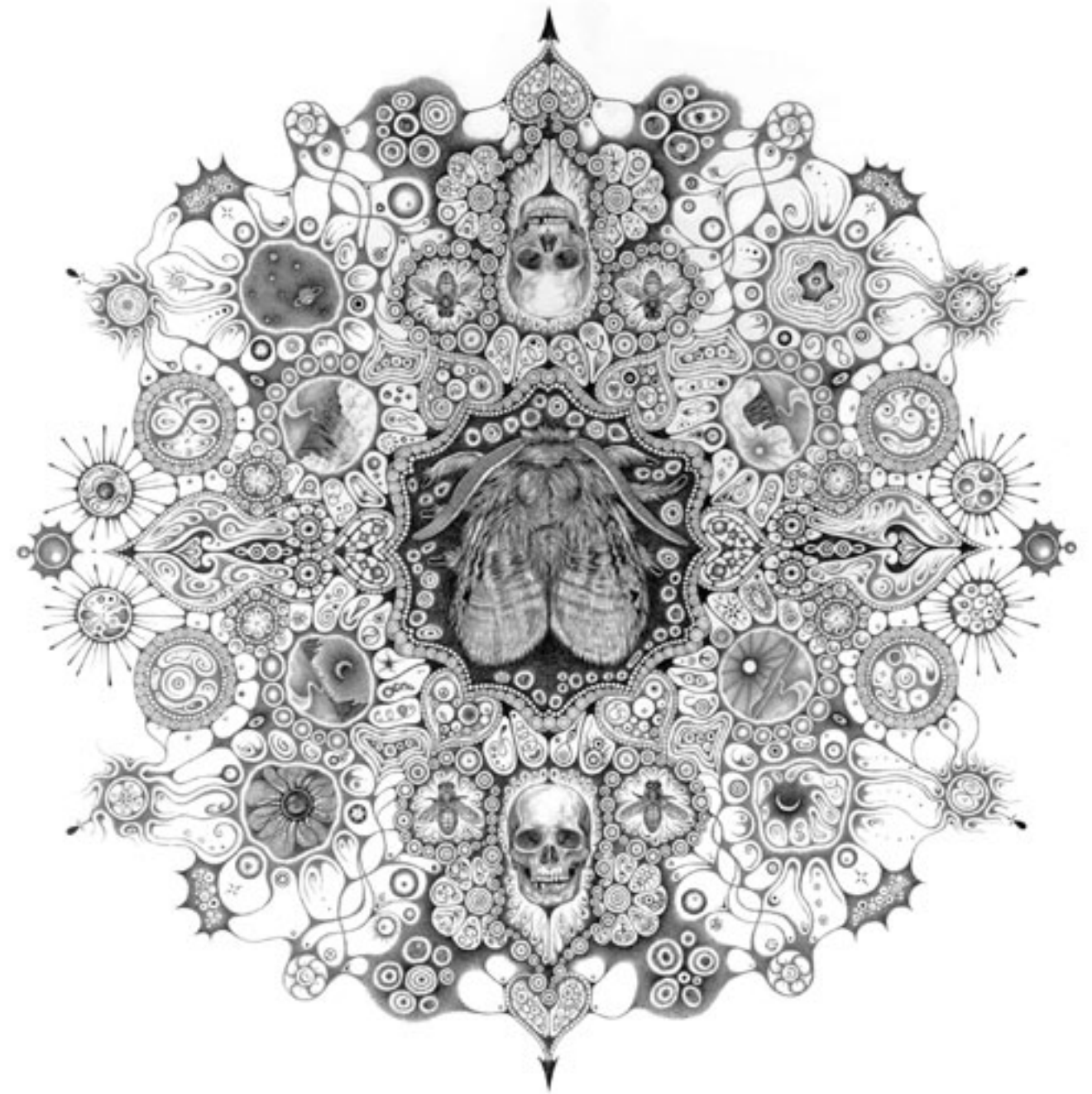
Snowflakes #149, Guardian Deity, 2016
Graphite on paper (hand drawn), 22 1/4 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of Kenise Barnes Fine Art

MICHIYO IHARA

Ihara combines delicate, intricate technique with gothic subject matter to create snowflakes populated with skulls, owls, moths, and moons. She says, “My drawing process requires just pencil and paper. It starts in the center of the page and I build a snowflake outward. The work itself tells me when it is done. . . . As a child I drew all the time. I drew long, long trains, carrying fruit, people and animals, leading into infinity.” Ihara begins her drawings with something small, which can expand infinitely: “From the microcosm grows the macrocosm, so each tiny snowflake becomes a symbol of the entire universe. People and snowflakes have the same source, that of infinity, and inspire in me a sense of awe.”



Snowflakes #84, Forester, 2011
Graphite on paper (hand drawn), 22 1/4 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of Kenise Barnes Fine Art



Snowflakes #115, Fascination, 2014
Graphite on paper (hand drawn), 22 1/4 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of Kenise Barnes Fine Art



Megalith, 2017
 Unglazed ceramics, oxides, and moss, 25 x 26 x 55 inches
 Courtesy of the artist
 Right, detail



HEIDI LAU

Like the poisoned thorn in a fairy tale, Lau's structures suggest menace that also allures. Her structures are reminiscent of images of enchanted castles cloistered in a wood. Their jutting turrets and towers appear constructed from twigs and brambles, but are ceramics that skillfully mimic the forms and textures of nature.

Lau grew up in Macau in the early 1990s, while the city was undergoing a major political upheaval, as it became part of China. She recalls seeing this transition reflected in the city's crumbling architecture—many of the colonial buildings left to decay, but once sovereignty was transferred the buildings were gentrified beyond recognition, or destroyed. "The hometown I think about often was a very 'porous' city, with visible layers of time, history, and problems," says Lau. "For me, ruins are the remainders and reminders of the future."



Dark Castle, 2013
Glazed ceramics, 8 x 6 x 18 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Cathedral, 2012
Glazed ceramics, 8 x 4 x 17 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Outlook, 2010
Oil on aluminum, 40 x 25 inches
Courtesy of the artist

LISA LEBOFISKY

Lebofsky's works are quietly somber and, here, in three artistic meditations on the dismal she focuses on the bleak beauty within a landscape that lacks a glorious sun, a dazzling rainbow, or a majestic mountain. In *Outlook*, her solitary figure is dwarfed by the large landscape, a bird's-eye perspective on a physical world that is closing in.

Bronx-based Lebofsky is an artist who paints landscapes that are most vulnerable to the negative effects of global warming and severe climate change. In *Fallen Hemlock*, the artist shows us a broken tree above a fetid swamp, both uneasy signifiers of the future. Unlike the implied violence in some other works in this exhibition, Lebofsky's art takes a longer, quieter, but perhaps, sadder view.



Lago Escondido, 2011
Oil on polycast, 10 x 16 inches

Right
Fallen Hemlock, 2014
Graphite, lacquer and oil paint on aluminum, 10 x 16 inches
Collection of the artist





Left
Relic # 17 V – Wedding Gown 2, 2016

Right
Relic # 17 III – Wedding Gown 2, 2016
 Photograph on paper, 27 1/2 x 18 1/2 inches
 Courtesy of Nohra Haime Gallery



ADRIANA MARMOREK

Marmorek's burning wedding gowns are reminiscent of the grisly demise of Miss Havisham, the character created by Charles Dickens in his classic novel *Great Expectations* (1861). Miss Havisham, jilted at the altar, wore her wedding dress for the next 50 years, until it accidentally caught fire, burning her to death. A woman whose hopes are dashed at the hands of a man is a recurring motif in gothic works. Marmorek's photographs would seem a feminist statement that alludes to the role of marriage as an act of immolation. In fact, these images relate to the artist's *Relics* series, in which objects of love are systematically destroyed by fire for a variety of reasons—but, ultimately, for cleansing, a ritual signifying grim emotional closure.



Left
Photograph of White Smoke, 2013
 28 x 20 inches

Right
Photograph of a Black Lily, 2014
 43 x 30 inches



ALEXANDRA FORSYTH MARTINEZ

Martinez photographs objects we associate with fleeting time. The flickering candle in *White Smoke* dies. All that remains is an effervescent trail of smoke that dissipates in the breath of a moment. The flame, either snuffed out early, or dying as the candle burns down, is the eternal metaphor for brief human life. By showing *White Smoke* without the candle, the artist creates a simple image of remarkable power. The white lily in Dutch still-life *Vanitas* paintings is a symbol of purity, but in *Black Lily* Martinez darkens the color of this flower also associated with both death and resurrection, leaving us to wonder if the trumpet-shaped blossom will continue to contain the promise of life in its new guise.



Empty Altar (Gold), 2016

Right

Empty Altar (Silver), 2016

Painted plaster, 12 x 9 inches

Courtesy of the artist



Empty Altars is Martinez's ongoing series of sculptures inspired by the portable altars Spanish colonizers used when converting the indigenous people of South America and the Caribbean to Catholicism. Martinez makes each piece by hand, violating the perfection expected from sacred geometry, and she creates a void—there is no religious icon to worship on the altar. Was it stolen? Destroyed? Lacking this element for religious worship, the empty altars become reflections on colonization and conversion, and, more broadly, abstracted ruminations on loss—a hallmark of gothic emotion.



I'm Made of Rain 3, 2014-2016
Museum print with archival pigment inks on baryte paper
Edition 12 + 3 AP, 22 1/2 x 15 inches
Courtesy of the Muriel Guépin Gallery

ISABELLE MENIN

Menin captures the proverbial “dark and stormy” sky with the intensity of the Old Master painters, which belies her background as a painter before she transitioned to digital photography. In four photographs, this artist captures the buildup of power to a great storm before it unleashes, visually merging sky with sea, and achieving the roiling, pent-up nervous energy of the gothic. We are reminded of the water cycle that moves inexorably between these two far apart places, as well as the fact that water makes up most of the human body—literally, we are made of rain. In some of Menin’s works, sun glimpsed beyond the clouds dispels our deepest fears and reassures us that we are one with Nature.



I'm Made of Rain 9, 2014-2016

Top Right

I'm Made of Rain 17, 2014-2016

Bottom Right

I'm Made of Rain 19, 2014-2016

Museum prints with archival pigment inks on baryte paper

Edition 12 + 3 AP, 22 1/2 x 15 inches

Courtesy of the Muriel Guépin Gallery



Left
Inevitable Impact, 2017
 Rabbit fur, rooster feathers, reproduction hornbill beaks
 42 x 24 inches

Right
What If, 2014
 Silver pheasant, lamb skin, steer hooves
 resin-cast flamingo bill, and rooster feathers
 26 1/2 x 30 x 10 inches
 Courtesy of the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery



ENRIQUE GOMEZ DE MOLINA

Constructing strange creatures from a variety of bird and mammal parts, de Molina makes himself master of a menagerie that is beautiful, scary, elegant, and terrible. Like Dr. Frankenstein's monster, a de Molina creature is an original, previously existing only in the mind of its creator. *What If* has a nimble balletic grace, walking on impossibly pointed hooves that could tiptoe quietly across a bedroom floor in the dark. *What If* and *Inevitable Impact*, forever fantasy animals furred, feathered, hooved, and beaked, present hypothetical questions: are they gentle or fearsome? Can they kill?

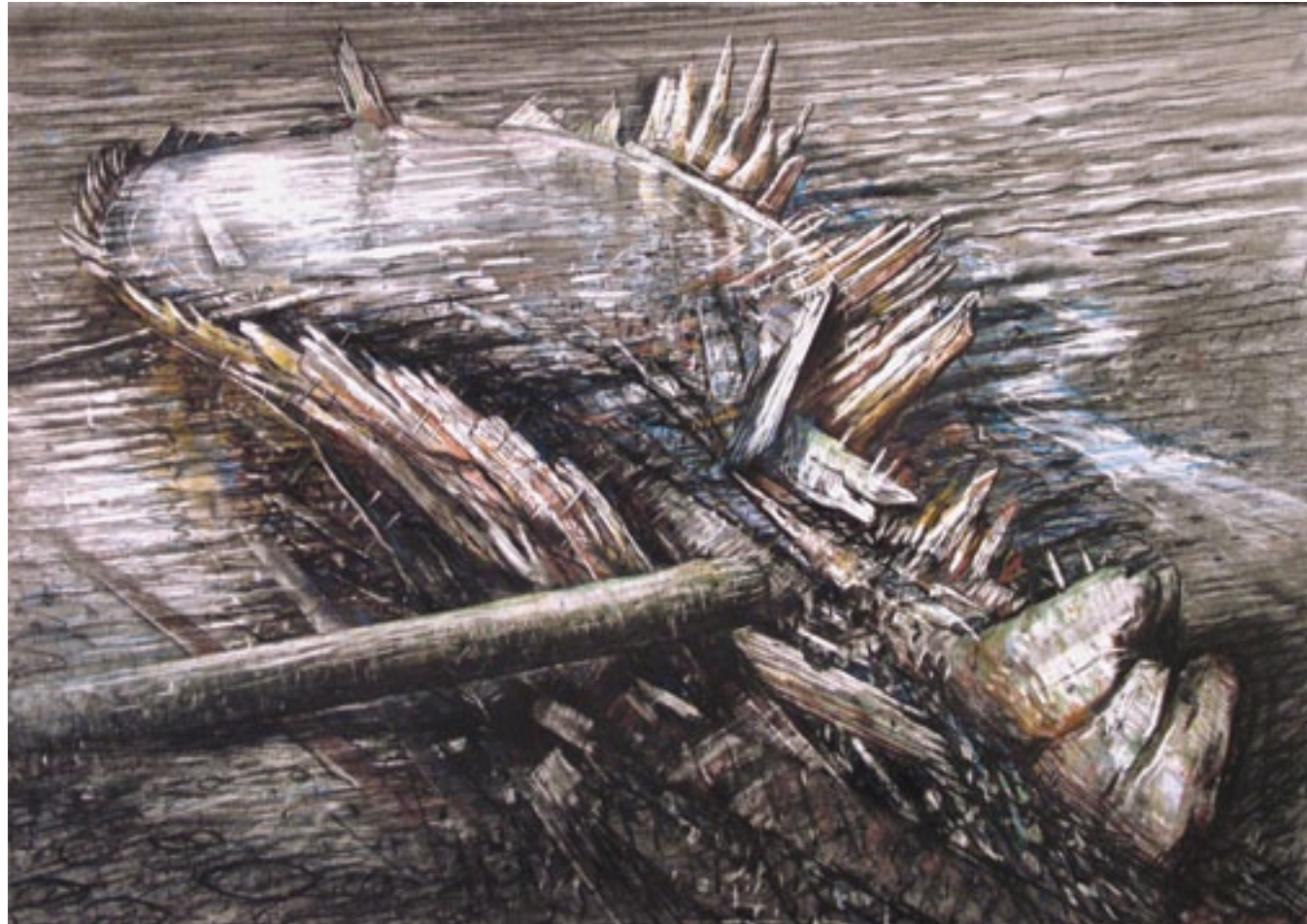
Born in Havana, and, based in Miami, de Molina followed in the footsteps of his father, pursuing the specialization of taxidermy—preserving dead animals with lifelike effect—but took his work further, creating life never seen or imagined from the remainders of spent life.



Memento Mori II, 2016
Oil and metal leaf on canvas, 30 x 40 inches
Collection of the artist

PATRICK MCGRATH MUÑIZ

The idea of “Death and the Maiden,” has appeared in Western painting since at least Renaissance times. Death, depicted as a skeleton, is the foil for a young woman who represents the pleasures of ephemeral life. In *Memento Mori II*, a skeleton stands behind a woman to convey this artist’s message that rampant consumerism and the use of fossil fuel will soon bring death to our planet. Muñiz combines elements of pop culture and images and symbols from Christian art with another technique of Old Master painters—depicting a bucolic landscape behind drapery, but behind the drapery in his painting he shows a traffic-clogged highway. The dress of the woman is embroidered with animals, a reminder that the bodies of buried ancient animals make up the fossil fuels burned in today’s manufacturing plants, and the painting’s border depicts the pumps that relentlessly force fuel from the earth. The motto Muñiz writes on his painting loosely translates as “what goes around comes around.” The woman refuses to turn to acknowledge the skeleton holding a draining hourglass, a symbol of earth’s life running out.



Skeletons (The Archeology of Loss)
Pastel on paper, 37 x 52 inches
Collection of the artist

BILL MURPHY

Murphy, a master of poetic decay, takes a common sight in a port city—the hulk of a destroyed ship—and infuses it with a great sense of loss. In this work, which is a symphony of subdued grays beautifully rendered in pastel, Murphy pierces the hull of the vessel with sharp and pointed palings that look like jagged teeth, and the whole composition is reminiscent of a dying horseshoe crab flipped on its back, tail broken. With the title *Skeletons*, Murphy makes overt the relationship between the life cycle of a ship and a living creature, and leads us to contemplate the dispirited dissolution of an object when it outlives its usefulness and loses its inherent power.



Origin of Quantrametronics, 2015
 Graphite, gouache, pastel and conté crayon on paper, 52 x 62 inches
 Courtesy of McKenzie Fine Art

AMY MYERS

Myers' work reflects her interest in physics, the science that describes the world at the macroscopic level, but her unframed drawings that she makes with conjoined sheets of paper also contain a large element of sexuality. Myers is Georgia O'Keeffe gone gothic. Her composition carries a glittering, malignant energy that simultaneously presents life force with shapes that suggest a vagina, a womb, and, from some angles, a skull. This piece conjures a dangerous, dark vortex, a gothic sensibility of the unknown from which life may be pulled. Myers says, "the constant changing nature of all things drives my work and guides my process."



Stawisko I, 2016
Ceramic, 15 3/4 x 15 x 17 3/4 inches
Courtesy of Metro Pictures

PAULINA OŁOWSKA

Ołowska creates a ceramic house that shimmers with glazes, and which she names for a small town in her native Poland. Her house recalls Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), the classic short story of a doomed mansion and its family that sinks into the earth and destruction. Rendered without signifying details, Ołowska outlines *Stawisko I*, and from its edges we discern a welter of porches, towers, and rooflines—the image of Queen Anne revival architecture that remains the epitome of the spooky haunted house today. Pop art, Soviet propaganda and graffiti are contemporary elements Ołowska incorporates in her work to create a link between Eastern Europe and the more modern Western world, but in its blackness this house speaks to memories of things past, which can never be fully retrieved.



Untitled (tree and frame), 2014
 Concrete, Polyurethane foam, reed mesh, wire, paint, fabric, lace
 leather, faux fur, artificial moss and plant, frame, chains
 broken jewelry, feathers, flocking, Swarovski crystals, and beads
 57 x 38 x 5 inches
 Courtesy of Geary Contemporary
 Right, detail



LINA PUERTA

“Nature’s Triumph Over Art” could be the subtitle of Puerta’s dramatic work that shows the roots of a tree that are slowly engulfing the frame of a painting. Although hard to distinguish, there is the suggestion of one of Monet’s water-lily paintings under the growing moss lichens and melting pigments. Puerta’s “natural world” that subsumes another artist’s painting is her comment on the ephemeral nature of any art. The artist may view this as regrettable but she, herself, uses feathers, beadwork, and bits of glinting gold that will decay sometime in the future to create a gorgeous textural surface, and that enables her suggestion that there is a kind of pleasurable decadence that occurs even in the midst of the destruction wrought by time. *Nature is Back!* was the title of a recent Puerta exhibition, and neatly encapsulates her chief artistic theme.



Realism, 2016
Stained glass in lightbox, 31 x 29 x 4 inches
Courtesy of Claire Oliver Gallery

JUDITH SCHAECHTER

Medieval gothic church architecture is closely associated with the art of stained glass. Today, too, there is a thriving glass art movement, where Schaechter holds a key place. Her works are a technical tour de force of detail that shows the continuing viability of this medium, once predominantly used to recreate Bible scenes, but now embraced by artists to transmit contemporary messages. Here Schaechter infuses her three modern stained glass works with traditional gothic feeling: in *Realism*, a slumbering woman seemingly enters the sensual world of moonlit dreams, a contrast of icy water and fire that symbolizes both sides of one's suppressed nature. At the bottom of this piece hangs an electric cord, a nod from the artist that her glass pieces are illuminated by electricity, not natural light. In *Odalisque*, a (literally blue) woman mournfully contemplates her existence. Best of all, in *Human/Nature*, a gothic "woman in white" observes a surreal and frightening bouquet, plucked from a field in frenzied bloom nearby. Shut away from nature, her heavily lidded eyes and blood-red feet make a gothic apparition.



Odalisque, 2015
22 x 30 x 4 inches

Right
Human/Nature, 2016
30 x 32 x 4 inches

Stained glass in lightbox
Courtesy of Claire Oliver Gallery





Anchor, 1991
Oil on linen, 35 x 60 inches
Collection of the artist
Right, detail



HOLLY SEARS

Sears's creative themes revolve around nature and animals, and examining the unseen mystical parts of life. In *Anchor* she portrays a dark scene of nature. While an anchor is the early Christian symbol of protection, here it has double meaning as a safe haven in a storm, or as an object that oppressively drags one down. Sears shows us a small island of dead branches in moody light, applying numerous layers of oil glazes, her signature technique, to provide the scene's exceptional glistening effect. The island's stacked branches appear as bones, an exoskeleton punctured by shadowy passages that resemble open mouths with teeth. Birds perch on the bony boughs. For Sears, the birds in this still and swampy setting are a visual metaphor for continuing life, even as we walk amidst death.



Harbor Seals, 2004
Watercolor and gold, 24 x 36 inches
Right
Striped Hyena Clan, 2005
Watercolor and gold, 30 x 60 inches
Collection of the artist
Courtesy of Bernice Steinbaum Gallery



DEBORAH SIMON

Simon is fascinated by the way we categorize animals scientifically but judge them emotionally. The seals in *Harbor Seals* are examples of “charismatic megafauna”—large-scale animals with “cuteness” that appeals to our emotions. Simon shows them gathered on the water’s surface but what lies beneath them in her painting and their own DNA are the bony representations of their long-dead ancestors, whom Simon revives in a floating strata of the dead and undead. *Striped Hyena Clan* conjures Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s phrase about the fierceness of nature as “red in tooth and claw.” A triumph of watercolor, the painting shows the central animal’s demonic eyes positioned at the middle of the canvas to directly confront the viewer. The composition mesmerizes as it presents an imminent attack, and one takes an almost instinctual step back before noticing the strangeness of several reanimated skeletons among the living animals. Ironically, the “dead” animals, though threatening, do not carry the emotional weight of the living. Instead they are reminders of dinosaur skeletons in natural history museums, posing abstractions of the terrifying creatures they once were, but in their new form take on a kind of safeness.



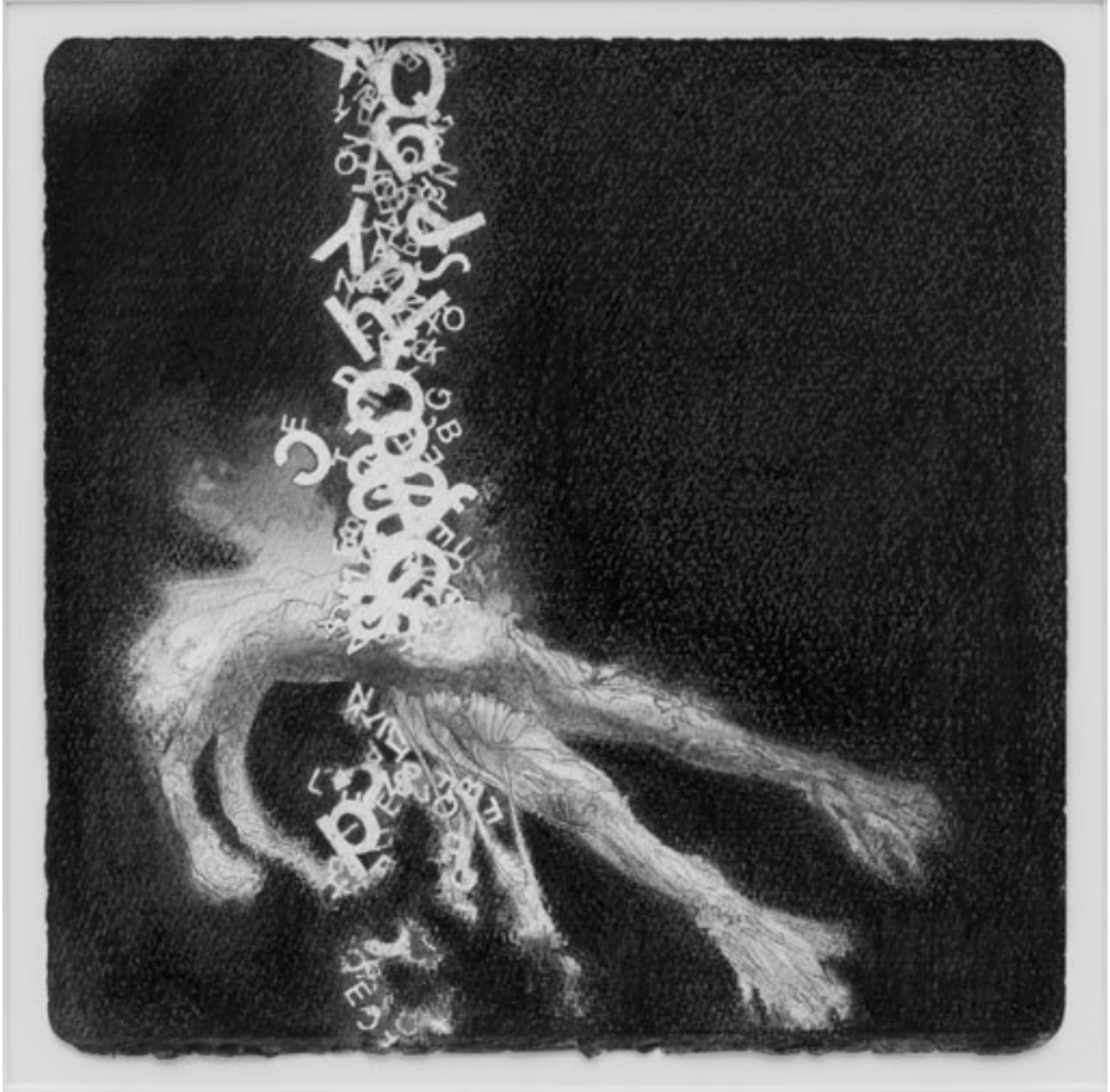
Winter Diary: Scrape, 2007
Graphite, watercolor, ink on paper, 12 x 12 inches
Collection of the artist

MARIE SIVAK

Sivak shows a nightmarish jumble of words and letters in her *Winter Diary* drawings. Literature and the act of writing is central to the gothic style, and it is notable to see a visual artist, influenced by the gothic, instill the alphabet into her imagery, its letters resembling those of an illegible note Elizabeth Gilbert describes in her novel *The Signature of All Things* (2013), “Each sentence was a crowded village of capital letters and small letters, living side by side in tight misery, crawling up on one another as though trying to escape the page.” Sivak speaks to our fear of losing language, losing ideas, losing memory, and the abiding sense of loss itself. In *Scrape*, a hand clings to language, dragging it along the paper, collecting jumbled ideas as it goes. The surreally huge bee floating above the letters in *Conundrum* threatens to devour language. A figure clings to a tenuous rope of letters in *Nightmare*, where, rope frayed, the dangling letters are all that stop it from falling into an abyss of darkness.



Winter Diary: Conundrum, 2007
Graphite, watercolor, ink on paper, 12 x 12 inches
Collection of the artist



Winter Diary: Nightmare, 2007
Graphite, watercolor, ink on paper, 12 x 12 inches
Collection of the artist



Yes, Death, 2016

Site-specific installation

Foam, contact paper, resin, fabric trim, fabric, feathers, and brass, 84 x 60 x 78 inches

Right, detail



RACHEL STERN

In a site-specific installation and a series of photographs, Stern presents the cemetery—coalescing this repository for the dead with the state of death itself. In her “graveyard,” the artist recreates traditional funerary shapes—the headstone, the obelisk, and the gothic arch—in pastel colors. Stern makes the cemetery, historically a place of sadness, riotously cheerful. She is influenced by playwright Oscar Wilde, who wrote, “Yes, death. Death must be so beautiful. To lie in the soft brown earth, with the grasses waving over one’s head and listen to silence.” Stern gives us another view of necropolis in photographs, which for her are a cool and distancing device that allows dramatic play to appear as through a window. Her photographs show leaden-colored headstones and neglected greenery backed by an empty sky and endless serenity, impossible to enliven or escape.



Top Left and Center
Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond Virginia
Bottom Left
Bonaventure Cemetery, Savannah Georgia Above
Above second column and Opposite
Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston, South Carolina



Yes, Death, 2016
Gelatin silver prints
Collection of the artist



Dark City, 1990
35 x 36 x 3 inches

Right

Tombstone, 1994
8 x 11 x 2 inches

Oil on canvas encased in lead
Courtesy of the Nohra Haime Gallery



ADAM STRAUS

Dark City, which contains overtones of the biblical destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, was actually painted in Tallahassee, Florida by Straus several months before he moved to New York City. Straus said the picture had, “something to do with my fears about leaving the safety and familiarity of Tallahassee behind for the uncertainty and dangers of New York City.” *Tombstone* was one of a number of paintings he made of apparitions and gravestones: “My brother had died the year before, a tragic end to a somewhat tragic life. My other brother, my sister, my mother, and I had dug the hole and buried him on my mother’s property in the woods outside of Lloyd, Florida. We had placed a large tombstone on his grave. It was an extremely emotional undertaking for all of us.”



In Case of Flood, 2014

30 x 44 inches

Right

In Case of Fire, 2014

24 x 36 inches

Linocut prints

Courtesy of Claire Oliver Gallery



BARBARA EARL THOMAS

Reminiscent of the scenes of destruction wrought by the hurricane that Zora Neale Hurston describes in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Thomas shows us natural disasters of almost biblical proportions. The strong lines and simplified figures in these prints project the drama and tension of a disaster from the elements, however the titles of Thomas's works appear somewhat ironic: "In Case of..." phrasing that usually introduces warnings issued in the smooth, commanding style adopted by authorities who seek to reassure the public suggests there is a "Plan B" to prevent disaster. Thomas seems to say that in "In Case of Fire. . ." and "In Case of Flood. . ." disaster cannot be always be averted.



Shrine of the Undead, 2001-2017
Mixed media, oil and wax on wood, high-fired stoneware, 64 x 53 x 6 inches
Courtesy of the artist

JASON WELLER

Against a moonlit sky, the undead roam the earth. In a scene from a restless nightmare, Weller creates an installation that has had long gestation in his imagination. It is a work that may hold hope of containing fright, or the conflicted temptation to release evils for which we hold deep fear.

Around an oil painting of haunted-looking figures, the artist places three ceramic vessels, originally from commemorative “funerary urns” he produced after the tragic events of 9/11. The vessels are sealed, and in the context of this piece one wonders if they contain more than ashes. Like Pandora of Grecian myth, we are curious about their contents. Pandora opened her box (sometimes described as a sealed pottery vase) to release a collection of evils that have troubled humankind since. Weller combines his sealed vessels with an earlier painting inspired by the golem of Jewish folklore. A being animated from mud and clay, a golem is controlled in mysterious ways. Unlike the monstrous flesh-eating zombies of pop culture, the golem’s haunted status is mutable—it can be villain or victim.

ZANE YORK



Vase with Bird Heads, 2011
Oil on linen, mounted to panel, 36 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist

York pictures death with shocking twist and color. His vase holds a floral arrangement that is a bouquet of death, each “bloom” a decapitated and taxidermied bird’s head. Behind hangs purple drapery—the color of “half mourning,” a state that follows a year of full mourning, symbolized by black.

The head of a man, in *Arrangement XII*, is suffused with green, a color often signifying new life but in death is the color of decay. Adding to our disquietude, the sculpture is a self-portrait of the artist.

In *Death Portrait*, York shows us the entire body of a woman—surrounded by a swarm of bees. Is this woman the sleeping “Queen Bee” of a hive, or is she dead? The green decaying flesh of her hand stung by the insect offers the answer.

When Kelly York, wife of the artist, apprenticed as a beekeeper, she discovered her deathly allergy to bee venom, but did not give up her pursuit. Though York assures us she is alive and well and takes safety precautions, the danger the bees posed led him to contemplate both the beauty of a death brought by following one’s passion, and the history of paintings that show Christ entombed, his wounds beginning to putrify. “I loved the idea of reimagining the theme in an opposite manner,” York said. “Where Christ is shown in harsh terms that illustrate the wickedness of man destroying beauty in God, my painting shows a woman following what she loves, and a death that perhaps alludes to peace and happiness—but displayed in the form of the Christ pictures.”



Arrangement XII, 2017
Oil on canvas, 22 x 22 inches

Right
Death Portrait of Kelly York (the Artist's Wife), 2011-2017
Oil on linen, 84 x 48 inches
Courtesy of the artist



poetic decay

Death and the Maiden



