

ROMANCE

Colleen Billing

nothing is so vivid as a void that swallows your senses

June 23—Aug 23, 2023

Kirlian photography, also known as electrophotography or electrography, is a photographic technique with connections to both science and magic. Discovered in 1939 through observation of a patient receiving medical treatment from a high-frequency electrical generator, electrophotography produces an image resembling an aura around an object, and was believed by its originators to depict a metaphysical energy field surrounding all living things—or an image of the organism's soul. The possibility that these images verified a life force reflecting emotional and physical states corresponds to the use of electrophotography in parapsychology research—a field studying paranormal experiences, such as telepathy, precognition, extrasensory perception, clairvoyance, and apparitions.

For this series of photos, plants often used in early herbalism were placed on a conductive surface and energized by a high-voltage power source. Photographed through an insulated discharge plate, the resulting images capture the electrical current surrounding the plant. A visible electrical current flows between the charged objects occurs when the strength of the electric field around a conductor exceeds the dielectric strength of the air. Used to capture this *corona discharge* around an object, Kirlian photography is highly sensitive to fluctuations in heat, moisture, and frequency. It makes visible the negative space around and in-between things. The invisible, imperceptible phenomenon is a reminder that a scientific understanding of the world, and a mystical one, are not entirely opposed. All science is fictive until it is accepted by the establishment.

The conductive aluminum panels are made in the image of early Jacquard punch cards, a precursor to the technology used in early computational machines. Each panel is inscribed with an abbreviated quotation from 14th century heretical mystic, Maguerite Porete's devotional text, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, with words of divination translated into binary code. Recycled steel oil drums play a choir of stressed tomatoes. Recently captured by scientists, the down-sampled audio recordings capture the ultrasonic noise of the plants when left without water. If all living things emit an unseen energetic frequency, perhaps there really does lie a potential of cross-species communication—one in which the human self dissolves. As is often the case in Billing's practice, the work favors the sensorial, highlighting the potential in the imperceptible. Holes store information, *nothing* matters.

Colleen Billing (1991) is an artist and writer living and working in New York. She received her BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University and her MFA from Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University. She has participated in residencies at the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, LMCC Arts Center and Vermont Studio Center. Recent exhibitions include *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, Inadequate Lighting, Baltimore, MD, Foundation for Contemporary Arts Benefit Exhibition, curated by Sonia Louise Davis, Greene Naftali Gallery, New York, NY, *There was earth in them, and they dug.*, curated by Nicole Kaack, Miriam Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, *Nightshade : a love story*, written with Esther Sibiude, Montez Press, New York, NY, *THE ENEMY KNOWS THE SYSTEM*, Motel, Brooklyn, NY, and *Sister Genus*, Bad Water, Knoxville, TN

by opening and appointment

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