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FLORID

Floriography, or as it is more commonly referred to, “the language of flowers”, is a coded system of communication developed during the 19th Century as an incognito method for sharing interpersonal messages. This language was aimed at concealing explicit emotions from public display in order to keep stride with the social stratum of the era, one governed by strict etiquette and moral ritual. Often utilized as a courting technique, the contents of a bouquet were selected to express intimate desires articulated by the meanings ascribed to specific blooms. The practice created a cryptic technique for disclosing intimate feelings between individuals within a culture of stringent codification, specifically regarding the feminine ideal as demure, chaste, and ultimately mute.

In *Florid*, the first solo exhibition by painter Gina Beavers at rodolphe janssen, the artist wields her own language of flowers as gleaned from a contemporary reinterpretation of their historical precedents. Representations from art history, from landscape and still life to Delft pottery, become repurposed through composite abstractions produced by artificially generated algorithms. Their palettes are familiar, their compositions feel legibly referential yet equally non-specific. Rendered in uninhibited relief of oil over acrylic, these paintings cast real shadows and provide real depth: they are not allegorical windows, nor screens in which to see ourselves reflected within, but objects occupying and claiming their own space. They materialize our addictive relationship to such mediated imagery through the artist’s extreme layering of paint en masse. Confronting viewers with the physical presence of her paintings, Beavers interrupts the possibility to scroll past ad infinitum, forcing an interaction with her subject by making tangible the reality of our visually saturated lives.

Language systems often evolve to become ultimately formed new by shifting contexts. Within the language of social media, as is the artist’s primary source material, foregrounding of the immediate reigns supreme. Aesthetic methodologies increase exponentially, rapidly forming to and from communities networked through their shared interface of smartphone glow. This sharing, copying and repeating places emphasis on aesthetic languages as commonplace. Consumer culture becomes impossible to decipher between lifestyle and advertisement, and the make-up industry has saturated this matrix with tutorials flooding our fyps (for you pages). Contained within these aesthetic disciplines, the body becomes both medium and message with the sites of feminine flourish: the lips and the fingernails are ground zero for attention economies.

Historically, the rendering of the feminine form has moved from the canvas to the body and back again since modernism. In the case of painter Gina Beavers, the artist collapses differentiation between hierarchical distinction, between painting the face, or nails, and the painting of a canvas. Beaver’s work dismantles the binary between novice and master by equating the growing complexity of personal aesthetics with those of the history of painting itself. The artist physically layers the history of representation onto the immense surfaces of her works. Monstrous hands clenching flora adorn nail sets that mirror their central subject—like the mimesis which occurs in our digitally networked lives, akin to the endless scroll of our timelines. Layers of acrylic build up like an encaustic materiality making physical the relentless tropes which permeate the slippery surfaces of our screens.

In confronting the histories of feminine representation, Beavers’ lips are not mute, but speak loudly and explicitly. Even in the abstract languages of pouting, pursing, and puckering, they interrogate the girly as being simultaneously beautiful and equally grotesque. Paint builds up in the creases of ornate mouths applied by brushes in Sisyphean acts of vanity. In doing so they confront a definition of beauty in forms of extremes, uninhibited. From one mouth to another their cacophonous speech becomes compounded together, clamouring for attention, like the obsessive reapplication of lipstick.

— Alex Turgeon