

MAGGIE DUNLAP – GILDED SPLINTERS

January 11th – February 18, 2024

Opening reception January 11th, 6-9pm

No Gallery – 105 Henry Street #4 NYC NY 10002



On Maggie Dunlap and the Gilded Splinters of Folk Horror

By Philip Best

I grew up in the UK in the 1970s. *Everything* was folk horror. I lived in Plymouth, Devon, on the wild edges of Dartmoor. On 19 August, 1978, thirteen-year-old local girl Genette Tate disappeared whilst delivering newspapers in the Devonshire village of Aylesbeare. The haunting monochrome image of her abandoned bicycle on a country lane was printed in the local papers, and soon the case gathered national attention and the London-based media descended. In many ways it was a godsend for the press pack, a juicy murder mystery in the summer doldrums that traditionally provide slim pickings for an ever-hungry news cycle. As is often the case when metropolitan outsiders descend upon an isolated community, the hacks were left unnerved by what they found, and soon pointed the finger of suspicion at Genette's father and the other residents at Barton Farm Cottage. *The evil was within*, and the incantatory media whispers continued for decades. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these urban sophisticates were entirely wrong. Genette was most likely murdered by Robert Black, a van driver from South East London, who would rattle down the lanes and byways of Britain, plucking children off the streets and gobbling them up in the back of his specially-modified vehicle. For all his folk horror trappings, the killer was very much a predatory pioneer of modernity, who cynically banked upon the carefree innocence and gentle routines of countryside life. Bobbie Black, a demon from the smoke; *the evil from without*.

Maggie Dunlap is an American Southerner who has spent some time in the South West of England — particularly Devon and Cornwall. She senses the connections between the British and American traditions, as well as the tensions and contradictions inherent in any formulation

of folk horror. Her work involves implements that can be fashioned into crudely effective weapons capable of injurious harm, but also protective charms and other symbols crafted to guarantee good order and the continuance of life's richly beneficent cycle. Dunlap's creations appear benign, and likely to be put to good use, but they carry an eerie undertow or grim fascination that hints at darker possibilities. At times in the past, and perhaps in times to come, they would be seized upon sight, decried as abominations; thrown onto the fires or trampled underfoot, splintered into a thousand pieces and scattered to the four winds.

Because sometimes the evil does lay *within*. Witness the 'witchcraft' murder of seventy-five-year-old Charles Walton at the Firs farm, on the slopes of Meon Hill in the village of Lower Quinton on the Saint Valentine's Day, 1945. Throat opened up with a pruning hook and pinned to the ground by a pitchfork through the neck. The blood leaking into the soil. Walton almost certainly knew his killer.

And other times *we just don't know*. What to make, for example, of the Delphi child murders at Deer Creek Township in rural Indiana? The case comes to trial this year, with the defense arguing that the killings were the work of Odinists committing a pagan blood sacrifice. The bodies having been staged in ritualistic poses. Or this coming summer's other blockbuster trial, the so-called Idaho Four, a group of Instagram-savvy students butchered as they slept in their beds. Seems like the *old ways* never entirely leave us. Our spiritual imaginations, abiding paranoias, and criminal perversities just won't let them go.

Maggie Dunlap (b. 1995, Washington, D.C.) is an American conceptual artist currently based in Brooklyn, New York. She received her BFA in Visual and Critical Studies from the School of Visual Art in New York City, and her MA in Critical Art Practice from the Royal College of Art in London.

No Gallery is an ambiguously commercial gallery space established in 2019, located in the lowest of the Lower East Side, Manhattan. Founded with the intention of curating exhibitions capable of pushing the boundaries of contemporary programming, *No* presents works dedicated to a nuanced exploration of extant social, personal and cultural paradigms.