

NATE FLAGG: THE MANY-RINGED TOUCH

SEPTEMBER 4 – OCTOBER 27, 2024
Opening Reception: September 4, 6–8pm

Nate Flagg's interdisciplinary practice is grounded in a deep study of language in all its forms. His work may first appear as intricately rendered abstract geometric drawings, but the complex patterns are structured by letters and words derived from a language invented by the artist. The writing systems Flagg uses are phonetic and ideogrammatic scripts that he developed and honed over the last several years. The process is also influenced by Flagg's study of seal carving and Chinese calligraphy, spending a year in China with master calligraphers to learn the craft.

The characters of Flagg's language are intricately woven into the geometric patterns of his drawings, seamlessly embedded to the point where they become one. Viewing his work requires an oscillation between attempting to navigate the text while also taking in the intricate relief-like patterns, fields of color that appear three-dimensional through contrasts of hue and gradations of value. When mounted to a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch medex backing, like *Tharathara / Double Cycle*, the works feel like an engraved stone.

The structure and composition of a work may begin with a challenge posed by the artist to himself, like, *can I create a book that can be opened and read around one's body?* The resulting work, *Po-Cama / Two Books*, contains all of the letters of his invented alphabet in two separate configurations, an additional challenge he set for himself. The work consists of a series of drawings on paper, which are bound together into two foldable accordion books with black covers and handmade paper pages on the opposite side.

The form of Flagg's works engage with the history of visual manifestations of language, like a hewn inscription in stone, a calligraphic tapestry hung on the wall, or scrolls that can be unrolled to great lengths or stored tightly in a roll. Other inspirations include carved seals, which render written language into forms so elaborate as to be hardly legible, as well as labyrinths, which appear as sacred images in cultures all over the world. The son of trained architects, Flagg uses custom brackets and structural supports to push the forms of his drawings out from the wall, producing convolutions in physical space.

In *Matwata yimamar reth-hfabt awiyiam / The many-ringed touch – it listens, dividing in time. Amwiyi ahfabt reth-mamar yimatwata / We change as the form defines, In a series of circles, embracing*, the work unfolds from a $12\frac{1}{2} \times 18\frac{1}{4}$ inch book into a $12\frac{1}{2} \times 123 \times 18\frac{1}{4}$ inch work hung on the wall, with four brackets protruding out from the wall that support the paper scroll as it unfolds. The protruding supports create pockets where a viewer's peripheral vision will become completely surrounded by the work. This overwhelming sensation has an almost meditative quality, as one loses themselves in the drawings as they navigate the incantation. The incantation in the drawing can be read bidirectionally, producing a different meaning if one starts from the left or from the right. Like many of Flagg's works, one has to physically move around the work, as it is impossible to experience it fully in one position. Here we are reminded of Ludwig Wittgenstein's quote: "Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from one side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about."

To accompany the exhibition, the gallery is publishing a catalogue of Flagg's work, which also serves as a guide to illustrate how his invented language is incorporated into the drawings. The release party will be on October 10.

Nate Flagg (b. 1989 in New York, NY) received his MFA in 2016 in Painting/Printmaking from Yale School of Art (New Haven, CT) and his BA in Anthropology in 2011 from Reed College (Portland, OR). Recent solo exhibitions include: *Cwacacaminsbin / Songs*, Elma (Brooklyn, NY), and *Yiawwiyi / Current Matter*, Galerie Dengyun (Shanghai, China). He has been included in group exhibitions at Island Gallery (New York, NY), Yve Yang (New York, NY), Swiss Institute (New York, NY), Ashes/Ashes (New York, NY), and Foxy Production (New York, NY). He lives in New York City and teaches Drawing and Time-Based Media at Pratt Institute and SUNY Fashion Institute of Technology.

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