

All the corner's inhabitants

Emma Rosenzweig

Melanie Kitti & Carl Mannov, *Hard Words*

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According to the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, daydreaming is vital for all human beings. In his 1958 publication *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard went so far as to call daydreaming crucial to exist at all and navigate what we call the real world. But where are daydreams born? In the childhood home, in a house, an apartment, in a nook, a corner, under a bed, behind a door. The good thing about the daydream, said Bachelard, is that it delights in its own being. When Bachelard wrote that "(...) to great dreamers of corners and holes nothing is ever empty (...) all corners are haunted, if not inhabited," he didn't just lay the cornerstone of phenomenology, but outlined a scientist's poetic approach to the very premise of art.

The visual artists Melanie Kitti and Carl Mannov lived under the same roof for many years, first in Oslo, where they met, and later in Copenhagen from where they both continue to work today. Once a couple, now the two are friends and colleagues. It is hard not to perceive their duo show *Hard Words* as the convergence of the daydreams of two individuals: two different minds on the run from the brain's everyday need for order colliding into each other's folded daydream corners. Kitti, born 1986, works with sculpture, tableaux, and fresco painting, with a writing practice that speaks directly into her visual art. Fragmented screams of intimacy, the body turned inside out and animals in always malleable metamorphosis. Mannov, born 1990, deals with inventions of private archetypes, characters repeated across different people in an insatiable portraiture featuring distinctive recurring objects: the same striped sweater, a pair of glasses, something you could define as a geometry of echoes in the words of Bachelard. What runs common for the work of both artists is that the spaces created around their motives could never exist outside the daydream. The lives of animals and people are interchanged, rooms narrow, horizons tremble.

In houses and rooms, reality and unreality exist side by side, and it is here, according to Bachelard, that we can hunt for inner imagery – that which will later create a renewed connection between ourselves and reality. Bachelard was an ardent advocate of the value of the inner image. But where Freud's psychoanalysis regarded symbols as part of our subconscious, Bachelard insisted that the images found inside when we lean into solitude carry their own reality beyond imagination. During the early years of Bachelard's career he was focused on science – with its mathematical formulas and a special interest in electromagnetism and telegraphy – when he was teaching at Sorbonne University. It came as a surprise to many around him when he, aged 36 and seemingly out of the blue, embarked on a career in philosophy. For the rest of his life, he taught and wrote about phenomenology, about the four elements and about how the spaces and objects we surround ourselves with inform us and our being. Reading Bachelard as a visual artist is like being granted a justification for one's existence, for it provides us with a possible per-

spective on art parallel to the way Bachelard asks us to see the world; it already exists, but the works make us pause and notice how the things that are already there are always changing into something that wasn't there before. The world is not static, and both Kittl's and Mannov's practices are exceptional examples of this. Like when the limits of language meet the ability of the image to stretch out the space between two characters, a letter caught in between, in Mannov's paintings, or when an animal's body is cut open and falls apart in the square fragments of Kittl's frescoes. Perhaps this is best described in a passage from *The Poetics of Space*, in which Bachelard quotes a passage on corners by the poet O. V. Milosz from his novel *Amorous Initiation*:

"(...) you find countless remedies for boredom, and an infinite number of things that deserve to occupy your mind for all time: the musty odor of the minutes of three centuries ago; the secret meaning of the hieroglyphics in fly-dung; the triumphal arch of that mouse-hole; the frayed tapestry against which your round, bony back is lolling; the gnawing noise of your heels on the marble; the powdery sound of your sneeze . . . and finally, the soul of all this old dust from corners forgotten by brooms."

Emma Rosenzweig, February 2026