

Margaret Crowley & Zander Raymond

Song

April 4 - May 16, 2026

At the core of this joint exhibition by Margaret Crowley and Zander Raymond is the convergence of two key actions undertaken by both artists: observing and transforming. Or, better stated perhaps, it is the single joint formed by those two actions that defines the commitment each has made within their practices. By coming together as co-exhibitors, these artists are giving each other, as well as the viewers, an opportunity to engage the particular tensions that their respective approaches to observation and transformation reveal, thereby amplifying and complicating what each is after.

For Crowley, the observations at play in her works derive from personal events, closely witnessed and anchored by familial relations. In her paintings on colored silk are depictions of her sleeping child as seen through a baby monitor and similarly painted depictions of the Eucharist (per Catholic doctrine, this is the body of Jesus Christ in the form of an edible wafer) in a religious rite known as Adoration. When the eucharist is displayed for this rite, it must be observed (adored), in person, at all times. The Eucharist images in Crowley's paintings come from what is known as Perpetual Adoration, which is the term for this rite when it is live-streamed, a post-pandemic phenomenon occurring at actual Catholic churches all over the world every day. Although sparked by and certainly tethered to observation, Crowley is also haunted by the belief that during Catholic mass, that modest wafer and glass of wine are believed to be literally transformed into the body and blood of Christ, a process known as transubstantiation (at the "Last Supper," the substance of that which was bread and wine miraculously became the substance of flesh and blood). This is where we find the joint in this work: where belief allows the observed to become something else. The screen, whether delivering us our sleeping baby or an arrangement of religious paraphernalia, requires trust that what we are seeing is what we want to be seeing and that we are being brought closer to it through observation.

Crowley deepens this attempt to get closer to the real by extending the central objects in these pictorial investigations—the Monstrance that holds the Eucharist and her child's crib—outwardly as sculptures. Made of either papier-mâché or foil, they retain a scale closer to their painted realities than what we might expect through a direct encounter. They're appearances are further distorted by de-emphasizing accuracy in relation to shape and surface details. In doing so, Crowley allows them to engender altogether different modes of contemplation, ones that, to paraphrase the artist, are both critical and confused in their attempts to contend with the contradictory nature of the formation and practice of personal beliefs.

Pushing even further away from the space of the picture screen, Crowley also presents a performance entitled *Real Presence*. Observation and transformation coalesce in a complicated fashion as the artist collaborates with her mother, a professional hair dresser. By positioning this piece just inside the gallery's store front windows, the gazes of the intentional / internal audience and the accidental / external passersby allow the substance of the mundane activity at the center of this performance to wholly transition into art. The performance title, *Real Presence*, is the term used to make the distinction that transubstantiation does not lead to a symbolic outcome, but, rather, a "real presence" of Christ in bodily form. Accompanying the performance will be a score by Crowley's exhibition partner, Zander Raymond, that comprises hair salon noise and the excerpts from a Catholic Mass.

In Raymond's work, the role of observation originates externally. Although, like Crowley, what we see of his work are products of a dedicated studio practice, the possibility for anything to manifest artistically is owed to materials that are happened upon. Sometimes they're his, sometimes they're other's, but they're always something discarded or abandoned. Of course, part of what makes such encounters with rejects so enticing has to do with their alignment with an internal force. Raymond doesn't require much beyond an initial pull to choose what he wants to spend more time with. It is at this point that any such material gets deactivated, to use Raymond's phrasing, with regard to its originally intended purpose, allowing a series of studio improvisations to occur, often intersecting with previously collected items. Just as Crowley's approach to transformation corresponds with the notion of transubstantiation, Raymond's could be said to correspond with transference. This is because the retention of a source essence (shape, texture, color, fiber, marks) is crucial. Take his laminated compositions, for example. These collaged works feel more like captured moments when certain scraps of drawings, photographs, magazines, tape, stickers, office documents, or cards happened to be crossing paths. Because of the ways heat and pressure can disturb Raymond's final placement of elements, the ultimate results owe much to chance. While we as viewers and artists have largely been trained to look at such acts as elevating humble materials into the higher realm of art, Raymond's work reminds us that transferences like these are more productive when they refuse to tip the scales of balance too hard away from the original status of the material.

In another series of works, multi-part photographs hover between clear identities largely due to the fact that each segment is contained within the face of one of several DVD cases. Designed to present imagery and text related to content on a disc inside that is printed on paper and held in place by a clear plastic sleeve, these cases are ready-made to arrange and deliver visuals. Some of these works have architectural resonances due to a combination of imagery and physical placement, such as his ongoing attempts to capture the point of intersection between a floor and a wall, which are then shown leaning against such an intersection in an actual room. It is precisely because of this phenomenological interplay of picture and placement that the oddity of the DVD cases as sequence can operate a bit more quietly than you might expect.

Raymond's sensitivity to the possibility for an object to emerge as other from by virtue of visual interference can also be seen in his over-spray pieces. Most city dwellers see misplaced sprayed paint so often they rarely give it a thought. Although unmodified by Raymond, the discovered results of these careless over-sprays (typically courtesy of utility workers warning colleagues about wires or pipes below a dig site) represent a pre-existing vocabulary that is deactivated as soon as these marked-up scraps of wood and concrete undergo their own kind of transference as they are picked up by the artist's hands.

For Crowley's and Raymond's exhibition, looking / searching / observing create a pathway of transformation toward belief / meaning / value, while simultaneously revealing that such a pathway is just as likely to be a falsehood. Thankfully, it doesn't stop there. The real payoff that comes from engaging these questions in their work jointly is that it offers a divergence from what was once seen and what it may have become, moving us to uncover a new unified truth.

Margaret Crowley (b. 1987, Ottawa, Illinois) is a Chicago-based artist. Recent solo shows include Hazard at University Galleries at Illinois State University, and Birthday at the Epiphany Center for the Arts. Her work has been exhibited at Ditch Projects in Springfield, Oregon; Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, University of Chicago; Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago; Chicago Artists Coalition; Cue Foundation, New York; and Área: Lugar de Proyectos, Caguas, Puerto Rico. Crowley has received the Jarislowsky Foundation's Emerging Artist Award, which included a residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in Banff, Canada. She has also been awarded multiple individual artist grants from the Illinois Arts Council and a residency at Ox-Bow School of Art and Artists. She received her M.F.A. from the University of Chicago, M.A. from Eastern Illinois University, and B.S. from Illinois State University.

Zander Raymond is an interdisciplinary artist and musician living and working in Chicago, IL. In his visual work, he improvises with found materials from his day to day to make collages and sculptures that serve as an autobiographical record of experience while pointing toward the unseen. His music is similarly rooted in improvisation, utilizing synthesizers, field recorders, and open-source sound computers to sample, warp, and build sonic images that embrace serendipity and highlight the musicality of the ordinary. Past Projects have been hosted by Devening Projects (Chicago, IL), Weatherproof (Chicago, IL), Switch Hook Projects (Chicago, IL), and Agatha's (Buffalo, NY). He's released music on Love All Day, Moon Glyph, Florabelle, Cached.media, among others. He holds a BFA in studio from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

****This exhibition opened with a performance by Margaret Crowley and the Hair Studio called *Real Presence* on April 4. Score by Zander Raymond.**