

Not Quite Fatal

“Why should we tolerate a diet of weak poisons, a home in insipid surroundings, a circle of acquaintances who are not quite our enemies, the noise of motors with just enough relief to prevent insanity? Who would want to live in a world which is just not quite fatal?”

— Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

Bringing together the work of visual artists practicing in printmaking, sculpture and drawing, this exhibition engages with our current collective state of climate grief and environmental anxiety. Exploring a range of artistic responses and personal identities, this collection of seven artists addresses place/displacement within the environment and the urgency of community care.

Luis Estrada and Julio Del Rio are studio artists at NIAD Art Center, a progressive art studio for neurodiverse and disabled artists located for the past 38 years in Richmond, California. I have worked at NIAD Art Center as a studio facilitator since 2014 which planted the seed for the idea for this exhibition, beginning slowly from conversations with Luis Estrada exploring how living in Richmond impacts his practice, as well as his interest in the weather and natural vs. manmade disasters.

Estrada shares reflections on making work in Richmond, saying *“Richmond has a lot of noise, too many cars, the noise is every day, every morning, every afternoon, every night. A long time I’ve been painting. I’ve been working at NIAD a long time, working a lot, I’ve been coming 15 years. 15 years I’ve been working real hard.”*

Richmond is a city historically steeped in environmental racism and big oil pollution, specifically from Chevron towards predominately Black Unincorporated Richmond. Estrada’s work has a unique power in visualizing and interpreting stories of environmental racism and preserving intimate histories of climate change.

In conversation with Estrada’s paintings is Ocean Escalanti’s ‘Nature’s on her Knees’ quilt, commissioned for this exhibition. Escalanti is an Indigenous printmaker and natural dyer living in Oakland California whose work meditates on the uncertainty of coexisting with nature and cycles of death and rebirth.

In the summer of 2020 the San Francisco Bay Area faced the trifecta of COVID 19, extreme heat waves and the largest wildfires in California’s recorded history. The affects of this were universally felt, but the works of Luis Estrada and Julio Del Rio depict the tedium and terror of it vividly. Similarly, in Veronica Graham’s screen printed posters we feel a sense of danger through the phosphorescent brilliance, what Graham describes as her ‘global warming agitprop.’ Graham is currently building “Diatribes,” a VR narrative experience that explores fears about climate change and is a lecturer of Virtual Reality in the Department of Art & Art History at Stanford University.

Flannery Cashill is a Kansas City Missouri based artist and illustrator whose work is in dialogue with Graham's print practice through their close network of small independent presses, such as Oddities Prints based in Kansas City and Tiny Splendor based in Berkeley California.

Another Kansas City based artist included in the exhibition is Gilvon Greer, a practicing artist at Imagine That, a similar studio to NIAD Art Center that supports neurodiverse and disabled artists in the Crossroads District. Greer's delicately intimate depictions of the universe and earth's biodiversity explore the wonder of the cosmos with a subtle hand and quiet revelations.

Danielle Wright is a Chicago based artist who has created a new body of work for this exhibition where she has transcribed Sun Ra's Science Fiction-tinged poetry collection "This Planet Is Doomed" onto trash which she personally generated.

In Wright's own words, "Who is disposable? What is disposable? How do small gestures of consumption, my consumer habits, contribute to impending global environmental collapse? Where am I located relative to the problems associated with environmental degradation? How does the language of "environmental racism" relegate conversations about race and capital to the fringe of environmental justice rather than center racial capitalism as the root of the problem? How does racial capitalism's definition of who and what is disposable threaten this planet?"

In the wake of COVID 19 I have been thinking of the diminishing returns of Earth and the power of visual art to reckon with the complicated possibilities of the world we are creating and living within.

Dedicated to Jon Fukui (gone too soon)