

September Diencephalon at Institute 193

Megan Bickel

“I thought, maybe you have to choose between happiness and truth and that is when I had my five imaginary children and I became happy.” And Other Self-Affirming Quasi-Truths by September Diencephalon at Institute 193.

Before making my drive to Lexington to see September Diencephalon’s exhibition, *Children Dance on Water I Wonder Why They Wash Away Sometimes* at Institute 193, I read “Porcelain Plates Hold Cyborg Supper Or the Two-Dimensional Door Through the Loop at the End of My Rope” on their website for an introduction and was bewildered and charmed by the magnitude of my disorientation. The text didn’t provide any contextual information (with obvious intentionality) to introduce the work I was looking forward to seeing, but rather felt separate. Its own work. Its own quasi-fiction. My editor will hate me saying this, but you should pause the reading of this review, and go read it yourself. Really... Here’s the [link](#). I’m not going to discuss its formal qualities here, as I don’t feel I’ll do it a service.



September Diencephalon at Institute 193. All images provided by Institute 193.

Reading “Porcelain Plates Hold Cyborg Supper Or the Two-Dimensional Door Through the Loop at the End of My Rope”... after seeing the exhibition... left me feeling hollow. Seen, but hollow. For those that suffer Depression with a capital “D” you may recognize the feeling—like you haven’t eaten in days and you’re very aware of your temples. The room is still and you no longer feel the palpability of life that is your blood moving. The text is easily conjured—this eternal love that is being a parent—that is caring. Only to be introduced to its falsity—its imagined qualities that act as a savior against a world that is at times magnificently hard.

All of this feels like the resurrection of safety that hides in imagination and a depiction of the middle—purgatory, waiting—the inability to recall a name. It would be more contextually correct to reference the transience, or the importance of this perceptual moment in the gallery—everything red and wet. But why be contextual when you can be escapist and pretend to be poetic. The painted depictions of images of images, and compositions adjacent to genre painting all resonate—or oscillate—in between what is historical, what is remembered, what is imagined, what is pretended and what is factual. The installation has no sense of identity of the maker—but it holds their autobiography hostage.

Intrinsically biblical and violent: all of this red, this Cardinal Red, this Vatican red, feels burdened—burdened with an experience of the economy of what was the Great Recession—the lack of mobility,

the standstill of a generation. A generation with more college graduates than not and a generation with a lot of them returning home after finding their education has nothing to fiscally offer them. To, as September puts it, “sitting at [the] same wooden kitchen table eating off [the] same porcelain plates and every fucking year since 2009 sleeping in the bed [they’ve] had since [they] were a kid.”



In addition to a red room and smallish red genre paintings depicting taped images, computer screens, digital spaces, credit cards, candles, flowers, and various clocks; the floor is draped with a black pond liner that has been covered with a moderate amount of water. Amongst the pond liner lies industrially manufactured lava rock and lily pads made of platinum silicone. In the back corner of the gallery there lies the text—the quasi-fictional memoir paired with ceramic peas and a bronze tongue. An offering of the body, the word—that which is consumed. To the right of this corner is the back wall of the gallery where you come across a magnificent red velvet curtain—embroidered with various strawberries, nail clippings, and other details found in the paintings. The curtain collapses onto a wanton, slightly bloated foot that is both macabre and Othered. All of these elements of the body feel fragmented—remembered but not fantastical—remembered but not memorialized.

In the center of the gallery, is a box that appears to have risen from the ground. Inside is a pile of found wood and wooden, sculpted hands. There are also wood eating insects. Insects that will devour the hands over time—our mortality incarnate. Humidity and precipitation within the box imply a sort of ecosystem. All things coming, going, and repeating.

There is about a week left at the time of this publish to see September Diencephalon’s exhibition *Children Dance on Water I Wonder Why They Wash Away Sometimes* at Institute 193. Lexington, Kentucky. September 28th–November 2nd, 2019.

—Megan Bickel

