

Art as Therapy: Symmetry Breaking by Melissa Watt

By Julie Wilson



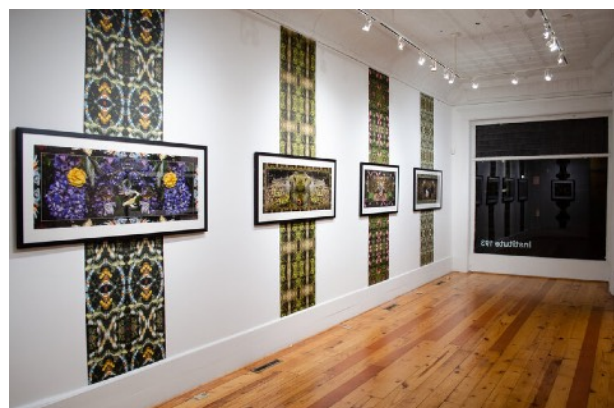
Melissa Watt, *Monkey in the Pawpaws*, 2019, composite photograph, 18.5 x 47 inches

Art is therapy. Mind you, it's not a cure for what ails this world, but its mere existence can sometimes soften the rough edges of our tempestuous climate.

That's what it did for me today. I went to Institute 193 in Lexington, Ky., to view Melissa Watt's exhibition of *Symmetry Breaking*. Gallery Director Elizabeth Glass had extended an invitation to come view the work a couple weeks ago, and I happily accepted.

That was then. As we all know, a lot has happened in the past 14 days, and I confided in her upon my arrival that I had come so close to cancelling. RBG and Breonna Taylor all in one week... it was just too much. It felt superfluous to talk about art in a time like this. Then we both agreed that times like this is actually when we need art the most.

Watt's exhibition is beautifully intense, with an aesthetic that lures you in to look deep within each photograph and discover subtle nuances that extend beyond the original meaning. Institute 193 (1B) Gallery Director Emma Friedman-Buchanan describes Watt's work, stating "In nature, symmetry occurs only in



Installation view

approximation. But it is the process of symmetry breaking that shapes every organism's growth. Symmetry breaking is fundamental to the creation of new life..."

As you can see from the photos, Watt's mirroring of the natural elements practically demands the viewer take a deeper dive into the work and makes no apologies for it. Natural settings, yet unnatural. Blooming, vibrant flowers belied up to dead or dying organisms.

The image "Monkey in the Pawpaws" puts an exclamation on this notion of natural vs. unconventional. The hummingbirds in flight, harmonious with their surroundings. Even the monkey seems in situ until the camouflage is broken by its berry-stained (or is it blood?) teeth. The natural state is disturbed. The unexpected is now the norm.

Many of us are struggling with how to ensure our current troubled climate (both the political and the planetary) doesn't become the norm. That we don't succumb to accepting that tumultuous is our natural state. Melissa Watt's exhibition at Institute 193 is an invitation for us to question what we are willing to accept as fable or fact.

Symmetry Breaking by Melissa Watt is on display at Institute 193 through October 3, 2020.