

Dread in the Eyes

January 13–April 14, 2022

The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts
323 West 39th Street, NY, NY 10018

Samira Abbassy
Allen T. Ball
Michael Eade
Sally Egbert
Jason File
Katya Grokhovsky
Edgar Jerins
Kosuke Kawahara
Greg Kwiatek
Dana Levy
Cheryl Molnar
Nazanin Noroozi
Whitney Oldenburg

Curated by Deric Carner



... in possibility everything is possible and he who truly was brought up by possibility has comprehended the dreadful as well as the smiling. - Søren Kierkegaard The Concept of Dread

Darker themes have soaked into the artwork being made at EFA Studios. Recent times have tested many people's optimism and it is no surprise that artists have picked up on a sense of dread and upheaval in the air. Fire, disease, flood, and food insecurity are in the media and evident on our streets. Artists are barometers of change, sensing the coming storm, and recording its erratic progress. The artists in this exhibition have created visual traces and frameworks for contemplating the turmoil that is often seen at a remove on screens. Some artists have worked in this vein for years already, having been buffeted by the stress of precarity and sensitivity to injustice. Others know of deep loss that has no resolution. There is dread but also hope in the eyes of artists.

Kosuke Kawahara confronts terror head-on by imagining the worst, the bodies left on the side of the road, the leering skull faces of despair, and the rot and putridness of disease. By addressing these negative fantasies he is able to work through the black feelings and live in the present smiling. Greg Kwiatek paints a storm-battered boat. It is an apt emblem for our times, though the image is timeless like a romantic tragedy. Or perhaps it is the prelude to an elaborate comedy? The tempest scene is paired with a painting of a horseback rider who stalks the horizon in a gasmask recalling a long-ago war or a dreadful future of environmental collapse.

Loss is softened by time and is the ground for new growth in the work of Sally Egbert and Michael Eade. Egbert's paintings run cool and hot in their gauzy ambiguity punctuated by fragile flowers or the scribbled line of a vase. Her moody canvases sometimes suggest a field of light filtered through water or shifting atmosphere, and other times glower in somber purples and night blues. Michael Eade paints glittering burned-out landscapes. A season after the fire, they bloom with new life.

Whitney Oldenburg creates awkwardly present sculptures. They are *like* something—*cave-like, womb-like, tumor-like*—but never settle into a final form. Some pieces like *holding 800* contain personal items squirreled away in their hidden interiors. Others purportedly represent household objects like a drying rack or an electric razor. Through accretions of various materials, they are worked and reworked into strange limbic externalizations. Across from Whitney's abstraction is a realist image by Edgar Jerins. A man is smoking in a bedroom littered with trash. Through the window is a cold winter city. The man's youth is betrayed by the hopelessness in his eyes. *Jay Alone* depicts the anomie and dread of dead-end masculinity.

A cabinet of curiosities with grisly sculptures, bones, teeth, evil eyes, and dolls with multiple heads and other unknown horrors brings the idea of dread to the level of burlesque. On view is a sampling of items collected and made by Samira Abbassy. A vicious vagina dentata, a widow's veil, and half-born fetuses speak of the indignities of being a woman in an absurd world.

Allen T. Ball uses residue from the land to make paintings and installations which deal with humankind's effect on the environment. On view are three panels of earth and bark which suggest a scorched and forbidding vision of our planet where nature and even our atmosphere might be a relic. Nearby is Cheryl Molnar's cut-paper collage inspired by the Griffith Park fires. The image taps into the Los Angeles noir binary of pleasure and doom. LA represents the apotheosis and unraveling of the American dream, where progress runs out of land, where fires, mudslides, and earthquakes replace seasons.

Riptide is a handmade film by Nazanin Noroozi which is set to an ethereal soundtrack by Joël Fajerman. Noroozi uses family footage from pre-revolutionary Iran, vintage computer graphics, and collage elements to tell a doomsday story with a hauntingly light touch. Suggestions of a meteor strike and ecological collapse are mixed with war games and nostalgia for a lost world. This creates a melancholic space that speaks to the pain of dislocation and loss which can come from human or cosmic origin.

Jason File's film traces the role of toilet paper in America and its global trading partners from 1960's advertising to 1980–90s footage of TP'ing as a suburban ritual of celebration and pranking to darker contemporary news footage of consumers fighting over shortages. The film is set to a pre-9/11 song appropriated as an emblem of the conflation of underground cool and consumer ecstasy. The film is a spot-on critique of hysteria in American culture and the thin line between abundance and fearful hoarding.

The Last Man by Dana Levy eerily combines security camera feeds from cities around the world recorded during the COVID-19 lockdown with scenes from *The Last Man on Earth*, a 1964 science fiction film starring Vincent Price. The contemporary imagery of deserted streets easily overlaps the dialog in which a pandemic has turned most humans into vampires leaving Price alone to wander the empty streets and lament society's sudden fall.

We do not know how fundamental change is going to come about - suddenly and painfully, gradually and hopefully, or like a clap of the hands the spell of the now will be broken. Katya Grokhovsky's drawing of a naked individual with long blond hair and a red penis stares up to the heavens as if asking *what's next?* Their arms are outstretched waiting for applause or perhaps a parachute of provisions.

Image: Kosuke Kawahara, *Welcome to the New Darkness*, 2015, oil color, gesso, paper, plywood, 26.5 x 22.5 inches