

Cathy Hsiao and Alejandro Jiménez-Flores

*Always Touches on a Flower*

February 17 – March 28, 2019

*The fleur is the finest, most subtle part, the very surface, which remains before one and which one merely brushes against [effleure]: every image is a fleur, or is a flower.*

- Jean-Luc Nancy

The title of this exhibition comes from a misremembered attempt at paraphrase, which, appropriately inverted a version of the epitaph above. To speak of the surface and softness of contact that is visual apprehension, both Alejandro Jiménez-Flores and Cathy Hsiao create works that take Nancy's maxim to a somewhat literal degree by placing the flower (*fleur*) directly to the surface and fabric of the image. Whether in Jiménez-Flores's repetitious and languid drawings and transfers, or Hsiao's botanically chromatic concrete sculptures, each artist engages the floral image and imaginary as an actant and subject imbued by memory.

In Jiménez-Flores's work, flowers become media in and of themselves as sensing and sensitive beings whose encounters can become site for communication between intimates, or as a gateway to memory itself. For Jiménez-Flores, the human experience with the floral form is a site of translation or a type of experience where one subjectivity is channeled through another. This translation is extended into the bedrock of the artist's practice through complex modes of transfer during the drawing process that involves revisiting, building out, and replicating an image or form asynchronously throughout the process. Across the surface of these images, Jiménez-Flores leaves behind hazy pastel and colored pencil drawings that seem to cling to the canvas by virtue of static electricity. Flowers float, fade, fizzle out and reappear with some parts more pronounced than others across the same image but presented differently on other surfaces. Stains from petals and petals themselves peak out from their supports, grazing the ground and blowing kisses at the firmament between surface and visitor. The flowers in Jiménez-Flores's work asks us to remember and pay attention, to see where and why they hide from us on one side, but show themselves on another, each work presents a different way of remembering not only our own floral encounters, but encounters with the work itself across the space.

Meanwhile, a series of new cast works by Cathy Hsiao takes up the challenge of memory, communication and mediation laid out in Jiménez-Flores's paintings, responding to them with their own challenge. Casting c-clamps, a tool used to hold two things together, or a single item in place against another surface, Hsiao's sculptures are hung directly opposite Jiménez-Flores's work with the space between the clamps left conspicuously open, holding nothing between it but a suspect absence that gives way to the realization that the distance between the clamps corresponds to the size of the correspondent painting the sculpture faces. The casts are made from an amalgamation of silicone, concrete, plant matter and natural dye,

redirecting the object from something that facilitates the binding of surfaces to a surface that is itself bound up in its own material interactions. The object withdraws into itself with gaps of various sizes between their ends demarcating an absence that leaves the viewer looking to fill in the blanks, demonstrating an image's capacity to act as an absence that communicates, and where the lack of a thing-in-and-of-itself gives way for its representation, suggestion, and reference. Hsiao situates much of her own material interests in her familial memory of Taiwanese natural plant dye makers. While not producing dyed textiles, Hsiao has positioned her memory of family traditions into the surface of her sculptural practice where the memory of the clamps and memory of technique brush against one another between immediate and ancestral temporalities.

*Always Touches on a Flower* seeks to eavesdrop on conversations between he works through the floral intermediary. In some small way, the tables are turned, revealing that we mediate with flowers and they in kind, mediate through us. The flowers might be displayed on the walls, but in this exhibition, we are all behaving like wallflowers.

Alejandro Jiménez-Flores (b.1989) is a process-based conceptual artist making gestures that occupy the space of painting, writing, and performance. Their practice is concerned with how the language we have, or lack, subordinates our subjectivities, identity formations, and the space we are allowed to occupy. They attained a BFA in Studio Arts from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2012 & a very minor in Poetry from School of Poetics in Marseille France in 2013 ;). They have had recent solo exhibitions at BAR4000 (Chicago, IL), Heaven Gallery (Chicago, IL), and ADDS DONNA (Chicago, IL).

Cathy Hsiao is an artist working in Chicago. She comes from a background in craft, weaving animal fibers dyed with plants, raised by a Buddhist mother. She has exhibited in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles. Upcoming shows include Aspect Ratio, MCAC, and DePaul Art Museum.