



It's Enormous.

As of 2013, the funeral market is estimated to be a \$20.7 billion per year industry in the United States alone, and both the proliferation of super deluxe death-care options and the escalating costs of the *stuff* of death (caskets, gravestones, embalming procedures) has transformed normative standards for how to show, and what to spend on, grief. Bereavement slides easily into a spending spree, whereby gullies of loss may cynically be measured by dollars spent on funerary procedures. Yet, finance is but one of many economies relating to loss. Bestride the money market exists our own personal economies of time, effort, and feeling. We may all do it differently, but we all ultimately do gild this particular lily.

The Stench of Rotting Flowers is an exhibition concerned with the decor and decorum of loss. The exhibition showcases labor-intensive, ritualistic, and repetitive approaches to sorrow that indulge grief beyond the financial and complicate the sad monotone of bereavement. Indeed, it is through a queer embrace of the superfluous, moldy, and unnecessary that many of these artists dwell in death — making it gorgeous, frivolous, meticulous, enormous, or even pleasurable. This is in no way to suggest that the mood or feelings of sadness and grief pulsing throughout the exhibition are not sincere or deeply, hugely felt. It is instead to suggest that moods and feelings of sadness and grief are entirely more complex than any one, non-reflexive emotional form.

Sincerity and satire. Artifice and ache. Decadence and decay. Both and all.

- Danny Orendorff, Charlotte Street Foundation Curator-in-Residence

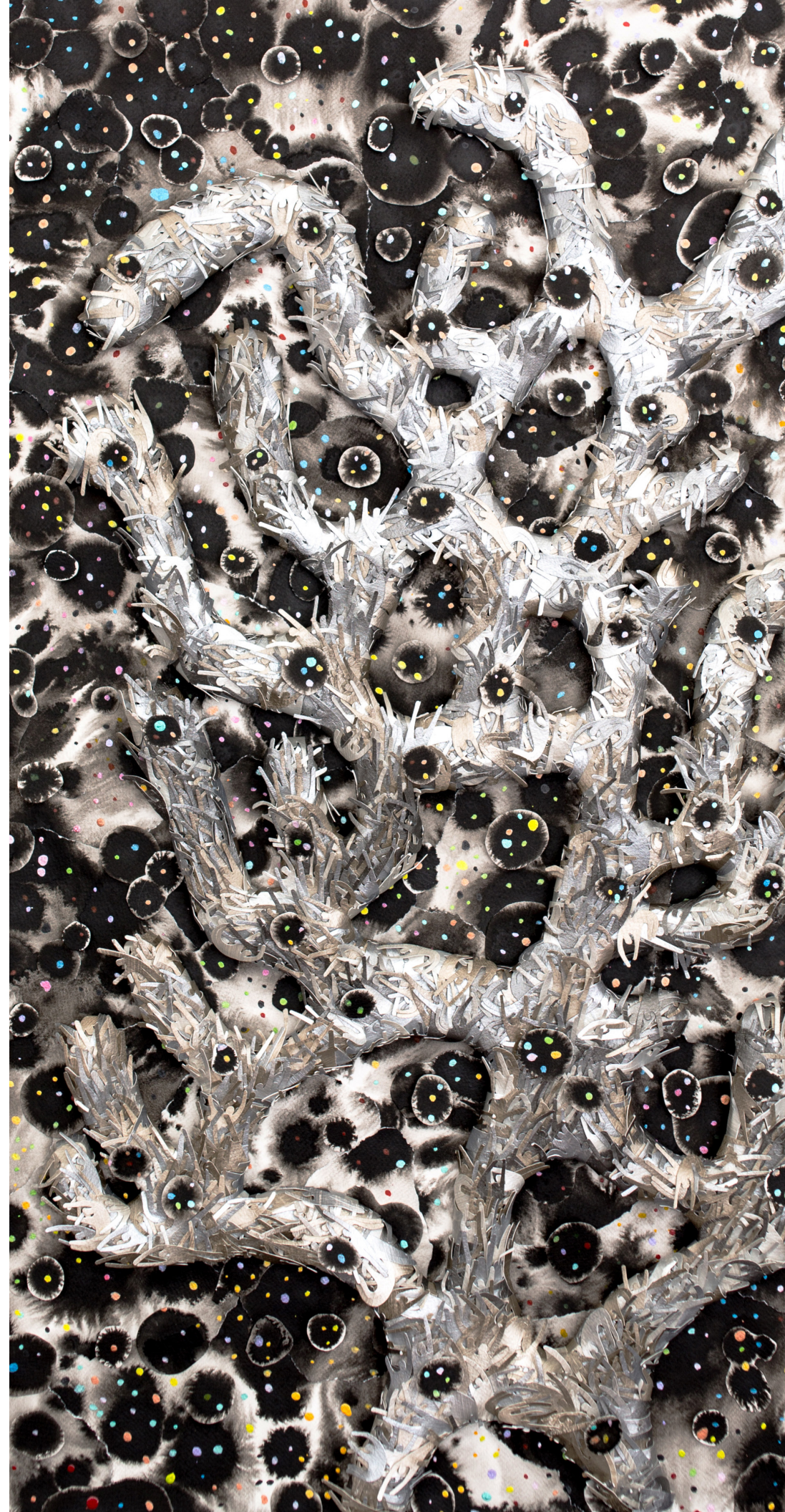
The Stench of Rotting Flowers

la Esquina | April 19, 2014 - June 6, 2014

Featuring: Marie Bannerot McInerney, Elijah Burgher, Adrain Chesser, Hope Esser, Edie Fake, Rain Harris, Jesse Harrod, Peregrine Honig, Jenny Kendler, Daviel Shy, Jeff Tackett, Ashley Thomas, and Michael Velliquette.



Image Credits | Front: Ashley Thomas, *Flowers*, graphite on paper, 2013 / Back: Michael Velliquette, *Waterless Mountain*, paper, acrylic, ink, 2013 (DCKT Contemporary: New York, NY) / Top Left: Rain Harris, *Bon Bons for Babs*, porcelain, luster, rhinestones, beads, artificial hair, 2006 / Top Right: Jenny Kendler, *New Ways to See I*, Vintage composite marble & wood busts, glue, archivally-preserved lichen, 2013
Brochure Design by Wendy Vong



THE STENCH OF
Rotting Flowers

Goddess who delights in the ruin of the rose, Prolong the night!

The Ruin Of The Rose: Flowers In Renée Vivien's Poetry

By Daviel Shy

Renée Vivien, born Pauline Tarn to English and American parents, was a British poet who wrote exclusively in French. She moved to Paris at age twenty-one, published more than thirty volumes of poetry and prose under various names and died at the age of thirty-two, of a slow suicide by way of alcoholism, anorexia and chloral hydrate usage.

Your cold kisses love the harm they do;

I planted bulbs in the backyard yesterday; yellow tulips, purple crocuses and white daffodils. I didn't understand flowers until late last summer. I hated them actually. I thought they were vain and impractical- why spend the effort growing something you can't eat?

It was late August and I was running the back route by the expressway. I turned a corner past tall unkempt roses and lilacs that assail your nostrils and drooping sunflowers all taller than me, spilling over onto sidewalks and obstructing paths. I actually had to dodge them, duck, dovetail. They were grotesque: too bloomed, almost going rotten with intense decadence, an overflowing display. This was the nastiness of late summer, nasty in the good way, like grinding to Ciara songs.

Revealing the hideous below your beauty.

I saw-as one sees a flower fade-

On your mouth, like summer auroras,

The withered smile of an old whore.

For Vivien, all flowers are dying. All perfume is sex, decay: reminders of our more true love or at least obsession, our end. Renée Vivien's use of flowers in her poetry and persona is consistent throughout her oeuvre. The flowers take center stage as actors, descriptors, and metaphors. They are most often removed from landscape— indoors, cut, bleeding. Cut flowers are a tragedy: all that drama without the ground. I sit now face to face with these strange plant parts, trying to understand Renée.

Thin membranes curl and wither, edged brown. After just one day, the tips of rose petals appear abused. Any contact with the neighboring flower leaves a mark, crease or bruise. Stiff veins line the backs of the lilies, holding the petals like cups to catch the dust of the stamens, deep red and brown that stains skin yellow. The face opens to its falling: a yawning which produces wafts of surrender. Goodbye, they say and this is called blooming. It is not long before one's nose acclimates to the heavy sweetness.

I am drunk from so many roses

Much has already been written about the symbolic value of flowers in Vivien's life- the flowers symbolizing the women she loved: Lilies for Natalie; Vivien's lover who was never faithful, criticized Vivien for her morbidity, was flamboyantly alive. Vivien called Natalie Lorelei in the 1905 version of her novel, *Une Femme Mapparut (A Woman Appeared to Me)*. In 1899, their affair was said to have begun in a room filled with lilies.

Vivien was responsible for the gesture, her proclivity for excess predating her first sexual encounter. And Violets for Violet Sholetto— Vivien's girlhood friend, whose early death caused Renée guilt and suffering the rest of her short life. Hyacinths for Hélène van Zuylen, the baroness to whom Vivien dedicated most of her books after 1902. Violets, lilies, hyacinths, and roses are the flowers most often mentioned in Vivien's poetry. If one notices the pattern: V=Violet, L=Lorelei (Natalie), H=Hélène, then roses might stand in for Renée herself.

In a poem dedicated to her neighbor Colette, Vivien writes:

In this wood away from prowling satyrs

My heart is sweeter than an open rose

The French word bois (wood) is significant since Renée lived at 23, Avenue de Bois where she shared a courtyard with the famed author Colette. Here, safe from prowling satyrs, or the danger of lovers she both desired and feared, Renée opens her heart to her friend. Renée told Colette, “There are fewer ways of making love than they say, and more than one believes.”

The pleasure of hearing the drops

your blood beading on the flowers

Vivien's sadomasochistic sexual practices are alluded to by her biographers but never mentioned outright. She is said only to have had “extreme” appetites. These appetites are openly manifest in her poetry.

Your nails have bruised my flesh among silks,

and I bear the proud record ... Your makeup

“Flowery” is often used as a description of the delicate, ornate, and extraneous, yet the flowers in Vivien's poems are the opposite. They are blunt bodies, bruised, bloodied, acting upon the speaker, exuding intoxicating perfumes and mastery over their victims. The flowers inevitably die, yet in this act as well they are not frail but powerful in their insistent decay.

Disordered, the flowers charmed the meal,

Bruised lilies and hyacinths bloody...

Have the flowers been battered or are they agents of pain? I think of the Leonard Cohen lyric, “And then I confess that I tortured the dress that you wore for the world to look through.” The dress is an inanimate object, a go-between for Cohen to react to the lover he sings about. But lilies and hyacinths are living things. It was the flowers that charmed the meal. Though bruised and bloody, they are the acting subjects of the sentence. Vivien's sparse lines convey a complex relationship between beauty and sorrow, pleasure and pain.

what sadness after pleasure, my friend,

When the last kiss, sadder than a sob,

escapes your trembling white mouth.

Players that are neither victim nor oppressor engage in a rotation of anguished and ecstatic encounters.

Flowers dangle their orgiastic glory

In the mud

Buying flowers in order to torture them, I feel guilty as I point the sales lady to the rose with brown spots and ask for the lily that has already turned. Does she know? I bring them home and put them in a dark closet (my studio) to expedite their decay. When I open the door to sit down and write, the air is thick with rank sweetness.

What she remembers are the kisses they forget...

She cannot learn to desire without feeling grief,

She who gazes still, with melancholy beset,

At flowers dying after night orgies, so brief.

I started with perennials, a little more practical, as a first step. I love the idea of putting those bulbs in now and waiting all winter to see if maybe I did it right. The backyard is a mess— I spent most of the afternoon pulling strange plastic things and bottle caps out of the soil, getting some of the rocks out and every so often getting a worm that let me know there was hope.

And you led me into a pagan orchard

Where the soul has no regrets and desires nothing.

Perhaps for Vivien death is a rest from desire.

Here is the place where your hot body rests

She wrote the epitaph for her own gravestone, which reads:

Here is the gate through which I leave...

O my roses and my thorns!

What matter now days gone by?

I sleep and dream of things divine.

Herein lies my ravished soul,

Appeased and sleeping now

Who, for the love of Death

Has forgiven the crime that is Life.

Without dirt, all that one can hold onto is the fact of fleeting itself. You cling to death as the scent of its coming clings to you.

coda:

To be buried in the ground longer than she lived in bloom.

Is this the definition of fame?

To be dug up again and again for posthumous printings and translations instigated by hungry poets, scholars, and tormented lovers in perpetual stinking Augusts to come.

You for whom I wrote, O beautiful young women!

You alone whom I loved, will you reread my verse...?