

One Foot in the Grave

Awareness of death and the fear it inspires affects our everyday decision-making. It plays a massive role in shaping our daily lives, culture, beliefs, and the way we choose to experience life. In an effort to find comfort and meaning, we have constructed religious mythologies, afterlife representations, and an industry that makes a considerable effort to deny decomposition. What if we accepted the gruesome beauty in mortality, imperfection and the terror of the unknown instead of trying to make it fit into a perfect life-like mold? What if we allowed for more conversation around this stigmatized topic?

While the expression "one foot in the grave" tends to refer to people who are close to dying, we may have all felt closer to having "one foot in the grave" in some way or another in the last few years. The title is borrowed from a Beck song where he sings about the approach of death with a post-consumerism blues lament, "don't carve no happy face on my tombstone, don't put no coupons on my grave."

One Foot in the Grave explores themes of the afterlife with works that playfully celebrate human fallibility and our temporal lives; messy, unconventional beauty. In this collection of artwork with bold, unrepressed mark-making, art brut, and colorful composition styles, six featured artists explore otherworldly themes. While some work seems to fathom the void, others seek to grasp life's subconscious undercurrents and messages from the other side.

How can we begin to understand or comprehend nonexistence? Professor and media artist Kristin Reeves approaches the topic from a scientific and philosophical angle in her video performance of "What Is Nothing (After What Is Nothing)." Using found educational films, direct laser animation, and nine-projectors, she attempts to realize the multifaceted materiality of nothingness through a child's eyes. "I had a unique experience of being photographed for medical research as a child. The discovery of these images at an early age introduced me to the media's power to act in lieu of a human body. The camera had transformed me into an unfamiliar media body which could travel and perform in places unseen."

Using graphite on tracing paper to create delicate works inspired by words and poetry, Masha Sha's large-scale drawings consist of thousands of tiny lines. Her creations can often bring her hands to a breaking point, and the graphite's pressure on thin paper also brings the paper and the graphite to a breaking point. As a Russian artist living in the United States, Masha is engaging in a visual relationship with language that is always in a

state of improvisation. In "Sign," Masha says, "This drawing explores the shape and meaning of warning road signs and brings attention to the fleeting nature of impermanence."

The afterlife symbolism is strong in Dylan Griffith's bold and bright paintings. "The spirit of the deceased is represented as a golden barbed wire fence transversing a mountainous landscape from dusk to dawn. Also, the spirit is a devil, a wide-eyed shadow, an angel, a swarm of butterflies, the shades of pink in the sky, a sunflower, and a snake," explains Dylan. Drawing on a library of cultural and personal symbols, his work explores the material and metaphysical interaction between people and their environment.

Alicia Ordal's sculptures, performances and installations tend to explore ideas of other realms. In this specific exhibition, her new sculptural installation addresses our longing to reconnect with our deceased loved ones and sustain communication with them by using tools such as ouija boards. Ordal contemplates the narratives and stories we create about where they are now and how we are driven to look for meaning and messages in our daily lives that signal they are still with us, in some form.

Julio Alejandro's primitive and urban expressionist painting style "channels his frenzied and unbridled artistic energy onto the canvas, becoming a vehicle for divine revelation," says Black Book gallery. Recently, having experienced the loss of a friend and collector, Alejandro shares a new painting, "Everybody Has Dead Homies," depicting Egyptian burial practices and citing the title of a famous Mexican song regularly heard at funerals.

Precious Kofi creates abstracts that are rich with color and emotion, each painting seems to capture the inspiration, wisdom and liveliness garnered from the moments in her life that her paintings reference. "When searching for answers or direction, go within. Inside of you lives the Divine universe. And it exists eternally," writes Kofi.

With this collection of work, I hope to capture a brutal vulnerability juxtaposed with a playfulness that feels vibrant, alive, and raw, the way we might wish to live our lives if we can absorb the wisdom death and impermanence has to offer. We cannot be truly alive without maintaining an awareness of death. It is not waiting for us at the end of the road; it is always with us, as an integral part of life. As Ken Wilber says, "All spiritual practice is a rehearsal - and at its best, an enactment of death. As the mystics put it, 'if you die before you die, then when you die, you won't die.' In other words, if right now you die to the separate-self sense, and discover instead your real self which is the entire Kosmos at

large, then the death of this particular bodymind is but a leaf falling from the eternal tree that you are.”

— Esther Hz