

# *Probably Just the Wind*

~Death, Necropolitics & Transformation~

## Curatorial Vision

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*Probably Just the Wind* is not merely a survey of art and death; nor, is it a morbid fascination or fetishization of the loss of life. It is an attempt to reconcile such attitudes within a society and culture that has yet to fully come to terms with the ways in which it, or rather we, are, in fact, collaborators, accomplices, witnesses, victims, and ritual participants in a faded rainbow of thanatological expressions.

Death has been called “the great equalizer” and yet, there is nothing equal about the ways in which we encounter death. Death is both custom-tailored and mass-produced. It is sublimely private and grotesquely public. It is feared, avoided, instrumentalized, and, at times, even celebrated. Can an art exhibition about death be serious and somber while still being irreverent and celebratory? Does one cast a shadow over the other? Or is it possible that the shadows need the light to exist, and vice versa?

There’s a magic trick called the *Traveling Flame* in which an extinguished candle is relit using its smoke as a flame bridge. It’s a simple illusion that’s often overlooked and only occasionally resurrected as a parlor trick or party divertissement. And yet, in the right hands, it can be a profound, poetic moment that conjoins chemistry and art with our perception of what is or isn’t possible. Throughout art and culture, the burning candle has become a familiar trope to represent life and death; spark and shadow. In the performance of the *Traveling Flame*, the audience witnesses an illumination extinguished in an act of finality that nevertheless leaves behind sensed traces of its former existence - wafting smoke; a whiff of wax; perhaps a faint, dying glow. In the hands of the conjuror, a scientific principle is applied to make the flame reappear with an appeal to the miraculous. What was lost, has returned as if time has been turned back. Light and heat and flame come alive once again.

It is not enough for an art exhibition to merely point at death or to remark upon a topic that is at once immensely personal and truly universal. It's not enough to simply show artwork that contemplates death. Nor is it enough to simply show work that shows images of death or death imagined. We can't pretend that these artists have thought about death, have experienced loss, or have mourned more than anyone else who may experience this show. We can only hope that this collection of attitudes and interpretations can help each of us reflect on our own relationship to death, individually and collectively.

Although death is truly universal, we cannot passively suggest that death is *merely* an inevitable consequence of life without acknowledging that, while death comes to all eventually, it does not come to all equally. The manner in which governments, corporations, institutions, economies and societies create conditions, laws, and actions that ultimately determine who lives and who dies has been termed "necropolitics" by the Cameroonian critical theorist, Achille Mbembe. Through the lens of necropolitics we come to find that death - while timeless - has not remained unchanged throughout history. On the contrary, it is through history, both distant and recent, that we come to see the ways in which the most pressing concerns and most popular cultural expressions are shaped by necropolitics in both the present and the future.

In the tarot, the card representing 'Death' is frequently misunderstood to mean a literal death; however, tarot readers will readily inform you that the card most often represents a transformation; the end of one thing and the beginning of something new. Is it possible to approach our current necropolitical layout in the same manner? To properly grieve, mourn and remember but also change, transform, revitalize, and celebrate?

Some work featured in this exhibition will feel 'old'. It will be 'already known'. It may even be labeled by some as 'past its prime'. How fitting for a show about death! Are we so quick to move past the past even when it continues to haunt us well into the present, and tomorrow's present, too? Can we forget Iraq so easily even while other wars fuelled by extractive agendas continue and will continue? Can we forget women's fight for rights and bodily autonomy in the 60's and 70's even while such rights are assailed today? Can we forget lynchings and police violence that happened decades ago, years ago, weeks ago, yesterday, this morning? Can we forget school shootings that happened when we were kids, when we had kids, when we have

grandkids? Can we forget species which have gone extinct, or entire ecosystems which have vanished from the face of the earth only moments ago and only moments from now? Can we forget entire peoples, assailed communities, and our own ancestors? Death doesn't mind if it feels old, forgotten, or out of time; death is timeless.

To speak of death is to speak of both the past and the future. But it is hardest to speak of it in the present. For some it is too close, while for others it is trivialized or denied entirely. In *Probably Just the Wind*, artists, activists, and other cultural producers also take a variety of approaches to create work that is both somber and celebratory, serious and irreverent, pensive and populist, prescriptive and enigmatic. Each is an incarnation of a social haunting; a scream or a shout, a whisper or a chill, that calls attention to the many traces of death drawn throughout our lives. Each is its own flame, smoke, and glow that travels from one to another, reigniting in the shadows. Is it an illusion? A protest? An invocation? It's *Probably Just the Wind*.

### Artists:

Dread Scott, Will Rogan, Pedro Reyes, Dennis Palazzolo, Teresa Margolles, Jill Magid, Paul Koudounaris, Packard Jennings, Matt Kenyon, Hilma's Ghost, Angela Hennessy, Kate Haug, Hans Haacke, Nicholas Galanin, Forensic Architecture, Joseph DeLappe, Amaryllis DeJesus Moleski, Public Collectors, Center for Tactical Magic, Andrew Brandou, Daniel Bräg, and US Games Systems, Inc.