

LAUNCH F18

August 12, 2019



IN CONVERSATION **CORINNE BERNARD & CHRISTIN GRAHAM**

On the occasion of LAUNCH F18's group exhibition, *Future Starts Slow*, co-curator of the show, Christin Graham sat down with participating artist, Corinne Bernard to discuss her studio practices, relationship with art, and voice as an emerging artist.

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CHRISTIN GRAHAM: Let's start with a simple introduction – where are you from?

CORINNE BERNARD: Missouri, Long Island, Rhode Island, Massachusetts but the first place that was home was California. It was the first place I found a community that I really connected with.

CG: Community can certainly create a home, especially for an artist- it's essential to us. Where did you go to college and what led you to becoming an artist?

CB: I went to college at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles. I was completely unprepared to study art, I really didn't even know what art was, but I always knew I wanted to be an artist. I had a natural inclination towards painting and drawing but I was often intimidated by this because I didn't know why I wanted to make art. Only in the past few years, have I really begun to dig into the content that drives me to make.

CG: I love the honesty you have with yourself and your need to find answers first. What pays the bills for you now, or what would you describe as your daytime job?

CB: Currently I work at the office of a hardwood flooring company. It's small and family owned, and they have been very accommodating of my goals as an artist, which I appreciate, but I'm on the journey of becoming a full-time artist.

CG: Something I'm always fascinated to learn is a person's morning routine, particularly creative people. Do you keep to a routine? Does it ever vary?



Corinne Bernard. VFGA: The Moment I Can't Return. 2018-2019. Mixed media on paper, 41 pieces

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CB: I try to keep a routine. I work best in the morning- creatively. Start with our dependable espresso machine, all days. On the days I work, I try to carve out at least thirty minutes to read or draw in the morning (and on my lunch break). On the weekends, I try to wake up early and get there around 9 and jump right in. Of course, this doesn't always work out since life always seems to get in the way, but when it does, it's usually magical.

CG: Is writing ever incorporated into your process as you prepare for a new project? If so, how much do you rely on that as part of your work?

CB: Only recently, as I have started to incorporate text in my images, has writing become more of the process. I write down ideas for text. If I do write *about* my practice or process, it's usually while I'm reading. Pulling language from my research helps me build language around my own practice.

CG: I'm sure a lot of people can really relate to that and it seems very much tied into to your stunning installation: *VFGA: The Moment I Can't Return*, featured in LAUNCH F18's current exhibition. Can you speak more about the concept or idea that helped formulate this particular body of work?

CB: VGFA is an anagram for Votum Factum Gratium Accepit. Translated from Latin to English means "Vow made, grace receive". It is often written on Catholic votive paintings. Votive giving is a part of many religions, but in the Catholic tradition it is often a painting that commemorates a spiritual intervention. I like to think of all of my works as an intervention because, while I give birth to the works and they are derived from my life experiences, I also feel that there is another source driving me. I think my best works are created when I allow myself to trust that source.

CG: What is it about the process of making the work that helped you through these thoughts and feelings, and did it help?

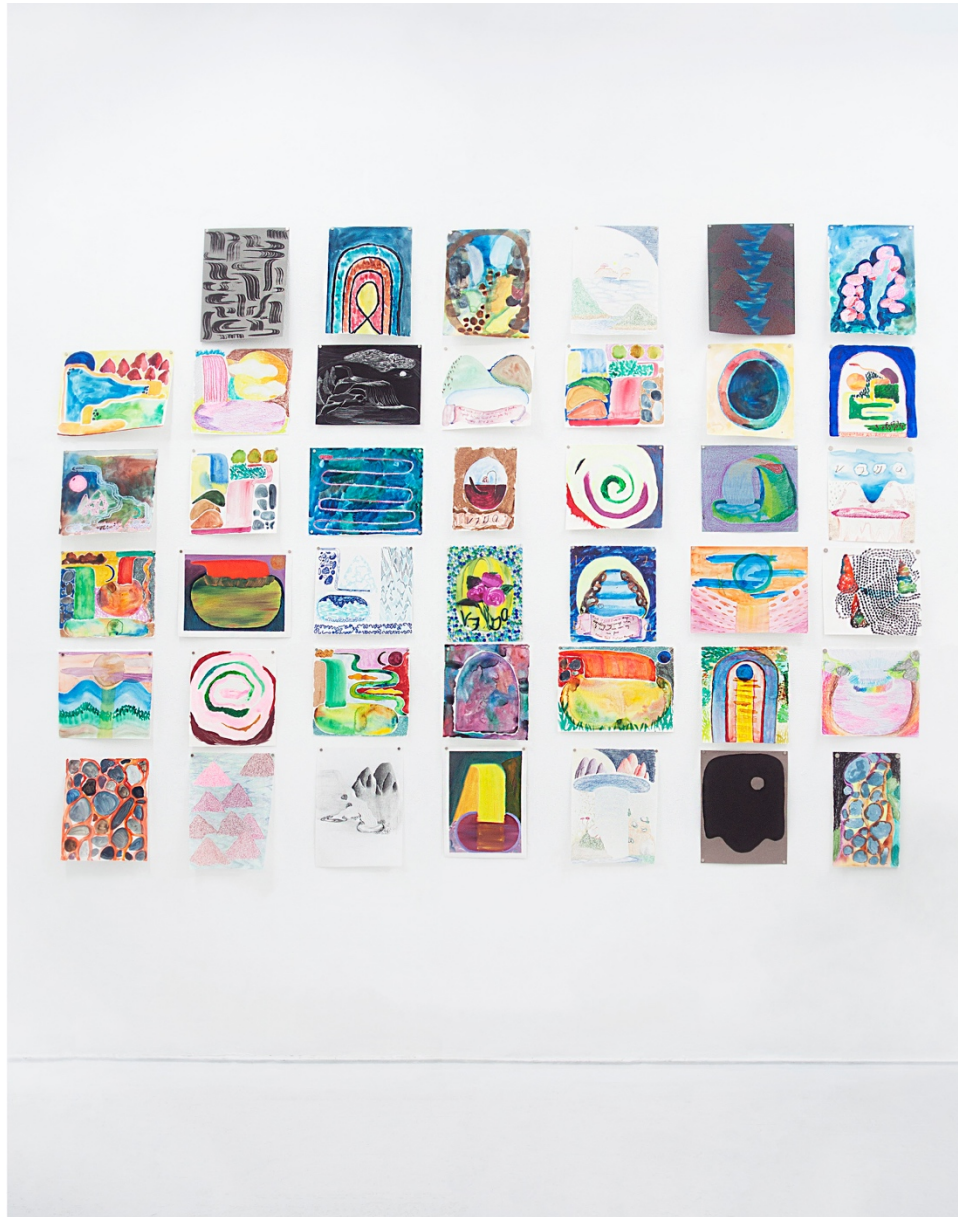
CB: The process allows me to use my creative energy, to be vulnerable, scared, inquisitive, confident and comfortable all at the same time. When creative energy is not used, it metastasizes as negative energy- it becomes a poison.

CG: There is a large amount of landscape and nature elements throughout *VFGA: The Moment I Can't Return* and other series of your work. Can you explain the symbolism of those references and the effect you hope it to generate with the viewer?

CB: I was going through a waterfall phase. I sometimes visit miracle sites with my family and had visited the small town of St. Anne de Beaupre in Canada and there were so many magical waterfalls! Huge waterfalls, taller than Niagara Falls. Waterfalls that were awe-inspiring. I was inspired by waterfalls as a moment of constant change and the stillness that surrounds the rushing water both at the top and the base. And of course, water and waterfalls are sites of spiritual cleansing and healing in so many cultures around the world.

CG: It makes sense why that would have such a significant impact. Much of your work also includes a diverse assortment of mediums and materials, can you speak more about that?

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LAUNCH F18, New York. June 29 – August 17, 2019

CB: I use materials to make a diverse visual surface but also to reference many different histories and practices. Sand has been used by many spiritual cultures to create temporary images as sites of meditation and worship, but it is permanent in my work. Sand also has an inseparable relationship to water. I use decoration as an option to express the divine figure without sex.

CG: Do you feel as though you are partial to certain types of materials depending on the experience related to the piece you are creating?

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CB: The materials are used to serve the idea. I understand the works being drawn from an idea rather than an experience because each piece is a building on the last and an uncovering of something that I am searching for. But it also involves using a material until I completely exhaust it. In this series, my watercolors were exhausted. Now I am primarily drawing.

CG: Do you listen to music or podcasts in the studio? Do you believe that certain types of music you listen to come through in your works?

CB: I think music really influences what I'm making- specifically the tempo and the lyrics. I listen to mostly female bands and musicians because the vulnerability they are able to express really helps me be vulnerable in the studio. And when you're vulnerable, that's when you really start taking risks and making exciting moves in the studio. I listen to a lot of Angel Olsen, Policia, Sade, SZA and Nuniyer Yanya. I like to listen to podcasts too, but it is hard for me to give my full attention to making and listening.



Corinne Bernard. VFGA: The Moment I Can't Return. 2018-2019. Mixed media on paper, 41 pieces

CG: Would you consider yourself a religious or spiritual person? Does that influence the historical context or subject matter that comes through in your work?

CB: I think I struggle with both. I am inspired by religion and see so much beauty in scripture and religious art. I look at Christian art, Tibetan Bon, Buddhist painting, Hindu art and Persian miniature

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painting. I never include figures in my work, or have yet to, but I am very inspired by how religious art manipulates perspective and proportion to create hierarchies and I try to pull that into my work.

One of the many reasons I struggle with religion is the male-oriented gods. This is a huge source of power to the patriarchy, to have a male gendered supreme being and I think this affects many women and how they access to spirituality and place in the world, in time, and beyond. I struggle to describe myself religious or spiritual just because language interferes and cannot describe my relationship to the unknown.

I was raised in the Catholic Church and while I see so much beauty and complexities and truths in the scriptures, the institution can be hurtful and damaging, especially to the minds of young people. I was raised to take the existence of god for granted, when I questioned this, when I rejected this, I was left with nothing to hold on to. I'm drawn to the images and the stories and symbols; they are seductive and still have an incredible power over me. Sometimes I am actively fighting this seduction into religion. When you give up your "faith", you have to form a new language to connect with the universe and with the void within yourself. I am in the process of creating that language.

CG: Have you had a moment since living in New York where you feel like you really made it or had an "ah-ha" moment? If you so can you describe it for us?

CB: This show has been a big moment for me! But there have been many: investing in my own studio, joining the amazing NYC crit group, being able to access so much art. The biggest thing was being able to go on my first residency. It was a three month residency in Virginia and it really allowed me to imagine myself being a full time artist. Once I experienced that, I knew there was no turning back but also that I would have to make a lot of sacrifices to get there.

CG: Lastly, what do you hope your viewers are able to take-away from seeing your work?

CB: It concerns me what the views draw from my work because I want to share my work and be able to present enough information to start a dialogue. At this point in my practice I don't know what I want viewers to take away, I only know what I want to express.

Corinne Bernard lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She received her BFA in Painting from Otis College of Art and Design and is the cofounder of curatorial non-profit group PEZ. She exhibited 41 pieces in the group exhibition *Future Starts Slow*, June 29 – August 17, 2019 at LAUNCH F18.