

Dana Tyrrell: *Blue*

September 17, 2017-January 21, 2018

Opening reception, Sunday, September 17, 2:00-4:00 p.m., Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University





A Forget-Me-Not Elegy: Dana Tyrrell's *Blue*

Often a vibrant shade of blue, the Forget-me-not is a common decorative bloom. These small blossoms grow in clumps and clusters. They are inconspicuous flowers that are easy to not see, easy to forget.

Perhaps because of this, their name is always a command: Forget-me-nots tell us not to forget. More poignantly, the Forget-me-not demands that you not forget me—the *me* that is already gone. By ritual, Forget-me-nots arrange us this way—living-remembering-you and dead-forgotten-me. Already, from this name-that-is-a-command—*Forget-me-not!*—we know our inevitable end: you are already forgetting me, *you have already forgotten me*.

Forget-me-nots, with all their layered meanings and significations, form the material background/foreground of Dana Tyrrell's *Blue* (2017). These flowers are silken reproductions of Forget-me-nots, heightening an all-over blurry combination of kitsch, craft, and a "grandma's house" aesthetic. Tyrrell's sonorous *Blue* soothes like Rothko's color fields while it jests like Magritte's pipe, seeming to say, "this is not a Forget-me-not." *Blue* invites viewers to remember—to memorialize a loss—by taking a sprig of flowers as a keepsake. But to remember what? This is left open-ended.

Exploring memory and affect, Tyrrell's installation is much more than a mere celebration of kitsch and artificiality. It is also not just one more iteration of "take away" art, where gallery-goers are encouraged to become active viewers by directly interacting and modifying the work. Tyrrell's use of the color blue recalls the many ways blue has been used throughout art history. Two relatively recent examples are the uses of blue by artists Yves Klein (1928-1962) and Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996).

Blue was so central to Yves Klein that he had created his own signature shade, International Klein Blue, used in his *Anthropometry Performance* (1960). In this work, Klein painted women with his blue and used their bodies to paint his canvases—a painting that was also a performance and a conceptual project centered on the presence/ing of bodies.

On the other hand, conceptually engaging the body through its absence/ing, Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *"Untitled" (Loverboy)* (1991) used blue stacks of paper to invoke the memory of a body lost. Viewers were invited to take sheets of paper, diminishing the body it invoked, only for the body to be "saved" when the stack of paper was replenished.

Rather than relying on passive spectatorship, both Klein and Gonzalez-Torres actively blurred the line between artwork and viewer: Klein brought actual flesh-and-blood bodies into his painting and Gonzalez-Torres made engagement with his work part of experiencing his works' aesthetic form. Klein required the active presence of bodies to animate his work. Gonzalez-Torres activated the role of viewer and institution—the former depleting as the latter replenished the work in turn. Adding to this history, Tyrrell's work draws on the affective resonances of the color blue; his Forget-me-nots ruminate on the relationship of the body to memory.

Going deeper, *Blue* activates viewers through a desire of remembrance always already bound to an inevitable forgetfulness. When viewers activate this installation by picking the flowers, they permanently deplete it. The Forget-me-nots, plucked from the wall, are not replaced. Thus, with fingers as greedy as our eyes, we consume *Blue*, leaving behind a minefield of pockmarks and pits on the wall—haunting echoes of the Forget-me-nots that are no longer there.

As viewers take away the flowers, a new landscape—buried beneath the colorful floral field comes into focus: white, bodily forms press out from the starkness of the museum wall. What these forms are, and what they are supposed to mean, is indeterminate. Is this a mass grave, long forgotten? Are these fragments of memories materialized, fractured by our own forgetfulness? Through the action of taking flowers, *Blue* invokes ritualized mourning, but with the mourned object unknown—already forgotten? *Blue* is an open-ended archaeological excavation of loss, (mis)remembrances, and finitude in which we all are activated to take part.

Forget-me-nots remind us that in the end there will be neither you nor me. In the end, someone will pick the Forget-me-nots from our field, uncovering the fragmented pieces that remain of our blanched selves. We see what we will forget, we see our own forgottenness. *Blue*'s Forget-me-nots become always-already-forgetting-yous, a poetic elegy to our simultaneous transience and irreplacability—a complicated economy of remembrance and desire.

Conor Moynihan
Visual Studies PhD Student
State University of New York at Buffalo, NY



ARTIST STATEMENT

Based upon previous explorations into the condition of the human body, as well as Minimal sculpture whose understanding is predicated upon the mediated body—both in presence and absence—*Blue* examines aspects of the human body as both a physical object and psychological remnant.

Death dislodges the physical body, removing it from the proverbial playing field of life. Whether it happens by the rigors of time, the quirk of violence, or the crucible of disease, every physical self is ultimately ended. The inexorable body, that which springs from memory or other physical traces, is what informs this installation.

Slices and abstractions of the human body are mounted on the gallery wall to form a visual metaphor of bodies reaching from memory and infinity alike, symbolized in turn by the stark, flat whiteness of the museum wall.

Surrounding and encapsulating the body parts are a field of artificial, blue Forget-me-not flowers. These flowers surround, shield and obscure each of the body parts in pieces, either by way of collective field, or distributed bursts of flowers through the plane of the gallery wall. Viewers are encouraged to interact with the piece and remove one flower each, thus slowly deteriorating the visual “field” of flowers, and by way of removing the flowers, exposing the resin body parts to the casual glance of passerby. This depletion is meant to symbolize both the physical depletion of human bodies and the erosion of memories which tie the illusory body to the present. When guests participate in the removal of flowers it connects their current, inhabited and evanescent selves to the artwork and places in each of their hands an everlasting *memento mori*.

The title of the exhibit, *Blue*, is derived principally from the unflinching color of the faux Forget-me-not flowers that are used for this installation. The term blue characterizes emotional states and moods, which exist tangentially to death. Blue also carries significant weight across art history; in everything from Picasso’s famed Blue Period to the sky-blue shroud worn throughout Renaissance depictions of the Virgin Mary. Blue becomes the marker for both the beginning and end of life: from the rushing, life-giving waters of Niagara Falls, to the blue impressed upon objects, places, and figures by the atmosphere as they recede from sight.

Dana Tyrrell

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Dana Tyrrell is an artist, curator and writer living and working in Buffalo, New York. He holds an MFA in Visual Studies from the University at Buffalo (2015), a BA in Drawing & Painting and a BA in Art History, both from the State University of New York at Fredonia (2012).

His work has been exhibited in venues such as the Burchfield Penney Art Center, Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, Big Orbit Gallery and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. Tyrrell is also deeply engaged with the Buffalo arts community, serving as a Board member of Dreamland Arts Inc., and as a member of the Sugar City Curatorial Committee.

EDUCATION

2015

Master of Fine Arts - Visual Studies, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY

2012

Bachelor of Arts—Drawing & Painting, State University of New York at Fredonia, Fredonia, NY

Bachelor of Arts—Art History, State University of New York at Fredonia, Fredonia, NY

2010

Study Abroad: Renaissance Arts of Florence and Rome, Italy

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Solo exhibitions are indicated with an asterisk (*)

2017

Dana Tyrrell: Blue, Castellani Art Museum, Niagara University, NY*

2016

Hunter Gatherer: Regional Artists from the Gerald Mead Collection, Gallery Q, Rochester, NY

42nd Annual Member's Exhibit, Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, Buffalo, NY

Chroma 2016, Glow Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Echo Art Fair, OSC Manufacturing, Buffalo, NY

Generations: Studio 464 Past & Present, 464 Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Postcards From the Edge, Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York, NY (presented by Visual AIDS)

2015

Disembodied, Dreamland, Buffalo, NY*

Of Niagara: Work from the Gerald Mead Collection, Genesee Community College, Batavia, NY

Staff Exhibition, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Dreamland/Sugar City Artist Lottery, Dreamland, Buffalo, NY

Of Niagara: Work from the Gerald Mead Collection, Niagara County Community College, Sanborn, NY

Spectra, Prism Gallery, Buffalo, NY

41st Annual Member's Exhibit, Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, Buffalo, NY

Chroma 2015, Glow Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Bring to Light, Castellani Art Museum, Niagara University, NY

Big Orbit Member's Exhibit, CEPA/Big Orbit Gallery Group, Buffalo, NY

2014

Staff Exhibition, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Displacement: Barge Prototype, Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo, NY

Cradle to Grave II, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY

Chroma 2014, Glow Gallery, Buffalo, NY

It's Not Me, It's You, Center for the Arts, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

2013

Chroma 2013, Glow Gallery, Buffalo, NY

MONSTER 3.0, 464 Gallery, Buffalo, NY

2012

Memory/Mentality, (with Rachel D'Alfonso), Emmitt-Christian Gallery, State University of New York at Fredonia, NY

CONTRIBUTING ARTIST

2015

We Share A Dream by Kaarina Kaikkonen, Buffalo Niagara International Airport, Buffalo, NY curated by Aaron Ott, Public Arts Curator, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY.

2014

Shasti: HALFLIFE by Shasti O'Leary Soudant, Nuit Blanche, Toronto, ON, Canada, curated by Heather Pesanti, Austin Contemporary, TX.

2011

Memory by Judith Olson Gregory, The Marion Gallery, State University of New York at Fredonia, NY.

COLLECTIONS

The Gerald Mead Collection, Buffalo, NY

The Pride Center of Western New York, Buffalo, NY

The Collection of Dreamland Arts, Inc., Buffalo, NY

The Collection of Sugar City Arts Collaborative, Buffalo, NY

The State University of New York at Fredonia, Fredonia, NY

ESSAYIST

Conor Moynihan is a PhD student in the University at Buffalo's Visual Studies program. Interested in queer, post-colonial, and disability theory, his research investigates the ways that identity becomes visually manifest in art and visual culture in relation to social and political structures.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Blue, 2017, synthetic flowers, resin, pigment, dimensions variable.

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