

The Speed of Darkness

Alison Kudlow and Natalie Lerner

Opening Reception on Thursday, November 2, from 6-8pm

On view from November 2 – December 16, 2023

WIND IN A BOX

*This ink. This name. This blood. This blunder.
This blood. This loss. This lonesome wind. This canyon.
This / twin / swiftly / paddling / shadow blooming
an inch above the carpet-. This cry. This mud.
This shudder. This is where I stood: by the bed,
by the door, by the window, in the night / in the night.
How deep, how often / must a woman be touched?
How deep, how often have I been touched?
On the bone, on the shoulder, on the brow, on the knuckle:
Touch like a last name, touch like a wet match.
Touch like an empty shoe and an empty shoe, sweet
and incomprehensible. This ink. This name. This blood
and wonder. This box. This body in a box. This blood
in the body. This wind in the blood.*

– Terrance Hayes

Parent Company Gallery is pleased to present *The Speed of Darkness*, an exhibition of slits, splits, openings, orifices, and lacerations by Alison Kudlow and Natalie Lerner. The four works in the exhibition share a knowingness, the familiarity of grief. Kudlow's hand-labored ceramic sculptures are nearly empty containers, goblets in the mid-transfer. In her drawings, Lerner's yawning maws of negative space actively transform into the positive, and then back again. Darkness — black wax, deep black oil, black holes — once stitched over, forms an escape plan.

What is the iconography we assign to our grief? In round, matte monochromes of graphite on paper, Lerner labors over this question. Anyone in the fabric section of Walmart knows the rough feel of the cotton broadcloth quilt *Obit* depicts fall leaves, polka dots, the bottom half of the moon and stars, and flowers that look like they were drawn in a middle school notebook. These familiar patterns of fabric, baby blankets stitched together with a line, delicately described by a skilled hand, are disrupted by an encroaching, stylized blackness, a consuming tear that leaves no piece untouched. As the quilts are torn, instead of batting we find pockets of nothingness inside, persistently waiting for eye contact. Lerner transforms the material by repeatedly, almost meditatively, piercing the paper with her drawing implement, layering first H, then HB, then 4B, then 8B pencil lines. Each mark remains distinct and specific. Labored over with a youthful familiarity and necessity, the stitches are perfectly placed.

Lerner's *The Last Guest* presents a simpler composition, a goblet etched with roses and thorns filling the picture plane and yet again marred by a rip. The tear holds an agency of its own, almost a comic POW blasting its way onto the scene. If this drawing were a rectangle, we'd never know the potential danger lurking around its edges, seams like bugs' legs unstitching themselves from their present reality, the slow reveal of a curtain pulling back to show us what is inside...more black.

Where the jagged darkness in Lerner's drawings ruptures an imagined skin with urgency, it oozes and pools in Kudlow's ceramics. The sculptures are at once ceremonial and organic, holding unseen forces and described by their motion. The hushed resonance of a familiar smoky scent permeates *Chained Breath*, a hand-formed 18 x 18-inch crowned cone that points downward and is suspended by three golden rings and a chain. The armature, just as significant as the object, hangs the work from the ceiling and sways somberly with any movement in the room, suspending the vessel one perfect inch above the floor. The interior of the cone is matte and dark, its apex culminating in an ink-black tip, saturated with fragrant oil. Above the vessel hangs a gourd-shaped object spotted with holes from which liquid glass weeps, its drips suspended in time. The thirsty cavity below will go un-nourished. The scent of longing wafts up and is met with coldness. Moments from satiety, hope is snatched away.

In *Spinal Aloe Flame*, a creamy pod reminiscent of milkweed is cracking open. Resting upon wrought iron legs, the sculpture gives away its dark mystery in slices of golden light. As with *Chained Breath*, a suspended, isolated element surrounded by darkness defines the parameters of the sculpture. Whereas in *Breath* a familiar scent permeates our expected boundaries, black wax and flame are at the center of this piece, living elements stretching and shifting in response to one another. What appears static from a distance is a living, changing being. Gravity leads the wax as it finds cracks between the petals and drips to the floor.

Lerner and Kudlow's hands build a lineage of touch and removal. In quiet palettes of cream, grey, and black, punctuated by chains and threads, the works in *The Speed of Darkness* find kinship, their fragile materiality insisting significance and an attuned eye. A cut is an opening, they whisper. A hole is a portal.

Text by Emily Janowick

Alison Kudlow (b. 1981) lives and works in Brooklyn. She earned a BA from the University of Southern California, a post-baccalaureate degree from Brandeis University, and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in Studio Art. She has shown at numerous galleries including Field Projects, Tiger Strikes Asteroid, Flux Factory, UrbanGlass, Deanna Evans Projects, Doppelgänger Projects, Paradise Palase, Underdonk, Wavelength Space, and at Fullerton College in California. She presented a solo show, *Meaningful Rituals in Irrational Times*, at Elijah Wheat Showroom's Brooklyn location in 2019. She was an invited resident at the Art Ichol Center in Maihar, Madhya Pradesh, India in January 2023.

Natalie Lerner (b.1992, Florida) lives and works in Brooklyn. Lerner received her BFA from Ringling College of Art & Design. She attended the AICAD/NY Independent Study Program, and the Orein Arts Residency in the Summer of 2023. She has exhibited in the United States and abroad, including Feinkunst Krüger in Hamburg, Germany; Stockton University, Galloway, NJ; Camayuhs, Atlanta GA; Mother Gallery, Beacon, NY; Left Field Gallery, Los Osos, CA; Underground Flower X Pee Pee Gallery, Fremantle, Australia; Geoffrey Young Gallery, Great Barrington, MA; and in NYC.

Parent Company is an artist-run exhibition space founded in 2023 by Ada Potter. Located in a 250-foot shipping container in downtown Brooklyn, the project seeks to support artists through exhibition opportunities, public programs, and events.