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Kissing Through a Bullet Hole: Alexandra Noel

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Alexandra Noel, Two fly fishing flies cannot consummate through a BB bullet hole, 2019
Courtesy: the artist; Derosia, New York; Antenna Space, Shanghai

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You could easily miss them, the flies—or mistake them for only flies, sunning on the glass, as flies do. In fact, *Two fly fishing flies cannot consummate through a BB bullet hole* (2019) is a tiny sculpture by Alexandra Noel. The title says it all: two faux, iridescent insects are attached face-to-face through a small round puncture in the front window of Potts gallery in Los Angeles. The flies are doubled, like the two B's in BB—mirrored, but complementary, seemingly attempting to mate. Noel mostly makes paintings—small ones, although not fly-small. The sculpture is an outlier in Noel's work, but also embodies the compressed drama of the rest: inert but tense, jewellike and precise, an erratum that's the rule.

Noel's paintings, too, are built around exceptional details. In *Plug* (2018), a buoy of caution-orange sinks into the dirt-red whorls of an ear, surrounded by meticulous fields of beard, the Army green of a cap and collar. A partisan at the firing range? An aging vet? The plug's orange seems to radiate through the cartilage, like the glow a Light and Space artwork leaves on the wall. Likewise, *Stigmata (Splinter)* (2018), a variation on the theme of penetration, renders the near-perfect puffs and calluses of the bottom of a foot, the exquisite grain of a sliver of wood, and the delicate translucency of its point beneath the skin. The canvas is small (24 × 34 cm) and full, racked in close with an almost psychedelic fixation.

Noel's attention to detail plays out thematically, too—sometimes in a trickling, fluid obsession, as with her recurring images of animals, vehicles, and domestic interiors. An early pair of diptychs feature Rococo bedroom sets (including one belonging to Jeff Koons), and the cascade of framed photos on the bedside tables in *Pull yourself together (New York)* (2015) themselves echo the scale of Noel's canvases. As much as their subject seems arbitrary, the paintings set up the reoccurrence of home decor and domesticity in later pieces. Noel's motifs resonate in other media, too; for example the painting *Riding Dad* (2020), a geometric diagram of a father and son playing horsey, provides the cover image and scenario for a short story published as an artist's book, *Ricky Rides Rick* (2020).¹

¹ Alexandra Noel, *Ricky Rides Rick* (Paris: Holoholo, 2020).

The bookmark that comes with it is printed with a pack of flies.

Lately, it's tornadoes. A couple of them appeared in Noel's contribution to *Made in L.A. 2020: a version* (2020–21), calling to each other across the exhibition's two venues, the Huntington Library and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. In one, *Giddy* (2020), the twister hangs in the jaundiced sky in almost erotic anticipation; the other, *Giddy Touchdown* (2020), depicts a consummation, complete with faint rainbow. Noel's most recent show at Antenna Space, Shanghai (2021), features a rush of storm paintings in increasingly abstract and surreal spaces, from the architectural skyscape braced by storm clouds in *Diaper Rash* (2021) to the barely possible scene in *Sprinkle* (2021), a funnel cloud descending from a clear, starry vault.

The forms and logic of painting also course through Noel's work from start to finish. There are ongoing self-reflexive jokes about her compressed canvases' gemlike appeal, such as a series of Neo-Geo compositions on beveled panels, like *Look at how big you are* (2018) (only 18 × 9 cm), a magenta field edged in fuchsia and lilac. *Trinkets and Gems* (2016) depicts startlingly crisp necklaces and charms seeming to escape from an inlaid box. There are also several riffs on Peter Halley, ranging from more to less buried, from the plainly Halley-esque olive, orange, and sky-blue striped appliances in *Grease Trap* (2019) to the cell-like grate and tall chimney of *Coal Furnace* (2017). Noel even uses a version of his signature textured effect, for example in *Ice Cream Mountain Cake* (2021), which swaps Halley's municipal black bars for patches the color of tired gelato.

Still other pieces play with the catastrophic tropes of Christian iconography—the title of *Asking for a hug under a crucifix* (2020) turns a trio of outstretched black brush marks on a gauzy blue-gray field into a crucified punch line, while the carried-cross angle of the two mint-green beams in *Selling a home in winter* (2018) become a tale of subprime sacrifice, the realtor's sign lost somewhere between taken and knocked down. One could go on—a horse with a Futurist number of legs, an abstract canvas the size and color of a carton of

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Neapolitan ice cream—but suffice to say that even Noel's silliest pictures are grounded in a wry art historical fluency.

Above all, perhaps, Noel's many paintings share the underpinnings of visions, light forms in navy skies, and a distorted, mis-scaled anatomical symmetry. Some are more obvious than others. *Finding Armageddon at the Beach, 1998* (2019) evokes Agnes Pelton's theosophical symbology, including a rainbow horizon, a trippy corona, and a uterine, illuminated egg. From these mystic heights, Noel plunges back into the spunk. The punny *Demons Abreast* (2016) imagines the weird, flattened-out upper jaws of a dog, then a child, balanced as a pair of carnivorous chakras and gaping toward the round nipple at the canvas's bottom. In *Circumcision* (2020), the strong vertical symmetry follows a peeping glans in a bell of stretched peach skin, held apart by two looplike forceps into an ontic

symbol on a midnight-blue ground—cosmic, mortal, the foreskin as womb.

Yes, paintings—in a way, it's not too much to think of them as little precious mysteries, still smudged with pigmented afterbirth. Indeed, *Baby Me* (2021) and *Y, a self-portrait* (2019) both render the same photo of a minutes-old infant (presumably the artist) with different framings; here, painting allows a sort of out-of-body pilgrimage to the artist's own beginning. It's a wild, splayed composition, the infant's purpled folds rubbed with medical gore, umbilical stub clamped closed. It is the endpoint of copulation, in a sense—certainly the end of gestation—and the beginning of consciousness and meaning making. The finished canvas is fresh, full, an articulated being unto itself, yet unresolved, taut with yearning, like two artificial flies kissing through a bullet hole.



Alexandra Noel, *Funny Looking* installation view at Antenna Space, Shanghai 2021
Courtesy: the artist; Antenna Space, Shanghai; Derosia, New York. Photo: Ling Weizheng

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Alexandra Noel

Sprinkle, 2021

Oil and Enamel on Panel

4 x 3 inches / 10.2 x 7.6 cm

Courtesy: the artist; Derosia, New York; Antenna Space, Shanghai

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Alexandra Noel
Plug, 2018
Oil and Enamel on Panel
10 x 7 in (25.4 x 17.8 cm)
Courtesy: the artist; Derosia, New York; ; Antenna Space, Shanghai

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透过弹孔接吻：亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔

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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔, Two fly fishing flies cannot consummate through a BB bullet hole, 2019

图片致谢艺术家、Derosia 与天线空间

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你很容易错过它们，这些飞蝇——或者误以为它们只是飞蝇，在玻璃上晒太阳，和普通飞蝇一样。事实上，《两只钓鱼用的诱饵飞蝇不能透过 BB 弹孔完成交配》(2019) 是亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔的一个微小雕塑。标题说明了一切：两只假的、五彩缤纷的昆虫通过洛杉矶 Potts 画廊前面的一个小圆孔面对面地连在一起。这两只昆虫是完全复制的，就像 BB 中的两个 B 一样——成为彼此的镜像，但互为补充，显然它俩在尝试交配。诺艾尔的作品主要以绘画为主——小幅的绘画，当然不是小得像飞蝇一样。这个雕塑是诺艾尔作品中的一个异类，但也体现了其他作品中一贯的浓缩的戏剧性：惰性依旧却气氛紧张，如珠宝般精确，仿佛是一个差错却依然遵循着规则。

同这件雕塑如出一辙，诺艾尔的绘画也基于超乎想象的微小细节。在《软塞》(2018) 中，警戒橘色的浮标在脏红色的耳廓中下陷，耳朵被细密的须发所包围，接着是军绿色的帽子和衣领。这是一个射击场上的游击队员吗？一位老年兽医？软塞似乎在发出橙色的光，轻盈地映射在软骨上，就像描绘光与空间的艺术品在墙上留下的光芒一样。与之类似，《Stigmata(Splinter)》(2018)，以渗透为主题的另一件作品，近乎完美地呈现了一只脚底上的水泡和茧，一根纹理精细的木刺，以及包裹着尖刺的半透明皮肤。画布很小 (24×34 厘米) 很饱满，它与一种近乎迷幻的定力绑在一起。

诺艾尔对细节的关注也通过主题系列展现——有时候以一种涓涓细流的狂热，伴随她作品中反复出现的动物、交通工具以及室内装饰的图像。《自己振作起来 (纽约)》(2015) 是一对画着洛可可风格卧室的早期双联画 (还有一间属于 Jeff Koons)，作品中床头柜上的一堆相框照片与现实中诺艾尔的画幅尺寸相呼应。尽管这些作品中的对象看起来是任意的，但是作品为后来重复出现的家居装饰和室内场景奠定了基础。诺艾尔的创作动机也会展现在其他媒介上，比如说《骑马的爸爸》中的图像——一个表示父亲和儿子一起玩骑大马的几何图示——变成了艺术家短片小说出版物《Ricky 骑 Rick》(Ricky Rides Rick) 的封面和故事中场景。¹ 随书附赠的书签上印有一群飞蝇。

诺艾尔最近的创作系列主题围绕着龙卷风展开，群展《洛杉矶制造 2020：一种版本 (2020-21)》中展出了其中几幅，它们分布在同一个城市的两个场馆——亨廷顿图书馆 (Huntington Library) 和汉默美术馆 (Hammer Museum) 之间，相互呼应。在《眩晕》(2020) 这幅画中，龙卷风悬挂在黄昏的天空中积蓄着色情的期待；另一幅《眩晕触地》(2020) 则描绘了一个圆满的结局，并配有淡淡的彩虹。2021 年诺艾尔在上海天线空间最新的展览，呈现了在更抽象和超现实的空间中描绘暴风雨的画作。从《尿布湿疹》(2021) 中乌云环绕中的建筑天际线到《彩色碎屑》中跳脱现实的星空中坠落漏斗形的云。

绘画中的形式和逻辑自始至终贯穿在诺艾尔的绘画中。她自嘲自己创作的小画幅有着像宝石一样的吸引力，比如在斜面木板上新几何主义构图系列，又比如《看你有多大》(2018) (只有 18 x 9 厘米) 中，一片被紫红与淡紫色围绕的洋红色区域。《饰品与宝石》(2016) 以令人震惊的方式精准描绘了项链和护身符，使它们看起来仿佛正要逃离首饰盒。还有几处或明或暗的对彼得·哈雷 (Peter Halley) 的模仿，从《油脂陷阱》(2019) 中明显的哈雷式橄榄绿、橙色、天蓝色竖条，到《煤炉》(2017) 中细胞状炉排和高烟囱。诺艾尔甚至用了一种哈雷标志性的机理效果，例如《冰淇淋山蛋糕》(2021) 中，她将哈雷常用在市政厅黑色围栏上的质感运用在了冰淇淋圆球之上。

¹ Alexandra Noel, *Ricky Rides Rick* (Paris: Holoholo, 2020).

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还有一些其他绘画调侃了基督教圣像的灾难性套路，《在十字架下索求拥抱》（2020）的名字将三个蓝灰背景上的黑色画笔变成了一个受刑的妙语。《冬季卖房》（2018）中两个薄荷绿横梁架构出了次贷危机的故事，房产经纪人的广告牌仿佛立在了被拿走和被撞倒的之间。类似案例不胜枚举——马在未来主义画作中长出了数不清的腿，一个抽象画作有着一盒那不勒斯冰激凌的尺寸和颜色——但我们不得不承认的是即使诺艾尔最傻的画也在游刃有余地开着艺术史的玩笑。

总而言之，也许，诺艾尔很多绘画的背后都是同一种想象，海蓝色天空中光的形状，和一种扭曲的结构对称性。有些更明显一些。《在沙滩上找到世界末日，1998》（2019）唤起了阿格妮丝·佩尔顿（Agnes Pelton）的共济会标志，画中有彩虹色的地平线、迷幻的光晕、子宫、发光的卵子。从这些神秘的高度，诺艾尔又投入到泼皮风格中。《恶魔在身边》（2016）的双关想象了一只狗的奇怪扁平上颚，然后是一个孩子，它们仿佛变成了两个凶猛的肉食脉轮（chakras），并向画布底部的圆形乳头张开。在《包皮环切术》（2020 年）中，一个伸展的桃色皮肤的铃铛被两个环状镊子分开，形成了强烈的垂直对称，而它的终点是一个窥视的龟头，这个画面形成了午夜蓝色的地面上的一个本体符——宇宙的，凡人的，包皮则作为子宫。

是的，绘画——把它们想象成宝贵的小秘密并不为过，连带着婴儿出生后的胞衣。诚然，《婴儿的我》（2021）和《Y，一个自画像》（2019）两幅作品都呈现了一个初生婴儿的同一张照片（大概是艺术家本人），但两幅作品在框架上有不同的侧重。在这里，绘画允许艺术家以一种灵魂出窍的方式向自己的生命起点朝圣。这是一个狂野、向外喷张的构图，婴儿的脐带被夹紧了，皮肤上的青紫色皱纹纠缠着医疗的血腥感。这是交配的终点——也是孕期的终点——又是意识和创造意义的起点。完成后的画面新鲜、丰满、清晰、却并不能给出所有答案，紧绷中带着向往，就像两个人造飞蝇通过一个子弹孔接吻一样。

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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔“相视可笑”展览现场
图片致谢艺术家与天线空间。摄影：凌卫政

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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔

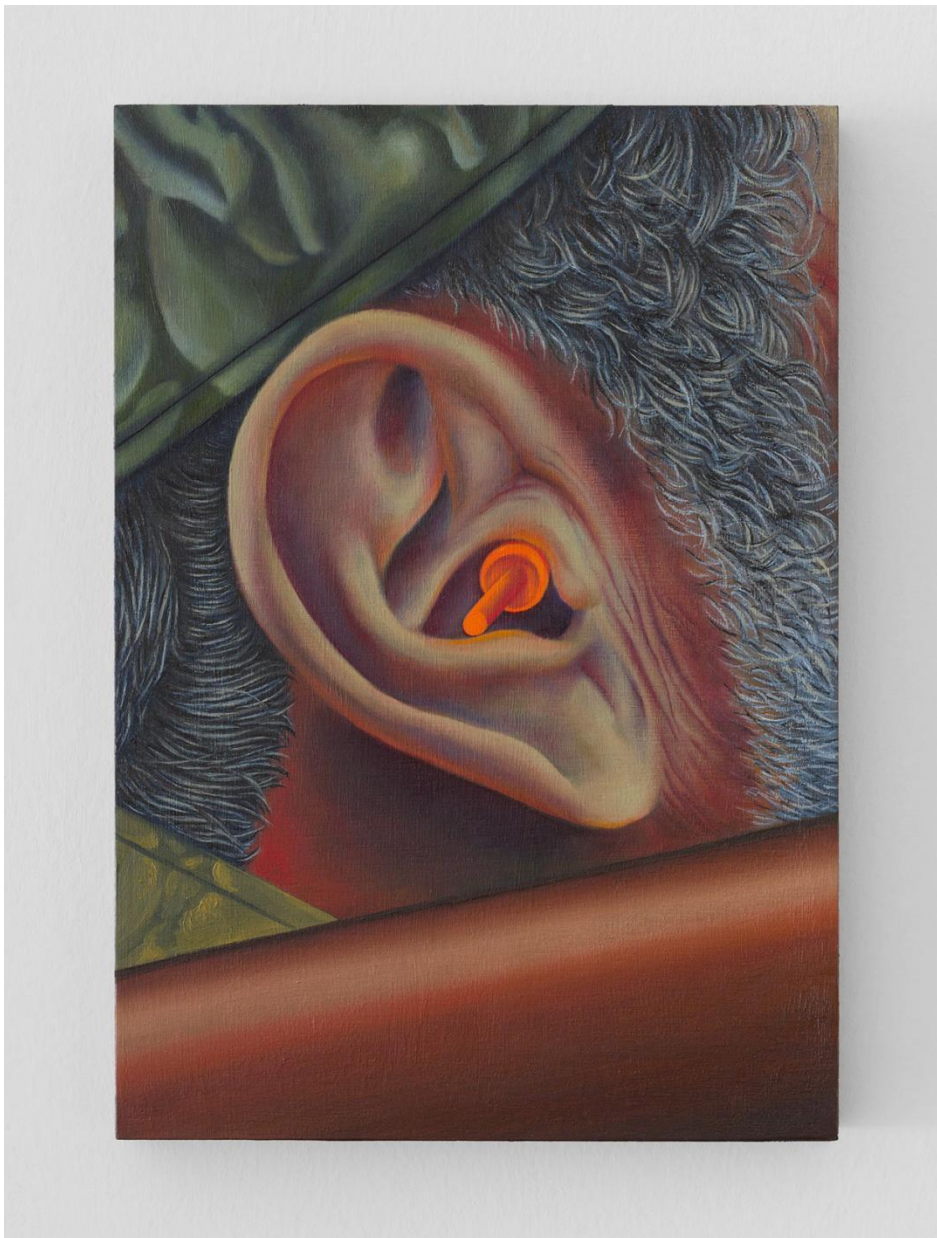
Sprinkle, 2021

木板上油彩与珐琅漆

4 x 3 inches / 10.2 x 7.6 cm

图片致谢艺术家、Derosia 与天线空间

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亚历桑德拉·诺艾尔

Plug, 2018

木板上油彩与珐琅漆

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