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Ava McDonough: 'All I Hear Is the Symphony

*Dense and Idiosyncratic Compositions*

Lowell Ryan Projects

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by Jody Zellen



Ava McDonough is a young, self-taught, Los Angeles-based artist whose solo debut at Lowell Ryan Projects is a mixed media installation titled *All I Hear Is the Symphony*. The mostly black and white works are intricately constructed collages on panel made by assembling hundreds or thousands of hand-printed images. Obsessive collaging of this nature made easier by digital technologies, but McDonough's works are hand-made and in some ways recall assemblages by Elliott Hundley, as well as drawings and paintings by outsider artists like Howard Finster and Adolf Wölfli, in addition to the all-over mark-making of iconic artists including Jean Dubuffet, Keith Haring and more recently, Trenton Doyle Hancock.

To create her dense and idiosyncratic compositions, McDonough begins by carving her drawings into linoleum blocks which are then inked and printed over and over again. She allows the saturation of ink to diminish over successive iterations resulting in different tonalities (shifts from deep black to light gray) in the small prints. Each block is printed multiple times and the imagery is often repeated across the many panels on display.

McDonough's doodle-like markings range from people and objects, to occasional words. Some of the imagery is generic—a shopping cart or scissors—while other drawings feel more personal. From afar, the works appear to be abstractions consisting of undulating shapes that range from light gray to deep black. The collaged elements within the large triptych, *I, As a Sky-painting Journeyman* (all works 2023) appear skeletal as if enlarged x-rays of the human body, yet upon close examination the overall shapes and structure dissolves into a montage of small-scale glyphs or pictographs that can be thought of as McDonough's alphabet. As the eye traverses the work, it may rest upon white silhouetted figures that morph into animals as well as utilitarian objects while the mind tries to create a narrative across the many tiny images.

*Feral Ecstasy* consists of overlapping curvilinear forms that suggest intersecting bodies. Looking at the individual fragments, one finds an array of nude figures, a teddy bear, a boxer, a box of Marlboro cigarettes, a toaster, the hare-rabbit illusion, a sign that states "hell" and another that reads "one way do not enter." How these elements "jive" is dependent on the viewer and their interpretation of the accumulation of line drawings. While McDonough might suggest a way of reading the works through her titles, they remain open ended.

Smaller works including the 7 x 5 inch *My Beloved Vegetables!* and *CARNIVORES* are easier to decipher. For example, in *My Beloved Vegetables!* there are myriad pills and pill bottles, a razor blade, as well as a hunched over seated figure suggesting pain and despair, while in *CARNIVORES*, McDonough presents a melange of human and animal forms. It is necessary to spend time with the images to discern McDonough's intentions and the works darker meanings, however it is also possible to enjoy the pieces on the surface and celebrate McDonough's labor intensive process and densely populated and evocative compositions.

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