



Valerie Hegarty: *Gone Viral*

Malin Gallery
515 West 29th Street
New York City

28 September - 23 November, 2020

At night I dream I am in a museum at midnight and there is a storm. The lights are out but when the lightening flashes, there are opiates on the ship with human cargo in the hull.

In another flash, vessels of precious metals bare the bones of their miners while a Vanitas painting has died so many times its rot sows seeds. When I wake I wonder what has been planted in the museum's painting and if it will grow.

-Valerie Hegarty (Diary Excerpt), 2021

Malin Gallery is pleased to present ***Gone Viral***, a solo exhibition of recent art by **Valerie Hegarty**. Featuring work from the past three years, the exhibition centers upon a suite of new sculptures inspired by the artist's personal journal entries from the onset of the Covid epidemic to the present, which she terms *The Covid Diaries* series. Also featured in the show is the monumental work *Fresh Start* (2020), a public commission that was previously on display in Riverside Park, and series of silver-hued skeletal sculptures inspired by the decorative arts

collection of the Winterthur Museum. This is the artist's fourth solo exhibition with Malin Gallery.

In *Gone Viral*, Hegarty returns to consistent themes: critical re-evaluation of the visual narratives associated with the mythologies of America's founding and history; the implication of pre-20th century American art in the destructive ideologies of expansionism and manifest destiny; hidden narratives of exploitation and environmental degradation and the tension between the ephemerality of human life and the allure of materialism as embodied in the concept of *Vanitas*. Her prototypical subjects are the repressed or hidden dimensions of the nation's mythology and collective memory. While Hegarty has consistently interrogated these themes from an intensely personal perspective, exploring the interplay of themes from American history and Western Art History with her own personal narrative, in *Gone Viral* she redresses these topics with a feverish urgency driven by the catastrophic phenomena of Covid and the unravelling of the nation's political institutions and culture. In *Gone Viral*, these themes collide directly with the artist's own recent experiences, yielding some of her most intimate and personally revealing work to date.



Valerie Hegarty, Weeping Tulips - *Semper Augustus* [The Covid Diaries Series], 2020

The upper floor of the exhibition features three large scale works that directly confront the bowdlerization of European and American history ingrained in the Western art historical canon. In her *Silver Skeleton* sculptures, Hegarty addresses the fraught history of the material, evoking both the role of the silver trade as a key origin of economic globalism in the 16th - 19th centuries and its

massive toll in terms of human exploitation. *Crumpled Clipper Ship* (2019) desecrates familiar imagery from the genre of American nautical art, assertively re-contextualizing the image of the clipper ship within a thematic framework acknowledging its role in the slave trade, economic imperialism and the frank subjugation of indigenous populations.

Relocated into the gallery from its original site in Riverside Park, *Fresh Start* (2020) illustrates a phantasmagorical narrative in which Hegarty imagines that an ornate Dutch *Vanitas* painting was stolen from the Metropolitan Museum of Art during the pandemic and then abandoned outdoors. The work poignantly combines elements of destruction and loss in the context of a pandemic with signs of incipient hope and renewal, as embodied by new foliage growing around and directly through the painting and an albino dove holding resurgent flora in its beak.

The lower level of the gallery is devoted to Hegarty's *Covid Diaries* series with works inspired by her own journal writings from the period after she relocated to rural upstate New York in the spring of 2020, while Covid was ravaging New York City, to the present. Drawing from her own experiences of trauma during this period, including the loss of dear friends for whom she could not properly mourn and alarming, vaguely apocalyptic scenes from across the nation, Hegarty depicts a domestic environment under assault by outside forces: a deadly, uncontrolled virus; political turmoil and social unrest; a



Valerie Hegarty, *Three Pink Tulips* [The Covid Diaries Series],

worsening opioid epidemic; climate-related catastrophes and violent manifestations of the nation's original sin of racism.

The *Covid Diaries* works are grouped into a series of fevered, hallucinatory vignettes. Two large scale sculptures, *Teapot with Clipper Ship* (2021) and *Faucet with Horsehead* (2021), illustrate the intrusion of external cataclysms directly into the home, which yields no safe haven. In *Sink with Teapot, Mug and Spoon* (2020), the natural environment appears to be exacting a revenge of sorts, with invasive foliage overtaking a household sink. *Covid Refrigerator with Flowers* (2021) and *Covid Mini Fridge* (2021) evoke an elegiac tone with references to both loss and futile attempts at preservation. A series of sculptures depicting the destruction of red, white and blue cakes evoke the broader themes of socio-political discord and the fraying of democratic ideals alongside an expression of the artist's own rage at the exogenous forces that seem to be overtaking her own life. As with much of Hegarty's work, flowers frequently assume center stage. Tulip sculptures invoke both the notion of *Vanitas* and a catastrophic period in Dutch history, while Ikebana or kadō arrangements allude to metaphysical conceptions of the relationship between humans, the earth and the heavens.

Framing all of Hegarty's works is an unease about her own place in the broader historical narrative as an individual who is inadvertently, perhaps inevitably, complicit in the nation's systems of oppression and inequality, but strives to transcend this position by adopting the outsider perspective of an artist. Many of Hegarty's works appear to crumple under the weight of historical sins. They frequently drip and blur in acrid colors - redolent of something inherently rotten. In the context of multiple, overlapping cataclysms, Hegarty creates an elegiac space for those who have recently passed and for those we have never properly mourned. Though her gaze is unflinching in her attempt to survey the tragedies and losses of our the current age, Hegarty maintains the courage to offer hints of hope for healing and renewal in her work.

Valerie Hegarty (b. 1967, Burlington, VT)

is a painter, sculptor, ceramicist and installation artist based in Brooklyn, NY. Previous solo exhibitions include Malin Gallery (New York & San Francisco); the University of Michigan Institute for the Humanities; Nicelle Beauchene (New York); Marlborough Gallery (New York); Locust Projects (Miami); Museum 52 (London); the Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago) and Guild & Greyshkul (New York). She has completed public commissions for the High Line in NYC and the Brooklyn Museum, and her work is featured in the permanent collections of the the Brooklyn Museum, the Perez Art Museum, the Saatchi Gallery, the Wadsworth Atheneum, the Peabody Essex Museum, the New Britain Museum of American Art, the Portland Museum of Art and the Tang Museum.



Hegarty received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has received grants and awards from the Pollock Krasner Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Rema Hort Mann Foundation, the Tiffany Foundation, and Campari NY. Her works have been cited in numerous publications, including *The New York Times*, *Artforum*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Hyperallergic*, *Time Out - New York*, *W Magazine*, *American Art*, *Artnews*, and *ArtNet News*. Hegarty is also an emerging writer: her short story "Cats vs. Cancer" was published in 2019 in the *New England Review* and won a PEN Dau 2020 debut short-story prize.

Malin Gallery (formerly Burning in Water Gallery) is a New York-based contemporary art gallery. With a close-knit group of roster artists and industry professionals, Malin Gallery is a 21st century gallery that still maintains a classical value system of integrity, scholarship and long-term support of individual artists.

Founded in 2016 by Dr. Barry Thomas Malin as Burning in Water, Malin Gallery actively represents a diverse roster of living artists. The curatorial program combines exhibitions by roster artists with historically-oriented shows, particularly of work by previously under-recognized artists. The gallery's progressive approach to curation has earned it a reputation for both introducing and re-introducing important artists to a New York audience.

Malin Gallery exhibitions have been reviewed in multiple national publications, including *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Artforum*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *ARTnews*, *Time Out - New York*, *Galerie*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The London Review of Books* and *Artnet News*. Gallery artists are included in renowned public collections worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Whitney Museum of American Art; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the National Gallery of Art (Washington D.C.); the Saint Louis Art Museum; and the New Orleans Museum of Art. Gallery artists have also received important grants and awards including the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, a New York Foundation for the Arts Grant, a National Endowment for the Arts Award, the Robert Rauschenberg Fellowship, an Art for Justice Fund Grant and a Guggenheim Fellowship.



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