



ART REVIEW: Liminality & Mind-State Journeys Explored at The Border

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by Jonathan Goodman

The word “liminality” is an anthropological term, referring to a halfway existence in which a ritual participant hasn’t quite finished the demands that will take him into the new psychic and social space the rites are meant to take him/her to. It is a medial position, with the weight of spiritual yearning and activity. “Liminality” is an exhibition that reflects this sense of a partially finished excursion, in which the longing of the ritual actor, in the face of various monuments to the final passage, is transformed by art. The exhibition is on view at The Border in Brooklyn, where it has been extended to remain on view through October 21, 2018 at the Bushwick project space.

“Liminality” is unusual in its eclectic embrace of a mind-state that is indicative of a journey to otherworldly places—in one’s geography, in one’s mind. The show features the work of [John Drew](#), [Scott Worrell](#), [Frank Wang Yefeng](#) and [Jamie Martinez](#), who is also the gallery director and founder. The art itself finds ways of communicating the desperate measures we take in our attempt to transcend our “liminality” —that is, our tenuous relations with spiritual states that may well border on death. The idea, physically and psychically experienced, of being next to but not quite there, holds this highly interesting show together which also has a unique setting made of dirt, that covers the floor of the gallery and has a distinct aroma which can be sensed the moment you walk in the building.



Installation view of “Liminality,” curated by Jamie Martinez, at The Border in Brooklyn. Courtesy of The Border.

Worrell’s monument sculpture, *It Looks like a Dead Body* (2018), consists of a black Ram on a tall square pedestal, whose lower third has the wooden finish removed to reveal a yellow layer with regularly jagged edges resembling an aggressive mouth of some kind. Worrell, a recent graduate of Yale, is presenting us with a memorial that is, in fact, an anti-memorial, a homage to an animal famous for its good eyesight, balance and aggressive battles to determine who will be the dominant male in their group. We also remember, given the overall tenor of the show, that monuments are public reminders of the dead, a state liminality may acknowledge but can never recover from.



Detail of “It looks like a dead body” by John Drue Scott Worrell, 2018. Wood, epoxy and graphite. Courtesy of The Border.

Inevitably, the sculpture raises questions—of intention, social placing, and participating on the current art dialogue. We cannot say this is done with easy clarity; instead, the symbolic elements remain obscure, their meaning camouflaged by the choice of animal and its highly conventional treatment as an object for a memorial. Why is this so? We don’t trust memorials much anymore, feeling that the personage involved is usually flawed in some way—there have been several dismounting of memorials in New York City because historical research has revealed the men honored as flawed, prejudiced people.

Still, the ancient function of sculpture was to honor the dead, and this work belongs to that continuum, even if its circumstances are pedestrian and small. In this sense, *It Looks like a Dead Body* plays with the diminished regard we now give the past, being certain of its moral turpitude.

Martinez’s two works, *Golden Passage to the Underworld* (2018), and *Silver Passage to the Underworld* (2018), are both medium size paintings, each filled with rows of Egyptian hieroglyphs pulled from “The Book of the Dead” and framed by a thin triangulated thread. The writing depicts a hieroglyph spell given to Ani to cross into the underworld. This code was originally only accessible to the Pharaohs and given to them by the high priest.

According to Martinez, he would like to bring these artworks with him to the grave, where hopefully they will guide the spirits in attendance to navigate through the afterlife. While only those trained in reading in this specialized visual language can make literary sense of what faces us, Martinez’s audience is welcome to appreciate the abstract, illegible beauty of the symbols and signs. We have lost our ability not only to read the hieroglyphs; we have lost our capacity to appreciate them. And maybe that’s the point.



“Silver Passage To The Underworld” by Jamie Martinez, 2018. Oil, acrylic, spray paint and thread, 16 x 20 inches. Courtesy of The Border.

Yefeng’s *Lockers #02* (2018), wrapped in gold vinyl, is composed of a vertical file with six drawers, some open and some closed, that reveal small monitors with a three-dimensional computer-generated image against a background of changing colors. It is a strange way to treat the sublime—by encasing its view within the confines of a banal piece of office furniture—but this starts to look like an intelligent decision after consideration.



“Lockers #02” by Frank Wang Yefeng, 2018. Lockers, gold vinyl wrap, bricks, framed touch screens, 3D animation. Courtesy of The Border.



Detail of “Lockers #02” by Frank Wang Yefeng 2018. Lockers, gold vinyl wrap, bricks, framed touch screens, 3D animation. Courtesy of The Border.

If we think of liminality as a partially realized state of insight, then the small monitors half-hidden in the file also occupy of place composed partially of recognition and neglect—even as they deliver a vision of remarkable beauty once they are available to their audience. Still, the larger query must be pursued: What is the meaning of a work that hides its state of transcendence? Likely, it can be received only in a limited fashion—being literally hidden by its metal framing. Even so, the possibility of vision is available, if in obscurity and incompletely.

And that is the point of the show: the states of mind and body the works refer to are actual and beyond words and pictures. Yet we know, or believe, these states exist. Liminality partial recognition of advanced imaginations derives from the following of the ritual-repeated acts of spiritual meaning.

The art in this show brilliantly recaps what it is like to live through such experience, although because the transcendence is partial, we never quite achieve the goal of transparent understanding. Yet, as Martinez’s hieroglyphs, Worrell’s exalted sheep, and Yefeng’s partially hidden monitors suggest, we can only reach high places by the intimated report. The Border project space offers us a show that takes us part of the way there—as anything liminal would.

BASIC FACTS: “Liminality” has been extended to remain on view through October 21, 2018 at The Border, 56 Bogart Street, Brooklyn, NY 11206. www.theborderprojectspace.com.

Jonathan Goodman is an art writer based in New York. For more than thirty years he has written about contemporary art—for such publications as *Art in America*, *Sculpture*, and *fronterad* (an Internet publication based in Madrid). His special interests have been the new art of Mainland China and sculpture. He currently teaches contemporary art writing and thesis essay writing at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.
