

MELISSA ORESKY

# GROWING TIME





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MAGGIE MORTON

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# CONTENTS

<b>DIVINE MATERIAL</b> Maggie Morton	4
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<b>PLATES</b>	7
---------------	---

<b>PROFILE</b>	27
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# DIVINE MATERIAL

Maggie Morton, MCAC Curator

*To live and to think in and from the middle, like a plant partaking of light and of darkness, is not to be confined to the dialectical twilight, where philosophy paints “its grey on grey.” It is, rather, to refashion one-self—one’s thought and one’s existence—into a bridge between divergent elements: to become a place where the sky communes with the earth and light encounters but does not dispel darkness.*

- Michael Marder, “What is Plant-Thinking?”

Light and its shadow, a shape and its negative, gesture and its echo, figure and the ground that nourishes it, the immaterial and its vessel; as plants thrive in such in-betweens, so too do Melissa Oresky’s collaged paintings and drawings. In layer by layer of paint, charcoal, and cut fabric, her work raises a bridge between us and them.

Oresky’s series of vegetal portraits, or “entities,” are vignettied in areas of bare canvas and linen, like plants lifted from their context and framed in clay pots. But like a plant in captivity, they push back against containment, resist human interference, and complicate isolated study. They are in flux, growing towards the surface, coalescing into our perception as recognizable form, and away, into a veiled space of abstraction that eludes our understanding. Neon oranges and yellows and deep reds and violets

are interspersed with reflective materials that catch the light of miniature suns around the gallery, inviting consideration for how plants experience and interact with light beyond our limited perception.

The artist's practice, what she calls painting "with" plants, breaks down the traditional notion of separateness between an object and its human observer, which, whether practiced in art or science, is based in the hubris that our perception alone can lend us understanding, while disregarding those mysteries that will always lie outside our awareness.<sup>1</sup>

In her studio, her paintings and collages develop slowly, over long periods of time. All the while materials, many of them plant based, are accumulating, entangling, and conversing within their own ecosystem. Pieces of cut canvas, linen, carpet, and rubber synthesize with painted impressions and charcoal rubbings as layer by layer a painting, which may hang unmoving on her studio wall for months, slowly absorbs and recontextualizes pieces of its environment.

The artist's interest in plant life began in her childhood when she would hunt for specimens with her mother, who was studying to become a botanist at the time. Despite Oresky's ongoing interest in botanical specimens and illustrations, the figures in her pieces resist taxonomic identification. In her large-scale drawing, *Patchwork*, an entanglement of flora weave over quilted together scraps of paper. As in a dense meadow or forest floor, one form is nearly impossible to visually extract from the next.



Oresky says of plants: “They don’t think, they are thought.” A plant does not recognize itself as a thinking “other,” rather it is inextricably tied to its biome, constantly adapting to become better suited to its surroundings. By contrast, human thinking is based in identity, adapting the environment to suit the “I” at all costs.<sup>2</sup>

As the title suggests, *Growing Time* is an invitation into process—a constant state of becoming. As materials are laid, they trace the edges of the ones below. Cut forms exist beside their negatives. In navigating this fluctuating terrain we begin to move beyond an anthropocentric gaze concerned with representation and scientific categorization, and into a space where, like the constant conversation between a plant and the soil, the metaphysical mind is in communion with the material that sustains it.

1. Aloï, Giovanni. Introduction. *Why Look at Plants?*, edited by Giovanni Aloï, Brill, 2018, pp. 1-35.

2. Marder, Michael. “What is Plant-Thinking?” *Klesis – revue philosophique*, 2013 : 25 – Philosophies de la nature, pp. 124-143.

PLATES





**Patchwork**, 2019, acrylic, collage, vinyl, and graphite on glue-seamed papers, 65 x 68 in.





**Atmosphere**, 2019, acrylic, collage, vinyl, and graphite on paper, 53.5 x 51.5 in.





**Outreach**, 2019, acrylic, collage, vinyl, and graphite on paper, 53.5 x 51.5 in.





**Vegetal Entity no. 1**, 2018, oil, acrylic, and collage canvas, 24 x 18 in.





**Vegetal Entity no. 5**, 2018, acrylic and collage on canvas, 24 x 18 in.





**Vegetal Entity no. 7**, 2018, acrylic and collage on linen, 24 x 18 in.





**Vegetal Entity no. 8**, 2018, acrylic and collage on linen, 24 x 18 in.





**Vegetal Entity no. 9**, 2018, oil, acrylic, and collage on linen, 24 x 18 in.





**Vegetal Entity no. 10**, 2018, acrylic and collage on linen, 24 x 18 in.





**Vegetal Entity no. 11**, 2018, oil, acrylic and collage on canvas, 24 x 18 in.





**Vegetal Entity no. 13**, 2018, acrylic and collage on canvas, 24 x 18 in.





**Vegetal Entity no. 14**, 2019, acrylic and collage on linen, 24 x 18 in.





**Vegetal Entity no. 15**, 2019, acrylic and collage on linen, 24 x 18 in.





**Vegetal Entity no. 16**, 2019, acrylic and collage on canvas, 24 x 18 in.





**Untitled**, 2019, acrylic, collage, vinyl, and graphite on paper, canvas lined frame, 15.25 x 12.25 in.





**Untitled (diptych)**, 2019, acrylic, collage, vinyl, and graphite on paper, canvas lined frame, 15.25 x 12.25 in.





**Untitled**, 2019, acrylic, collage, vinyl, and graphite on paper, canvas lined frame, 15.25 x 12.25 in.





**Untitled (diptych)**, 2019, acrylic, collage, vinyl, and graphite on paper, canvas lined frame, 15.25 x 12.25 in.





**Untitled**, 2019, acrylic, collage, vinyl, and graphite on paper, canvas lined frame, 15.25 x 12.25 in.



PROFILE



# BIOGRAPHY

Melissa Oresky has shown her work in painting, collage, and video nationally and internationally, with recent shows at Tripod Space Project, Busan, South Korea; Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago; Elmhurst Art Museum, Elmhurst, Illinois; Minnesota State University, Mankato; and K. Imperial Fine Art, San Francisco. She also recently organized and participated in the project Collage Office, an experimental, charitable platform for artists to make work for visitors by appointment hosted by The Franklin, Chicago.

Oresky received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and an MFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago. She has attended residencies including Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine, and The Santa Fe Art Institute, New Mexico. Originally from Maryland, she lives and works in Normal, Illinois, where she is a Professor of Painting and Drawing at Illinois State University.



*Growing Time* | *Melissa Oresky* has been published on the occasion of the exhibition *Growing Time* | *Melissa Oresky*, organized by the McLean County Arts Center. The exhibition is on view at the McLean County Arts Center from January 10, 2020 to February 14, 2020.

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