

Alex Nowak: "Animal Dictionary"
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If an artist is an enclosed chamber to enter, one might wish to determine whether or not there is meaning or treasure located behind its door. Or if one could feel at home or locate respite from mediocrity: *the average*. Is the decision to enter mechanized or instinctual—incremental or abrupt? There is questionable gratification in premeditated emotion; the relationship between authenticity and sentiment wanes, partially due to emergent technologies, *ad infinitum*. Yet, 'waves' of feeling and aesthetic pleasure do not require invitation nor catalyst; rather, they flow with little to no regard for the host or consequence. Chaos (and its wayward offshoots) periodically imposes within the realm of art. Its presence is not dependent upon current events, timely trends or social etiquette. These spontaneous and frictional components support deviance; here, a slight (if not obscure) calibration of attention *away* from order and its fundamental motives is suggested. The definition of an animal may be contextualized by its environment; the value of an artist may be tied to conditions of their existence. Regard the confining alienation of terminology: the problematics of naming, determining and clarifying a specific object, observable instance or illuminated entity.

Alex Nowak does not readily share his compass coordinates; his work reflects moods just as his talent mirrors shifting circumstance. Living in askew times, the pressure to (re)produce and feign generic harmony remains the status quo for those still obsessed with some amorphous yet traditional climb—a seemingly trite journey often providing an obstructed view or unsatisfying reward—dangling the promise of finale or catharsis as mirage. Hybridized Sisyphus-Icarus mythologies are tweaked and staged at this lonely peak: boulder cruel and wind demanding, as is the urge to fly unscathed, wings spread, towards an ethereal light—deceptive sky littered with hidden mistakes, unethical twists, farcical turns, material distractions, ruthless gravity, landlocked fools laughing below. *No rest for the wicked* (as they say); we trick ourselves into decision/indecision, as pretense and disillusionment keep us from ourselves. Though air seems cleaner at such heights, excessive altitude proves toxic.

In the midst of A to B, one pauses to gather thoughts and view Nowak's obscurantist works embedded in an uncompromising forest—distanced from a well-trodden path, partially shielded by lush branches with hanging fruit. These stunners pulsate, similar to the predator who seeks them, yet what unfolds when the hunter (dirt caked beneath nails) and hunted (pristine sight, light-footed) recognize their nemesis remains private: mutual longing, phantasmagoria, danger. Both depend upon nothing but a severe hunger to thrive and prolong death. Nowak's creations do not belong in just any space; they require attentive shelter which prioritizes organic zeal, untethered potentiality and a neo-slacker *je ne sais quoi*. Though the artist is aware of historicity and influence, Nowak does not appear to be casually swayed; yet, he welcomes palpable shades of irreverence (e.g., snide contradiction, clipped renderings, juvenile indifference, mutinous sensuality) but, at the moment, in rationed doses—with tomorrow in mind.

An ambitious diver convinces herself that she may rule the ocean—that sea floor currents will work in her favor. She finds herself trapped in a dark labyrinthine cave with just one functioning torch; she is careful not to kick up soot or disturb sleeping monsters as she drifts. One wrong move and she will be lost; panic could provoke convulsions or drowning. Meters below the surface, submerged in a world devoid of other humans, surrounded by slithering creatures harmless and not, the fear is real but subsides with repetition and exposure. To invest in afflicted conditioning, to set the bar only to later ignore it, to deviate from codes, to take an illogical plunge which becomes rational, to gravitate towards the unknown with no remorse, to reach a dead end yet know when to turn around, to recognize the point of no return. The artist takes parallel risks; rapt trial-and-error transforms whilst providing an escape hatch or unsullied neutrality. The diver floats mid-water, hovering with near perfect buoyancy—knowing that an uncontrolled ascent haunts each miscalculated breath.

In conjunction with tenacious energies at play, Nowak translates peculiar cinematic fragments from one of his recent yet unexhibited video works (e.g., a Columbian man's knowledge quest, childhood scenes, a woman's enigmatic vanishing, funeral highlights) into these displayed asides as a flourishing continuation: scratched textures, pulpy reliefs, beguiling paintings, rough pustules, unknown visages, vivid chalky towers—a non-linear ensemble dodging easy interpretation. And with one vexing sweep, tumultuous air blends with dry earth to make fire. Intense flames (art works) turn wrongness into ash; rats and serpents scream and hiss in protest. No structure can withstand such heat and pressure; this experiment is more fragile than initially gauged. Predictions are met with procrastination and blind denial. All may be forgotten if not observed, recorded and preserved. *What was that species? The title of that ancient artifact?* Joan of Arc's gothic statue stood for centuries inside the Notre Dame Cathedral; is it possible for art to usurp the four elements? With each act of destruction or rejection, flummoxed indeterminacy looms. With each name logged, altered or erased, a surfacing breed may join the ranks and occupy some void—clandestine flag in hand. This lexicon's disarray will lead to no imminent reckoning or denouement.

—Jacquelyn Davis