
ART

Fatigued by the Everyday? These Artists Are, Too

In the medical field, “empathy fatigue” is used to describe a state of exhaustion when compassion towards patients becomes tiring. Applying this term to its latest exhibition, Andrew Rafacz has brought together seven artists whose works investigate empathy on a global scale.

Gabrielle Welsh February 13, 2020

Installation view of *Empathy Fatigue* at Andrew Rafacz (all images courtesy of Andrew Rafacz)

CHICAGO — In the medical field, “empathy fatigue” is used to describe a state of exhaustion when compassion towards patients becomes

tiring, as practitioners’ own anxieties and stresses are continuously prodded. Applying this term to its latest exhibition, Andrew Rafacz Gallery has brought together seven artists whose works investigate empathy on a global scale.

Rachel Schmidhofer’s humorous painting, *hi and bye* (2018), opens the exhibition. A smiley face waves ambivalently from its frame, evoking the awkward feeling of looking in the mirror too long or posing for a passport photo. Directly to its right, Dominique Knowles’ massive painting “vadhithana VAM” (2019) depicts a warm scene of horses running, grazing, and a foal nursing from its mothers. A headless, nude human figure sits near the nursing mother. Knowles himself is an equestrian;

riding is a trade and sport that necessitates a relationship of mutual respect between horse and rider. In an interview with [*Bad at Sports*](#), Knowles noted, “You can’t really dominate a horse, but you can ask a horse to do something with you.”

Installation view of Mev Luna’s “Far from the distance we see” (2019) in *Empathy Fatigue* at Andrew Rafacz

Mev Luna’s video work, “Far from the distance we see” (2019), collects oral histories from members of Luna’s family in Houston. Accounts of working in a hat factory as a teenager and being targeted by the Houston police are interwoven with 3D animations and found video — splicing the typical seriousness of an interview into something layered, playful. Partially obscuring the video is Luna’s sculpture, “Action Office was meant to be about movement II” (2019), in which viewers can see themselves reflected via privacy glass as discolored and cloudy glimpses of the film shine. Near Luna’s work is Jason Lazarus’ installation, “2019 — Present (26 Sound Screens)” (2020), in which white noise machines typically employed by therapists for confidentiality background the exhibition, and Luna’s work in particular, with an ambient buzz.

A highlight of the exhibition is Jeremy Weber’s communal commentary on Albert Camus’s 1944 novel *The Stranger*. Utilizing several annotated copies of the novel, Weber discards all text not directly referenced by the reader through underlining or commentary. In Weber’s installation, copies of his own script, “The Strangers” (2020), are placed alongside the original altered Camus copies (a gallery worker encourages me to take a copy home). Weber’s play yields a dialogue between the anonymous readers-turned-jurors and Camus’s novel —the first whited out copy becomes the character Juror #1 and so on ... The jurors, through their anonymous marginalia, ‘sit’ for the trial of the narrator, Meursault’s, murder charges, to which he is seemingly indifferent. Just as the seven gathered artists grapple with meanings of empathy on a large scale, so do Weber’s anonymous readers. The commentary of one juror, as Meursault is sentenced to death, perhaps best sums up the exhibition’s feelings of emotional fatigue (read: burnout): “Wow. Sad.”

[*Empathy Fatigue*](#) continues through
February 22 at Andrew Rafacz (1749
West Chicago Avenue, Chicago, IL).

Installation view of Jeremy Weber’s “The Strangers” (2020) in *Empathy Fatigue* at

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