

NYU STEINHARDT
MFA CLASS OF 2023 | THESIS PART 1

SECRETS OF THE HEART

MARCH 29–APRIL 15

David Vades Joseph
Megan Nugroho
Sam Ticknor

Opening Reception: Wednesday, Mar 29, 5–7PM

These works search for a conduit, through the body, to what William James called *the more*. A more not estranged from this world, a separate supernatural entity, but embedded in the daily, the domestic, and our tender corporeal forms. A more with traces of fairy tale enchantment, the lingering soul and the unconscious as a palace in time. A new, and much anticipated theology is developing, image by image, fueled not by traditional religious precepts, but rituals lost and found, nature and the movement of energy. Unbracketed life force, urgent as the thrust of green stems in spring, whirling in the spiraling mind, but manifest too in quiet, in stillness, in absence. To go inside is to enter a wilderness. We know this; but we forget. Life at its most elemental; the root seeking in the dark earth. Mundane yet mythic, the glow of veins that are also vines, a son's careful attention to the residue of maternal spirit, and a partner's visual message to a lover, that while the struggle is real, the doorway is open, the doorway is not only open, it is also spewing light.

Written by Darcey Steinke

David Joseph's photographs of his mother's apartment, after her death, are quiet, raw and tender. A bed becomes a fenestral opening, a transitional object that lets Joseph commune with a mother whose corporeal form is gone, but whose influence can still be felt, in the mundane of a stripped bathrobe, a lopsided wardrobe, a coffee cup. Joseph's works alone in the apartment, not forcing catharsis, but trying to make something out of both his loss and his love. These images, sanctify the everyday and hint at the incremental and deeply intimate textures of grief. Emerging from the black and white images, the watercolors of life in the Caribbean, where his father was from, are expansive and childlike. These paintings are not of the external world but come from the imagination, mountains above a modest house, Joseph's aunt taking sheets off a line. All are green, like the plant, in one, that defies a cold silhouette of black skyscrapers. These works together, expand out from Harlem into the tropics and hint at the difficulty of the emigrant transition but also its beauty, and wonder; the heroic ability to hold two worlds at once. Grief fragments, these works attempt to bind, to acknowledge life's impermanence as well as its continuous flow.

Megan Nugroho's work seeks, by way of spiritual vegetal forms, to reconcile the beliefs of the east and the west. Growing up in Indonesia, nature was not domesticated, but wild, even dangerous as is her family's belief system which is rooted in the supernatural. Nugroho's work struggles for spiritual release from traditional religious systems and an interest in a relationship with an unmediated life force. This force grows, infects and strains to connect. Her color palette of browns and greens replicates the foliage and motifs of central Java where her family is from. These green and red vines, white roots and gesturing branches are not the usual peaceful and soothing natured visuals of the wellness culture of this time. Instead this work questions the boundaries of the body, and the false idea of separateness. Green hands and feet hint at veritas, an ever-greening, that Nugroho creates with the medium of colored pencils and paper. Using this simple medium, she evokes the movement of the green fuse, the liminal thrust of life.

Not long-ago, **Sam Ticknor** left her childhood religion. She says, "This is a big change in thinking. You start to reimagine the nature of God." Ticknor's work, created with water-based paints and inks, centers on the minds struggle with slippery, generative ideas. Lamps, letters, books, stairwells, mobius strips, windows and moons all are used to evoke a mind that has fallen down and into the heart. "The mind was dreaming." Borges writes, "The world was its dream." In one painting eyes move out from behind a rose curtain, hovering above a tight spiral, evoking both fingerprints and the concentric circles inside old trees. In another, a green staircase ascending to the heavens also acts as a slide leading down to earthly architecture. But these corridors and passages are not the dead ends of an Escher. Instead Ticknor's work suggests that ritual and tradition can be a jumping off place, not so much a trap, as a trampoline. Ticknor, has said her work is not planned out, she relies on call and response. The seeker calls-out in confusion, even pain. The response while never simple, can be hopeful, can be soaked in color and light.

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