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***Soft Moods* curated by Emily Gove**

Wil Brask, Destiny Grimm, cherry kutti, Lee D'Angelo & Bethany Rose Puttkemery  
September 8 – October 14, 2017

“Softness is powerful. It is about healing. It is about inner-strength. And strength means standing up for yourself. It is not about forced passivity.”

-Lora Mathis, *On Radical Softness*<sup>1</sup>

*Soft Moods* aims to explore the concept of radical softness through a range of artistic practices and approaches. Through sculpture, installation, painting, drawing, animation, foraging and floral artistry, the artists in the exhibition – Lee D'Angelo & Bethany Rose Puttkemery, Destiny Grimm, Wil Brask, and cherry kutti – though diverse in practice, together generate a space of comfort and soothing.

Lee D'Angelo and Bethany Rose Puttkemery's sculptural fountain combines the practices of each of the artists; D'Angelo is an artist, illustrator and self-taught tattooer, and Puttkemery has worked as a floral artist for the past five years. The sculpture is an interpretation of the Star card, as seen in the Ryder-Waite Tarot Deck (1910). While interpreted in various ways through the many

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<sup>1</sup> Lora Mathis, “On Radical Softness,” [loramathis.com](http://loramathis.com/post/140474165618/on-radical-softness), 2016:  
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Tarot decks in existence, the card most often features a woman bearing water. Based on a tattoo flash<sup>2</sup> drawing interpretation of the Star Card by D'Angelo, the three-dimensional sculpture features a life-size plaster cast of a feminine form holding a jug in each hand, from which water (dyed blue with tattoo ink) pours into a pool below. Using plasticine layered on the plaster form, D'Angelo has added organic textures as well as a figure reminiscent of a Jean Cocteau's illustrations. Plant life, including pampas grass, goldenrod, and other grasses foraged from the neighbourhood around the gallery, surrounds the pool, held in place with rocks and minerals, such as amethyst and calcite, mined by Puttkemery's great-uncle. A painted section of chain link fence, also 'foraged,' hangs behind the figure, and she is supported above the pool by a found crate. The soothing sound of gentle running water fills the gallery space. Traditionally, the Star card indicates generosity of spirit, hope, creativity and inspiration, with the pictured water representing many things, including both the unconscious mind, and universal memory.<sup>3</sup> While the work engages with the card's meaning and the history of magic and mysticism, the artists are most interested in highlighting the resilience of the natural world. They communicate this interest by mixing both natural and industrial elements within the piece, and making work

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<sup>2</sup> Flash refers to original drawings created by tattoo artists for the recipient to choose from.

<sup>3</sup> Michelle Tea, *Modern Tarot*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2017. P 117-118.

that produces as little waste as possible by using primarily found and recycled materials in its creation.<sup>4</sup>

Painter Destiny Grimm's practice also often incorporates natural elements in the juxtaposition of hard and soft elements. In her painting practice, Grimm is interested in how unplanned, intuitive and accidental use of colour, shape and texture can explore the various states of being human. Grimm's process of layering thick sections of both pastel and vibrantly hued oil paint onto a chosen surface using a palette knife generates a tactile, soft and icing-like appearance. Rather than pre-designing each work, Grimm works intuitively, achieving images both abstract and figurative, as they transform to their final form. Included in this exhibition are a number of oil paintings on found river rocks of varying dimensions. These colours and textures are contrasted in these pieces with the rough, hard-edged chunks of rock on which they're arranged. Alongside the smaller works, Grimm has included a larger painting on wood. The image uses cool-toned colours and features a human figure embracing another surrounded by greenery; while ambiguous, Grimm mentions that the image portrays feminine energy embracing and supporting the masculine, two figures finding a moment of peace.<sup>5</sup>

Wil Brask's installation uses animation and sculpture to explore self-care in the face of everyday oppressions. The installation is formed by a series of four .gif

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<sup>4</sup> E-mail conversation with the artists, September 6, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Conversation with the artist, September 5, 2017.

animations, drawn and animated by Brask and presented on a series of monitors that the artist has embellished to resemble oversized flowers. Each animation consists of a simple emotive gesture – a romantic sigh, a wistful blush, a swing back and forth under the moonlight, and a celebratory pose inspired by Sailor Moon. The artist has also created life-size papier maché versions of hir character drawings, also painted with vibrant colours and patterns, and dressed with accessories sourced from thrift stores and roommates. Brask constructed the figures with the assistance of a group of friends during a party organized for this purpose. With the aim of decolonizing hir creation process and incorporating radical disability practices,<sup>6</sup> this coming together of friends from different positionalities to work towards a common goal encourages the imagining of an alternative future, free from the systems of oppression known today. While the animations continue to cycle infinitely, referring to the constant cycle of systemic oppression, Brask's use of bright colours and playful patterns in both the .gifs and sculptural figures generates a sense of hopefulness.

cherry kutti's installation explores notions of comfort and home. Splitting her life between Dubai, Colombo and Toronto, kutti's practice includes drawing, painting and installation that often explores the anxiety of living within the diaspora. kutti thinks of her installation in *Soft Moods* as both another way to

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<sup>6</sup> See the writing of A. J. Withers, including *Disability Politics & Theory*, Fernwood Publishing, 2012

make a line drawing, and as a consideration of the idea of 'home.'<sup>7</sup> She has sectioned off a corner of the gallery space using bright yellow wall paint and a sheer yellow curtain printed with a repeating illustration of eyes, lips, noses and spirals. Inside the makeshift room, two paintings and a print hang on the walls, each featuring a more and more developed version of the same image - beginning in the first image with a simple gesture painting of a nude figure, followed by a slightly more detailed painting of the same figure, which then becomes an artwork hanging on the wall of room behind a seated figure in the final print. In front of the hanging print, kutti has placed a stool, side table with plant, cup and saucer, and a lamp with a yellow bulb. By sitting on the stool, the viewer becomes the 'most detailed' version of the image.<sup>8</sup> Inside the cup, the artist has placed earplugs which visitors at the opening party are welcome to use, should they need an escape from the crowd and noise. In kutti's installation, one is able to find comfort in a crowded and potentially uncomfortable place.

*Soft Moods* embraces emotionality and opens up space for vulnerability in the face of discomfort and adversity. Each work, though disparate in medium, is linked through its openness and tenderness. By asking what it means to be soft, each artist depicts alternative approaches to care that can be understood as a means of self-preservation, in various circumstances. Whether physical, emotional or conceptual, radical softness offers both a refuge and an opportunity for folks to

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<sup>7</sup> Conversation with the artist, September 5, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

navigate a world that is often antagonistic and unsympathetic. *Soft Moods* invites the viewer to embrace these approaches and consider creating their own strategies for developing radical softness on their own terms.

-Emily Gove

Wil Brask would like to thank the following for their assistance with this project:

Hannah Zbitnew, Leif Gifford, L-FY CA, Petrose Tesfai, Rachel Davis, Rhea Yee,

Natalie King, Toni Lomax, Holly Jo, Chandler Fitzpatrick, Knarles, Miranda

Tansacha, Kendra Yee, Lucy Marrion Pauker