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Jamiyla Lowe,  
***A Whole New World***  
November 3rd- December 9th, 2017

Jamiyla Lowe is a professional silk screener. Her compositions are polished and complete, but her function as an artist exceeds the craftsmanship of painstaking hours, weeks, and months worth of delicate thin brushstrokes. *A Whole New World* presents origin stories, providing context for a being in the world. These five worlds are comprehensive and multifaceted; a task Lowe is currently working on is to tie these microcosms together by finding unique ways to breach their cosmic borders and boundaries.

The five fictionalized civilizations hypothesize four central themes: sensuality, environmental entanglement, scarcity, and political apathy. Sensuality is examined under the scope of how senses affect the body and further, how the body experiences others. Through a series of environmental experiments, immersed in a treacherous biosphere, these beings either flounder or flourish. When these sensual bodies combine into groups, they compel governance and politics – here is Lowe’s critical commentary.

*The Cave’s* central coral-red figure holds a flower in her mouth as she extends her right leg in a can-can position with sheer drapery falling from her hip. The surface of her body is like pleated sausage casing stuffed with pink flesh. Behind her, as a spotlight for her performance, a circular opening with lush greenery contrasts the cave’s black

stalagmites. To the right, two blue folks sit with a beer and a face in hand, with love emojis for eyes. Below the central dancer, in monochromatic blue, the raised arms of four audience members with blue worm-like hair splash some beers.

*The Cave* echoes Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. Plato's account is about prisoners in a cave who watch shadows on the wall; the shadows are their reality; one cannot know true reality until their chain bonds are broken. The metaphor Plato employs reveals that the chaining bonds of the human experience serve as the senses' connection to reality. In *The Cave*, Plato's projections encompass the reality of the prisoners. In Lowe's *The Cave*, the reality of a performer is in their flesh.

This focus on sensuality and flesh is also celebrated in *The Beach*. Two figures embrace in a cobra-spooning position on a beach, turquoise water splashing around them. Enveloped in seaweed, their long black dreads form flowing lines, framing pronounced muscular and veiny necks. The distant sea horizon line lie parallel with six volcanoes jutting out of the water with four visible lava explosions. A large moon sits off-centre in the black night sky. *The Beach* is a graphic representation of embodied intersubjectivity – when two become one. This heteronormative display of unity transcends individualism as the figures morphs into one body.

Each world is represented by a graphic silkscreen emblem which unlocks secrets to the nature of law there within. *The Union* is the emblem for the world inhabited by the lovers. The crest features an atmospheric space with a wedding scene. On the left, a figure with three long snouts, a muscular chest and defined arms stands beside a dropsy texture body with flesh in excess – the feminine. They stand hand-in-hand, foot-in-foot gazing at each other in union.

The characters in *A Whole New World* are subject to Lowe's environmental experiments wherein the entanglements of the body, their senses and their surroundings

are central to the series. *The Garden* juxtaposes an inhospitable lava environment with a fertile field where fantastical plants whose unfolding sheaths expose smooth yellow interiors; six red petaled flowers punctuate the green field of thick grass stems. There is a figure on a swing, entangled with the background's volcanic lava, whose body is coloured by a soft gradient. At their toes, a rusty peach fades into the yellow of the plants. The body's mass is not unlike a skeleton; again, entrails of flesh as skin provide volume and form. Their fleshless mouth smiles. The carefree and frivolous exaggeration of sensuality is implicit. The reference to *The Swing* (1767), the popular rococo masterpiece by Fragonard, is undeniable. This Romantic period painting illustrates an idealized garden setting with a key female figure in lush pink folds, swinging, erotically kicking off her shoe to her lover hidden in the garden below. It is known for its representation of frivolity.

When these sensual bodies combine into groups, Lowe's attention shifts from the sensual to the political. The *Grain Keepers Fortress* emblem illustrates two figures standing guard of a small bundle of grain on top a fortified landscape. This guardianship represents economic prosperity that demands protection.

*The Grain Keepers'* composition contains two columns of lush greenery attended by two standing figures that have their backs to the centre of the painting. A wall of bud-topped reeds is pulled open by two eight-fingered black hands; the reeds curve and intersect, creating a vibrant optical illusion. The illustrative black grim reaper behind the grain reveals the figures of these worlds to be shockingly mortal; this unsurprisingly humanizes their monstrosities. The scarcity of grain, representing both as economics and food security, is implied in the emblem by the emphasis on the singular grain bundle. At the same time, the landscape of *The Grain Keepers* is demonstrated to be lush and abundant, with a predominant water source and labourers. These images combine to represent artificial scarcity, an economic product of capitalism. The grain supply of this

civilization is treated as a scarce commodity though there is every indication that it is, in fact, abundant.

*The Quicksand Island* emblem shows a crest hung on a doweling, held by a column of three figures perched atop one another's shoulders. The bottom figure, seemingly made of mud, stands in metamorphosis between floor and figure. A leaning castle tower sinks into a black sea with three seagulls glide in the distance. The black inverted triangular earth seeps with dripping sand. The emblem infers an environment that is not a good selection for settlement. The viewer can envision the ground devouring structures and the labour required to maintain and rebuild the settlement. Nevertheless, the figures themselves are made of the material that is cause for their demise creating a unique expectation that they themselves may sink into the quicksand.

*The Procession* is a technical showpiece featuring thirty-eight humanoid red dreading figures. Porters carry a litter with a pink fabric cover carrying two ample and cloaked figures. An archive of historic litter images leads one to understand that the litter is inherently a tyrannical vehicle with roots in oppression, jockeyed by the bourgeoisies or ruling class. This understanding is depicted here. A central cluster of participants, lead by two figures with rifles, raise their arms in an exasperated gesture. In front of them, a soon-to-be trampled figure lays on their stomach, inching forward. There is green ooze pouring from the rooftop, dropping into pyramidal heaps. To the far right, this ooze has substantiated itself into four legless standing creatures with beady red eyes. They march two-by-two in single file leading the procession. What strikes Lowe about these characters is the apparent apathy of their participation in the procession. "Everybody has mixed feelings about whoever is in power, you either have complacency, or people that are really into it. Though these people are reluctant and unsure, they carry

on with blind loyalty. While everything around them is falling apart, there is a feeling of denial and obliviousness” states Lowe.<sup>1</sup>

The five fictionalized civilizations develop origin stories, from the initial celebration of the flesh and senses, to the reviewing of the hazardous environment that generates these sensations. Lowe’s work is humorous, often disarming you from your preconceived notions of what ‘hell’ would be like. These creatures are thriving while poking fun at the horrors of being human. Lowe’s *A Whole New World* is a comprehensive examination, if not a celebration, of flourishing in a world with flesh in an environment that is decrepit.

- Theresa Slater

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<sup>1</sup> Jamiyla Lowe, interview by Theresa Slater, October 15, 2017.