

# NATHALIE KARG

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joe Fyfe *But a flag has flown away*  
January 3rd–February 10th, 2019

The title of the exhibition is meant to evoke materiality, lightness and distance, qualities important to my practice. It is a phrase taken from “Exiled Grace,” one of the poems in the book *Calligrammes* (1913-1916) by Guillaume Apollinaire, written while he was a soldier serving in World War I.

Each painting utilizes a poem from the book. *Il Pleut* came about capriciously. I imposed the Apollinaire poem over the variegated surface of the support. It felt cheeky to apply this beloved modernist poem--as important to literary history as art history--as an organizing motif for a painting.

When I finished the *Il Pleut* painting, I had to understand it. I thought of the Giorgio Agamben essay, “What is the Contemporary?” I had been wondering, how do you feel the present? How do you frame it? One of Agamben’s conclusions was that one must “transform the present, putting it in relation with other times.”

Soon after I discovered the Marxist cultural critic Mark Fisher, now deceased, who described in his book, *Ghosts of My Life*, “the slow cancellation of the future” how neo-liberal capitalism has “systematically deprived artists of the resources necessary to produce the new” resulting in art that tended towards “retrospection and pastiche.”

Similarly, perhaps, I have always tried to achieve something like stasis in my work, as if I had all the time in the world-like Baudelaire perusing the Salons-in opposition to the compulsive, purposeless dynamism of capitalism.

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I wished not to prod nor distract the viewer, but to problematize the relationship between the viewer and the artwork. I sought an anachronistic relationship to the present as way of moving outside of history, or at least the panicked environment of hyper-consumerism, by refusing to over-stimulate the eye and by attempting to avoid the flourish.

Other aspects of the Calligrammes paintings have other precedents. Their compositions, for example, share something with French painter Claude Viallat, a big influence, whose own emphasis on materiality seems to conflate Matisse with Brecht, being both decorative and political. Viallat's painted patterns are introduced over re-purposed objects often made from industrial or commercial fabrics.

Another conscious model for this series was the Robert Altman film, *Short Cuts*, in which the plots of a half-dozen Raymond Carver stories are yanked from their Pacific Northwest settings and cobbled into an episodic narrative set in Los Angeles. Here, Altman demonstrated that to genuinely respect borrowed material you must be ruthless with it.

Apollinaire called himself "a traveling spectator of the world,": the cloth, flags and signage that make up my surfaces have been collected during international travels. But I know very little French. So, even though I had translations at hand, my experience of painting the texts has been an appreciation of their appearance.

The 100th anniversary of the Armistice occurred just as I finished up this series. There is portrait of the Apollinaire by Picasso that serves as a frontispiece in the original edition, in which the poet is seen with a head wound wrapped in bandages. The canvas strips adhered to the surfaces of some of the paintings correspond to the bandages wrapped around Apollinaire's head.

-Joe Fyfe, December 2018

**Joe Fyfe** (b. 1952 in New York, New York) is based in New York City. He repurposes found materials like kites, signs, and banners to reveal the poetic beauty within overlooked everyday objects. Culled from daily refuse—particularly that of impoverished areas in Southeast Asia—Fyfe's work documents regional transitions and globalization. They are deliberately nonrepresentational, allowing materials to dictate form and come together on their own, rather than adhere to a preconceived artist's vision. Fyfe received his BFA in 1976 from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His work has been included in numerous solo and group exhibitions in locations such as Galerie Christian Lethert in Cologne, Germany; Ryllega Gallery in Hanoi, Vietnam; Galerie Bernard Ceysson in Geneva, Switzerland and White Columns in New York City.