

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ELLEN WETMORE

A Capricious Catalogue of Grotesques



Ellen Wetmore, #137, 2018, 24" x 19", 25" x 31" (framed) acrylic and pigment ink on paper; Courtesy of the artist

September 23, 2018 – January 13, 2019
Opening Reception: Sunday, September 23, 2 – 4pm.

Ellen Wetmore's **Grotesques**—both her 2014 video and ongoing series of drawings on marbled paper—lyrically unite eclectic collections of subjects keenly observed. Her video's title references the grotesques of the first-century CE frescoes in Nero's Domus Aurea (Golden House). A rediscovery of Nero's palace and the motifs and style of its decorative program inspired Renaissance artists. The genre flourished in Italy in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Grotesque came to refer to a type of decoration in which a variety of things, which could include creatures and monsters, were combined with naturalistic or geometric ornamentation. The spatial effect of the designs seemed confounding and the subjects a mix of cultural references.

Wetmore's contemporary take on the genre is a compilation of her fears, cultural values and observations. In the video, framed tableaux of historical artworks are bordered by insects and flora, humorously reflecting on age-old themes like motherhood. **A Capricious Catalogue of Grotesques** will also survey a selection of the themes that she catalogues, ranging from disease, surveillance, to popular culture in drawings produced since 2016. Among the works in her ongoing series of **Grotesques** are two that cite artworks from the Fitchburg Art Museum's permanent collection.



Wetmore uses the Turkish stone technique—a method in which paint pigment is floated on water and then transferred to an absorbent material—to first marble batches of paper. She then spontaneously draws what she observes. As Wetmore states, “the rules are that I must draw [in ink] the first thing I see.” In each distinct drawing, the decorative, marbled ground improbably folds into Wetmore’s surreal network of imagery to create open-ended narratives. Bodies, monsters, characters from fairy tales, architectural facades, and historical artworks materialize as black outlines within swirls of color. Her subjects bare Wetmore’s interest in the contemporary usage of “grotesque” to mean “comically or repulsively ugly.” Scenes that include things such as giant eyes and lips, buildings and creatures, spores, cells, or mechanical parts are expressions of, as she describes, her “well-honed paranoia.”

The exhibition, organized by Curator Lisa Crossman, will be on view **September 23, 2018 – January 13, 2019.**

Please join us for the opening reception on Sunday, September 23, 2 – 4pm.

About FAM

The Fitchburg Art Museum serves the cities of Fitchburg and Leominster and the surrounding communities in North Central Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire. FAM was founded in 1925, and its five-building complex, with over 20,000 square feet of exhibition space, features exhibitions from its art historical collections as well as special exhibitions focused on New England contemporary art. FAM plays a vital role in the cultural life of the region and the Museum maintains active educational partnerships with the local school systems, as well as Fitchburg State University. FAM is an engine for creativity, education, community building and fun!

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