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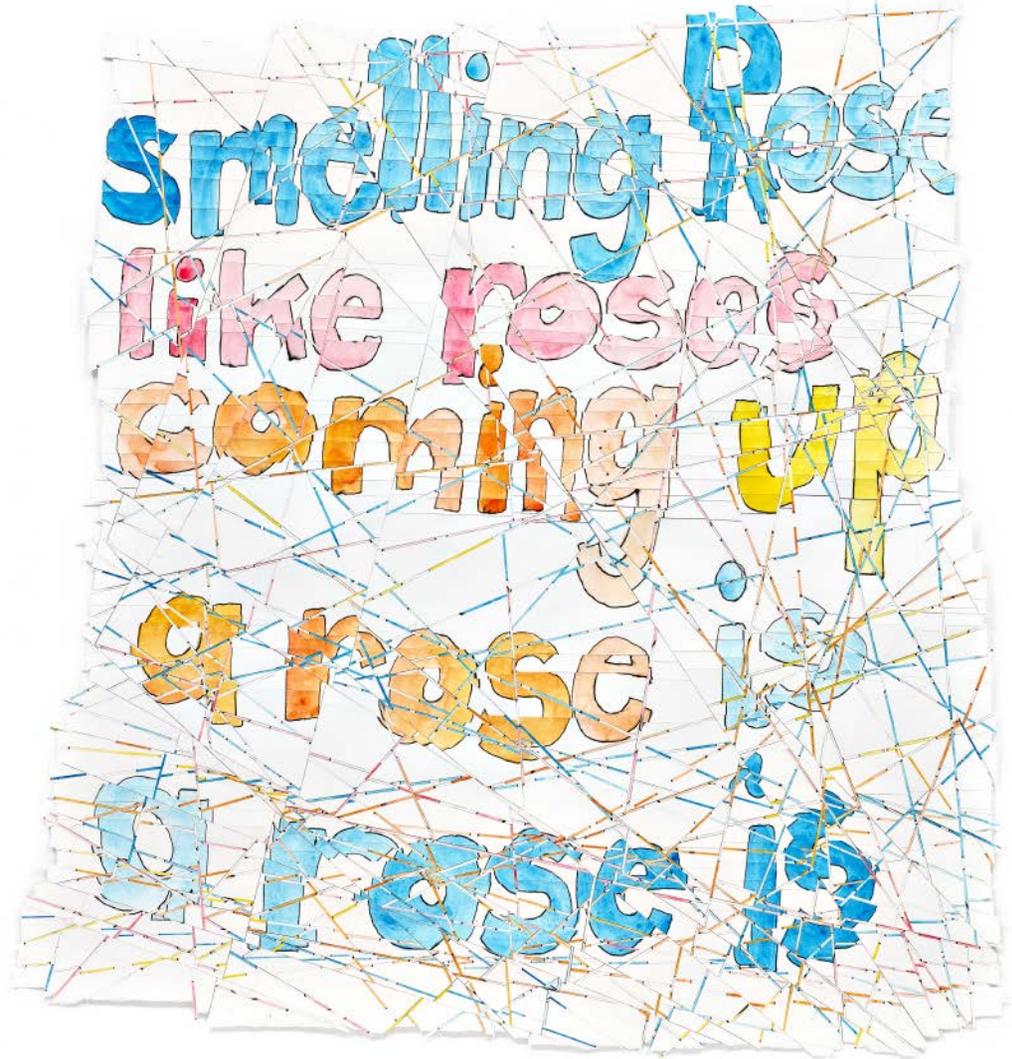
Curated by Michelle White, Senior Curator

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Roni Horn

When I Breathe, I Draw



front Roni Horn, *Th Rose Prblm*, 2015 (detail). Watercolor, pen and ink, gum arabic on watercolor paper, and tape; forty-eight drawings in sets of four, average size each 26 x 19 ½ in. (66 x 49.5 cm). Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland. © Roni Horn

Part 2 June 7–September 1, 2019

THE MENIL COLLECTION

This installation, the second part of a six-month exhibition at the Menil Drawing Institute, presents the varied and complex drawing methods of American artist Roni Horn (b. 1955). On view are works created across the span of four decades—including the recent *Wits' End Sampler*, 2018, in the building's main public space, called the Living Room—showcasing the artist's innovative approach to drawing through cuts, text, and color.

The exhibition begins with two series from the mid-1980s: Hamilton Reds and Brooklyn Reds. Horn created the forms with powdered pigments mixed with turpentine. The brushed-on color clings, forcefully asserting its materiality, sometimes over charcoal, at other times directly on the smooth paper support. The artist sliced the paper and reassembled the pieces so that the assertive, energy-filled edges abut. Describing the process as architectural, Horn uses the tectonic term “plates” to refer to the cut paper, and she regards their edges as physical material akin to geological fault lines.

As Horn's interest in the possibilities of slicing and reassembling images developed, she turned to published maps of Iceland, which she cut and reconstructed with printed lists of the island's lava fields. In her photographic series of clown heads, *Clowndoubt* (2001), *Clownout* (2004/2008 or 2013), and *Clownpout* (2002–2003), multiple hazy images of white-faced, red-lipped, costumed figures have also been sliced apart and made anew.

Horn took a similar approach to idiomatic text. In the *Dogs' Chorus* (2016), she combined a phrase from William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1599), “let slip the dogs of war,” with more mundane and familiar expressions from daily speech. Physically, literally, she cut through Shakespeare's phrase with clichés like “let the cat out of the bag,” “a bat out of hell,” and “chomping at the bit.” Her repetition and pairings of these idioms (by definition, turns of phrase that are peculiar and not deducible from the individual meanings of their constituent words) fall apart when analyzed. “What does ‘a bat out of hell’ even mean?” Horn seems to ask by reconfiguring the term.

The forty-eight framed watercolor and pen-and-ink drawings that constitute *The Rose Prblm*, 2015, function in a similar way. Horn used a hackneyed literary quotation, this time the repetitive “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,”

in all its variations, from Gertrude Stein's poem “Sacred Emily” (1913). The artist intercut the main quote with a cliché, “come up smelling like roses”, and its permutations. Like Stein, Horn plays with the double meaning of rose as both a woman's name and a flower. One example reads, “Rose is a rose coming up roses smelling like a rose is a rose.” The viewer is asked to grasp the two passages as they splinter, conflate, and multiply.

Horn's *Remembered Words* (2012–13) also engenders uncertainty. Small circles of colorful gouache and watercolor are labeled with handwritten words that range from satisfying onomatopoeias to obscure pop culture references. The artist says that many of her most salient memories involve words rather than images. She talks about the series in terms of extracting words from her memory as well as from her moment-to-moment awareness. Some words flow effortlessly into neat rows, while others stutter onto the page, partially obscured by paint. The artist explains, “The words have no context. They are someone else's recall, present as evidence or residue of something the viewer cannot know.”

For Roni Horn, drawing is never static. It is a process: a way of thinking, a way of being, and a way of remembering her experience of place in and through the world. As such, her approach to the discipline is an allegory of discovery and invention and so fundamental and necessary to her that she compares it to the life-sustaining act of breathing. Horn's drawings form, she says, a “kind of breathing vocabulary on a daily level.”

Roni Horn (b. 1955) lives and works in New York and Reykjavik, Iceland. Her work has been the subject of numerous major exhibitions, including Roni Horn at the Fondation Beyeler, Basel (2016); Roni Horn aka Roni Horn, co-organized by Tate Modern, London, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and which also traveled to the Collection Lambert, Avignon, France, and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2009–10); and Some Thames at the Art Institute of Chicago (2004). Horn received her MFA from Yale University in 1978 and her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1975. Her work is held in numerous public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Kunstmuseum Basel; and Tate Modern, London.