

COMMAS IN ENEMY
TERRITORY
(THE HORNET FLIES
I TRIANGLE)

Helen Marten

WHOSE FUNERAL IS THIS?

Simone White

Candace Hill-Montgomery
A Bare Woman Mutters Nothing...
5 June – 18 July 2026

COMMAS IN ENEMY
TERRITORY
(THE HORNET FLIES
I TRIANGLE)

Helen Marten

Hand, writing

Molten bitumen is poetry's tendency anyway. These are Candace Hill-Montgomery's words, exquisite expression of language's fluid tendency, its ability to flood and leak between gaps, to spill into spaces unreachable by light then slowly harden. Molten bitumen is a paradox: an elastic solid, a workable liquid. It is adhesive, viscous and waterproof. Perhaps the *tendency anyway* marks a lyrical referent to urban entropy, to the gleeful wielding of words that come with the power of wounding or seducing. For bitumen, after all, is deep primordial carbon, a trans-organic compound of darkness oozed into the mechanics of contemporary industry. Like the metaphor of amber that traps the prehistoric fly, bitumen harnesses with mimetic and messy overlap: contemporary index with ancient sonic density.

To *paint*, in all modes of the medium, is another strange suspension of authority. The process, like handwriting, is subject to heartbeat and logically then, to shakes and wavers and drips. The vibrational grain of voice is positioned with deliberate visibility, via motifs of error that move towards flourish or explicitly identified decoration. Perhaps these marks might be considered like the un-dictionaried burbles of noise that fall from mouths when definition is too abstract: sexual delirium, gasps of rage, of contentment, the sigh of quenched thirst – all sounds whose component signification can be understood but less adequately phrased with conventional language. These are the semantic complexities of a more architectural message.

Driven by informational logics or emotional heat, object-making also compels a certain peculiar engagement with language, its sly metamorphosis, its seduction. Words arrive with enormous speed, tumbling en masse, but they act equally like nets or fences, harnessing particles of meaning into place via differing mechanisms of speed or amorphous association. Hill-Montgomery understands this idea of iterative flexibility, how it holds great appeal, but also adhesive danger: what *thrill* to plunge within the Earth's milkshake and gather with sincerity nuggets of productive rubble, but what horror, too, in the doing of all that digging, to find exposed and sticky the granular indecency of material, its mechanistic hierarchies, its feral stink of policy or corruption. So much of Hill-Montgomery's work picks deliberately from the debris of urban transformation as though scooping at rare jewels: soft wood whose grained edges show advantage; diaphanous scraps of coloured foil or plastic; toys; animal decoys; sheared and bulbous metal, both; bent wire and its calligraphy as industrial vector; so many countless remnants of the natural world whose portions of textural wonder map like careful increments of time and place. This mode of gathering and re-articulation is an explicit tethering to both vulnerability and power.

Common articulation in language might branch from knowledge, from ego, intuition, rage, but it can also root down in panic, and thus artifice or *drama*. The same might be true of substance. There are classic materials that are default "appropriate" categories – for structure, for smoothness,

for strength, for security, for softness, for enclosure, for speed, for hygiene, for sex appeal, for delay. The tool, the jig, the prototype – these are corroborating tonal manipulators because deployed material of any type is *political*: it collects and harnesses commerce, culture and capital held ingrained in countless thousands of ways. Things may be described as *made well* or *made badly*, but the line between how those categorical distinctions are drawn is very fine. Craft can be tedious, yet it carries identities of mercantile touch, and it is this labour that retains productive syntax. Effort is numerous in taxonomy: rescue, adhere, partition, scratch, dissolve, hunt, collapse, decorate, delay, expose, acquire, resist. The submerged side of making – where dark intent lies – is the place at which mistake is embraced to become generative.

Hill-Montgomery demonstrates that there are many ways to caress and flatten fabric against a wall; that an adhesive joint might be flirtatious or intransigent; that metal is hermetic, mythic, carceral; that geometry is impossibly ubiquitous and divisive, it wrecks of history, but opens-up to fantasy, too. Her work exemplifies that what a hand can achieve is more nuanced and unregulated than a machine. The fingertip is tender, but also impatient. The art of the structural “fix” acquires shortcuts and between the extremes of organisation and chaos, an intense phenomenology of making is established. Approximation is script, critique, votive, surrogate. Approximation is poem and architecture all at once. Hill-Montgomery engages in a practice of making that gleefully flicks away the etymological claim of propriety and reforms the provisional or the bricolaged as simply a more ingenious route forward. Finding a radical tactile articulation is to persist continually against the lodged social anticipation of problems solved via seduction or silence; a making premised on impeccable material *control*. That “control” is the key attraction valent, a deliberately unsymmetrical way of seeing and doing that does not unquestionably cohere with what may be the “proper way to do things”.

To push towards strategies of play is to align with theoretical terms linked to danger, the presence of which might evoke vertigo, simulation or speed. This is a deliberate moving within visible margins, towards undefined spaces that history has sought time and again to close. It is a moving with the cascade of pleasure in ideas, a courageous or mischievous changing of terminology without changing the subject. Hill-Montgomery sets forth across all media in pursuit of accruing a defiant semantic touch that powers her works with a sense of exuberant translation or a becoming pleurably *othered*: becoming radical vapour, becoming majesty, becoming vermin, becoming scavenger of the cosmic. These are qualities of prolificacy and dispersion, of reflex. Foil, paper, glue, Xerox, horsehair, staples, tape, wire, Lurex, thread – offset against more classically obdurate material (stone or wood), these perceptions of trash reject the violence of erasure and embrace instead the provisional appeal of trial and error, balance and avatar.

Acid, powering

The photographic works of Hill-Montgomery might be understood in part as explorations of memory, Black subjectivity, and the instability of historical representation: how the institutionally biased edifices of “archival practice” (dys)function to exclude as much as they endow. These images deny straightforward documentary interpretation, instead constructing lush laminations whose points of entry or emphasis are deliberately multiple. Personal ephemera and material texture further complicate the act of viewing. Citrus fruits, vehicular infrastructure, drawing or painting fragments, water, packaging graphics, and countless mitigations of sightlines and their implicit reflections are layered in a single chromogenic plane. Double exposure works within the historical-critical context of a *dialectical image* in which temporal strata fizz with movement or rupture rather than static cohesion. These sliced excerpts move as a filmic reel of ghosted commodities, residual bodies, and mnemonic debris. Like a constellatory logic of abstraction, Hill-Montgomery positions photography not as a transparent record of reality but as a site where histories refuse linear narration. Legibility is not the objective but rather something more metaphysical and *felt*, a spectral recurrence of sensibility – like Rimbaud’s *rational derangement* – that leads, via distortion, to a poetic reprogramming of understanding. This photographic practice engages the politics of visibility, particularly in relation to Black identity and diasporic experience. By manipulating conventional photographic surfaces and incorporating mixed-media interventions, the photographic plane is used both as an aesthetic object and a cultural artefact, with the coolness of the technological lens offset against the heat or desire of the hand-eye cooperative. In this sense, Hill-Montgomery’s work leans towards broader postmodern and feminist critiques of representation, emphasising how images inherently mediate relationships between body, history, ownership and collective invocation. The artist’s use of occasional self-portraiture extends the tautological feedback gaze of the artist-as-model out to the viewer, with the figurative image becoming an odd form of facial haiku: an open circuit or invitation in which seeing and being-seen fold into one another, producing the face not as explicit identity but as a recursive surface open to new inscription.

Any cartoonish gesture, with its exaggerated elasticity and improvisational rhythm, destabilises distinctions between writing and image, symbol and body, language and matter. Hill-Montgomery’s vector cartoons, figurative approximations or brushy painterly marks inherit this classical function of transference, converting emotive biography into exaggerated motion and symbolic play. The improbable inclusion of antique iron *cache-sexes* in small wall-based textiles is not immediately legible as a sexual or proprietary gesture, but rather as a sculptural move that marks territory. As a dog leash defines the hypothetical circumference of a living animal’s neck, so too do these objects act as a means of carving out a conjoined conceptual and architectural space for identity. Perhaps the

electricity of this gesture is in its *simulation* of a redaction. These scalloped forms are akin to skirts or umbrellas, small motifs of protective enveloping that perform a paradoxical visibility. In this sense, Hill-Montgomery's mark-making functions as a perpetual living inscription; narrative that unfolds through stylisation and delay. Bleeding, washy ink absorbed into woodgrain produces a vibrational resonance in which speculative language becomes material grain itself – a porous, trembling field where meaning disperses through the fibrous cellular “memory” of the carrier surface. Timber is animated in classical etymological manner – *anima*, from *ánemos*, meaning wind: paint here does not simply sit, but rather it blows and bellows. Perhaps the pursuit of a relentless politics of “kinetic desire” is a means of human wanting that is intentionally never static, or innate, but rather contagious, bridging social philosophy and behavioural psychology in search of change that does not directly wound the civic body. From the Cynics to Aristotle's reflections on mimesis, society's cultural imitation of animals, of fables, masks or creatures, constructs a means of expressing human passions indirectly, externalising fear or mobilising desire and humiliation into entities that can be abased: cyphers that may be directly laughed at, disciplined, mourned, spurned, eroticised or abused. The cartoon animal, then, is not merely childish entertainment but a psychic notation – a playful method of deferral – and a buffer through which discomfort might be translated into gesture, iteration, and comic elasticity before it can return to consciousness as more “rational” or empirical knowledge.

Knots, tying

The knot acquires a grand mystery, like the feather weight of a cloud or a bubble of soap. Its origins are humble, string being foremost a constituent material of woven fibre: animal to human, molecule to corporation. String might measure space or snap a straight line on the ground; it may plumb depths, dropped weighted into wet earth; string wraps a package, tenderly tucks paper in folds or contours; it creates theoretical frameworks for interaction in chemistry or mathematics. The topology of the knot or tangle is held by mystery, by the point at which a line is not consistent but rather transformed through its musical passage into and within itself: simple linear variants link and overlap, creating new shape and shadow within tiny, closed loops that are impossible to see from the outside. Is a knotted string more alive than a single untangled length because it carries the trace intent of a hand's heat, its collaborative endeavours, its wilfulness? Is it less vulnerable because it has undergone the duress of touch, because it has undertaken kinetic repurposing? A clump of domestic knots tells of time. It maps practice or frustration.

Through weaving and knotting, Hill-Montgomery transforms the already topological act of drawing into a space of anticipation, where the line does not describe the world in literal terms but materially performs

the condition of experimentation. Weaving as handwork is a material analogue of speech: each crossing, each loop and tension, every warp and weft of fibre functioning like a phoneme within a larger grammar of cultural (or personal) memory. Perhaps in this vein, it is easy to imagine ancestral storytelling as not merely recounting origins but infinitely celebrating the proximity of oppositions – life and death, nature and culture, kinship and exile – braiding seemingly incompatible information into patterned structures whose meaning emerges as much through direct imagery as through insistence on repetition and the nuances of variation. Textiles acquire their coherence through precision and a meticulous interlacing of threads. The knot-as-metaphor replicates the idea of craft as the secretive accumulation of complicated lineages. Successive knots conceptually bind motifs of shade or discretion, marking analogy with taboo or ritual obligation. Oral traditions, like woven forms, are less precise transmissions than recursive acts of binding, with some labour explicitly ornamenting the façade, whilst other details remain silently concealed. Perhaps this sense of chosen visibility mimics how community of any kind re-links itself to its ancestors through symbolic entanglement: a vocal contemporary presence endlessly hinged on and between a historical armature. In Hill-Montgomery's work, the persistent density of line, in all its various deployments, operates less as contour than as a linguistic event. She refuses the stability of singular representation, producing an undeniable vibrancy whose semantic force proves that perhaps pleasure is the fundamental *itch*. The knot, the line, the wash of colour or scratch of ink thus become tangled within a wider ontological structure; not a closure, but an endlessly prolific site where hands, histories, and signs are cycled in joyous and enigmatic relation.

1 Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 1961 – inspired by Caillois' theories of games and the risks, and therefore discoveries, in social play.

WHOSE FUNERAL IS THIS?

Simone White

Everything here was new once.
Gentrification completes itself when the neighborhood stops whispering to me
at night.
When I say whisper,
I mean scream obscenities
in the middle of the night.
In the wind of the B26 there's battle between black lovers, black addicts,
 between the black mad
& the black sane.
The birds begin at 4:57 am.
Chief Keef at 5:49. He, calling me, calling himself
Jesus.

Jesus is not
under the billowing skirt of a nineteenth century lawn jockey;
Jesus would not dwell in recovery of historical style.
Her hair does look practical under an extinct hat.
When I say Jesus,
I mean warblers and goldfinches, varieties of yellow bird
likely to herald the lord.
On her knees, then. In order to make the sheltering shape
with her dress.

Jesus say, a machine glint on the prosperous,
and I love a good tunnel walk
as much as the next person.
Go Jalens everywhere.
Go Wemby.
We are trying to communicate with you guys.
We, like the preadolescent say, are "dusty."
They mean busted tore-up in a careless way never going to Sephora
to smell good.
The sweaty patina of wealth on these young men
is language.

With you.

Everyone was out here parched and sputtering on cemeterial rubble.
My friend Pat was dead, but here she was at
not-her-funeral,
bent to hold me because I was dusty.
Tears just-a-streaming down my face not even knowing who was dead.
Pat was crooked to figure engulfment,
long arms and fingers made powerful by sewing and knitting
after they replaced her kidney and she left for upstate.
The funeral, a cartoonish disturbance in the force
as reason could not
hold me. I needed help.

Hollybush Gardens
1-2 Warner Yard, London EC1R 5EY
www.hollybushgardens.co.uk