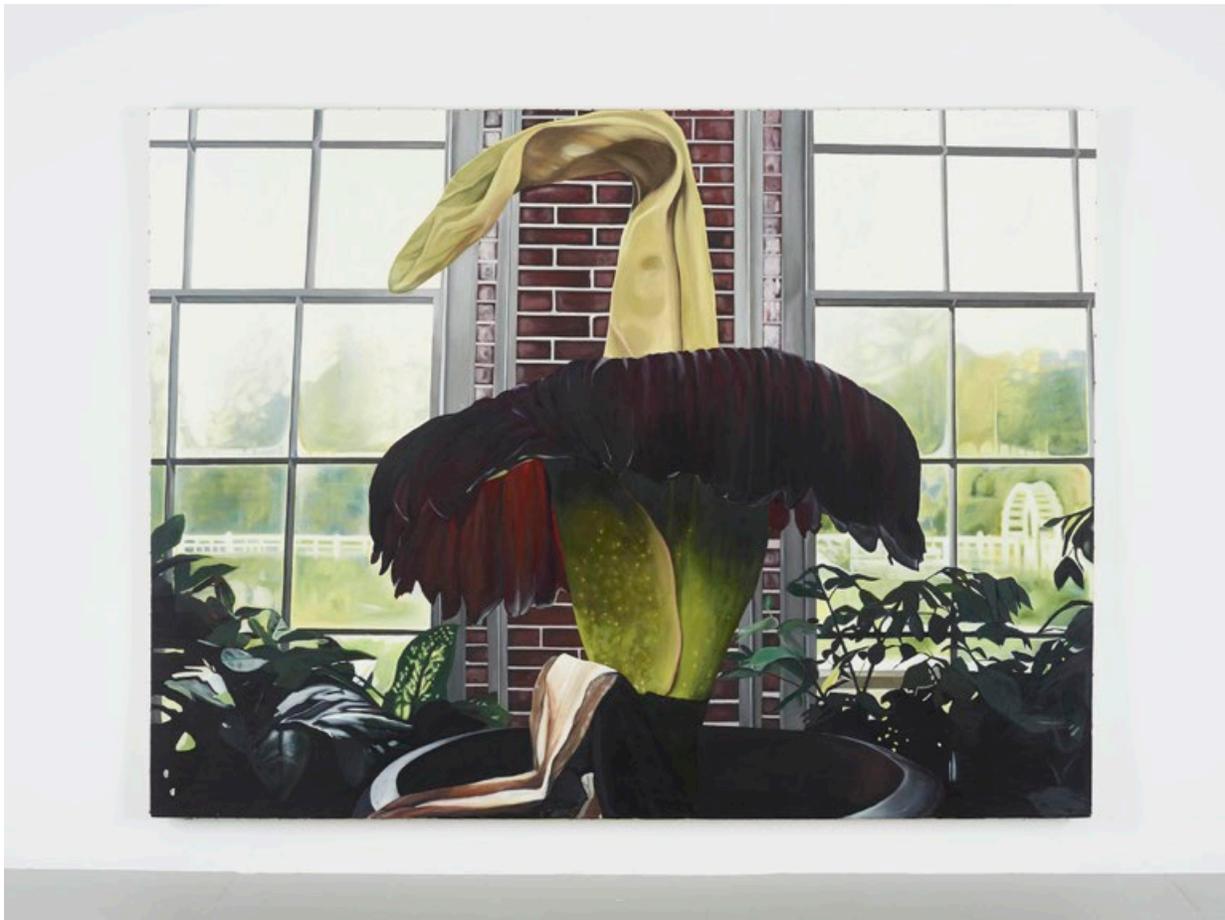


# HYPERALLERGIC

## Painting the Pageantry of the Corpse Flower:

Megan Marrin's paintings at David Lewis gallery show the remarkable plant in different stages of its life cycle.

by Claire Voon  
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Megan Marrin, "The Legacy (STL)" (2017) (all photos by Max Yawney and courtesy David Lewis, unless otherwise noted)

Was there ever, in modern times, a species of flower more monitored and visited than the *Amorphophallus titanum*? Better known by its more sinister-sounding name, the corpse flower, this smelly plant requires between seven and ten years of care before it blossoms and unleashes its awesome scent of rotting meat. Its bloom is our spectacle, lasting only about a day but spurring a public frenzy every time. When the New York Botanical Garden's corpse flower was set to unfurl in July 2016, the organization set up a 24-hour live cam so that anyone could track it online. Ditto for a corpse flower in Washington, DC, and for the one at Indiana University. It was the summer of the *Amorphophallus titanum*, which captured hearts and noses around the world. And it's happening again, with one corpse flower set to bloom this week in Chicago and three in the nation's capital.



Megan Marrin, "The Hunger" (2016)

At David Lewis gallery, the flower is blossoming, too, but with no trace of its famous scent. Currently on view is Megan Marrin's solo show *Corps*, which features seven paintings of the flower in different stages of its life cycle, from peeling to peaking and, finally, to death. Large-scale, hyperrealistic, and rendered in smooth oil paint, the works immortalize the flower through an entrancing and evocative narrative.

Marrin began the series in January 2016, months before New York City's corpse flower bloomed. The paintings are based on photographs she found online of different specimens on display at botanical gardens across the country. They're stunning for Marrin's careful and evidently laborious brushwork, but also because they freeze, on a grand scale, a rare phenomenon that allows us to witness life at its climax, followed by death, within such a short span of time. I didn't grieve when I saw the real corpse flower at the end of its cycle (instead, I Instagrammed it), but when confronted with Marrin's larger-than-life series, I felt a tinge of sorrow for a living thing that works for a decade to blossom, only to collapse after a day.



Megan Marrin, "The Breed" (2016)

That's not to say that *Corps* is entirely sobering. The series also cheekily reveals how we fetishize the corpse flower through our odd, thoroughly documented interactions. The plant is a sexy star in "The Keep," in which a woman holds up a yardstick to measure its spadix, while smiling and posing for a picture; I've seen many iterations of this scene in videos posted by botanical gardens on YouTube. In "The Appointment," someone has dramatically cordoned off the flower on all sides, making it resemble a strange captive or the victim at a murder scene. In that work the crumpled flower – with its spadix folded over like the head of a Japanese paper crane and a curled spathe like its plume – is also surrounded comically by a medley of other, less exotic plants, which seem to watch over it.



Megan Marrin, "The Keep" (2016)

Beyond her choice of source imagery, Marrin's playfulness also comes through in the titles of her works, which could double as the names of pulp paperbacks. Their vagueness – "The Invitation," "The Hunger" – makes them sound more like cheesy, over-the-top brandings than serious descriptions, like tongue-in-cheek characterizations of the arranged pageanties.

The punch line of a corpse flower's existence, of course, is that it stinks when it's at its most appreciated part of its life. Marrin portrays this paradox perfectly in "The Sacrifice," a funny painting in which a woman contorts her face as she steps up to the flower's spathe to get a huge whiff. The perspective of this piece almost puts us inside the plant's velvety cup, viewing the world beyond its folds. It's an unexpected position, especially since the other six paintings feature the flower head-on and from a cautious distance, but I'm fond of the inclusion: it captures *Amorphophallus titanum* in all its essence, without any pomp – as a vast, magnificent, and quietly mighty creature, in appearance and aroma.

David Lewis



Megan Marrin, "The Sacrifice" (2016)

Megan Marrin



Megan Marrin, "The Invitation" (2016)



Megan Marrin, "The Appointment" (2017)



Installation view of Megan Marrin: Corps at David Lewis (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

*Megan Marrin: Corps* continues at David Lewis (88 Eldridge Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through August 20.

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