

'Divinity and Slaughter'

by [Melinda Kozel](#)

May 28, 2019



"Rikki" 2018, Lenticular Print 24×16
by Danielle Spires

When photography was invented, the art world insisted that representational art was dead. The ability to replicate reality would always be inferior to the camera, the status quo said. But instead, art defied our expectations. It found a way to show the impalpable in a way that brought even more reality to the surface.

The subsequent abstraction and experimentation gave a context to the figures captured by the lens. It explained how they interacted with and were affected by the world around them beyond the representation that traditional art-and now photography-gave us.

Petshop Gallery's latest exhibit brings together Omaha-based Anthony Licari and Los Angeles-based Danielle Spires for their twist on the realism of photography. Not only in their use of the medium, which heightens the two-dimensional surface with depth and perspective, but in the theme of their work. *Divinity and Slaughter* delivers a narrative sprung from regret and pain—the result of a disconnect between reality and expectation.

The window into the world of Licari's and Spires' subjects allows us a quick gauge of who they are but instantly creates a screen that makes it more difficult for the subject to remain who we thought. The exhibit plays with the comfort of our expectations and demands that we see their actual reality.



"Divine Hunters no. 2," by Anthony Licari 2019,
Photo Wax Encaustic, 24" x 36"

Even Licari's method didn't end up the way he expected. The original series of photographs for "Divine Hunters" showed clear representations and the womanly in them were obscured by either a veil, their position from the camera or by an actual mask.

But as he experimented with wax encaustic and oil, he obscured these figures even more with thick clouds of material creating a mysterious space between the reality of the photo underneath and the narrative the viewer places on it.

Throughout the series, a varied number of details fights their way to the surface: a branch, a fold in the garment, a leg. This figure is fighting to break through despite the resistance that's been placed upon it. In "Divine Hunters No. 2," the figure seems to be using the encaustic itself to push out of obscurity. She uses this barrier, this imposed expectation to lift from the surface, arms coming into focus.

Licari notes that this set of expectations mirrors the relationship this series is based on—two people became strange shells without a clear path but with every assumption placed upon them.



"Rikki-combined" by Spires

Spires balances a duality of the lives of women as well in her series "Slaughterhaus." Upending traditional photography with movement and illusion, she delivers a story that uncovers the reality underneath and the imposed expectation on these women.

Inspired by her own experience with illness, "Slaughterhaus" captures an enclosure of sorts that is placed upon women—and particularly women who are disabled or suffer from illness. Using lenticular printing, Spires combines two photos that, when viewed at different angles, change the image the viewer sees.

In one half of the print, a woman looks relaxed and even sensual in the bedroom where she feels safe and comfortable. The other half is a still life of discarded slaughterhouse meat. This pairing illuminates the idea that women are denied their comfort in order to be available for consumption either by stripping away their independence and dignity and/or valuing them for their ability to satisfy a need. The increasing isolation and sense of being discarded becomes a prominent component of discomfort and the places that replenish their sense of ease become the places they feel whole.

When viewing the work, it seemed easier to see the whole picture more clearly from a distance as opposed to close-up where it became far more difficult to decipher where one print ended and the other began. Thus the frustration. If the experience of marginalized people could be looked at holistically and with a respectful distance, the close-up scrutinizing, judgement and expectation of access could fall away.

For instance, "Rikki" cannot just be Rikki. She is seen in this piece as the combination how the world wants to see her and every expectation placed upon her with the way she sees herself somehow wedged in. In fact, when you can see the two halves together, the cut of meat that interferes lays a large vein across her mouth. She doesn't have a voice or autonomy in this context; she is who we see her as and how we need her to be.

In both Licari's and Spires's work, the viewer works hard to find a clear, satisfying view. But, why is it so important to find the perfect vantage point to see these women? The need to label, identify and silo women into a category that makes us comfortable no matter if that allows for her comfort is a large part of what challenging these expectations is about.

Not to mention, the expectations put on disabled women and those that experience illness come with loaded accusations, suggestions and condescensions. Have you tried this treatment? Why can't you just be happy? You are so helpless; this is what you need. The expectations that we put on others dictates who that person is based on our perception and our need.

Divinity and Slaughter is on view through May 31 at Petshop Gallery, 2725 N. 62nd Street. For more information, visit bensonfirstfriday.com/petshop, daniellespires.com or sordidlove.com.