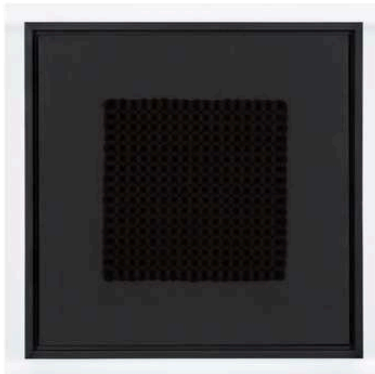


Installation view of JULIAN DAY's exhibition "Vibrant Matter" at Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney, 2016. Courtesy the artist and Dominik Mersch Gallery.



EMMA FIELDEN, *Relics: The Lord's Prayer*, 2016, ink on Fabriano Artisticco 300 gsm paper, 38 × 38 cm. Courtesy the artist and Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney.



EMMA FIELDEN, *Dark Matter II*, 2016, iron oxide pigment and neodymium magnets on white primed linen and steel, 33 × 33 cm. Courtesy the artist and Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney.

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AUSTRALIA

INVISIBLE FORCES

BY CHLOÉ WOLIFSON

It is said that meditating monks chanting "Om" are echoing the vibrational frequency of the universe; it is their mantra, a pervasive yet invisible force, made tangible. Three exhibitions in Sydney see four artists endeavouring to visualize such invisible forces that surround us, capturing organic phenomenon in synthetic form. The results are profound, meditative and uncanny.

For Sydney-based Julian Day, who has "twin backgrounds" in art and music, it is inevitable that the two forms mingle. His visual-arts practice has previously employed musical instruments and tools, such as synthesizers and metronomes, to reflect human tensions via the mechanical. In "Vibrant Matter," Day's first solo exhibition at Dominik Mersch Gallery, the artist pushes into more abstract territory, creating large-scale minimalist objects to harness the inaudible through visual elements. Day's *White* and *Pink* (all works 2016) appear at first like a series of minimalist, color field paintings, while *Black* is exhibited as three, large rectangular prisms standing stridently in the gallery. Each work consists of a frame stretched with a silk canvas. At first these appear as modernist objects, perhaps channeling Malevich, Rothko or Judd. However, their fragile fabric skins soon begin to tremble, and the cool minimalism melts away, replaced with a frisson of energy. A subwoofer within each piece plays a subsonic tone—below the audibility of the human ear—causing a vibration in the canvas. The vibrating color fields, particularly in the large "Black" series, recall amplifiers themselves, and while standing next to a speaker of that scale in a typical musical context would be dangerously loud, here the silence is eerily powerful. Day's works remind us that sound waves are all around, whether we are aware of them or not.

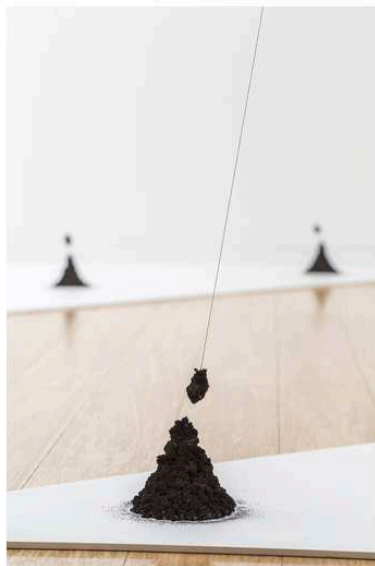
The neighboring space at Dominik Mersch is occupied by the work of Emma Fielden. Also a Sydneysider, Fielden's background as a maker of contemporary jewellery comes through in the detailed works she creates. Her exhibition "Dark Matter" investigates the macrocosmic and microscopic tensions between matter and the void, through drawing, sculpture and installation.

In a series of works on paper titled "Relics" (all works 2016), Fielden has repeatedly inscribed religious texts such as the Lord's Prayer in layers upon layers, until the words appear to give way to something beyond their meaning, and a space opening up beyond the page. Just as a repeated word will eventually lose its meaning in a wash of abstract sound, Fielden's "Relics" interrogate acts of indoctrination and worship. The words, however, are repeated in tiny neat squares in two other works on paper, *Zero* and *Nothing*. In these works, Fielden takes viewers further into the void, with the eponymous words written over and over to form dark, abstracted shapes. While the choice of words in these two works may seem somewhat literal, the execution is effective as the shapes appear to form cracks in the paper. One is led to peer closer and closer into the work, in order to read the text that forms it, until it feels as though one may fall through it.

Fielden has also made a series of painting-like objects which, like Day's works, recall certain modernist traditions. *Dark Matter I* and *Dark Matter II* are small canvases primed respectively in white and black. They contain in their center accumulations of iron oxide pigment, which gathers in formations dependent on a number of magnets affixed to the reverse side of the work. The square formation of the pigment is a device echoed in Fielden's "Relics" drawings and throughout the exhibition, and in the case of these works, the pigment falls into line in different ways according to the shape of the hidden magnets. The matte, textured surface of the pigment takes a woven form, which appears like a magnification of the canvas itself.

In a series of works titled "Terrain," Fielden has brought the magnets out from behind the canvas, arranging them in squares on plinths and placing crushed iron oxide pigment on top. The pigment gathers in the center of each square magnet, creating cushions of blackness like miniature undulating landscapes. Fielden takes this geographic reference further in an installation work titled *Mapping the Void*. Tiny mountains of iron oxide pigment rise out of the gallery floor. Hovering above each is a satellite of pigment suspended from thread that is anchored via invisible tension to the formation below. This miniature landscape delicately describes the invisible forces at work in the universe.

The complimentary aesthetics of Fielden's microscopic particles and Day's vibrating color fields are a neat pairing. Moving through the gallery, one is made acutely aware of the invisible waves passing through one's body.



EMMA FIELDEN, *Mapping the Void* (detail), 2016, iron oxide pigment, crushed ferrite magnets, neodymium magnets, linen thread, site-specific installation, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney.