

## *One through the Other*

Brandon Poole

## *Say it with Flowers*

Kate Whiteway

San Sheng Art Space  
March 4 to April 17, 2022

### List of Works

*Could you find a way to delight me slowly*, 2022  
Archival pigment ink on baryta paper  
27.5 x 27.5 cm  
Edition of 5 + 2 AP

*Let's be beautiful together*, 2022  
Book, mount, and mirror  
22.5 x 27.5 cm

*Ann's Flowers' Arrangements*, 2022  
1:35 min video projection (interior, day), 16:9, silent  
2:00 min video projection loop (exterior, night), 3:8, silent

*Florists' Transworld Delivery*, 2022  
Mousepad, armature  
20.5 x 20.5 cm

Curated by Yuluo Wei  
Commissioned by 333 Industrial Arts  
Text by Kate Whiteway

FTD® Garden of Grace™ entrance bouquet chosen by Jeremy Laing

The artist would like to thank Yuluo Wei, Kate Whiteway, Virginia Gabrielian, Andrea Carson Barker, Jeremy Laing, Julian Dime, Adam Basanta, Eli Kerr, Christophe Barbeau, Chris Mendoza, Holly Fedida, Emily DiCarlo, Jordan Prosser, Simon Fuh, Lucas, Nicholas and Robert Poole, and ever, Katie-May Arndt.

In response to an invitation from Yuluo Wei to produce works for the luxury showroom San Sheng Art Space, the artist Brandon Poole found an entry point when a familiar publication turned up in an unexpected place. The publication, “Mark Lewis: Cold Morning,” published for the Canadian Pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennial, appeared in the hands of an influencer in an Instagram post promoting the showroom. Struck by the use of the catalogue as a prop, Poole has created a series of ouroboric works that respond to San Sheng Art Space itself, a bifurcated site that functions both as retail and exhibition space for contemporary art.

Brandon Poole regards Mark Lewis as somewhat of an artistic influence. Searching the catalogue, Poole settled on a phrase describing Lewis’ work *Off Leash, High Park* (2004) from an essay by Barbara Fischer, the commissioning curator of the biennial project: “Both pictorial spaces are beheld equally, one through the other, perceptually pulsating back and forth in tension.”<sup>1</sup> Taking these words as theoretical premise and instruction, Brandon Poole’s exhibition *One through the Other* (2022) is a series of “nested diptychs” – paired photographic, sculptural, and video works that, when read through one another, are meant to reflect an unresolvable tension latent in the hybrid site.

The opening diptych takes the Instagram post as its subject, setting up Poole’s working thematic of art and its entanglement with commodity. *Could you find a way to delight me slowly* (2022) is a cropped photograph of the Instagram post by user @angeliaheee. Head cut off and body in deconstructed bridal dress, the influencer holds “Mark Lewis: Cold Morning” upside down, parting the pages slightly with her powder blue acrylic nails. The photograph is framed in black walnut wood that matches the showroom’s custom-made clothing racks. Displayed beside the photograph as counterpoint is *Let's be beautiful together* (2022), a sculptural reproduction of the catalogue. Poole worked with a bookbinder to create a facsimile that is flipped on both the horizontal and vertical axis, so that it appears doubly reversed as in the

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Fischer, “On Location,” *Mark Lewis: Cold Morning*, Canada 2009 La Biennale di Venezia, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and the Vancouver Art Gallery, 33.

Instagram post. Read together, these two works form the core diptych and, in my view, represent the case made by the exhibition: the embeddedness of contemporary art in that which it seeks to critique.

The second diptych concerns Ann's Flowers, neighbour to San Sheng Art Space at 333 Denison Street. In the video work *Ann's Flowers' Arrangements* (2022), we observe the floral shop on a quiet day. An arrangement of wedding paraphernalia is staged in front of half drawn, slatted blinds. Foam spheres of artificial white roses are reflected in mirrored plinths on which oblong and fluted glass vases and chalices sit. A curled wire arm holds a dangling dove cage used to collect envelopes of money at weddings. Through the windows, a truck with the decal "Worldwide Services" idles in the parking lot before pulling away to make a delivery.<sup>ii</sup> *Ann's Flowers' Arrangements* is projected both inside San Sheng Art Space and on its exterior window. Fischer's description of Lewis' work may again be applicable to this artistic gesture: "Urban history appears here as a montage: the building is an anachronism, one shard of time inside another. It invokes with uncanny precision what Walter Benjamin once described as dialectics at a standstill, the instant at which a 'then' and a 'now' conjoin in the present to make the past newly accessible."<sup>iii</sup>

Brandon Poole has previously explored the symbolic and commemorative presence of flowers. In *Flatter Movement No. 2* (2015), a bouquet of artificial flowers is blown by an electric fan in the art-deco basement restaurant of the James Bay Inn in Victoria, BC. Poole lived across the street, where a passing bus announced over loudspeaker to tourists several times a day how Emily Carr had died in that same basement in 1945. Interested in the building, which had briefly operated as St. Mary's Priory, Poole positioned the flower arrangement at the centre of the image, as the sentinel of this anachronistic setting where one shard of time encroached upon another. Where the flowers in the older work invoke a sense of commemoration to an artist and nostalgia of changing urban space, the flowers on display in this current work speak to an image of logistics and global e-commerce that is distinctly contemporary.

Ann's Flowers is a member of Florists' Transworld Delivery (FTD). Founded in 1910 by a lawyer named John Valentine, FTD is a global floral wire service. As an early logistics company, customers placed orders via telegram, and FTD matched the buyer's order with the nearest florist for delivery by ice trains within mere *days*. For cut flowers sold in North America today, the cold chain begins at night in Colombia or Ecuador. Flowers are tightly flat packed and sent on refrigerated planes to Miami International Airport in the middle of the night. By 10am, they have cleared customs and are moved via chilled trucks to wholesalers across the continent, arriving in stores and florist shops by the afternoon.<sup>iv</sup>

<sup>v</sup> Kate Greenaway, *Language of Flowers*, George Routledge & Sons, London, 1884.

<sup>ii</sup> On second sight, because of the window frame blocking the truck, we actually see something more like "Worldwide vices" which could be said to overstate the exhibition's thesis, were it not completely accidental and unmediated.

<sup>iii</sup> Fischer, "On Location," 32.

<sup>iv</sup> Clarissa Pintado, "Fairness in Flowers Campaign Toolkit," International Labor Rights Forum, 2008.

When FTD began its operations, a culture of floriography proliferated in Victorian England. Emotions were assigned to specific flowers where the repressive culture otherwise disallowed intimacy and desire from being expressed.<sup>v</sup> As a form of cryptological communication, "talking bouquets" were decoded by floral dictionaries – peony for shame or bashfulness, red poppy for consolation, dead leaves for sadness. In harnessing the symbolism attached to their product, FTD adopted the slogan: Say it with flowers. The tradition of communicating sentiment through flowers continues to this day. For instance, the *FTD® Fond Reflections® Arrangement* is composed of white gladioli, carnation, rose and Bells of Ireland. Found in the "Sympathy and Funeral" tab on the company's website, the bouquet is said to express "sympathy that is tasteful, dignified and with a beautiful sensibility that conveys feelings with warmth and sincerity." If ordered, it can be made by Virginia Gabrielian, the owner of Ann's Flowers, or by another local artisanal florist at one of FTD's other 30,000 locations worldwide.

Poole's video is paired with the sculpture *Florists' Transworld Delivery* (2022). The work is a promotional mousepad printed with the FTD logo, gifted by Virginia to the artist. The mousepad is a banal, functional object of the digital commerce of the floral shop. Displayed on a custom-made armature, it undergoes a contextual shift when moved into the space of exhibition, landing somewhere between ready-made and index of Virginia's daily labour. The FTD logo is an adaptation of Flemish sculptor Giambologna's statue *Mercury* (1580). FTD's Mercury Man dashes across the globe with a bouquet in one arm, his winged cap and feet illustrating the speed of his pursuit. The logo was introduced in 1914, and at this early stage of logistics infrastructure in North America, the design reinforced an impression of the movement of goods within the market as hyper-fast and superhuman rather than essentially dependent on human labour. What better mascot to create an image of mythical efficiency and speed than Mercury, the god of financial gain, commerce, travelers, thresholds, and thievery?

Poole's final diptych is not an art work but the two sites of the exhibition itself – Ann's Flowers and San Sheng Art Space – and the encroachment between them. By linking these two sites, Poole creates a closed circuit between both as spaces of display and sales. The art works are read through the retail space, and vice versa. Poole's works indicate that critique cannot be made from an extracted place. Rather, each artistic gesture of displacement and homage Poole makes is hosted, shaped, and contextualized within perceptually oscillating dialectics of the exhibition's sites – the here and there of the two stores, their online and in-person operations, the in and out of products bought and sold, and the material and symbolic lives of flowers.