

# KATHLEEN RITTER

In Broad Daylight  
Visiting Artist Exhibition

September 15 –  
October 14, 2017

Artist Talk and  
Opening Reception  
Friday, September 15  
6:00-9:00pm



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# THE PICKPOCKET & THE SLOTH<sup>1</sup>

BY ELLA DAWN MCGEOUGH

The Pickpocket is a butterfly.<sup>2</sup>

The Sloth is a screen.<sup>3</sup>

The Pickpocket trades in razzle-dazzle.

The Sloth shifts shape and changes colour.

The Pickpocket can turn two into three and three into two.

The Sloth develops states of interdependence.

The Pickpocket shows up in spit-shined shoes and rolled up sleeves.

The Sloth wears a cloak of moth-eaten rags.

The Pickpocket exposes itself to a state of constant spectacle, a name splashing across headlines.

The Sloth is embedded in a thicket of covert operations, waiting.

The Pickpocket performs pirouettes.

The Sloth moves with deliberate restraint.

The Pickpocket cuts itself up into separate entities.

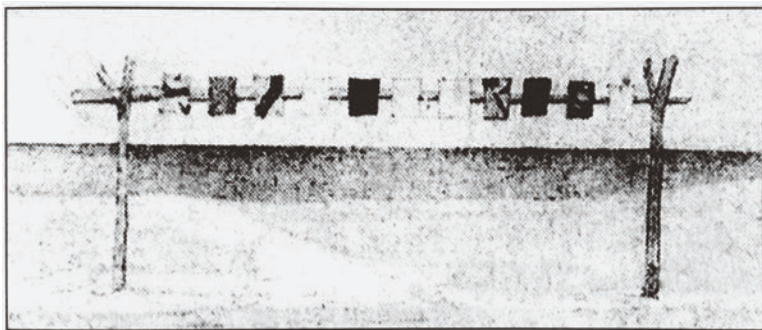
The Sloth accumulates methods of disguise and suppression.

The Pickpocket is deceptively visible.

The Sloth is bafflingly ambiguous.

The Pickpocket is an artist.

The Sloth is a camoufleur.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The semiotics of visibility evolve as a dance between perception and deception. While this negotiation is enacted across numerous conditions and species, each occasion relies on a process of encounter wherein the aim of both entities is endurance – the power to persist. In this spectrum of activity, the pickpocket and the sloth provide useful archetypes to understand the self-perpetuating co-evolution between surveillance technology and obfuscation.

<sup>2</sup> The pickpocket is a creature that relies on tricks of the eye and slights of hand. It uses powers of fascination, diversion, and disruption to detract from areas of weakness and vulnerability. When its body seems to break up into apparently unconnected objects, its goal is confusion, not concealment. As such, it becomes difficult to determine the edges of its subjectivity or the limits of its control. Try to focus on the flashing scales of an iridescent boa constrictor. Recall early twentieth-century attempts to confound long-range missiles with zebra stripes. Consider the dissimulating consequences of a politician's blatant and excessive lies. Conspicuously, it hides in plain sight and is thus highly adapted to a variety of environments.

<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the sloth's concerns are endemic. Its survival is conditional and subject to its surroundings. Utilizing methods of crypsis such as resemblance, withdrawal, countershading, and post-production, it virtually obliterates its own presence. Its acts are intensely relational: rock ptarmigans' seasonal plumage; a Polish sniper in a ghillie suit made of straw; developments in pixelated camouflage against a world increasingly covered in a fine layer of digital snow. Pay attention to IP addresses, 4chan, and Reddit. Like money, it is made visible in terms of aftereffect.

<sup>4</sup>This short text was developed in response to Kathleen Ritter's ongoing research into disruptive camouflage patterns used on naval battleships during World War I and the labour of the camoufleurs that painted them. In particular, it is informed by the work of two men named Thayer, father and son, artist and accomplice, Abbott and Gerald. Their groundbreaking 1909 text, *Concealing Coloration in the Animal Kingdom*, outlined various protective strategies found in nature. Notably, they were first to describe the use value of dazzle or high-contrast patterning, particularly by birds and butterflies. With the advent of war, they expanded their research across species to describe potential military applications for their findings. For example, they petitioned the British Navy to paint their fleet white to blend into the North Atlantic's overcast skies. And while their contemporaries ridiculed their work for its supposed wild universalism (imagine the pink plumage of a flamingo veiled against the setting sun as evolutionary tactic), it has been increasingly corroborated by the scientific, military, and fashion worlds (reflect upon the ubiquity of khaki).

#### FURTHER READING

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#### Artist Bio

##### KATHLEEN RITTER

Kathleen Ritter is an artist currently based in Paris. Her research into the intersections of military technologies, camouflage, women's movements, and art from the early twentieth century have resulted in an extended body of work, including a mural on the exterior of G Gallery in Toronto in 2014, titled *Camoufleurs*.

The artist gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

#### Author Bio

##### ELLA DAWN MCGEOUGH

Ella Dawn McGeough is an artist whose transdisciplinary practice spans individual projects & numerous collaborative activities.

##### VISITING ARTIST PROGRAM

Through the Visiting Artist Program, Open Studio is accessible to all professional artists, with or without printmaking experience, to explore and develop new bodies of work through print media. Every year, four artists each produce their work in the Open Studio facilities followed by a two-person exhibition in the Open Studio Gallery. See [openstudio.ca/residencies](http://openstudio.ca/residencies) for further information.

#### Images

Cover: *Abbot Thayer's Card Demonstration*, 2017, screenprint with exposed photochromic inks, 15" x 22". Printed by Meggan Winsley under the auspices of the Open Studio Visiting Artist Residency program.

Interior: *Abbot Thayer's Card Demonstration*, 2017, screenprint with unexposed photochromic inks, 15" x 22". Printed by Meggan Winsley under the auspices of the Open Studio Visiting Artist Residency program.

## Open Studio

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