

## Bob Fleming, *Kilter*

July 28–September 1, 2023



*We Can't See the Signs*, 2023, mixed media, 96 x 114" (Photo credit: Aitina Fareed-Cooke)

### *Seeking Kilter*

Curatorial essay by Shirley Verrico

Robert Fleming is a visual artist who works across the mediums of painting, photography, printmaking, and film, using artmaking as a form of investigation. Fleming believes the imaginative possibilities of responding to the world are vast, and he notes that no two people, let alone artists, are affected in the same way. Fleming's work is a reaction to living in an era that always seems to deprioritize our shared humanity. The images come from observing and absorbing material elements of both his small, personal universe and in the wider world, including, consciously or not, the omnipresent media.

Fleming finds himself feeling as though he and many of those around him are in a constant state of imbalance brought on by the unparalleled set of crises that face the world today, including inequality, climate change, political extremism, and social isolation. Fleming's work examines the difficulty of creating meaningful and sustained personal interconnections, particularly in light of the nearly constant disruptions caused by human-made disasters.

Fleming sets the stage for this investigation with the exhibition's title: *Kilter*. The noun means *balance* or a *state of working well*, but the word is rarely used that way. Instead, it generally appears as part of the phrase "out of kilter" or "off kilter," meaning outside of this condition. Encountering the word alone seems strange, and puzzling out its meaning is an exercise in dissecting the expected phrase to find meaning.

Many of the paintings and prints in *Kilter* were inspired by the performance of Catherine Gaudet's *The Fading of the Marvelous* that Fleming experienced at *Tanz 2019*, the annual Berlin international dance festival. The *Tanz 2019* website includes the following information regarding the production:

*"The Fading of the Marvelous" came out of an investigation into the universal structure of circles to discover deep human experiences.... Astonishment, fear, tension, struggle, resilience are just some of the emotional outcomes*

*manifested by the expressive bodies. As they stretch, twist, arch, scatter and emit strident sounds, their limbs and faces reveal insights. The bond between mind and body is clear. Long lasting and repetitive phrases are accompanied by soft hypnotic beats that lead the dancers to a state of ecstasy through a challenging crescendo of transforming motion. When they freeze at the end, it appears reassuring; an interruption to the transformative, incessant metamorphic process.*

Fleming found the performance a powerful display of his own feeling of imbalance; a physical representation of complex emotions. He embraces the structure of the circle in several works. In *Fortuna* (2023), a round object hovers above the figures suggesting a satellite adorned with faces of children and the abstracted terrain of heavenly bodies. In *We Can't See the Signs* (2023), circles radiate across the bottom of the painting like rippling water or orbiting planets. In *Don't Look Away*, Fleming has nearly filled the top half of this 96 inch by 78 inch canvas with a large, yellow circle. The flat neon glow alludes to artificial light rather than sunlight, compressing the limited space in the composition and pressing the figures against the bottom part of the picture plane. Fleming further flattens the composition, placing a series of squares and rectangles across the surface of the painting where they function like a mysterious code of dots and dashes always parallel to the top and bottom of the canvas.

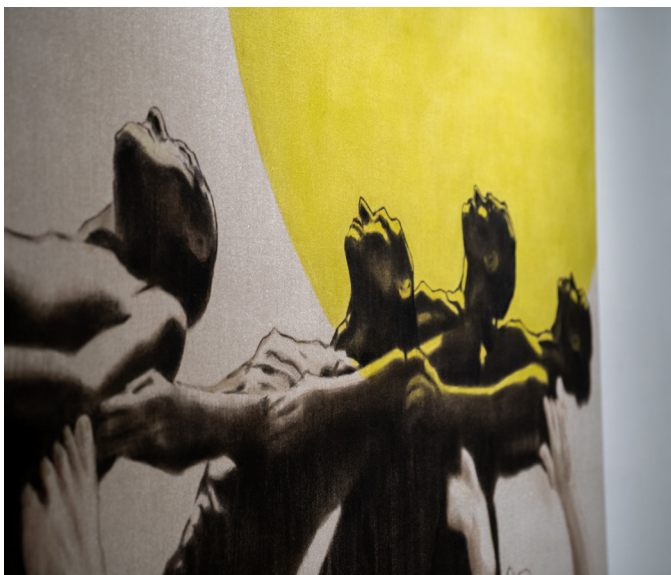


*Fortuna*, 2023, oil on canvas and collage, 96" x 78"  
(Photo credit: Aitina Fareed-Cooke)

All of the paintings include figures, many that are leaning forward or backward, suspended on the precipice of collapse. Fleming works on unprimed canvas and leaves much of the space around the figures untreated. The figures are meticulously rendered with thin layers of monochrome pigment along body contours, with color washes indicating shadows and the raw canvas indicating the light reflecting off the figures' flesh. This process leaves no room for errors and no mode for correction. Although frozen, Fleming's figures do not feel reassuring. Instead they seem to be looking to each other for support, seeking kilter in the personal universe and in the wider world.

#### Artist Biography

Bob Fleming has a BA in Political Science from Cornell University and worked as a lawyer for a number of years. During this time, he also maintained an active art practice and studied Printmaking at University at Buffalo. In 2018, Fleming co-founded and opened Mirabo Press, a printmaking studio and edition facility in Buffalo, New York. Fleming has exhibited at Western New York Book Arts Center, Nichols School Gallery at Flickinger Center, Big Orbit Gallery, El Museo Gallery, Main Street Arts, Dolce Valvo Art Center Niagara County Community College, and Burchfield Penney Art Center.



*Don't Look Away*, 2023, oil on canvas and collage, 96" x 78"  
(Photo credit: Aitina Fareed-Cooke)

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