

In a practice spanning site-specific installation, photography, olfactory media, and various methods of drawing, French artist Manon Bellet seeks to make visible the unmediated expressions of vital materials. Bellet is interested in revealing the creative agency of uncommon, found, or obsolete matter—evident in works that comprise, for instance, the delicate sprays of iron fillings which interact with magnets, the textured imprint made by solar-heated metal plates pressed to thermal paper, or the linear path drawn by fire along the burned edges of silk paper. As an artist, she has come to approach her studio practice almost like a chemist in the laboratory—experimenting with the raw states and residues of graphite, light, scent, and fire to investigate how these materials or elements undergo processes of transformation and change. Importantly, Bellet’s primary interest lies in animating—not manipulating—her materials; she often removes the authority of the artist’s hand from the act of mark-making and composition, allowing organic and chemical elements to perform freely and autonomously.

In her recent series, *Captures* (2021) Bellet produces a suite of drawings using ferrofluid on clear glass. The sepia-toned liquid is composed of ferromagnetic nanoparticles which become activated in the presence of magnetic objects. After applying the fluid to a panel of glass, Bellet utilizes a small magnet to draw the pool of liquid into trails of abstracted filigrees and linear patterns. Due to the strength of the magnetic attraction, she is unable to fully control the motion of the ferrofluid, which spontaneously renders a web of tributaries and feather-like coils. Bellet performs this experiment on both sides of the glass panel, ultimately creating a sense of depth and visual complexity through the sensitive interplay of opacity, transparency, and organic form.

Allison Young, 2022

Allison Young an art critic of modern and contemporary art. She is currently Assistant Professor for Contemporary Art History at Louisiana State University. A specialist in postcolonial and contemporary art of the Global South, Allison received her Ph.D. in Art History in 2017.