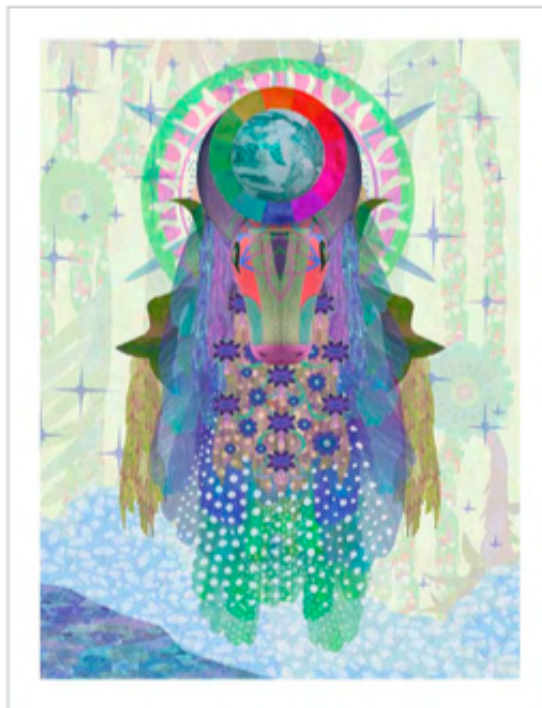


Tallman, Susan. "Reviewed Work(s): Encyclopedia of Cloud Divination (Plates 1 – 3) Edition of 14 by Saya Woolfalk," *Art in Print Review*, March – April 2019.



Left: Saya Woolfalk, *Encyclopedia of Cloud Division (Plate 1)* (2018). Right: Saya Woolfalk, *Encyclopedia of Cloud Division (Plate 2)* (2018).

## Saya Woolfalk

*Encyclopedia of Cloud Divination (Plates 1–3)* (2018)

Three prints combining inkjet, screenprint, silver leaf and collage, image 40 x 30 inches, sheet 44 x 34 inches. Edition of 14. Printed and published by Lower East Side Printshop, New York. \$4,000 each unframed; \$4,750 each, framed.

**T**hrough her installations, immersive environments and video projections, Saya Woolfalk expounds on the fictional material culture of the equally fictional Empathics, a female species genetically flexible enough to merge with plants. Like the Chitra Ganesh's 27 linocuts for *Sultana's Dream* (2018–19) [reviewed on page 13 in this issue], Woolfalk's work posits an alternate reality in which familiar patriarchal hierarchies are ruptured in ways that appear sumptuous rather than scary. But where Ganesh uses the graphic linearity of manga and comics, Woolfalk's visual language is one of wacky decorative accretion. It's as if every

craft kit at Michael's—silk-painting, sewing, woodworking, glass-painting, gilding—had been put into the hands of a particularly brilliant ten-year-old.

With their posed mannequins, elaborate costumes and diagrammatic backdrops, Woolfalk's installations suggest the ethnographic dioramas in venerable natural history museums, or soundstage sets for a sci-fi movie. In the flattened space of painting (she does that too), the bright colors and designed elements can stop uncomfortably close to the unencumbered cheeriness of nursery décor, but the three *Encyclopedia of Cloud Divination* prints that Woolfalk recently completed as part of a residency at the Lower East Side Printshop in New York make the most of both worlds—exploiting the concision of two dimensions while maintaining a bewildering hybridity. This is accomplished in part by actually being hybrids, built from screenprint, photographic elements (printed digitally) and silver leaf. Some bits are actually reflective, some just look reflective; some juxtapositions are printed, others are accomplished by collage: you're never

sure how physical or illusory any given edge is. The effect is a seamless suturing of documentation and myth.

The three images all show some kind of central object or figure against a pale background of stylized branches, flowers and starbursts. In one, a potted shrub erupts in flowers, one of which opens to reveal a Yoruba-like sculpture, its head surmounted with a glowing orb and expansive nimbus. In another, a large, striding female statue with swirling skin is given a large mask and two orbs, one for each hand, while another sphere floats over her head, backed by an even larger nimbus. In the third print, the orb is held in the horns of a bull's head painted in vibrant colors. What does it all mean? It's a mystery, and a hook. ■

—Susan Tallman