ARTIST STATEMENT

"Portal Glyph"

Ka'ila Farrell-Smith's newest body of work, *Portal Glyph*, invites us to imagine an access route to a different world. This world is not stipulated with the colonial discursive temporalities of "new" and "old." Instead, this world is a parallel stream, one that leaks through, dams up, and carries us to ways of being that are inscribed in the deep recesses of the earth: as petroglyphs and rare earth minerals. Across a suite of nine new paintings on canvas and panel, and two new monoprint series from her 2024 residency at Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts in collaboration with Master Printer Judith Baumann, Farrell-Smith's vibrant abstraction is daringly hopeful. In her paintings, the swatches of color—set against a striated blue throughline—and angular marks, achieved through both found and forged stencils and aerosols, register as familiar and surreal forms. Brimming on the surface are configurations that gesture to the contours of mountains, crests of sunlight, and petroglyphs from Pyramid Lake on Paiute Lands. Simultaneously, a rippling lace splays across the works, the product of a stencil that was created with retrieved material from the Umatilla Reservation in eastern Oregon, on the grounds of the old Mission School. The spliced X's and O's from this stencil, in tandem with the multi-directional pillars of copper paint, generate portals, which Farrell-Smith asks us to radically step into.

Much of the conceptual grounding of this work arrived from imagining a visual successor to Farrell-Smith's last series, *Ghost in the Machine*. While that series touched on the imminent arrival of a ubiquitous surveillance state, necropolitics, and a global spiritual death that emerges from mechanized land extraction and expropriation, *Portal Glyph* takes us beyond that death-rattling transparency, and into a rooted speculation. In this series, she contends with the gravity of modernity illuminated in *Ghost in the Machine* and infuses it with exponential possibility that promises something else, something beyond the virulent mandible of the nation-state.

The *something else* is palpable in each work, and yet lives in the yet-to-be-known. Its quantum nature asks the viewer to imagine *with* the work, imagine through portal after portal, the copper paint a vibrating conduit, generating these whirlpooling ingresses. In her monoprint series, *Emergent Glyphology*, the cool dusk blues and sagebrush greens splay across a mountain landscape, while ibex-like petroglyphic stencils hover and gallop through the cosmos, overlaid on the humming, shadowed land. The ibexes register as a patterned veil, delicately shrouding the view of the basalt, bedrock, and granite, as if they are myodesopsias. However, perhaps the more accurate description is a peeling back of a veil, the multitemporal story of the land suddenly revealed in a momentous rush. The petroglyphs as stories of the land—made visible to us in this contemporary moment through Farrell-Smith's meticulous hand—create a possible future that branches out and refuses a catastrophic, linear finality.

What is pivotal here is Farrell-Smith's relationship with the petroglyphs. They are not to be extracted and made sterile in the catalogues of institutions. Simultaneously, they are not to be buried, desecrated, flooded, and made alien to our knowledge of and obligation to the land. This mirrors her relationship with rare earth minerals as well, which made their way into this new suite of paintings when she named each painting (or, portal) in honor of their periodic symbols. The question molts and morphs from a commercially utilitarian one to a relational one. What can we learn from these marks and molds of the land? Where will they take us when we are not taking them? It is hard not to consider Farrell-Smith's many routes of study in the past, but in particular, it is hard not to consider her deep interest in archeology when taking in this work. We

are asked time and time again to hear the story of the land, to allow it to come to us, in all of its sedimentary vibrancies and interludes.

In these portals carved out by the streaks of Farrell-Smith's paintbrush, the viewer finds themselves positioned within the flurrying movement between present and future. This is not a prescriptive, dogmatic telling of the future, of something beyond the mountainous horizon line. Instead, Farrell-Smith asks us to collaboratively wonder. The momentum of this wondering is accelerated with her streaks of paint, the abstractions of land, water, and sky speeding along with us. As the acrylic and aerosols propel us through these possibilities, we are beckoned to situate ourselves in the unsituating, unsettling, world-making, and world-melting hollows of these portals.

Written by Carmen L. Petit for Ka'ila Farrell-Smith, 2025