ALMINE RECH

# Peter Halley
# Spotlight

## May 21 — Jun 21, 2025 | The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY, US

'The Spotlight' series includes a new or never-before-exhibited artwork paired with a commissioned piece of writing, creating focused and thoughtful conversations between the visual arts and authors, critics, poets, scholars, and beyond. In this iteration, 'the Spotlight' features Peter Halley's *ALTAR,* 2025. A text by poet Elaine Equi accompanies the presentation.

*ALTARED STATES*
By Elaine Equi

1.
I stand before
a brick wall.

"It's a humble brick wall,
only the bricks happen to be gold."

A gold better than real
or fool's gold – a gold
only to be found at Home Depot.

Actually, it's more a brick box,
a cupboard, a medicine chest,
a little theater.

It's like an inside-out vault.
You break in to steal its emptiness.

But there's something else.
Do I need to know what?

Yes, I'm curious.
It's got my attention.

Haven't you ever wanted
to stare at a wall
and watch it like a movie?

Wait as long as it takes
for it to open
and tell you its story.

2.
Now the brick sea parts
and other colors emerge
in all their dayglo glory.

Colors are the actors.
Colors bring the drama.

There is even an explosion!
More on that later.

This is a moving picture
with moveable parts.

A blue and red unfolding.
A pink and orange waiting in the wings.

You can alter your mood
by looking.

You can open these panels
of color like shutters on a window.

You can look through this picture
into another one.

Haven't you ever wanted
to look inside a picture?

3.
*A digression on altars and their pieces.*

An altar is a table
set in the soul kitchen of the sky.

It is a square crossed by languid girls and boys
who ring bells – carry incense and bread
while we perform the dance of circling,
standing, sitting, kneeling, as the choir
sings a hymn to him and her and they and them.

An altar is a battery for recharging
a frayed and fretting – a fried mind.

Its silence absorbs us – drinks us in.

*

No church is needed.

One can fashion an altar
in the smallest of spaces
from the simplest things –
offering a flower to a painted being.

I have an altar to perfume.
I have an altar to candy.
I have an altar to Ganesha.
I have an altar to Isis.
I have an altar to Elvis.
I have an altar to Brando.
I have an altar to Rimbaud.
I have an altar to St. Joe Brainard
who was himself a maker of altars.

4.
Where is the spark?

Match held in the cave
of a cupped hand.

Lightgeist.

The blank light
of a page
around a word.

The light of a word
in the mind.

Learning the language

the luminous
light-headed ones speak.

Sipping cocktails of water and light.
Fizzy lemon and limelight.

("to pin to the shimmer a name")

Ordinary light waving a warm greeting --
or is it a warning?

Atomic
Trumpet
Blast

Desert music.

Sonic light echoing --
the everywhere-all-at-once-ness of it.

Sudden bright
out-of-body lightness.

Hot-headed light.
Heavy light.

Does this light make me look fat?

I remember during a long stretch
of insomnia – climbing up every morning
to the altar of my roof-deck
to be startled by the cool beauty of dawn.

"Eden, glossolalia of light
Mountain the gods stepped from"

Looking with darkness
for light lost and found.

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*The quote in Section 1 is by the artist Peter Halley.
*The two quotes in Section 4 are by Ronald Johnson from his book-length poem, *ARK,* (Flood Editions, Chicago)