

# HYPERALLERGIC

DRAWING IN A TIME OF FEAR & LIES • WEEKEND

## Sliding Down the Slippery Slope

The choice has come down to essential realities or a life of fantasy.



Benji Whalen March 17, 2018



Benji Whalen, "Kaprowcchhshkshhhh" (2017),  
India ink, watercolor on paper, 8 x 10 inches  
(courtesy of the artist)

To find a way to draw during a political and moral descent, I can look to a painter working at a nadir, as Thomas Micchelli did at the outset of this series by pointing to Max Beckmann's "Birds' Hell." Beckmann gives us overgrown, foppish birds, dealing out topsy-turvy payback to their subjugated enemies. Describing a different painting, "Departure"

(1932-33), Beckmann reportedly said he aimed for "*departure, from the illusions of life to the essential realities that lie hidden beyond.*"

Instead, we have a president who chases a life of illusion. The hair, the cloaking suits, the hotels, the pageants, the constant talk of “winning” — they all belong to a preening surface. Artists aren’t the only ones who believe in what Beckmann called “*the magic of reality.*” But as a practice at this time, an artist’s pursuit of essence may be our best instinct and way forward.