

Translations

That the artist's open face can peep out from the surface of a richly re-texturized darning ball--more usually associated with socks and therefore with feet--seems emblematic of Marina Dempster's translations of the Huichol practice of yarn painting. There is clearly a personal dimension to "common sense", a work that also insists on sensory perception as something that unites us by staking out and enlivening our shared medium of experience. But that face, the openness of that face, doesn't impose any particular way of seeing. Rather, it invites us, first of all, just to see, and then, as our eyes are guided by whorls of colour and the mysterious stories they intimate, to see what we will.

If you lean in to smell this work--and you should--your nostrils will be glad at the scent of pine resin and bees' wax, with which the surfaces of these objects were prepared. Though it is our eyes that are most lavishly rewarded by this work, it engages us through our noses and the tips of our fingers as well--the very sensitive points that the artist, too, is instructed by as she works. That our senses are not only our most intimate interpretative devices but are also potentially misleading is not something this work tries to suppress. What does it mean to be misled? What, really, distinguishes an errant path from a straight one, and how can we (why should we want to) recognize it as such? These are the kinds of questions that Marina Dempster's work is refreshingly hospitable to.

For her, guidance also comes from the surface of the particular object that she works over and through, whether an alluring roundness, a curve, or a strangely mobile nib. With guidance should come gratitude, and indeed these pieces are letters of thanks sent out not only to the peculiar generosity of smooth surfaces but also to the Huichol tradition, and to those people who, as we see in "The Folly", have given her the tools to nurture and to create. So it is not despite but because of its personal dimension that this work is also selfless, for rather than appropriating artistic and personal influences for its own purposes, it makes these influences its method and its subject.

Yet this kind of selflessness, while meditative, is not the practice of emptying and negating, for it is supremely concerned with filling space, with density. There is, after all, something very tangible that rewards this process in turn. It might be noted that the meditative improvisation of fingers upon these found objects takes its cue from the forms of the body as well: a bust, a head, a hand from which the fingers seem to sprout as naturally as grass. And, to balance the engagement of the eyes, feet--or shoes--themselves balanced between fire and water.

As, perhaps, the scent of bees' wax might set you to thinking, Marina Dempster's work is ornate and--since the idea of "labour" is here finally reconcilable with meditation, improvisation, and above all surprise--labour-intensive, but also keyed in with what she calls, doubly, "healing nature". And like the butterflies depicted in "self-portrait", it makes an amazing journey between Mexico and Canada, one which requires--and amply demonstrates--both delicacy and strength.

– *Dr. Meredith Evans*