

DonFoulds

Don Foulds' exhibition, *Metaphorical Figuration*, connects inner spaces, both physical and spiritual, to the natural world. The exhibition, itself, is a ten-year survey and comprises several bodies or streams of thought executed in a number of media: wood, cast bronze, cast aqua resin, cast paper, and clay.

Before the artist moved to the West Coast of Newfoundland in the mid-1990's, he was known for his modernist three-dimensional work; however, the overwhelming power of the rugged landscape of his new home influenced him and his art profoundly. He turned to working in wood in a more figurative manner using natural imagery to explore ideas of creation, evolution, and our place in nature and the cosmos. An early work in the exhibition, *Future Fire* (2003), relates directly to this body of work and looks forward to the current work in clay in its low relief and concern for interior and exterior imagery.

A major influence on the work in this exhibit is the artist's travel for extended periods of time and the opportunity to see firsthand historical and contemporary art and artifacts from cultures outside of Western European/North American influences. Foulds lived in Morocco for several months; and more recently visited Greece and India. The recent work subtly reflects these influences—through both its use of historic and traditional processes and forms, and the use of colour, surface and pattern. At the same time, it is very clear that the work is an expression of the artist's unique voice.

For example, the small bronze sculptures of *Metaphorical Figuration*, which, according to the artist, were inspired tangentially by the Chola bronze sculptures of deities in tenth century south India. The cast components that Foulds uses to assemble his bronze (and, also, aqua resin) sculptures function as metaphors—for example, fingers represent touch; the hand, our ability to create; noses, breath and the spirit. The realistic casting and the domestic scale leads the viewer to relate viscerally, and hence, empathize with, the humanness of the parts. The works are quietly jarring, compelling and meditative. Like the Chola bronzes, they are at once conceptual, representational and physical.

The aqua resin and fiberglass cast sculptures which also are realized from cast elements, fold in vibrant colour. *Midnight Shell* is an electric blue reminiscent of the blues seen in the Islamic tilework that the artist would have viewed in Morocco. As with the bronze sculptures, *Shell* seeks to connect the viewer with the humanity of the cast elements—to the point that the cast hand elements are open and the viewer/participants can insert their own hands into the cast hands.

The recent work in cast paper and clay, the artist situates us in the natural world. Interestingly, the artist uses a number of quite divergent approaches to working with clay in exploring these issues, approaches that are informed by his time spent in Morocco and Greece, in particular, Crete.

Foulds' ongoing series of small, colourful, glazed clay tiles which combine images of Newfoundland wildflowers and geometric patterns take some inspiration in part from the the *zellige* or *qashani* tilework—terra cotta tiles decorated with enamel paint in the colourful, geometric patterns sanctioned by Islamic law. Free-standing sculptures like *Stream* are brightly coloured highly-glazed realizations of natural forces. Likewise, the three-sectioned, unglazed *North Wind: Fallen, Gust and Movement*, seems to reference the physicality of Greek terra cotta figures and is wonderful evocation of this unseen force.

Lair and Shelter, though, follow from works such as *Vessel* (2005), *Egg* (2007) and *Midnight Blue*, all of which speak of interiority—both physically and spiritually—and our place within the greater world/cosmos but impose the added layer of the natural world. A small human figure crawls in (or out?) of an interior space imbedded in a landscape of real and mythical creatures.

Metaphorical Figuration is a coherent exploration of what it is to be human in nature and the cosmos, a process which looks and connects inward and outward. Further, Foulds' art is informed by a sheer delight in the plasticity of the medium and the actual process of realizing the work. In this it is life-affirming.

For more information (images, extended biography and artist statements) please visit: www.donfoulds.ca

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