

Apnavi Thacker: Drawing Breath and other occupations.

Apnavi Thacker's work creates a site for the contemplation of home. Thacker suspends morphing organic forms such as bark, bone, stone and moss onto an unmarked white/beige background. This suspension suggests and encourages a meditative quality that draws attention to the fine brush and pencil detail of the watercolors in contrast to their suspension. While the plain unmarked background suggests capture, the detail of the forms suspended within this frame suggests an ongoing morphosis that continues even after the moment of capture passes.

In addition to the lyrical quality of the work there is an organizing principle at hand which dictates the morphosis of each form which involves a seemingly welcome act of occupation. Rebellion in this regard takes place in the framework that the work draws from.

Home, place and space and displacement are at the center of Thacker's work. These four concerns have taken differing forms over the years starting with graffiti, a form of territorial marking. For Thacker graffiti parlayed itself into a tool for covert rebellion until it came together with socially attuned sculpture/installation in her solo show, *Domus Vulgus* - which translates into House of the Common People. The exhibition held in New York in 2010, addressed the construction of house/home with found/discarded material. Thacker reconstructed a shack widely used by slum dwellers in Mumbai within the white cube of a gallery space instigating the disjunction between location and content. Mediating this disjunction were works on canvas that used collage (a black and white print of the skyline of Mumbai as seen from a new high rise) juxtaposed with graffiti tags in order to place onto the frame of the canvas the conflict between territory and access.

While *Domus Vulgus* contemplated a specific location and Thacker's personal stake in the consideration of home within that location, the works that developed after, most notably the works in the growing series, *Drawing Breath*, contemplate in distance and with an intimate sense of detail, a rendering of the concerns of home, place, space and displacement from within in contrast to without, and more importantly using organic forms in place of human constructs. In *Drawing Breath* Thacker takes away human agency and replaces it with its biologically encoded form - human bones - that are caught in the moment of morphosis into another biologically encoded organic form - tree bark.

In particular these structural elements are taken over with remarkable ease by moss in *Drawing Breath XLVII* and *Drawing Breath XLVI*. While in *Crown* the graceful arch of the skull is interrupted by upward flowing stone. In these three watercolors the structural integrity of the bone is kept intact while the surface is insidiously occupied. The next three works, *Drawing Breath L*, *Drawing Breath XLIX* and *Study for Sculpture II*, there is an almost complete breakdown of the structural integrity of each component. Bone, bark, leaves and stone merge and reassemble, and more than the previous three works, the components are

more fluid, the differences between each are more shadowed and hidden. This is not only a function of the increasing confidence of Thacker's brushwork and lines, but also an indication of the maturity of the conceptualization of Thacker's work where self awareness on part of these forms takes place in the process of morphing rather than being instigated by outside forces, and agency becomes more nebulous situated somewhere between the imperative of biological survival and an agreed upon compact. Suggestive in the compactness and coherence of each work is the notion that biologically dissimilar components are able to co-exist and cohabitate in the same plane of existence, without completely shedding individual identity, while embracing and in some instances integrating difference.

Disruptions at points of morphosis are delicately rendered by changes in palette, or line, and are in some cases mediated by light (additionally suggestive of the materiality of the forms), suggesting to the outside that disruptions are encoded while reactions to changes are equally mediated by biological changes in color, appearance and tone while form is in flux.

The watercolors use a palette that is composed of subtle gradations of blues, blacks, greens and yellows into white or gray interspersed with fine pencil lines. The drawing in the watercolors is exquisite and recalls the lines of Beuys as well as his technique. In Werner Schade's essay, *On Substance, Depths and Forces*, on the watercolors and drawings of Joseph Beuys, Schade writes on Beuys's use of colors, ' He (Beuys) was justifiably suspicious of indulging in color. In his relation to color, conciseness, exactness and restraint dominate. The use of color is subject to stringent control. Brushmarks are executed with extreme precision, with an exactitude that seems to contradict the easy flow of the color: wispy delicacy but never a watery effect. Beuys wanted to make manifest, never to cover over.'¹

This very same use of color can be seen in Thacker's watercolors, but in her case, the shift from the use of color in graffiti (signaling and territorial) to its use in these watercolors (material and evocative) suggests a maturity in the consideration of the issues of home, place and a sensitivity to space and territory that is less a function of exclusion and more a function of inclusion and co-existence.

With the addition of the three collage works – *Drawing Breath XLVIII*, *Stoma*, and *Drawing Breath XXXIX* - exhibited here alongside the watercolors a progression is seen in technique from flatness to figuration, which further suggests that the conceptual concerns of Thacker's works are continuing to deepen. In particular *Stoma* and *Drawing Breath XXXIX* are powerful contemplations, demonstrating the maturity of Thacker's visual poetics while suggesting the often-porous line between self and other, home and the alien.

The use of collage here is predated by the use of collage in *Domus Vulgus*, however where *Domus Vulgus* used collage in the form of a black and white print of Mumbai's skyline, and therefore as the representation of the man-made, the materials used for collage here are taken from old issues of National Geographic and

¹ Schade, Werner, *Joseph Beuys: Early Watercolors and Drawings*, Translated from the German by Paul Kremmel, Schirmer Books, Munich, 2004

represent naturally made objects – Nests, bark, coral – and a physical home. It becomes obvious that Thacker's concerns with home/house have shifted from the man made to the organic, and taken as a progression and in conjunction with the watercolors signify that Thacker's position itself has shifted; from the binary of inside/outside into fluid and blurred lines into ever expanding territories with shifting boundaries.

The identifiable forms are not longer those of the hip bone, or of the skull as in the water colors, but rather in the forms of birds, nests, branches of trees and coral, suggesting that Thacker's next series of works will follow some of the lines of flight that will bring the material and conceptual concerns of her works closer together while attempting to further the language she has put forward in these works.

In addition to the representation of home in the collage works there is a representation of insects and of birds alongside their nests. In a Deleuzian reading of these works difference and repetition while integral to identity formation co-exist with any and all others and function as delimiting processes instead of constricting processes. In other words, deterritorialization takes place within the organic forms suggesting potential lines of flight moving beyond these organic forms as well as their epistemological differences. This is the most significant aspect of these works; the visual language that Thacker has put forth in these works is ephemeral while their visual poetics is subtle and insightful and is used to suggest occupation and expansion.

The timings of these works is remarkable; in the age of the Anthropocene, what is most intriguing in Thacker's art is that she posits reverse anthropomorphism; the space for the human form in its structurally fundamental form is slowly declining as evidenced by the morphing form of the human bone, while the natural world slowly and in some instances insidiously copulates and occupies. By suspending the human framework in such a place, Thacker also suspends human constructs (epistemological, social and political), and instead allows for a different set of constructs to establish a hold, suggesting that we may have much more to learn from the natural world, than we realize, while demonstrating slyly that the age of the Anthropocene is itself just a construct.

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