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Visitation I by Kiki Smith

Inspiring body/Embodying spirit:

The Art of Kiki Smith

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Figure 1 *Kiki Smith*

My ongoing inquiry into the nature of creative process has led me to focus, in this paper, on the metaphor of the body as clothing, vessel and ground for the manifestation of spirit and, conversely, on the body's agency in longing for and seeking to bring to life its own hidden, inner spirit. The work of Kiki Smith, one of the most intuitive and influential artists of her generation, draws the spirit deeply into a bodily feminine narrative on a number of levels, through media, method, style and content. Her intensive process transfigures this convergence of embodied spirit and inspirited body into an extraordinary array of symbolic forms, exemplifying a singularly feminine mode of creation.

Like the dandelions she holds in her lap here, Kiki Smith's work is delicate, open and ephemeral but also humble, earthy, and broad ranging in its sources as well as in its influence. At times her work can also be dangerously bold and transgressive, as the dandelion's weedy stealth, ubiquity, indomitability and even the name "dandelion", meaning "lion's teeth", suggest. The childlike sense of wonder and trust we see in this photograph conveys Smith's light, playful, trusting approach to her work, which, on the other hand, is by no means innocent, but deeply self-aware, with sophisticated psychological, political and historical insights as well as far-ranging art-historical references and sources. The spirited playfulness exemplified by Smith's approach to her work evokes Winnicott's well-known theory that play is the foundation of creative living and cultural life (p. 102).



Figure 2,3 and 4 Images from Kiki Smith's "I myself have seen it" exhibition

Mary Oliver's poem, "The Spirit Likes to Dress Up", conveys the playful delight the spirit takes in intertwining with the body, as do these images from Kiki Smith's recent exhibit called "I myself have seen it", which brought together thousands of her photographs, many of them of her own works in progress as she engages with them before sending them out into the world.

The spirit

likes to dress up like this:

ten fingers,

ten toes,

shoulders, and all the rest

at night

in the black branches

in the morning

in the blue branches

of the world.

It could float, of course,

but would rather

plumb rough matter.

Airy and shapeless thing,

it needs

the metaphor of the body,

lime and appetite,

the oceanic fluids;

it needs the body's word,

instinct

and imagination

and the dark hug of time,

sweetness

and tangibility,



Figure 3

to be understood,
 to be more than pure light
 that burns
 where no one is –

so it enters us –
 in the morning
 shines from brute comfort
 like a stitch of lightning;

and at night
 lights up deep and wondrous
 drownings of the body
 like a star.

Mary Oliver



Figure 4

Jung has said that the creative process “has a feminine quality” and that “creative work arises from unconscious depths – we might say, from the realm of the mothers” or “the matrix of life”. (1933, p. 170) In these depths, instinct and archetype intermingle and, if the artist can allow herself to follow the agency of the body as well as to act as containing and mediating vessel, the spirit can, in her art, “dress up” and “plumb rough matter”, until it “lights up deep and wondrous drownings of the body like a star”. (Oliver) When this happens, Jung says, “the work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never unequivocal” (1933, p. 170). Art acts - more so than the dream, due to art’s more highly developed inter-

relationship with consciousness - as an "exemplary form of consummated meaning". (Johnson, xi)

In contrast to the playful attraction, desire and interpenetration Mary Oliver describes between spirit and body, the dictionary defines spirit and body in strict opposition to each other. Spirit is defined as "the non-physical part of a person that is the seat of intangible emotions, consciousness and character." (American Heritage, p. 1737) The word spirit comes from the Latin "spirare", meaning to breathe – so spirit, like breath, is the vital principle and animating force within living beings – and, also like breath, the spirit or soul is said to separate and depart from the body at death and may reappear as an apparition



Figure 5 Bird/Wolf

or ghost. In keeping with its original wind-nature, spirit is always an active, winged, swift-moving being as well as that which vivifies, stimulates, incites, fires, and inspires. Spirits are also what we call essential volatile substances like alcohol, which can intoxicate and stimulate high spirits, liveliness, or wit. (Jung, 1926, 318-319; vol 9i, 1959, para 389)

Body, on the other hand, is defined as "the physical structure and mortal aspect of a person or animal, including the bones, blood, tissues and organs, as opposed to the soul or spirit".

Body also refers to a lifeless corpse or cadaver. It also suggests a fullness or substantiality, as hair or wine can have "body". (American Heritage, p. 211)

This defining diametrical opposition between spirit and body forms a seeming membrane or boundary, which separates as well as links them, so they are continually splitting apart and seeking ways come together again, whether in love or enmity, inspiration or possession. For the alchemists, the secret of the work was to "join the toad of the earth to the flying eagle". (Stolcius, pl. 20) The eagle is winged and fugitive, flies to the sky and receives the rays of the sun, while the toad stays close to the moist heavy earth. Jung quotes the alchemist Michael Maier: "Were it not



Figure 6 *Visitation I*

for the earth in our work the air would fly away, neither would the fire have its nourishment nor the water its vessel." (Jung, 1955-56, p. 5) Matter and spirit, the fixed and the volatile must be linked and brought together for creation to happen. (ARAS 5Gs.519)

Jung envisioned a more fluid and unified relationship between body and spirit, and posed the fundamental task of psychotherapeutic work as the mending of this split – which at its extreme can manifest in a fragmented

psyche or self or in the "loss of soul". Jung wrote, "if we are able to reconcile ourselves with the mysterious and paradoxical truth that spirit is the life of the body seen from within and [...] body [is] the external manifestation of the life of the spirit", then we can "understand why the striving

to transcend the present level of consciousness - through acceptance of the unconscious - must give the body its due" (Jung, 1928, para 74-94).

Kiki Smith's vision and work as an artist exemplify the struggle to give the body its due while continually transgressing this artificial boundary, breaching this invisible membrane and allowing the eros of body and spirit to flow into one another again, to reunite. She says, "...In working with the body, I feel I'm actually making physical manifestations of psychic and spiritual dilemmas..." (Posner, p. 32) She suspects that Catholicism and art have gone well together because "both believe in the physical manifestation of the spiritual world, that it's through the physical world that you have spiritual life, that you have to be here physically in a body... And it's about transcendence and transmigration, something moving always from one state to another." (Art 21 video, I.S. #4)



Figure 7 Siren

Jung's vision strove to reunite not only spirit and body, but also spirit and nature — and recognized that there was a spirit which interpenetrated and animated all forms of life — mineral plant and animal — alike, often imaged as a siren or melusina, a winged virgin above and a snake

below. (Jung, 1942, para 415-416) Jung turned to the ancient world, which still acknowledged a connection between spirit and nature, and to the Renaissance physician Paracelsus, who called this uniting force the *lumen naturae*, the light of nature, or the “natural [mercurial] spirit, whose strange and significant workings,” Jung said, “we can observe in the manifestations of the unconscious.” (ibid., para 229) This natural spirit was also known as the *anima mundi*, or the feminine creative principle. Smith’s siren sculptures take the form of bird women, and in this setting, surrounded by light, rocks and trees, give an apt contemporary image of the *anima mundi*.

These conflicting ideas and definitions of body and spirit bring us to the question of the purpose of art – and its role in bringing spirit and body together in making meaning – enlivening the body through activities that lead to representations of life beyond the body, which also



Figure 8 *Kiki Smith at light table*

resonate with other bodies. The philosopher Mark Johnson suggests that meaning grows “from our visceral connections to life and the bodily conditions of life”. (Johnson, ix) He asserts that art matters because it “provides heightened, intensified and highly integrated [bodily and emotional] experiences of meaning.” (ibid., xii) The artist at work is in a constant, liminal state of

receiving immaterial/unconscious impulses or contents and transforming them into a more manifest or “physical” state of being and reality.

Making art, Smith says, is about trying to reveal or construct meaning through inanimate objects: “You’re taking the energy out of your body and putting it into a physical object.” (Posner, p. 34) “Artists are people who are making a physical manifestation of their sense of possibility (ibid., 34)... And art is in a sense like a proof: it’s something that moves from your insides into the physical world.” (pbs.org)

Through exploring the depths of her visceral bodily experience of being a woman in the world at each particular moment, and laboring to find expression for it, Smith shapes it into meaningful symbolic form, which creates a containing vessel for this experience. Concerned with the fragmentation and dualism that pervade our individual bodies and



Figure 9 Uterus

culture, Smith has attempted to heal the ruptures through tender portrayals of the body’s hidden organs, systems and fluids that are usually hidden away out of sight, crafting them with the utmost care out of materials such as paper, wax, glass, gold or silver leaf and bronze.

At one point, Smith says, she thought – “I have to fight for my life – I have to make something that insists upon a presence that isn’t spoken of,” which took her to investigating and representing the insides of the body, the partial birth, the abject figure, and later to the domestic realm and the private interior lives of women and girls. (Smith 2011) This white terra-cotta ribcage, delicately sewn together with bits of thread, tenuously suspended yet remaining intact –



Figure 10 *Rib cage*

evokes the vulnerability as well as the strength of the body. Smith considers this piece the beginning of her work and the origin of her artistic identity, sprung like Eve from Adam's rib. When she was criticized for making such frail and potentially ephemeral work, she defiantly determined to make the most vulnerable work she could, without apology, and to do so in an aggressive manner, employing humble materials and techniques disdained for their craft orientation, and subject matter reviled for its visceral femininity. (Posner, p. 14) As she put it, "something used against you can be an asset. I like employing my deficits." (Engberg, p. 39) Smith says that as an artist,

"...You get to play with your own identity and how your work is perceived..." (Posner, p. 34)

She says, "our bodies have been broken apart bit by bit and need a lot of healing; our whole society is very fragmented – everything is split and presented in dichotomies – male/female, body/ mind – and those splits need mending" (Posner, p. 13) She maintains that all that is associated with the feminine, such as nature, the body, and the natural spirit, is constantly devalued. "If you're a female artist" she asserts, "you're already marginal, on a discard pile, so you can use things or situations that are discarded, that are sort of free, and that aren't associated with power." (Posner, p. 34) This calls up the alchemical notion of the *lapis*



Figure 11 *Bandage girl*

exilis – the worthless pebble tossed on the dung heap which, if picked up, cared for and worked on, becomes gradually transformed into the *lapis philosophorum*, turning from dull, heavy lead into alchemical gold.

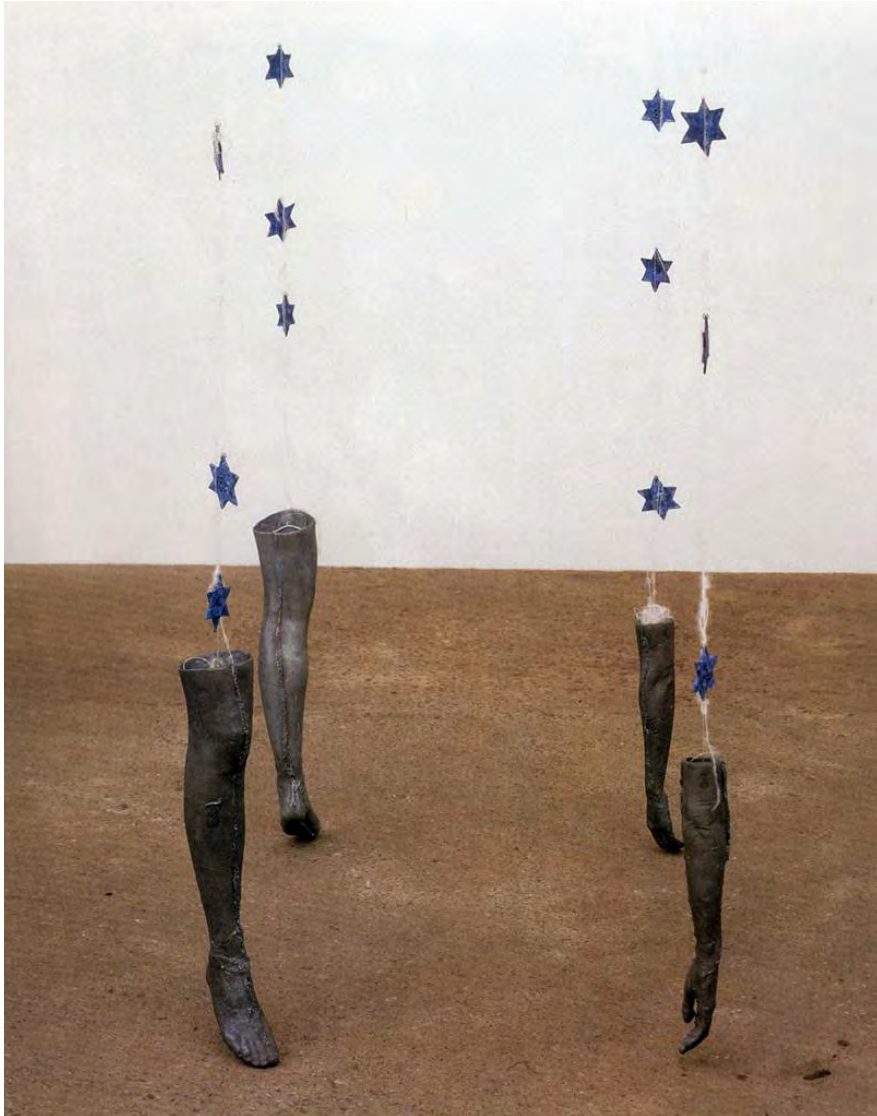


Figure 12 *Nuit*

She imaged this transformation as dismembered arms and legs held together and enfolded by the night sky, taking those fragmented body parts and linking them together in the embrace of an enveloping nature. This piece also plays on the figure of Nut, the Egyptian sky goddess, mother of the stars who, stretching her body protectively over the world, eats the disk of the sun at night and gives birth to it again in the morning – merging the digestive and procreative functions and thereby creating the cycles of life. (Pos-

ner, p. 39) Smith's "Blue Girl" gives a sense of this tender mourning and reverie over the existential isolation brought about by separation from collective attitudes, as well as the connection to a healing, overseeing presence and to the larger cosmos that this separation allows.

Jung says that the work of the [artist] "comes to meet the spiritual need of the society in which he [or she] lives" through the use of symbol, which he defines as "an expression that



Figure 13 *Blue girl*

stands for something not clearly known and yet profoundly alive". (1933, p. 170) According to philosopher Suzanne Langer, artistic forms are more complex than any other symbolic forms we know..." (Langer, p. 25) "Significant form" or "expressive form", she adds, "is not an abstracted structure, but an apparition and the vital processes of sense and emotion that a good work of art expresses seem to the beholder to be directly contained in it - not symbolized but really present." (ibid., p. 26)

This kind of "presence" is immediately evident in Smith's work.. Each of her pieces lives and breathes, fully imbued with the life she has bestowed on it. She says she's "less interested in [her] work being 'about' something than 'being'". She adds that her "relationship to the figure isn't as close to sculptural history as it is to dolls and puppets...When you start making figures,"

she says, “you’re in a sense making effigies or you’re making bodies. You’re making, physically, bodies that spirits enter or occupy or that have their own souls, presence and physical space.”

(Engberg, p. 64) Smith says she felt that these paper bodies, after her sister’s death,

took on more of a spiritual

meaning... “because they have no weight to them – they’re translucent and fragile – [and] have [a] quality of transcendence.” (ibid.)



Figure 14 *Paper bodies*



Figure 15 *Fetus*

While early in her life she imagined herself unborn, or stillborn, Smith says that she made artwork to save her own life, and to prove that she was indeed alive. (Engberg, p. 51) The split between body and spirit is continually being revisited, explored and reconciled in Smith’s art. The trajectory of her work, beginning with dismembered body parts, which are tenderly

held, reconstructed and enlivened through her careful attention and ministrations, slowly coming together into abject human figures and then moving through the realm of animals, nature and the cosmos, are seemingly reborn into partially or fully human figures whose poses and gestures express unfathomable depths of feeling. Often casting from her own body, Smith says that “em-



Figure 16 *Born*

bodying those gestures, you experience the world through that particular movement and it changes your relationship to your environment, and to yourself." (pbs.org)

"The work", she says, "works in mysterious

ways". (ibid.) She makes

it clear that she's "not making art about being a woman able to reproduce." She says: "To me making stuff about birth is about the fact that one is born oneself rather than that one is a capable breeder...Everyone is born. That's how you get here, and it's also something that you have to keep on repeating over and over again to keep your life vital – to be like a phoenix, to make new, or renew your life existence...." (jca-online,)

Through this continual shaping and reshaping of her experience, and immersing herself for a time in the realm of wild, instinctual, animal life in a kind of internal, meditative, incubating activity, she eventually emerged into herself as a woman and as an artist. (ibid.) This new birth was sometimes portrayed as a composite being, like the wolf girl Smith imagines



Figure 17 *Rapture*

might have been the daughter of Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf. This figure, rather than being ashamed of her monstrosity – seems to glow with life and even shows a sly humor and delight in her hairy physical presence, as well as in her dangerously sharp teeth. (Engberg, p. 236)



Figure 18 Daughter

These increasingly fleshed out women begin subtly and not so subtly, to disobey – to fight back, and transgress the roles to which they've been relegated. Smith says that artistically, she started “coming out of the bag”, allowing more emotion and insisting on her own vitality – refusing to go away or be dismissed. She describes the figures that began to appear as unruly, uncontained and misbehaving. (Posner, p. 39) The postures and gestures of these spirited women speak volumes.



Figure 19 *Daphne*

Daphne refused rape by the god Apollo by turning herself into a tree. (Engberg, p. 45)



Figure 20 *Lilith*

Lilith was created before Eve, but wouldn't obey Adam, and is considered a demoness who steals children. Smith says, "... I was going to pose her crouched on the floor, but she's light – I made her out of papier mache – and I realized I could just stick her onto anything, so she's like a fly hanging upside-down on the wall, denying gravity" and watching from her marginalized, exiled position. "Lilith is a disembodied spirit," Smith says, "so she's an invisible observer and witness." (Engbert, p. 34-35; 80-81)



Figure 21 *Lilith detail*

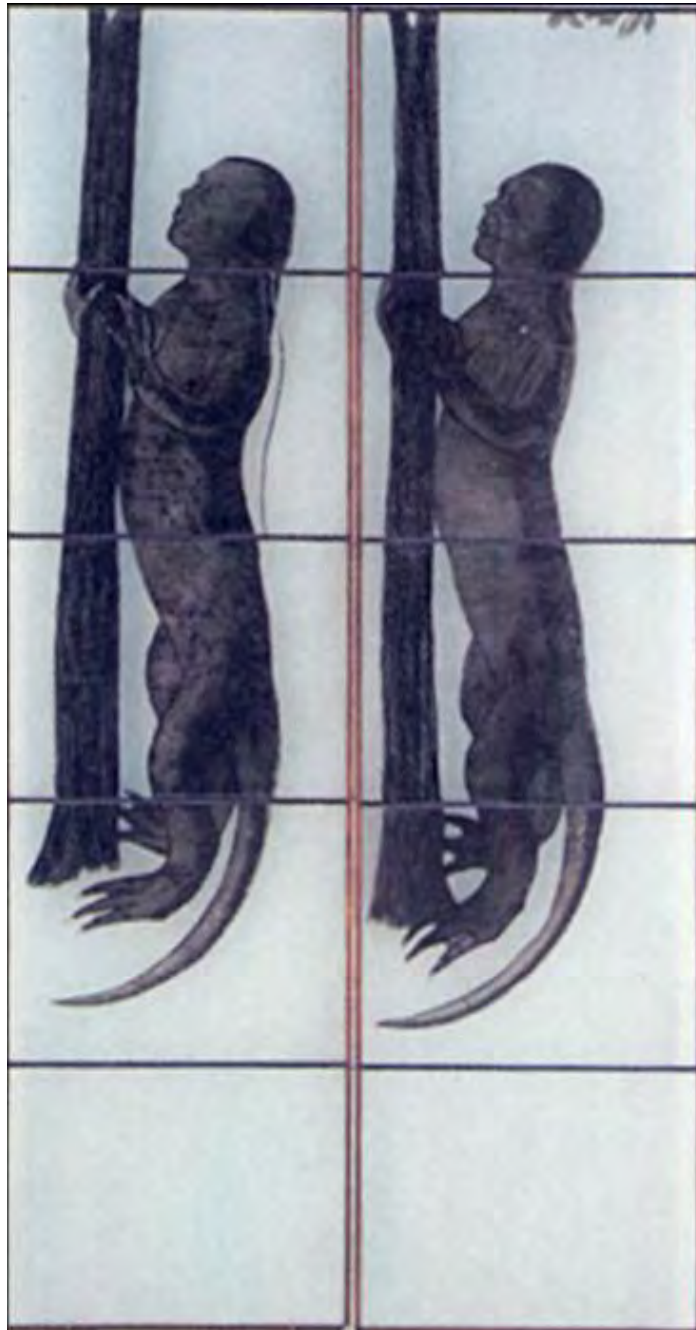


Figure 22 *Eve*

Eve, too, disobeyed god by picking the forbidden apple, and - consorting with the snake, itself a chthonic feminine creature, depicted here as a child-woman with a tail, resulting in the fall of mankind from paradise into the physical, earthly realm. (Engberg, p. 39; 43-44)



Figure 23 *Lot's wife*

Lot's wife dared to look back on her burning home...back to her people, her past, her history, insistent on the flesh. She gets punished – turned into a pillar of salt – metamorphosing into the mineral – and thereby immortalized. (Engberg, p. 46-47)



Figure 24 *Mary Magdalene*

Mary Magdalene – as a former prostitute is usually depicted with very long hair, signifying sexuality and sinfulness – all that was attributed to femininity and reviled by Christianity. Smith covers her body with hair like a wild woman, and chains her leg like an agonized dancing bear. (Posner, p. 39; Engberg, p. 35)



Figure 25 *Virgin Mary*

The Virgin Mary, Smith says, gets robbed of her voice, sexuality and agency to be a vehicle of the god made flesh. (Pbs.org)



Figure 26 *Kuan-yin*

Smith considers Kuan-yin as similar to the Virgin Mary in that she represents an open, bottomless compassion. The Kuan-yins, she says, “tell me to pay attention....and I just do. They say pierce me with your eyes...I like that because you’re not sure whether [she’s] telling you to look at [her] or you’re telling [her] to look at you. It’s like Darshan, like being blessed. It’s important to stay in the gaze of what’s important to be thinking about. (Pbs.org)



Figure 27 *Homespun Tales*

This re-imagining of the feminine figures of myth, religion and fairy tale leads Smith eventually into the historical and domestic realms, where the lives of girls and women are carried out invisibly and silently. (Engberg, p. 40) Beginning in Venice, with a show called "Homespun Tales", loosely based on domesticity and the idea of an American "squatting" in a Venetian palazzo, she reinvents the notion of domestic life, and re-imagines it as a highly creative realm where one dreams up and invents one's own future being. (Hentschel, p. 6) This show traveled and evolved into a show in Germany called "Her Home", and culminated in

Smith's 2010 show at the Brooklyn museum entitled "Sojourn", which is the consummation of these concerns. Through myriad materials, interlacing themes and parallel narratives, Smith conveys the ways that spirit and body converge in the creative life of a singular woman.

Following her time in Venice, Smith returned to New York to find her mother in the process of dying. One would imagine that Smith must have been steeped in thoughts and feelings about both the course of her mother's life and of her own life and mortality, as well as the sense of relationship, mutual influence and continuity between one life and another, between mother and daughter, between siblings, life-partners, friends and fellow artists, past present and future. (Bittencourt, p. 123-124) This chain of continuity and the interpenetrability of life and death,

conscious and unconscious, body and spirit, permeates the show quite palpably from beginning to end. The broad range of materials, from translucent paper, glass and glitter to aluminum, copper, bronze and rough wood, suggests both the fragility and precariousness of our presence here, as well as a sense of solidity, permanence and even immortality, with hand painted mirrors, silver and gold-leaf throughout reflecting and emphasizing the exquisitely precious outline of every fleeting moment and flash of inspiration.

“Sojourn” is as an extended meditation on the myriad permutations of birth, life, death and the possibilities of inspiration and rebirth at every stage of that journey.

The show’s title was inspired by Sojourner Truth, who Smith admires for choosing her own name and reinventing herself, escaping slavery with two of her children to become an itinerant civil rights activist, spreading the word about women’s and racial equality. (Sutton) The name also suggests the temporary quality of our stay on earth, of our ‘sojourn in the flesh’ and the brevity, transience and poignant intensity of our lives and relationships from moment to moment.



Figure 28 Sojourner Truth

Smith herself calls the show an “open narrative about the precarious wanderings during life’s pilgrimage”, which acknowledges that “often during quiet or seemingly incidental mo-



Figure 29 *Dandelions*

ments, creativity and inspiration are given to us freely” and “as an artist, one tries to imbue the next generation with a sense of possibility.” (youtube)

In walking through the installation, which extends over seven rooms and into two of the museum’s period rooms, one gets the feeling of being transported into another life, of taking a break from the present to walk through someone else’s timeline, which also has a timelessness about it. Dandelions, paradoxically made of heavy, durable bronze here, though turning up in various forms throughout the exhibit, recall the dandelions Kiki

collected and held on her lap as a small child, suggesting the memorializing of that delicate, fleeting moment of child-like wonder, whose seeds will carry on the breath of wind to scatter far and wide and germinate new life.

The centerpiece of the show, which serves as an orienting as well as a jumping off point, is the needlepoint of Prudence Punderson called “The First, Second and Last Scene of Mortality”. It depicts a woman’s journey from birth through death, cradle to coffin, both of which seem to circle around the central image, of a woman seated alone at a



Figure 30 *Prudence Punderson needlepoint*

round table, deeply engaged in creative work, rather than in more commonly found images of marriage, family and domestic work. There is an almost contemplative, spiritual feeling to the

woman, as she traces out on the paper a single branching line, perhaps another metaphor for life's twisting path. While somewhat stark, this image is not bleak – but contains a spirited full-bodiedness. The fabric of the woman's billowing skirt – seemingly indicating an abundance of life – is echoed the coverlet over the baby as well as the shroud behind the coffin and the curtains on the windows, so that the beginning and ending, rather than being linear, seem to go around in a continuous loop, the one fulfilling itself and starting over, circling around the central round table. Smith said she sees the empty chair in the picture as a projection of the beloved, or the imagined future life. This supposition is also suggested by the mysterious picture on the wall, depicting an ambiguous encounter. Punderson was very young when she made this needlepoint, and was later to marry and die in childbirth, a harsh reality contrasting with her young dreams of the future. (dossierjournal.com; Hentschel, p. 29)



Figure 31 *Annunciation and seated woman*

As we enter the first room, we approach an aluminum statue entitled “Annunciation”. A seated woman with shorn hair on her oversized head, dressed simply in a shirt, jeans and slip-

pers, extends her hand in a gesture of wonder toward a gold-leafed aluminum bird, which seems to break through from another realm, shattering refracted prisms which suggest the divine, impregnating light ... (ibid., 24ff.) Her posture, gesture and absent gaze, along with the coolness of the aluminum, seem to “catch her up in another space” at a slight remove from “that of the viewer”, a kind of transitional, contemplative space open to an experience of transport or rapture... (ibid.) In these drawings of the same figure, an older woman resembling Smith’s mother, is in a



Figure 32 *Virgin with Dove*

state of reverie like that found in numerous images of the Virgin Mary at the moment of the annunciation, when the Angel Gabriel appears bearing a bouquet of flowers, accompanied by the dove of the Holy Spirit, suggesting the simultaneity of the annunciation and the conception. (ARAS 5Ga.017) Jung wrote that an analysis, at its best, “should release an experience that falls upon us as from above, an experience that has substance and body such as those things which occurred to the ancients. If I were going to symbolize it”, he said, “I would choose the Annunciation.” (Unpublished seminar notes, cf. Edinger, p. 19, ARAS) Mary’s re-

sponse is variously awe-struck, welcoming, fearful, or ambivalent, but always conveys that she is already caught in that state of maternal reverie that envisions and is preoccupied with, while already containing and nurturing, what is to come. “The annunciation”, Smith says, “is not far away from how an artist experiences [the influx of new] ideas”. Smith quotes Emily Dickinson

with a similar notion in a paper scroll on the wall, which says “A something overtakes the mind; we do not hear it coming....”



Figure 33 *Quickening*

The alchemists believed that matter was pregnant with spirit, parallel to the virgin's pregnancy, and that their role, along with the metallurgists, was as midwife in completing the work of nature. (aras.org, 5Gw.005) On the threshold of the next room is a large diptych collage drawing entitled “Quickening”, showing a doubled image of a pregnant woman, like the inspired artist pregnant with artistic ideas and “inwardly full of figures” (Hentschel, p. 25), which Smith continues to elaborate on even as it is being installed.



Figure 34 *Window*

In this magnificent painting on glass, floating as in a dream, an older woman is birthing and sending off her younger alter ego, who both precedes and follows her, just as someone will send her daughter away from home when she decides to venture out into her own life – also suggesting the destiny of an artwork in its moment of creation as well as when it is sent off into the world. The daughter emerges from the body of the mother like a spirit – pointing also to the pos-



Figure 35 *Search*

sibility of resurrection and transfiguration interwoven with the idea of artistic invention.

Moving into the next room we find the second central sculptural figure of the exhibition, again cast in softly glowing aluminum - a full bodied, sensual young woman in a tight slip, perched on the edge of a table. Everything about this figure suggests enfleshed embodiment, just as the bird in her hand suggests the manifestation, presence and possession of spirit, even if momentary. This figure invites the touch – as she is full of texture, the satin of her skin, the intricate, form fitting lace that hugs and accentuates every curve, the full head of fluffy hair and soft features, and her pre-

cariouly balanced, graceful position, as if the slightest breeze would topple her. She seems to have alit on this table's edge as spontaneously and fleetingly as the bird perched on her hand. This work's title, "Search", suggests life's erotic adventures and yearning for another, while the dove again suggests the eros and fulfillment in creative pursuits. (ibid., p. 26)



Figure 36 *Large drawings/collage on Nepal paper and reverse paintings on glass*

Surrounding this figure are images of women of various ages and occupations, seated and standing, amid images of flowers in glowing reverse paintings on glass. making clear that the woman themed in Smith's installation is not one specific person...Rather, the narrative threads in this room divide and refract, creating a composite picture of myriad feminine potentialities. (ibid.)

Around a corner, we come upon the third sculpture of the exhibit, called "Singer", a figure whose extended left hand holds a bouquet of fresh flowers, suggesting another iteration of the Annunciation scene, while her right hand is giving the beat for a concealed musical rhythm. Sacred harp singing, celebrated in the southern United States since the 19th century and designed



Figure 37 *Singer*

to be participatory, is led by the hand movements of the lead voice, setting the pitch and time while the group of singers follows along. This figure with her participatory action brings us full-circle to that ideal of joint creative work that Smith sees as realized in the process of collaboration with other artists, which has always been of great value to her, and also recalls the blithe, playfully intent, absorbed singing of her youthful self. (ibid., p. 27)

In addition her “Singer” seems to us be leading us, through participation, into a kind of eternal time-keeping as we

reach the thresh-

old of the exhibit’s final room. This singer with her bouquet also seems to beckon us, like the messenger who heralded new birth, now appearing as an angel of death, perhaps leading to the afterlife or rebirth, or, like Hermes, ushering souls into and out of the underworld. (ibid.)

As we step through the doorway into the final room, a hush seems to fall, as the room is filled with images of death, drawings of corpses on deathbeds and in coffins. In the middle of the room we find a turned-leg table holding a simple wooden coffin, a perfect embodiment of the one in the Punderson needlepoint, but this one is propped open



Figure 38 *Young harp singer*



Figure 39 Coffin

for our viewing. We find ourselves at a kind of wake, with papier-mache chairs set about the room, some empty, some holding flowers or a crafted quilt, and a feeling of suspended animation pervades.



Figure 40 Flower chair

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In contrast to the crumpled flesh of the dead, there are also large, waif-like floating female figures, so light they almost seem to breathe, “their long dresses fluttering and glinting across the walls...” with lacy vaporous trails wafting around them, their paper eyelids and long paper lashes, flickering between open and closed. (Hentschel) “Somewhere between life, death and dream, these liminal figures seem to take the place of the spirit birds perched throughout the installation, bringing the themes of Annunciation and inspiration full circle, as these spirits now depart.” (Hentschel) As we finally summon the courage to step up to the



Figure 41 Floating



Figure 42 Dandelions

wooden coffin and peep inside, we are amazed to find breathtakingly delicate blown glass dandelions. In this last room, there’s a feeling of a long slow passage into death, a transformation, but not a total separation – as the dandelions evoke a sense of new life beginning and carrying on as the souls of the dead depart. Smith

described her own mother’s death process:

“... most of the summer I was spending time with my mother, in preparation for her death. ...She had a wonderful death... I wrote things down and made drawings of her... it was a very optimistic death...I was very loved by my mother, and I loved her very much

so...there's not a separation...I also think that she would laugh that I'm immediately turning her into my art work, because (laughs) ... she knows who I am." (Bittencourt, p. 123-124 and film)



Figure 43 Pilgrim

The epilogue to "Sojourn" is a series of giant puppets installed in two of the nearby period rooms of the museum. These articulated puppets, paper cousins of the aluminum sculptures, appear more disembodied and frail – and have an immediate emotional impact. They suggest angelic visitors come down to earth to inhabit a quiet, secret space after hours, in a kind of after-life or counter-existence, or the house-spirits that make visitations to empty houses after their owners have departed. Light-filled, airy spirit-pilgrims, wayfarers, kindred souls, that have stopped here to rest for a while, but are just passing through, as we are.... (Hentschel, p. 32)

Rilke believed that the artist's task was to "praise the world" into being (p. 93) – in response to what he took to be "the mute need of the earth." (ibid, p. 87) Making and looking at art connects us "with the things that surround us and with the forces that shape and animate and

move them. It's a way of taking in the world's strangeness and power and finding comfort in it." (Steinhardt, p. 690) The psychoanalyst Marion Milner has said that these creative "moments ... are perhaps forgotten by most people; or else they are guarded in some secret place of memory because they [are] too much like visitations of the gods to be mixed with everyday thinking." (Winnicott, p. 102)



Figure 44 Dandelion

In several languages the name for dandelion translates as "blowing-flower", because of children's propensity for blowing wishes upon them and scattering their fluffy heads into millions of floating white, fairy-like seed-pods. Though death spells the end of mortal life, the dandelion suggests a prospect of resurrection or continuity. Since its seeds will be carried off by the wind, it already harbors new life within, as the work of one artist is the seed and inspiration for the next artist and for all who witness the work.

(Hentschel, p. 30-31)

About the evolution of her work, culminating in the "Sojourn" installation, Smith says, "You think you're doing one

thing and then completely other things happen that you don't expect...I realized after I was making this work that, in a way I was making a model for being an artist, and I thought – creativity is given freely to us. It just comes in us and you can pick it up and move with it – you have to

show up for it and use it. But in general it's like the messenger. It's like the holy ghost coming – you're just minding your own business and then things appear to you or become evident to you...I trust my work. It's a collaboration with the material, and when it's viewed, it's a collaboration with the world." (Pbs.org)



Figure 45 *Annunciation (detail)*

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Figure 1: *Visitation I*, 2007, Ink on Nepal paper with graphite, colored pencil, mica, glitter and collage, 87" x 85" (Pace, 2010)
(Hentschel and Sieferman)

Figure 2: Photo collage (Brown and Smith, 6)

Figure 3: Photo collage (Brown and Smith, 23)

Figure 4: Photo collage (Brown and Smith, 200-201)

Figure 5: Photo collage (Brown and Smith, 57)

Figure 6: *Visitation I*, 2007, Ink on Nepal paper with graphite, colored pencil, mica, glitter and collage, 87" x 85" (Pace, 2010)

Figure 7: *Sirens*, bronze, 6 units, variable dimensions (Engberg, 251)

Figure 8: *Photo of Kiki Smith at light table*, 2010 (The Pace Gallery, 16)

Figure 9: *Womb*, 1986, bronze, 15 x 22 x 7 in. (Engberg, 112)

Figure 10: *Ribs*, 1987, terra-cotta, ink, thread and nails, 22 x 17 x 10 in. (Engberg, 118)

Figure 11: *Bandage Girl*, 2002, bronze with silver nitrate patina, 28 x 14 x 16 in. (Engberg, 252)

Figure 12: *Nuit*, 1993, anodized aluminum, bronze and mohair (Engberg, 173)

Figure 13: *Blue Girl*, 1998, silicon bronze (Engberg, 220-221)

Figure 14: *Untitled*, 1990, Nepal paper (Engberg, 33)

Figure 15: *Untitled*, 1998, newsprint and papier-mache, 3 x 6 x in. (Engberg, 125)

Figure 16: *Born*, bronze, 39 x 101 x 24 in. (Engberg, 249)

Figure 17: *Rapture*, bronze, 67 ¼ x 62 x 26 ¼ in. (Engberg, 248)

Figure 18: *Daughter*, 1999, (in collaboration with Margaret De Wys) Nepalese paper, bubble wrap, methyl cellulose, hair, fabric, glass and motion-activated sound track, 48 x 15 x 10 in. (Engberg, 232)

Figure 19: *Daphne*, 1993, glass, plaster and steel (Engberg, 45)

Figure 20: *Lilith*, 1994, silicon bronze and glass, 32 x 27 ½ x 19 in. (Engberg, 180)

Figure 21: *Lilith (detail)* (Engberg, 181)

Figure 22: *Serpent*, 1999, fired paint on glass with brass and lead, overall 89 ½ x 47 (Engberg, 44)

Figure 23: *Lot's Wife*, 1993-1996, silicon bronze with steel stand, 81 x 27 x 26 in. (Engberg, 46)

Figure 24: *Mary Magdalene*, 1994, silicon bronze and steel, 60 x 20 ½ x 21 ½ (Engberg, 177)

Figure 25: *Virgin Mary*, Papier-mache and glass.

Figure 26: *Untitled (Head of Kwan Yin)*, 2002, dye coupler print (chromogenic) (Brown and Smith, 148)

Figure 27: *Homespun Tales*, 2005, various media (Bittencourt and Katz)

Figure 28: *Sojourner Truth*, photo: <http://american-biography.blogspot.com/2011/02/sojourner-truth-slavery-abolitionist.html>

Figure 29: *Field*, 2006, bronze dandelions, dimensions variable, (Hentschel and Sieferman, 107)

Figure 30: Prudence Penderson, *The First, Second and Last Scene of Mortality*, 1786, needle-point, silk and muslin (Hentschel and Sieferman, 168)

Figure 31: *Annunciation*, 2008, cast aluminum, 61 ½ x 32 x 19 in. (Hentschel and Sieferman, 38-39)

Figure 32: *Virgin with Dove*, from the series *Blue Prints*, 1999, etching aquatint and drypoint on mold-made Hanhnemuhle paper, 20 x 16 in. (Engberg, 239)

Figure 33: *Quickening*, 2009, ink and graphite on Nepal paper, 62 ½ x 39 1/8 in. (The Pace Gallery)

Figure 34: *Emergence*, 2008, mouth blown opal antique glass, fired black enamel paint, 6 panels: 74 x 34 5/8 in. each (Hentschel and Sieferman, 50-51; The Pace Gallery, 22)

Figure 35: *Search*, 2008, cast aluminum, white and yellow gold leaf, 56 x 53 x 48 in. (Hentschel and Sieferman, 63)

Figure 36: *Her Circumstance (two bulbs) and Bouquet*, 2007, ink on Nepal paper with glass splitter and silk tissue with lithographic crayon, each approx 75 x 86 in.; *Untitled (reverse painting on glass - flowers)* 2008, oil paint on mouth blown clear antique glass, white and yellow gold leaf, 23 1/8 x 19 ¾ in. each; *Light Bulbs*, 2008, papier-mache, tooth picks, gold leaf, silver leaf and glass glitter, 8 x 6 x 4 in. each (Hentschel and Sieferman, 68-71)

Figure 37: *Singer*, 2008, cast aluminum with artificial flowers, 65 x 27 x 24 in. (Hentschel and Sieferman, 74)

Figure 38: photo of young harp singer, www.awakemysoul.com

Figure 39: *Heute*, 2008, wood, lamp glass, and *Open Coffin*, 2008, ink, graphite and lithographic crayon on Nepal paper, 96 x 88 ¾ in. (Hentschel and Sieferman, 112)

Figure 40: *Chair*, 2008, papier-mache with artificial flowers, approx. 35 x 22 x 20 in. (Hentschel and Sieferman, 131)

Figure 41: *In Rest (Red Poppy)* 2008, ink on Nepal paper with litho crayon, graphite and glass glitter, 93 ½ x 58 in., and *Mice*, silicon bronze and synthetic rubies, 7 units, approx 2 x 8 1/8 x 2 ½ in. (Hentschel and Sieferman)

Figure 42: *Heute, detail, interior: 10 dandelion puffs* 2008, wood, lamp glass (Hentschel and Sieferman, 125)

Figure 43: *Standing, Walking and Seated Puppets, Dancing Doll*, 2008, Papier-mache with muslin, glitter glass, cloth, wire, wood, motor, variable dimensions (Hentschel and Sieferman, 144-145)

Figure 44: *Dandelion*, 1998, mezzotint on mold-made Hahnemuhle paper, 10 x 8 1/2 (Hentschel and Sieferman, 57)

Figure 45: *Messenger*, 2008, cast aluminum, white and yellow gold leaf, 31 ½ x 43 ½ x 39 in. (Hentschel and Sieferman, 46)

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