

Deborah Thompson's enigmatic title *Boat Without a Boat* sets the stage for a series which holds space for emblematic actors and embraces contradictions of all kinds across a vast time space continuum. This conceptual boat did not sail on the tumultuous seas of William Turner or undergo the violence of *The Raft of the Medusa* or *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*. Those boats carry other stories. When I think of the purposely perplexing title in reference to the work on display, instead of a tangible vessel, I am reminded of the conceit of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and the otherworldliness of *Mists of Avalon*; boats that carry complex connotations. If these two novels had a love child, it might look like work in this exhibition. It is the rhetoric of absence of the title that brings such ideas so strongly to mind, of spirituality and sentience. Such concepts are embodied and emboldened by the figurative abstract assemblages that range around the room, stoic and searching, like visitors from some far-off place, that have stepped off onto an unknown shore.

The faces that animate these works are beautiful portraits drawn without model, another reversal of convention. The faces are surrounded by surrealist scenes and ornamentation, body and soul. These beings communicate a fascinating pastiche of tranquility, distortion and transformation, they are the gods of the artists' subconscious, and their scale and gravitas underly the depths of their inception. Implicit in the artist's stylistic approach is a determined challenge or subversion of norms and expectations. Relying instead on an intuitive inquiry into a world where science and mysticism reign supreme. Like the bold and intricate fantasy world of Esther Warkov, or the political and feminist work of Paula Rego, Thompson delves deeply into similar sources to augment her vision.

*I say to you: one must still have chaos in oneself to give birth to a dancing star.*

Fredrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

There is a strong drawing and composition background to these works, a foundation which extends from Thompson's previous work, such as *Maternal Body, Underworld & Plant Forms*. Paintings that were brewed in the womb, as it were, infused with complex color spectrums, animism, and the comingling of form and emotion; works that are determinedly primordial and organic. Thompson's previous work is akin to the feminist fury of artists such as Joan Mitchell or Betty Goodwin. The sentiments remain in *Boat Without a Boat* but the approach has shifted to an eerie calm, and the articulation of haunting faces, cut lines, and monochromatic precision. And here again, the absence of certain elements draws attention to their importance; the relatively restrained use of colour and constraint, illuminating the opposite.

There are countless faces throughout the pantheon of art history, thousands alone depicting the Virgin Mary, Cleopatra or Hindu deity Vishnu, to name but a few, in various iconic views and traditional tableaux compositions. The legacy of such devotion is mined and echoed here in the adoration of amalgam archetypes such as *Leda, Vesuvia & Amulet for an Anchoress*. These faces shine with the determined grace of ageless saints.

The utilization of cut paper antithetically creates floating and sensuous horizon lines and folding and layering, anthropologic and extraterrestrial stratifications of significance. There is a straightforwardness about the medium, a calmness after the storm sensibility. Henri Matisse undertook a series entitled *The Cut-Outs*, which he coined "drawing with scissors", a stark departure to his early fauvist focus and bold brushwork. The use of overlay and fusion in Thompson's paper works leads inevitably to the stop motion animation *Night Ritual* and *Midden* videos. Stop motion is a process driven exercise which liberates static pieces into flowing forms. The groundbreaking 1902 silent film *A Trip to the Moon (Le Voyage dans la Lune)* by Georges Méliès, and the contemporary stop motion and diorama work of William Kentridge are brought to mind when watching and listening to Thompson's videos. The score that accompanies *Night Ritual* gives her psychopomps the

perfect soundtrack for their cosmic and comic-relief romp. These playful characters function as foil for the deeply serious subject matter on display; an essential role reserved for wise fools throughout history.

*The fool doth think he is wise, but the wiseman knows himself to be a fool.*

Shakespeare, As You Like It, Act V, Scene 1

The importance of the fool can not be overstated. So too the mischievous cherubs of the Renaissance rolling their eyes and looking irreverent in the corner of paintings and underfoot as rulers of heaven and earth contemplate the weight of the word. The fool archetype, like the trickster of Indigenous art and literature, often bring ironic humor, and irreverence to the table, a necessary balm to heavy subject matter and a light in dark places.

Arin Fay, Curator