

Millicent Young: Solid into Vapor

Millicent Young has always used form and material to explore ideas that are fully beyond the realm of matter and structure. Equally paradoxical, the construction process for each nuance she assembles is so meticulous and involved, consuming hours of time devoted to all the minutia that the perfection of artifice demands. All is done in order to create these uniquely ephemeral entities of metaphor. Turning solids into vapor has a name - sublimation. That conversion is what Millicent Young's work essentially seeks to achieve.

Known / Not Known is, to perhaps put it in a more playful cartoon-like term, like dumping flour on a ghost we suspected was present so as to see it's amoebic shape shiftily creeping about beside us. That ghost, in this particular instance, is Time.

Time has long courted the imagination of the mystic and the scientist. As coy and unpredictable as it is, we humans believe ourselves to have some understanding of it, having assigned it some numeric trustworthiness by which we might at least measure its passing. But of course, that is just our chivalrous and charmingly modern conceit. Time on its larger scale (where it tends to prevail) is much more flexible and elusive than the most reliable Rolex would ever admit.

In Known / Not Known, time has many scaffolds that it assumes. It is a wall, a veil, a spiral, a path, a vessel, a book, a circle, or, in many cases, an extension or structure that has no nomenclature, drawing purely on the unraveling mathematical indiscretions of nature to determine its framework. That framework establishes the juncture between the past and the present. That juncture is the artist's portraiture of the living, the sensory, intellectual, and superstitious existence that we who are here today enjoy. On one side - either side - is the past, the other, the future. Young's towering scrim between those places are gentle, seemingly alive, somewhat enabling and somewhat deceptive. The slightest breeze can part them, a sharp silhouette, strong light or vivid color can trespass, but whatever quality is seen through them is always altered in some way.

Time, in Young's definition, is not a lost hour, or an impenetrable wall to the past, nor is it the certainty of a date inked on the calendar, or a vow made as unto death. It is perception, awareness, imagination, the planetary movements that determine days and years turned into memory, poems, prayers and songs that reveal or envision stories

outside of our brief personal experience. And there is death - most assuredly woven into the fine pensile strands of horsehair - always with birth glistening along the same fluid filament. Those are certainly the two events we assign to time most finitely to cling to the veils of the juncture, to remain acutely to each individual, yet invisible to others, gently parting slightly when something happens to create a new disturbance in the air.

Why hair, of all materials, would the artist choose to define the limens of time? Aside from horsehair holding an autobiographical component for the artist who has lived with horses most of her life, hair has an important place in biology as a symbolic material. It originates from a living source to form chains of amino acids, the essential ingredient of life, making it a natural surrogate for existence. It has sensual and sexual characteristics that stimulate reminiscence and desire. It can grow long enough to inspire biblical myths and fairy tales about entrapment, wisdom, strength and salvation. And if it is indeed horsehair, it can include a vast provenance of historical uses. Artist brushes, violin strings, early pottery and basketry, fishing line, wigs, petticoats, and blueprints used horsehair as a medium. Like everything incorporating human act, aptitude, creativity, foresight and folly, it encircles what it describes to form its matrix.

*We invite the viewer to wander amid Millicent Young's incandescent work in *Known / Not Known*, and temporarily abandon what he or she is accustomed to thinking about life before, during and after. We welcome each to imagine the confluence between existence and memory, what we consider knowledge and superstition (a word I intend in its earliest etymology, where it derives from the Latin *superstitio*, meaning "to stand over in awe.") It is a term also related to the Latin word *superstes* ("outliving" or "surviving"), which in this sense refers to the remains of ideas and beliefs that continued long after their original meaning had been forgotten. However these striking works strike you, we hope you will enjoy the passage through them and the eternal spirit that whispers within them.*

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Deborah McLeod, Curator and Director of Chroma Projects, has been a curator of contemporary art for a number of venues around Virginia, D.C. and Maryland. Her reviews and articles have been published in *Art Papers*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *Ceramics: Art & Perception*, *Baltimore City Paper*, *Style Magazine*, as well as in numerous exhibitions catalogs for various galleries and museums.