

Vote Imagination!

by London-based artist, Shane Bradford.

Speaking from experience there are often two distinct points of view about an artist's work: the artists and the viewers. The artist invests learning, intention, goals, beliefs, philosophies, ideas, directions, and outcomes. An entire neural network of memory, thought and coincidence is whittled down to a single selection which the artist hopes will in turn reflect the complexity of the works origins. Then the viewer comes along, takes one look at the work and simultaneously superimposes an entirely different set of values upon it. Thrown into a completely different context another set of connections is made; billions of electrical impulses recalculate in an instant and stamp out a brand new neural imprint that, more often than not, bares not the least resemblance to the artist's original intention.

I mention this in relation to Bibi's work in particular for one reason: to express the inherent generosity afforded to the viewer in her work. The underlying premise of B's approach is to give up her ideas, her style, her thoughts, and her intentions to the viewer. Rather than to impose her point of view, the very substance of Bibi's work is to expose the myriad neural ticks that went into its fabrication. Part of what makes this work modern is its willingness to relinquish the hierarchical power systems that are assumed and exploited by other artists. The decisions made during her process are not based on value; she doesn't ask is this good or bad? Or is this better or worse? Such questions would imply a pedagogical framework in which the artist is employed as 'teacher' and the viewer as 'student'. Instead, expectations on the viewers' part are confronted and challenged, not in an aggressive way but in a way that takes you beyond the nuts and bolts of the work itself. What you see in Bibi's work is not the hard edge of certainty or solution, but the generous and open world of intelligence and possibility.

Once this is understood we are free to roam inside the work and see what it is all about. First of all, I would say there is a prevailing feeling of 'folk' that logically would seem to sit in opposition to its modernity, but somehow doesn't. The log-cabin-like, into-the-woods appearance works hard to specify Bibi's Scandinavian roots while at the same time alluding to a more general, almost pagan environment in which myth, magic, dream and spirit are still considered valid and tangible propositions. Of course, the work as a whole is far too restless to settle upon such a reading for long, I only suggest that the hint of folk in the work subtly prepares the mind for the lucid journey it's about to take.

The word 'journey' leads to another important element in Bibi's work, which is 'narrative'. Narrative in the sense of storytelling is certainly linked to the folk tradition. The narrative employed within this work however is disjointed and

random. It is the narrative of the dream, not the story. In Bibi's world narrative has more to do with the relationship between the painting or installation as an object and its osmosis with the imagination than it does with the upholding of tradition. The stories told in B's work are multi-dimensional in that they speak outwards to the viewer as well as to themselves. They are conscious trains of thought that lead you in and out of reality and illusion. In the harsh reality of the present you are standing in front of a seemingly ordinary, perhaps random object, where the work has a definite artistic and aesthetic value. But it is up to the viewer to make the leap into a less certain world of what the object implies in terms of the imagination. It is tempting to apply a kind shamanistic definition here whereby the work is pinned down to serving the role of medium between our world and the world of the spirit but I think that is too easy and simplistic an idea to settle on for long. What discounts this reading for me is the fact of the works modernity in terms of the art world in which it very much exists.

Aside from all this talk of storytelling and tradition, all artwork in the 21st century has a dialogue with the commercial and hierarchical world of art for which, to some degree at least, it is made. Younger artists don't necessarily see the commercial art world as completely separate from their experience as artists as much as older generations.

When held up to the art world in this light you begin to see Bibi's relevance in terms of expressing the 'new'. The prevailing need in a commercial art world is for commodities to be defined so as to be understood and therefore sold. Whether good or bad this has led to the exposure of clearly defined market driven artistic strategies as artists follow commercial models in order to succeed. Bibi's work in this sense bucks the trend and points to a new approach among a younger generation in which all specific definitions and solutions are abandoned in favour of a non-linear explosion of creativity.

This work is modern because it makes no attempt to specify its direction. With Bibi's work what you see is a conscious assertion that creativity, when accompanied by awareness, can be a much more valuable commodity. Each generation should break the shackles imposed by its predecessor. The creation of raw, complex, creative, intelligent, yet accessible and art market conscious work is what prompted respected London critic JJ Charlesworth to comment that Bibi's work was 'ahead of its time'. Bibi has an unfettered connection to her own strange psyche and that is just to scratch the surface.

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