

Anna Williams: *Dark Timber*

The immense quiet of the gallery silences you upon entering. The sudden hushed solemnity of a frozen moment cascades over you like the dappled light from scores of slick glass arrows suspended above your head. You perch on the edge of this surreal narrative, awaiting the moment it comes to life; the deafening shriek of shattering glass. Welcome to Anna Williams' installation *Dark Timber*.

The arc of the weapons directs your gaze to two bronze deer, awkward but unshaken in the centre of a fibrous bulls eye. Closer inspection reveals the island of colour to be a meticulously crafted braided rug, formed from clothing collected by the artist from friends, family, and members of her community. An expressive spattering of acrylic paint clings, saddle-like to the backs of these bronze creatures. You hover around the fringes of the rug, a shroud.

The media in this installation attain a tension between timelessness and the present moment, hovering between a fleeting narrative and physical persistence. The forms, media and content are all mutual constituents; their historical weight is at once bearing down into them and being excised from them by their relations to one another.

Clothing is intimately tied to our sense of self. It becomes a primary vehicle by which we construct our visible, public personas. It records our autobiographies like second skins. We wash them, but tells remain. The re-purposing of these articles for the creation of a braided rug speaks to what Williams' refers to as a "horizontal history". These concentric circles of history spread out around us, living in objects, environments, garments, surrounding us and constantly being subsumed into our sagas as we live them. Weaving the clothes into the braided rug draws them downward into the history of craft and it's locational identity. Rug braiding, a tradition rooted in Williams' own native Ottawa valley, would draw people together to ward off the harsh winds and to build narratives of community.

Williams continues to solicit clothing donations and weave the rug while in gallery spaces. In so doing, she creates new connections in new locations, her definitions of community not being hinged on physical proximity, but on shared systems of values and the ability to create emotional support networks through honest interactions.

Inhabiting the space around the rug is a wallpaper of fractured light, glimmering through the cloud of glass. Glass and arrows are ancient crafts, tools and products simultaneously. Williams traps the archetype of the hunter in the delicacy of the medium, the threat rendered impotent in the face of these deer in bronze.

Mimicking the marbled light are the spots on the deers' backs; hues of turquoise and bubblegum pink, loosely applied in acrylic paint. The paint is plasticky, a candy-sheen where one might expect to see the seamless blush of a patina. Williams' choice of paint and its method of application demonstrate a willful rejection of the histories we associate with bronze. It is a complicated medium, whose lineage is bound up in monuments and weaponry. By choosing the application of a contemporary, synthetic paint material over a traditional surface treatment, Williams confronts the medium with the gestural techniques of abstract expressionism. A re-positioning from conceptual monolith to basic material undermines the authority of the medium, situating it on the spectrum of the anti-monument and inviting it into a free-flowing dialogue with the materials around it. By virtue of their place within a woven nest of personal histories, the deers vulnerability is transformed into impenetrability. The deadly arrows become fragile. We see through them; we await their inevitable sundering.

– Kailey Bryan, 2013

Kailey Bryan is an artist currently living and working in St. John's. She loves vibrant colours, puns, and working with the sculpture collective Tongue & Groove.