

SUMMER 2015
HOLLY FAY: FLOATING WORLDS



EXHIBITIONS | SHERWOOD GALLERY

Holly Fay: Floating Worlds

Curated by Wendy Peart, Curator of Education and Community Outreach

JUNE 13 TO AUGUST 26, 2015

Artist Talk: Saturday, June 27, 1:00 pm, Sherwood Village Meeting Room

Reception: Saturday, June 27, 2:00 pm

Imagin(in)g

by Wendy Peart

Whether produced by artists, scientists, historians, or spiritualists, ancient cultures have left evidence to our proclivity towards knowledge, self-awareness, and speculation through an array of artworks and artifacts, mostly in the form of drawings, paintings, or carvings on stone, wood, or other natural materials. These prehistoric works, although culturally distinct, reveal a common tendency towards physical, spiritual, or nature-based inquiry, demonstrating our deeply inquisitive human nature as well as our inclination to observe, record, hypothesize, dream, and invent.

In a similar vein, the work of artist Holly Fay has been invested in the exploration of visual and natural phenomenologies. As a painter and drawer, Fay's work "oscillate(s) between something that is representational and abstract," denying



her images anchored bearings or stationed subjects, but hovering over, or alluding to what those subjects are or could be.¹ As such, her work questions fixed positions of knowledge and is more subsumed by the shifting processes and systems of “knowingness.”

Floating Worlds, Fay’s latest body of work, represents a three-year ongoing study. Following her previous series, *Systems*, which more directly alluded to biological and propagative structures using a developed lexicon of repeated, organically shaped forms, this new work is progressively more abstract but increasingly more referential. *Floating Worlds* is comprised of the titular series of graphite drawings on paper, as well as a series of oil on paper paintings, *As Above, So Below*. For Fay, the graphite drawings mark an important focus on the immediacy of raw mark-making, application, and manipulation of media on surface. The images are formed through a series of clustered marks, often smudged but held together by some imperial force, producing cloud-like, globular entities. Radiating from and connecting these clusters are a series of irregular strokes combined with surgically straight lines, implying a kind of chaotic order within explosive, yet lolling gestures.

It is no coincidence that Fay’s graphite work bears a palpable resemblance to the drawing studies of Leonardo da Vinci, found in countless sketchbooks, and borne from his insatiable thirst for investigating the physical world through representation. It is this quest that Fay correlates in her work.² The paintings



depict swirling, cloud-like entities — grey and tar-coloured— resembling air, water, smoke or the combinations of all three. Da Vinci too, made numerous studies of air and water currents dynamically flowing through landscapes and other made-made structures in his attempt to capture natural phenomena in motion, as a dynamic process.³ Similarly, Fay's work bears this connection to nature, to the land, sea, and sky, as well as to the processes of change, mutability, flow, and combustion.

Fay's graphite work also makes striking reference to the traditions of ancient Asian scroll landscape paintings, wherein bodies of land and water float solitarily within the negative space of the picture plane. Fay's clustered objects bear this characteristic "float," along with her visual allusions to the land, rolling hills, and reflections in bodies of water. For Fay, this negative, empty space is just as important as the positive, object-filled space. The emptiness of the picture plane is what really denotes the ambiguity paramount in the work. The "space" in and around her figures is perhaps what leaves the viewer questioning the locational space of the work. Where is this? What am I looking at? Through what lens is this picture focused?

Da Vinci did not have the advantage of microscopic or telescopic lenses through which to investigate the world, although if he had been born just a half-century later, he might have. His world was limited to the observable Universe, what was visible through the naked eye. This is certainly not the case any longer. The



vast array of image producing systems created in last few centuries make visible to us what has never been seen before: from the microscopic, infinitesimal level of atomic imaging to the macroscopic, infinite scale of astronomical imaging. With this range and with this capacity, it is clear that we are still bound to our inquisitive nature, and still swimming in the chasm of knowledge-seeking.

Fay's work, too, shares an affinity with these advanced images. Her graphite drawings could be renderings of absorption nebulae (dense interstellar clouds which absorb light from behind), microscopic images of pond water, or perhaps atomic particles at the lower end of the nanoscale. Or, are they clouds in the sky or islands in the sea? This complexity and multiplicity is key to Fay's work. Her work subtly addresses all things physical, which in the same respect, slides quickly into the metaphysical, asking two fundamental questions: What is ultimately there and what is it like?

For Fay, the systems of the microscopic and macroscopic, abiotic and biotic, ordered and chaotic have similar and repetitive forms, all of which inform her work, in what she refers to as a series of "emergent patterns within ecology."⁴ Her allusive subjects, which may simultaneously be water, air, microscopic particles, globular star clusters, cellular matter, or cumulous clouds lead to a recognition of wholeness, of all things combined, interconnected, and never one without the other.



¹ Holly Fay, email correspondence with the author, April 27, 2015.

² Holly Fay, interview with the author, April 20, 2015.

³ Johannes Nathan and Frank Zöllner, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Graphic Work*. (Cologne: TASCHEN, 2011), 514 .

⁴ Holly Fay, Artist Statement – Current Work. Artist's website, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://hollyfay.com/gallery/Current-Work/491>

Artist Biography

Holly Fay completed a BFA from the University of Regina and an MFA from the University of Ulster in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Her art practice encompasses painting, drawing, mixed media, and installation with projects examining ecology, emergent patterns, systems of knowledge, ideas of place, and phenomenology. Fay's work has been exhibited in Canada and abroad, and is in public collections including the MacKenzie Art Gallery, the City of Regina, and the Saskatchewan Arts Board.



CREDITS

HOLLY FAY *As Above, So Below* (detail), 2014, oil on paper. Photo: Don Hall

HOLLY FAY *As Above, So Below*, 2014, oil on paper. Photo: Don Hall

HOLLY FAY *Untitled (Floating Worlds)* (detail), 2014, graphite on paper. Photo: Don Hall

HOLLY FAY *Floating Worlds* installation view, 2015. Photo: Don Hall

HOLLY FAY *Untitled (Floating Worlds)* (detail), 2014, graphite on paper. Photo: Don Hall

HOLLY FAY *Untitled (Floating Worlds)* (detail), 2014, graphite on paper. Photo: Don Hall



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