

Eidolons

Lorraine Simms

5 November – 10 December 2022

Intangible traces of living beings. Shadows. Presences. Like apparitions.

The series of drawings in this exhibition was created during two residencies of a few weeks in the Department of Mammalogy at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, followed by several months in the studio. Alone with the institution's collections and through a process that was mostly instinctual, Lorraine Simms selected bones and skulls based on their shape as well as their symbolic value. She focused on species considered endangered, vulnerable, or on the verge of extinction and that are native to Africa and North America. The manner in which she chose to represent them—through shadows cast by their bones—is not insignificant; it is both precise and diaphanous, as though trying to capture their spectral presence before they disappear completely. Yet the subjects of the drawings are not living creatures, or what remains of them, but rather the shapes created by light. Their immateriality. *Eidolons*.

In the museum's collections, the artist creates shadows and articulates compositions by casting light on bones placed on paper on a few supports. She traces the contours of the shadows and notes the intensity of the light and then takes it all apart a few hours later. Decomposition. It is almost a performative act in so far as these compositions can never be reproduced exactly the same way again and the artist must use her entire body when moving and tracing large bones. There is something furtive about the act of capturing these rare specimens, even though afterwards, in the studio, the work takes many hours. The time needed to make one drawing – sometimes several months – opens up the possibility of a different temporality, in which time expands in the attempt to freeze a precise moment that is already gone.

We sense that something is disappearing; we sense a desire to capture it and hold on to it for a while.

The bones and skulls seem to float in the centre of the paper, an illusory suspension created by the light multiplying the shape, as though the shape was superimposed on another or in motion. The shadows reproduce the exact shape of the bone while also multiplying the angles, which gives the impression that we are walking around it. By reproducing the shadows of the bones rather than

their specific details, Simms makes new forms appear on the paper; we often recognize the shape of a bone or body part, but we can easily see other images as well. Apparitions. This play develops as we observe the drawings. Even the artist does not entirely know what the end result will be before finishing a drawing; the balance between the intensity of the shadows and their shapes is difficult to predict. An unexpected materiality.

The texture of the pencil is fully present on the paper; the layers of graphite or conté give it transparency and depth. However, the stroke of the pencil is not visible. For Simms, these are not emotional drawings. She must not leave her mark. Disappearance. She withdraws in order to allow a certain space to exist, a space between our presence and the animals' presence, into which we can settle and experience the contact without the presence of another subjectivity.

The artist tends to work in series, in which she repeats the same parameters. Yet in this case, she has no choice but to make drawings of different sizes because it is the bone or skull that determines the dimensions. The background grid of the drawings is slightly different each time and serves to evoke rational thought, the Cartesian aspect of science. Sometimes, the grid and paper are slightly coloured, but for the exhibition at OBORO, Simms chose to remove the colour. The hanging of the works is

also designed to add another layer of neutrality. The drawings are presented without mats in cases that recall those used for museum conservation. The labels indicate the Latin names of each species, as well as their accession number. Although these presentation parameters suggest a context of research and scientific demonstration, the intention is not the same. Simms is not interested in classifying the species or the values attributed to certain parts of their bodies. Instead, she wants to treat them all equally and with respect for what they were: living creatures. Now gone.

The drawings inhabit the gallery somewhat like minimalist sculptures, in that they imply a relationship to our bodies in the space. The bones are represented to scale. By standing before a work—but also by reading its title since we don't necessarily recognize the animal right away—we immediately understand the relation to scale; between the animal and us, between the different species. Based on this information, we can try to imagine the animal's entire body and physically relate to its representation, its trace. Our own body—thus drawn into the exhibition space—the bones, and the animals to which they belonged, all seem to us slightly more real, perhaps even more alive, for a moment. Yet the contours of their presence still insist on their absence. A ghostly absence.

— Catherine Barnabé

Translation: Oana Avasilichioaei