

CAROLINA ROJO GALLERY

LOUISA HOLECZ. THE EYES OF THE SKIN

MARCH 18TH – APRIL 25TH, 2015

Memory activation is the concept that Louisa Holecz (London, 1971) strives to achieve in the series of drawings, paintings, photographs and sculptures presented in her show entitled *The Eyes of the Skin* at the Carolina Rojo Gallery.

Louisa Holecz writes:

"Only in retrospect do I realise that the sewn sculpture *Home II* (2013) was a metaphorical representation of myself, and as such, served as preparatory study for the *Self-portrait* of 2014. Similarly, the sculpture *Home I* (2011) was an initial symbolic representation of my mother before beginning the figurative portrait entitled *Mãe* (2014), a large scale portrait in pastels on canvas. It is the product of the self-set task of drawing and re-drawing my mother, with the core objective of enabling me to visually recall her face at will.

Mãe inspired the creation of the small scale doll-like sculpture called *Meerschaum Mother*, months of observing and sketching *Mãe* enabled me to sculpt the small clay head purely from memory. The sculpted head was then fired and attached to its sewn and sepiolite-filled 'body'. The fabric used is a fragment of an embroidered linen heirloom; growing up as a young woman in Madeira, my mother and all the other female members in her family either embroidered or washed linen for a living. Not surprisingly, embroidery and linen have become part of the symbolic language used in my work and is the central connecting theme that joins *Mãe*, the *Meerschaum Sculptures* and the series *Bordado I, II* and *III*, three photographic copies of *Mãe* printed on cotton paper, overlaid with a sheet of hand-painted acetate in primrose-yellow oil colour; the sections of her embroidered nightdress are painted, traced, repeated, distorted and re-arranged, creating a webbed structure through which the viewer is only allowed to see fragments of *Mãe*.

For as long as I can remember, there has been an important relationship between drawing and sculpture in my work. As a child, the very first sculpture I made was a miniature tea set. Sketched first onto paper, then modelled out of a clay-like paste (made by experimentally mixing talcum powder and water), and finally left to dry in the sun on a window ledge. Instead of being rewarded for my ingenuity, I was scolded by my mother for using-up all the talcum powder.

Years later, the transition of my work from a figment of imagination, into a two-dimensional drawing and finally a three-dimensional object, still forms part of my working method. By transforming thought into tangible object, I am attempting to understand the reason behind its initial conception; this in turn helps me to understand more about myself and my physical relationship with the external world.

Vision needs the help of touch; the senses of sight and touch are intrinsically linked. As Juhani Pallasmaa remarks in his book *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*: "The eyes want to collaborate with the other senses. All the senses, including vision, can be regarded as extensions of the sense of touch – as specialisations of the skin. They define the interface between the skin and the environment – between the opaque interiority of the body and the exteriority of the world. "

The initial ideas for the *Meerschaum Sculptures* can be traced back to the branched structures drawn in the *Betadine drawings* and the *Outpatient Sketches* (2013). I consider these sculptures to be a unification of my "soft" sewn sculptures and "hard" fired clay sculptures. They are probably the union of the sculpted clay project entitled *Anonymous Heads* (2012) and the sewn structures of *Home I* (2011) and *Home II* (2013).

All of the fabrics used in this project are fragments of family heirlooms; fragile, embroidered linen at least a hundred-years-old. Firstly, the fabric is pattern-cut into pieces that are then hand sewn, pulled inside-out and filled with powdered sepiolite. Also known as Meerschaum (sea-foam), sepiolite is a white mineral sometimes seen floating on the sea's surface. The hand sewn and filled fabric 'bolsters' protect the bases of the fired clay sculptures and act as an interface between the clay sculptures and their surroundings".

[Louisa Holecz, 2015]

