



THE HIDDEN SHAMAN
FIONA CARSON

1 MARCH- 8 APRIL 2011



The Hidden Shaman – Fiona Carson

The title of the exhibition refers to my interest in ritual objects and the dynamic role that art-making can have in personal development. I am interested in objects that have an enigmatic presence or ritual function. I like the chaotic energy, vitality and density of organic forms. The work inhabits the spaces between textiles, sculpture and painting. I tend to work in series in response to a particular material, process, place or archetype.

My work is influenced by psychoanalytic and feminist ideas. I regard my creative process at its best as a dialogue with an unknown part of myself, which throws up personal myths and archetypes that give structure and meaning to different stages of my life. This is Jung's journey of individuation which involves confrontation with repressed aspects of the psyche, resulting in transformation and change.

Of central importance to my work is the representation of the maternal feminine – whether it is understood as the maternal archetype of Jungian theory, or the maternal uncanny of Freud. To date these motifs have been explored in themes of desire for pregnancy (*Demeter Rising*); *Pope Joan*, a female creatrix; the uncanny female presence in the garden of *Landscapes of the Self (Whirligig 2006)* and the woods (*Sixty by Degrees*) and most recently the *Cailleach*, storm goddess of the Atlantic coast of Scotland.

The work in this exhibition is drawn predominantly from two recent series. Landscapes of the Self grew over a decade from a tiny circular loom in a little girl's weaving kit to an installation and short film, *Whirligig* (2006) located in *The Hill Garden* in Golders Hill Park. This was when I first realised how installation, narrative and a landscape environment enhanced the work. The mandala form ('circle' in Sanskrit) is a Jungian symbol of wholeness and integration; of holding it all together. It refers to a period in my life when I was juggling the demands of being a working mother, and making art 'in the crevices of my life.' The motif of the circle is developed in a series of dream-catchers woven on hula-hoops. The series culminated in an installation in a pergola in which the spectator encounters a series of artworks in a ritual space (*Whirligig*).

The series *Sixty by Degrees* refers both to chronological age and the temperature at which wool felts in the washing machine. Different kinds of everyday ritual activity are referenced, including washing clothes, going for walks in the woods of North London with friends, and knitting. These feminine domestic activities underpin another iconography that opposes nature to culture and refers to an animistic engagement with nature reflected in forms and rhythms derived from flowers, birds, insects, and sea creatures. This represents an escape from the constraints of domestic and professional roles, this dichotomy reflects the contradictions of female embodiment and subjectivity in contemporary society.



Fiona Carson

Fiona Carson was born and brought up in Scotland, spending every holiday camping in the Highlands and beaches of the Atlantic Coast. She studied Art History in London and Archaeology in Oxford before setting out for India in 1969. She travelled all over India, Sri Lanka and Nepal and began to draw. This experience made a lasting impression on her sense of colour and her interest in objects imbued with a religious presence. On her return she embarked on what was to become a forty year career in art education. In her late twenties she underwent Jungian analysis, and embraced feminism. These two ideologies had a strong influence – the Jungian idea of life as a personal journey of self-reflection and dialogue with the unconscious, and feminism's highlighting of gender as a key aspect of identity construction.

She went to St Martins School of Art to study Sculpture in 1976, followed by an MA in Fine Art at Goldsmiths in 1981-3. Marriage, two children and part-time teaching followed. Eventually domestic and financial pressures led to a full-time university career at the University of East London in 1989, teaching a feminist art practice in Women's Studies, and later Media production on a Media degree, up to the present time. The teaching has always emphasised identity, self-reflection and creativity. The art practice changed under the joint influence of domestic and work pressures and feminist thinking. Her art practice became textile-based, engaging in processes such as direct painting on to canvas, weaving, plaiting, coiling and knitting, but the interest in colour, construction and three-dimensionality remained. Form is abstracted from female body shapes, natural forms and the exigencies of the making process. Found, recycled and donated materials introduce an element of chance or limitation. Since 2006, digital photography, installation, video and outdoor locations have become integral aspects of the creative process. The short films *Whirligig* (2006) *The Pope Joan Cycle* (2008) and *Snowbound* (2010) have drawn together cycles of work into a narrative which explores issues of place, presence and the sacred.

Exhibition dates

1st March to 8th April 2011
10am to 5pm

KARAMEL

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