

Towards a Practice of Care

**Reflections by Storm Janse van Rensburg
in response to Kathy Robins' solo exhibition: RE-TURN.**

I am writing these words on a plane 40'000 metres up, hurtling towards a holiday. The past months have been a blur, of work, deadlines, the commitments of home, and a travel schedule that tells me that, regretfully, the world has turned back to 'normal'.

I am writing this from a vantage point of having an intimate glimpse into Kathy's practice which is intertwined with observations offered by the time we have spent together both in her studio and outside of it. I am thinking in particular of the engagements with Kathy on the farm in the Hemel and Aarde Valley. It is in the invitation to join her and observe a closeness to earthiness and plantlife, and an interaction with its offerings - flowers and produce. It is the tactility of walking through long grasses and pushing through shrubs on our way towards the water, jumping into its icy depths. We catch our breaths and sit on loose gravel to dry out, ducking the dogs' wet furry shakes. We will pause in the studio and look at drawings, examples, things in progress and ideas gestating. Meals will happen almost freeform and informally, assembled from beautiful ingredients. I witness and experience Kathy's practice of generosity and care.

I recall the first time that Kathy shared with me the clay forms that she has been working on. Fitting into the palm of her hand, and carrying the imprint of her fingers, the small red earth objects' forming is seemingly the thing in itself, whilst the traces thereof referencing something quite primal and larger. These small things had presence, imbued with a powerful essence. These forms also revealed themselves to be figures, and had a creature-like quality to them, but not quite sentient. Later they developed to include elongated sticks which serves as both a device for display, but also demonstrated their will to stand up and transcend their lumpiness. Their value should be understood in the

process of their making and forming - thus as an action - but also what they then become through something akin to transcendence to fully inhabit their symbolic potential.

It is Kathy's observation that these objects also reference *golems*, which in Jewish folklore denotes anthropomorphic beings, conjured from inanimate and shapeless materials such as mud or clay. The rich potential for interpreting these humble clay objects as such provides myriads for readings, but what struck me is that at its core, these objects are about the act of creation and the potentiality of transformation. More simply, they also reference the start of life itself, of the creation narrative in early Judaism.

It is also important that these objects could be viewed as multitudes and that they are latently a protective force, as with the early mythological incarnations of the *golem*. It is once again within these readings that the artist relates through a humble process and materials a consideration of potentiality, conjured from little. It is the imprints left by hands of care, which transmit their most important symbolic meaning, a meaning through which these figures become imbued with this intentionality, and release it within the configurations of display and exhibition.

In a more formal studio visit with Kathy earlier this year I encountered larger amorphous sculptures - which share some genealogous relationship with the small clay objects. I am intrigued by how Kathy navigates shapelessness through forms that are bulbous and organic, both plant and animal-body like. It has the quality of husks, perhaps even some alien presence. While I am sure of the *golems'* benevolence, these sculptures have a more foreboding presence. However, their impact is in relation to the viewer's own body - when we stand in front of them our own physicality comes into play. An anecdote - as a slightly above averagely tall person moving through the world, I only feel tall when I encounter others as tall, or taller than I am. My literal view of the world is challenged when I encounter this other entity, and I become aware and conscious of the space that I occupy.

These works bring attention to our bodies as spatially occupying forms and an awareness is created of our own organic nature. Whilst I am not implying a metaphysical experience here, this fundamental perception awareness of an encounter between body-sized

amorphous objects and our own body-vessels brings a sensitivity towards our immediate environment and hone a sensitivity of perception, that is potentially, and subtly so, transformative.

I want to offer some notes on the organic found objects from which Kathy constructs her meaning-world, her care-world. She sources within the outside environments in a subconscious manner, picking up and collecting disparate things. These objects have their own intrinsic aesthetic and symbolic qualities, but the way in which they are placed within particular environments and exhibition spaces, with both intentionality and intuition generates relationships which become charged, and become experiential environments. In some cases she will chose some objects to be transformed, and which creates a layer of complexity - a bronze cast of a complex organic shape becomes shielded from the ravages of time. It is a way of seeing, of perception and unveiling of a spiritual, emotional and aesthetic connection to these objects, which Kathy channels. It is a display of sensitivity and an act of care-fulness.

I share these notes as a humble offering to Kathy in celebration of her exhibition 'Re-Turn'. I offer these, inadequately so, in deep appreciation of her generosity as an artist, a friend, a host. I am deeply touched by her fundamental concerns for our living world, and her continuous efforts, through making and giving, to embody a practice of care.