

MIGRATING FEAST

by Michael Ventura

Introduction to “Migrating Feast” Catalogue – May, 2006

The Russian poet Boris Pasternak wrote that “art has two constant, two unending concerns: it always meditates on death and thus always creates life.” Like... “Wheel of Souls,” a Ferris wheel on which revolve, instead of seats, glass jars filled with olive oil and images, suggestive of ascension, descent, the return of memory, the equally persistent return of forgetting, and even, perhaps, reincarnation -- a piece festive and mournful both, a carnival of life.

That is the mood of “Migrating Feasts,” this collaborative collection by Steve Teeters and Ann Bromberg. Their title is worth contemplating. Migrations, whether of animals or humans, are set in motion by forces out of an individual’s control, forces like oppression, famine, plague, economic collapse, and climate change. Feasts are celebrations, whether sacred or secular, but of course they revolve around a most pressing necessity: eating. (Those who have been hungry know that every meal is a feast.) Thus Teeters and Bromberg have chosen as their subject the primal elements of life, and to view their art is to be in the presence of the eternally elemental -- that which always undeniably matters.

In an era when so many artists merely play visual mind-games -- a chaotic era when many people are losing faith that anything matters, while many others cling fanatically to limited visions -- “Migrating Feasts” invokes the complexity and vitality of

what really matters.

“Freida’s Song,” set in a violin case, embodies music, cooking, time (that tiny watch), money, a window on a soul, and, above all, memory, along with a chicken bone and a cosmic eye stamped in tin -- elements that evoke the essential. That is true of all these pieces. And in most the calm colors -- soft beiges, yellows and browns, with occasional purples and reds -- invite us to be easeful and gaze. In fact, the intricacy of this art, its abundant yet delicate detail, asks us to slow our step and enter a realm described best by the writer Caroline Casey: “Beauty is abundantly available to the unhurried mind.”

There is no way to view a piece like “In My World” hurriedly. In the right panel of what I take to be a medicine cabinet, an elegantly gowned woman (her hair done in a style half a century past) carefully balances herself while exiting a window (it seems)... beneath her, the scowling face of a boy, a face from even longer ago... also from longer ago is the calm lovely expression of the woman in the left panel, where there are more faces that one must look closer to see, as one must look closer to examine the objects placed here and there... and atop the right panel, an old flashbulb attachment... and on the mirror-side of the cabinet, a woman of the ‘40s or ‘50s sitting cross-legged, looking at you frankly... and there’s writing too, you can read it if you try (except if it’s backwards -- these artists sometime prefers backwards)... and all of it harmonized by color and line... and it is not only that in this work the dead and gone are lively and eloquent, it is also that they remind us that our moment is fleeting. These styles and objects, antique to us, speak of how everything we now touch and use will one day be as unfamiliar and antique as these, for the present disappears more quickly than we can say “the present

disappears.” The art of Teeters and Bromberg is no exercise in nostalgia, but an appeal for the present *to remember itself.*

The techniques they employ are frankly beyond my powers of understanding -- computers, scanners, emulsions, etc., etc. But one element of technique impressed me greatly, and is itself a metaphor for their art, mixing the ancient with the present. Yes, they work with modern gadgets, but the paper on which their images are printed carries the same watermark, and is made in the same way and of the same materials, as the paper used by Leonardo DaVinci. It comes from a company called Fabriano Uno, a firm that's been in existence since circa 1246. You are looking, in other words, at a concrete example of the continuity of art, and of any artwork's relation to all others: the inventiveness of Teeters and Bromberg recorded upon the materials of DaVinci. And the only code needed is the prompting of your heart.

Central to this collection is Teeters' “Ship of Souls.” Its materials are emblematic of this exhibit's significance: glass, steel, photographs, olive oil. The presence of olive oil in his work is especially important for me, because humans have been using this substance for thousands of years longer than they've used any other substance in this exhibit -- olive oil has been with us since before the Bible's Ark was new. In the jars, atop the coffin-like body of this Ark-like structure, we see photos of people now dead. We don't need to be told that. The presence of death radiates from this work. Yet, with its graceful galleon-like top and its legs that seem to be walking, the piece also conveys an elegant sense of movement -- movement is always alive, even the journeys of the dead are alive, and all movement is dance at its root. I began with one Russian poet, I'll conclude with another, for I thought of Anna Akhmatova's lines the first time I saw this

piece in Teeters' workshop -- for me they sing the song of "Migrating Feast":

Either dance before the Ark of the Covenant

Or disappear!

***Teeters' and Bromberg's Migrating Feast is on display through September '06 at the
Albuquerque Museum of Art and History***