

Studio Visit: Eve Wood

By Author | May. 30th, 2020

 Send to Kindle



Eve Wood, Me Portrait; Image courtesy of the artist

*“You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves...*

*Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.*

*Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –*

*over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.”*

~ Mary Oliver

Written by Gary Brewer

Art can be a process of reconciliation, of examining oneself and giving voice to traumatic events in one's life, and in so doing, freeing yourself from them. It can also become a vehicle to open oneself up and to deepen one's empathy for others- from both the human and animal worlds.

In this approach, our personal experiences are transformed into pan-personal archetypes; our stories- told in symbolic images- become the springboard through which another person is drawn into them and adds their own history, experience and interpretation; it is a symbiotic relationship giving life to language.

Eve Wood is an artist, a poet, and a novelist. Her visual art is wrought in a raw and direct style that gives the work a sense of humor and charm that can be a counterbalance to the dark themes that occupy her. Indeed the use of humor gives an artist more latitude to move freely from one theme to another. She feels a deep kinship with nature and especially with birds. “When I was a young child I had a prescient sensitivity to birds. One time my father was driving us somewhere and I exclaimed, ‘There is a green parrot injured on the road.’ My father looked around and not seeing an injured bird, told me that I was wrong. Again, later, I had a strong feeling- sensing this injured bird- and I cried out again; my father told me I was wrong and to be quiet. A short distance down the road we came upon an injured green parrot on its back in the middle of the road. My father stopped the car and I rescued it. This was one of many times in my life that I had this kind of experience with birds. As I grew older I had to tune this out a bit, as it became overwhelming. Birds are important to me, as symbols in my art and as a deep connection that I have to the natural world.”

While attending Cal Arts, Eve experienced the bias that was held against traditional art of any kind from her professors. Drawing and painting were discouraged, as they were deemed retrograde and anachronistic art forms. Conceptual, performance and installation art were dominant, so after being criticized for some drawings she had done, she shifted her focus to a form of conceptual sculpture.

After finishing school, during a studio visit from one of her first gallerists, Eve showed a group of sculptures. She left the room for a moment and when she returned the gallerist had pulled out her drawings and said to Eve, “These are what I want to show!” Her focus shifted and she began creating highly personal, idiosyncratic drawings, whose interior subjectivity has a complex mix of humor and pathos, a romantic impulse mediated through a dark shadowy wit.

The drawings and paintings often entail a person in some kind of interaction with an animal. Her lines have a scratchy, expressive nerve-sensitive energy; the raw style is both emotionally charged but has a light touch that creates a subtle tension with the subject matter. In one drawing, a nude figure of a man with lobster claws for hands looks out at the viewer with a defiant gaze mixed with consternation at his strange fate. The figure and the face bring to mind the work of Egon Schiele, with whom Eve feels a deep connection. In another drawing, a boy is wearing a fox mask. Eve said of this, “The image came to mind from our current pandemic, the Corona-virus; people are wearing masks to stay safe and protect themselves. In the drawing the boy is seated in a landscape, he is wearing a fox mask. He is seated uncomfortably, his torso twisted in an awkward position; it expresses this current state of anxiety that we are all facing. My images come to me in dreams, from memories, or arise from current situations like this one we find ourselves in now.”



Eve Wood; Image courtesy of the artist

We spoke a little about the difference between her poetry and her drawings and paintings. In my mind her poems convey an idea; often an expression of sorrow or outrage at human folly, articulating in words and images, a more complete descriptive narrative. Her poems present her feelings more in a prose style- while her visual art seems to be a fragment from a longer narrative- they are a form of visual haiku suggesting a story that remains open to interpretation.

Below is a portion from one of her poems.

*“There’s a magpie in my brain
And I know it’s serious
When any creature prefers
The dark and harrowing matter
Between my ears
To the magnificence of the living world”*

“The magnificence of the living world” is what we all long for; it is the absence of beauty that we decry. Eve said, “ I believe that many artists feel a deeper connection to nature, we have raw nerve endings that feel more and are more connected to the natural world. My relationship with birds is deep. Years ago, in a studio I had, I rescued an injured crow. I brought it back to health and released it. For years it would return to my window, once bringing its mate and offspring. Crows are incredibly intelligent- there are many stories of their offering gifts as thanks to people who have helped them.”

We spoke of Joseph Campbell and his belief that we do not create meaning; that meaning exists and we find the language and symbols to represent archetypal truths. In Eve’s work, animals are totemic symbols, in a sense representing her tribal connection to these beings. They are symbols of vulnerability and strength. The power of nature is showing itself today, in this shutting down of the entire world caused by a microscopic organism that exists in a nether-world between living and dead matter; only coming to life in a host body like our own. In Eve’s

work, sometimes we can feel a sinister element to the animals roosting upon the head of a person, or seated nearby looking upon the world we have created. At other times, there is a sensitivity expressed, a loving interaction between the human and animal worlds. In her work, the theater of human folly is played out to an audience of the flora and fauna that we coexist with, and to the animal elements that we still carry within our primordial memories.

Interspecies dialogues have a rich history in contemporary art; Joseph Beuys spent eight hours a day with a coyote for the duration of his exhibition, *I Love America and America Loves Me*. The animal can be seen as the other, as spirit guides or as a judge of our anthropocentrism and hubris. We have elevated ourselves above the natural order in our belief that we have control over the elements; this conceit has become our nemesis.

Eve Wood uses a light touch to address profound concerns. Her images exist as fragments of a dark fairytale about our fall from grace. Crows are known to flock to members of their own species after death; scientists believe it is a form of analysis, of trying to figure out what killed it and how to avoid their fate. Eve's work is a cautionary tale; they are anxious offerings reminding us that our animal natures are still there to be embraced- that we are a part of this magnificent living world- but that the path we are following is fraught with self-destructive impulses.

We tell stories to connect with each other; it is in our nature as social animals. Our need to belong, to be loved and acknowledged and to protect each other is expressed in words and images from the ancient world to the present. Eve Wood weaves her sensitivity and empathy with the animals she loves, to create a lexicon of symbols and metaphors to remind us that we are one life form among many. In her work she examines the shadow we cast upon the living world, hoping to remind us that the destructive impact of our way of life is destroying the only

home we have. Like the crows examining one of their dead, she is striving to awaken within us the urgency we need to avoid this fate.

evewood.net

Eve Wood, Fuck No; Image courtesy of the artist

Eve Wood, Lobster
Hands; Image courtesy
of the artist

Eve Wood, Me Portrait;
Image courtesy of the
artist