

SUSAN SMITH TREES: roots

At first glance, a room full of Susan Smith Tree's works are recognizable only as abstractions. Yet, there's something about the character of her viscous sculptural mounds, her turbulent gestural drawings, and the gleaming globules of her cast objects that is innately familiar. It's not that any of these various multimedia works resembles anything in particular. Trees intends it to be that way, eschewing the representational and the limits it imposes on her expression of the human experience, or more specifically, the experience of being in a human body. It is this sensation that the artist succeeds in imparting to the viewer, this sensation that resonates with the shared reality that we know so well and rarely take the time to contemplate.

In her oeuvre, Trees works with abstract manifestations of human bodily experience, some of which speak to the viewer in a visceral way. In works like the enormous *Tullme*, floating suspended from the ceiling, sinewy tendrils wind around bulbous deposits of foam, like networks of innards and organs pulsing with veins and connective tissues. Other works feature fleshy, textural polymer molded into a collection of lumpy, vaguely figurative objects and forms with puckered and pinched caves and openings -- very much reminiscent of bodily orifices, though unspecific ones. For Trees, the body itself is a kind of "wilderness": an organic apparatus operating according to systems born of nature, independent from our conscious intentions. In this context, then, the orifices can be thought of as, respectively, the boundaries of and gateways to this wilderness within.

Trees' cast objects also rely upon the visceral, but in a manner diametrically opposed to the maximalism of her fleshy polymer and foam sculptures. Titled, *Stretch*, the black, cast sculpture has the simplicity and symmetry of the microscopic, like an amoeba encased in a sleek, flawless membrane. The monochromatic palettes of the artist's pieces keep them from being too literal, prompting the viewer to consider not so much their viscous realism, but the complexity and mystery, the known and the unknown functions operating automatically, and outside of our control.

While much of Trees' works have to do with the mysteries of the more tangible aspects of human bodies, she also delves into that which is so much more difficult to render: the intangible. In Tree's series of oil stick drawings, the artist's gestures are vivid and brutal; the reds and blacks, layered and smeared, bear the evidence of the intuitive aspects of her creative processes. If her foam and polymer pieces represent the physicality of our bodily experiences, then her drawings suggest that which composes our experience of consciousness. Trees "explor[es] the language that speaks the inexpressible," and indeed the process of art making itself is one of these languages. Not only has she made concrete this "wilderness," the inner workings of our existences, but her sculptures and drawings themselves are an index of such mysteries: the creative impulse, the unique gesture, and the innate impulse to connect emotionally and intellectually with others because of what we all have in common.

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