



Raine Bedsole: *Floating House IV*, 2012. M/M. 23 in. high.

Fragments of Memories

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RAINE BEDSOLE
Dream Documents
Callan Contemporary
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IN THE QUIETLY seductive, subdued lighting and serene space of the gallery, *Dream Documents* invites reflection on the memories of dream and experiences as the warming air of spring draws forth the fresh scents of new life rising from the moist and fecund earth. Where springtime quietly announces the renewing of life in the perennial cycle, *Dream Documents* is a meditation on what has been lost and might have been. A soothing lugubrious aura emanates from the forms and images, filling the space in which one stands, enclosing the viewer within the ephemeral substance of dreams in a crepuscular light like the soft, even light beneath the leaved branches of a beech tree on a mid-spring day where the flowers of a dogwood tree appear as apparitions suspended in a dimensionless world.

In *Boat Tree*, a mixed media diptych composed of two panels measuring forty by sixty-five inches, the leafless branches of a ghostly pale dusty pink tree spread across an ambiguous ground composed of sheets of printed text and prints of ancient sailing ships from old publications. One knows not whether the

tree is in the nascent state just before the new growth season begins or after the last leaves have fallen and the life sustaining fluids have returned to the roots beneath the ground, or in the final stage of existence when all hope and promise of renewal has dissolved in the inevitable passage of time, a metaphor employed in literature from B'reishit to Baudelaire and painting from Bellini to Thomas Cole.

The vague, delicately warm tonal harmonies lie within a narrow range of hues and values that lie just beyond the reach of tactile apprehension. Charts and diagrams, maps, and pages from old books that had once served as surrogates for inaccessible experiences have been quilted over the ground in a carefully organized array, documents of others' dreams and voyages to distant lands, adventures on ocean journeys by Nantucket sailing ships to the South Pacific and Indian oceans in search of spermaceti or the China Sea for tea, written and published dreamlike documents evidence of the floating within an evanescent luminous cloud. The suffusing of tree and ink and paper of publication in the oneness of art as document of dreams mirrors the truth that tree and paper and ink were once the same substance, from which they were differentiated, that individuality now dissolving into a vaporous unity of light.

The magnificent sailing vessels, that themselves were once the vehicles of others' dreams whether imagined voyages or

Ishmael pseudo-autographical narrative, were created in response to an expanding anticipation of larger dimensions of experience. Sailing ships and the sea became emblematic vessels for imaginary voyages, dreams of traveling to distant lands, the fulfillment of desire for something beyond the ordinary and the everyday, and the memories of what had never come to be except in dreams. These vessels passing over the seven seas, once the media for imagined and accessible experience, are now but memories of days gone by, relived in fiction or maritime museums, as they sail in through the seas of dreams.

Coral Painting No. 5, a tonal pendant of *Boat Tree*, represents branching coral as an undersea analog for the tree. The tree is represented from the perspective of a viewer standing on the ground from which the tree grows. The coral 'tree' is presented as if one were standing on the bottom of the ocean in a surreal Redon-like world. As in a dream, without the slightest sense of being other than normal the viewer has become a participant in another world, immersed in an aqueous vision of soft luminosity simulating the elusive substance of dreams.

The sympathy of the color and value range of *Boat Tree* and *Coral Painting No. 5* is iterated in the parallel between growth patterns of land and sea life, the fluid nature of air and water, heir to the ancient notion that as it is above so it is below. The living skeleton of the coral is like the wood of the dormant tree, both preserved in their respective deaths as documents of what had been, like the memories of a dream. Common to both is one of the most ancient of symbols, the tree as metaphor for life, celebrated in the mythological lore of cultures around the world, from the *eitz chaim* of the Garden of Eden in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Fusang tree of Chinese folklore, the sacred tree dating from Indian prehistoric times, and the live oak trees of southern Louisiana and the Ceiba trees of Mesoamerica.

The warm toned pair of *Boat Tree* and *Coral Painting* has a cool counterpart in *Bird Tree* and *Blue Coral*. The ghostlike, fractal arabesques of tree branches spread across the background like a veinal network. Birds perching silently on the snow-rimed skeleton in a motionless world are undisturbed by the slightest breeze. Birds like boats and trees are universal symbols of passage between spiritual realms and the natural world, harbingers of what is to come, and messengers of the gods, soaring into the air as ships sail across the seas: crows and ravens, doves and frigate birds, the thunderbird aka eagle, Nike and Cupid, and the hybrid angel, part human, part bird.

The branching limbs and twigs are composed of pale blue gray rectangles like long bricks or wooden siding one on which are written various texts, all suffused with a dreamlike quality. It is a space illumined by itself, rather than revealed by reflected or radiating light, an amorphous volume coextensive with one's consciousness. The lightness evokes remembrances of rimed wintry landscapes where every surface is coated with whiteness, a wintry fairyland where sounds sublimate into hoarfrost. The companion piece is the large thirty-seven by one hundred sixteen inches *Blue Coral*, the blue coral painted on layers of painted sheets accumulating to form a low relief.

Tattered Wing I and *II* are delicate *flamboyante* traceries of branches expanding and rising upwards, repeatedly dividing, the source of the tatted skeletal shadows on the wall. A variation on the theme of tree, the wings are like the delicate lacework skeletons of leaves from which the interstitial tissue has decayed

that mimicks the wintry branches of deciduous trees. Graceful bifurcating extensions reaching outwards fill the air like ethereal nets grasping bits of paper like a spider enwrapping a fly caught in its web in silken threads, the memory of the fly transformed into the substance of the arachnid, passed on to successive generations, as the present is embodies the memory of the past.

Along one wall a fleet of small pirogues floats suspended amid an aura of light and shadow. From whence have they come? For whom are they waiting? To where are they going? The form of the slender, delicately constructed shell of *Rain Boat Empty Tears* is echoed by its shadow cast on the wall. The hundreds of holes perforating the hull allude to the fragility of dreams and memories and the explicit peril of hoping for that that may not come to be. The evanescent nature of the light that illuminates is also the light that seeps through the holes to create shadowy shapes in which it is the light which is something and the shadow signifying the insubstantial nature of living in Plato's cave. The unrequited dreams and desires of flesh and blood beings once experienced intensely one on one are related in the many pages of letters and printed text, each with its own story to tell and with which the hull of *Rain Boat* has been made, meld into the undifferentiated shadow of absence projected on the wall, the stories surviving in the present tense of the reader's awareness as witness to the lived lives of those who have gone before.

Scraps of paper torn from written and printed pages are attached to the twigs and narrow branches that the artist has woven together to make *Prayer Flag Boat* in imitation of Tibetan Bon Buddhist practice. Prayers, trees, and boats like the Asmat *wuromon*, soul canoes, from PNG carved from a single tree, embody the hopes of those who offered them, the boat the vehicle of their passage from or return to the spiritual world from which they came into this world, or nilotic passages from the land of the living to the land of the dead. As one approaches the better to learn the details of the narrative specificity eludes one.

Oars is an interesting installation because there are similarities with trees and the association with boats. An assortment of painted oars stands upright like the most attenuated of figures, their long slender shafts like emaciated bodies, blades like heads/faces descended from Cycladic idols, each painted with different designs as distinguished as the painted and tattooed faces and bodies of PNG warriors, a signal presence of totemic forms of beings from another realm of consciousness, perhaps the past, perhaps a parallel world, a visitation from another dimension, with adhering bits of text the muted speech, vaguely reminiscent of the ominous gathering of jade figures discovered on an Olmec burial. Subtle irregularities of surfaces and textures and varied color schemes within a limited range supports the quiet presence of these sentinels waiting quietly.

The Floating Houses are deceptively flimsy constructions as one might discover peering among the trees along an inland waterway, made of materials found lying along a path or caught among the branches of a bush along a stream after a flood, suspended in air like an epiphyte in rainforest. Floating is an idea frequently employed by the artist, alluding to the amorphous nature of dreamtime and dreamscapes whether literally as in the *Floating Houses* or implied by the boats and ships and the ambiguous luminosity of the two dimensional works.

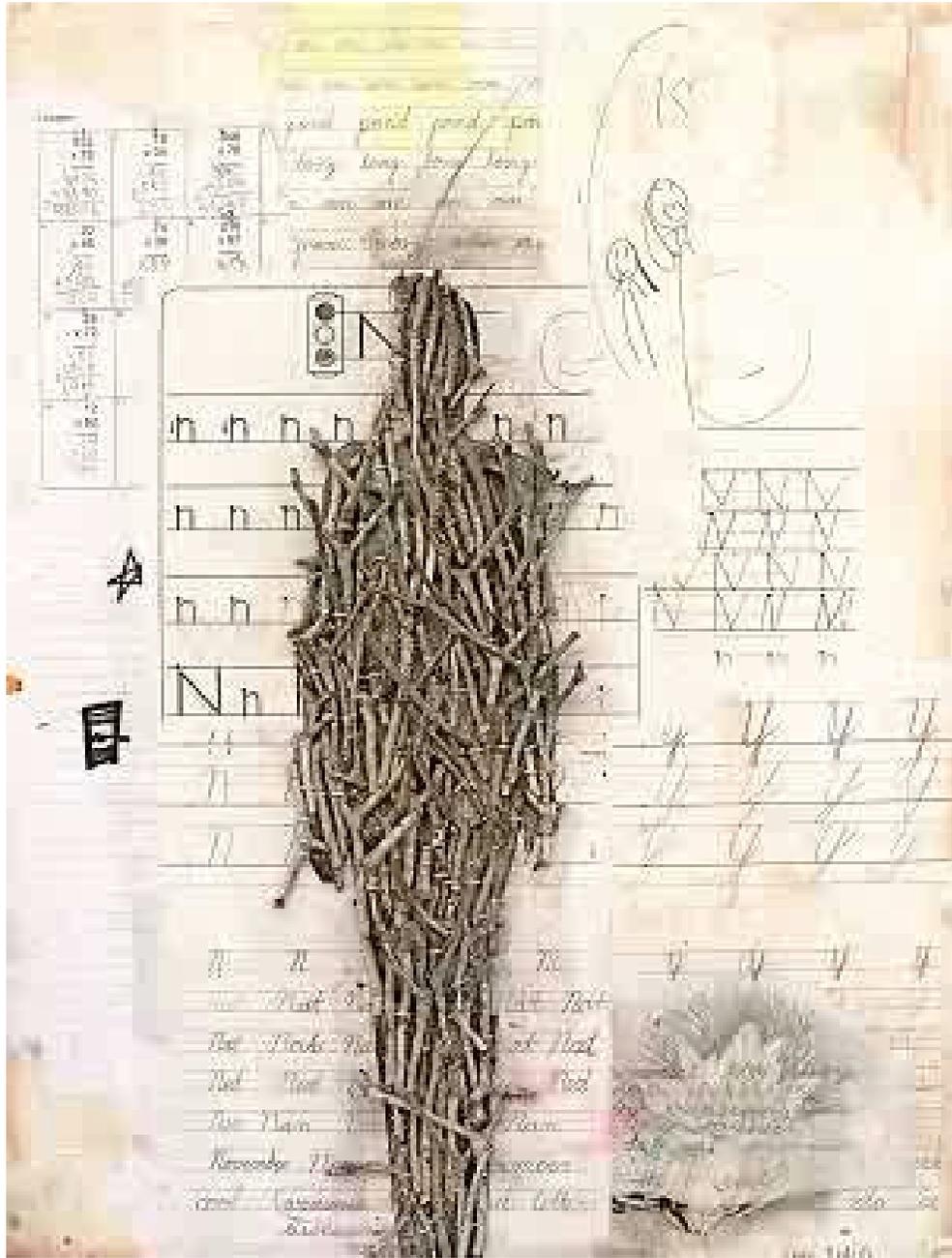
Floating House IV is assembled from a fragment of sheet music, a page from a children's book with a young boy wearing



Raine Bedsole: *Boat Tree*, 2012. M/M. 40 in. high.

a beret with checked shirt and shorts and long socks with his dog beside him as he does his exercises on the wall, all fragments of whole lives, elements as happenstance in their combination as the nests of birds and as ephemeral as the events that shape lives. *Floating House III* consists of a wire framework and a ladder dangling like the roots of an orchid in the rain forest, a structure made of materials chanced upon, some bits of wire, a cover of a magazine, a few sheets of paper, some twigs, each with their own histories, put carefully to create a primordial habitat.

The *Twig Figure* man could have been discovered as a pile of debris that had accumulated in an eddy of a flooding stream, placed on pages from children's writing exercises shaping letters and words carefully placed between the lines, a printed n and a capital N, the loop of the p in pond fitting in the line below, the tail of the d extending up to the line above, arithmetic products the long way, from early phases of learning when structured patterns of thinking representing the coda of a culture are encoded in young minds. □



Raine Bedsole: *Twig Figure*, 2008. M/M, 24" high.