

Introduction

by Emma Gray

When Rebecca Farr told me her father was dying, she was oddly radiant: beaming, glowing; explaining that through the tremendous loss and suffering, she and her father were experiencing an unexpected spiritual growth and expansion. After that, I learned both Rebecca and I share a long – held and deep commitment to meditation (and art). Our meditation paths have converged, we often practice together and we may even know each other better through silence than words. We share a hunger for stories and information that the eye can not see, a desire to get to the fundamentals of what it means to be alive and how to address and live that potential from the inside out. But, this is just a backdrop to Farr's process of painting and meditating through the 12 month story of her father's passing, as revealed in her exhibition *Out of Nothing*.

If breath can be understood to both give and take life, the vehicle upon which the spirit enters and leaves, then water is surely the fluid that eases the passage of the body in and out of existence. In dream analysis, water is symbolic of emotions, or the deepest recesses of one's subconscious mind and intuition, moving us from one state to another like the myth of the Ferryman Charon, who transports the souls of the newly dead across the River Styx.

It makes sense then, that nearly all of Farr's featureless, gender – less figures are immersed or wading through water. In the first paintings of the series, their flesh is still pink, they are rolling and holding onto vibrancy; there is joy detected in their movements and halos or ripples of light bounce around their still vital forms. As we move through the series, their skin tones mute significantly from pink to a yellowish grey, yet still appear solid and built up – they feel like they contain a lifetime of experiences and knowledge.

The beings are dense and submerged now, the paint thick and buttery and labored – a nod to British painters such as Lucien Freud or Leon Kossoff, whose additive layers of paint, speak to the weight of existence. The struggle in Farr's paintings is more palpable now. Are they drowning or drifting? The 'Bathers', mostly seen from above, could be wading through the layers of their lives together. From sloth, torpor and resistance to gentle acceptance of their impermanence.

In one of the paintings, there is a ghost-like figure floating, suggesting surrender – permission to go? The body, a chalky white line drawing in oil on ink black water, is floating, like a cork, bobbing in the water, free, understanding the next step will be complete separation from form.

The accompanying shroud – like sculptures appear in two forms in the exhibition: dropped on the floor like someone has stepped out of tunic or dressings (that have solidified into paper-like layers where they fell). And again, at the exhibition entrance: the papery white shrouds are long-hanging, appearing like giant chrysalis pods where a butterfly or moth could grow. Simultaneously, though, they are so human in scale and recall cured and stretched animal carcasses hanging proudly in the Spanish butcher's window. Farr wants to keep reminding us of life and death.

The fishing – net – like sculpture in the corner of the gallery hanging on large butcher scale hooks are yet more evidence of the trawling and sifting, or the hand of something bigger? But, it is when you turn the corner into the last exhibition space where the artist makes her final conclusion. A golden Turner – esque seascape hangs catty – corner to a black wall scumbled with white chalk drawn waves which meet crumbled dried plaster and ashes on the floor. The bodies are no more, a radiant light and dust are all that remains.