

Coming with Doubt: Nomadology

"Skeptics and Nomads" Catalog Essay by Brian Karl

Let's wander around a bit and ask some questions. We are built that way—to keep moving—fragile beings, vulnerable things. Moving toward what? Escaping what? Unsure of outcomes, doubting the premises for our own impulses and perceptions.

Bringing us to May Wilson's figures. Anthropomorphic. Set up in the ambiguous tableaux of rarefied spaces. Stripped down versions of ourselves. Do we want to get to know them? Phantasmagorical, lovable creatures, unsteady and barely holding it together, both menaced and threatening. Dark cartoons, shadowed by precarity and loss.

And, nearby, separated, as if in some pristine abattoir: beautiful intestines, spools of guts pulled out, hung up and still glimmering with signs of life, rubbed by a patina of gloss, the guilt of embalming. Not entirely stable on their own, touched by light bondage—strapping mechanisms yoke, holding them ready for potential use.

A paradox, despite what those old nomadologists Deleuze and Guattari propose: no nomad ever really keeps moving forever. However much we come and go, we all also must give way to fatigue and collapse and...stasis.

Both those who keep moving and those who wind down to stillness project uncertainty about their points of departure and arrival, remaining tentative about returning. Skeptical about any move as much as any position. These useless figures, constantly stuck, fastened to locations by somebody else's gaze, or, more prosaically, locked together by movers' stays (ironic, that), bound to a place, trying to gain balance in what is always already unstable. (A reminder: walking is falling). The unknown in any one relating to any other. Hardship in embracing failure. Who does not maintain will surely fall.

The transmutation of material things accompanies the passage of spirit-souls. How do we feel about down-cycling the stuff of industry? Synesthesia: glimpses of figures' surfaces transmit sensations of texture and aroma—easy to imagine from other encounters, out in the world somewhere: the visit to the factory, the operating room, the warehouse, the emergency site. The by-products of other designs. Almost natural, industrially processed—felt, fiber, carbon, rubber: dye-jobs. Hard, heavy fabrics whose purpose has passed: the alligator-skin of old fire-fighters. Stiff, brittle, pebbled and cracked, almost organic. Metal colors—a different kind of stay, even more temporary.

And what flowed through there—those materials, worn at the edges? And from which uncanny realm do such creatures come? What twists and turns bend them into each their own idiosyncratic form? And what to make of the smaller bits—knotted innards, containing membranes, extrusion mechanisms defining the borders of liquid and gas and solid phases.

Function served? We don't know what goes on in there. We can guess. And we will be wrong. Adopting positions of skeptics from birth. So...better to doubt what we know than know for sure what we doubt. Keep questioning, keep moving.

Nomadic thoughts. Guattari and Deleuze feel more accurate when surveying psychology than politics or anthropology: identifying the fluxes of affect, the unpredictable spasms of interiors. How *does* any figure relate to any other—viewer, maker, neighboring character, complex bio-apparatus?

What goes on in there matters—and what matters depends on what's inside: are things fluid? Do we sense concrete hardening or shifting sands? Unhollow, possessing strange integrities, such humanoid forms sketch at least three dimensions, and—beyond form—hint at stranger movements still, happening through time: the run-off of interactions with other proximate figures in always tenuously occupied space.