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DACHI COLE
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Murmurs is pleased to present *Slingshot Through the Bellows*, a solo exhibition by Santa Fe based textile and mixed-media artist Dachi Cole. Using mindfulness and play as complementary anchor points, the exhibition explores possible paths through the mysteries surrounding chance, self-actualization, and spirituality. The journey begins in the center of the gallery where dolls in an array of sizes from life-size to child's doll-size are clustered in and around a sailboat. The boat itself is a found object whose many years spent floating in the water or cracking under the hot desert sun and are evidenced in the worn state of its hull. Its sail, by contrast, is a new addition that Cole sewed with pieces of fabric into a map-like structure of interconnected shapes and characters. Metaphorically, the boat is a vessel, like the human body, while the dolls inside are the spirit. Together they have been "slingshot" on a voyage through the waters of experience. To continue the metaphor, everything above water level: the sky, sail, tapestries on the walls, is in the domain of conscious awareness. This means memories, stories, language, etc. Meanwhile the water represents the unconscious mind, a vastness under the surface where the boat floats containing unseen entities like dreamscapes that can bubble up into waking life in the form of symbols. Currents and waves from the roiling unconscious can rock the boat while it is propelled forward by wind in the sail. When the boat began its journey, the passengers inside were blank slates. As they navigate the waters they accrue knowledge and memories which become layers on the tapestries as characters— coyotes, reptiles, foxes— from their lives.

One of Dachi Cole's core beliefs is that if a person increases their awareness of the world around them, they can become more fully integrated into the universe and receive signs or even answers to what they seek. Rather than a *deus ex machina*, every person is their own God in the sense that the power to shape their lived experience lies within themselves. *Slingshot Through the Bellows* is a celebration of this ebb and flow of infinite knowledge through the world and how each person holds the key to their own enlightenment. Reverberations of this foundational principle are felt throughout the show, especially in Cole's use of a modified "Cut-up" method (a technique coined by poet William S. Burroughs but traceable to the Dadaists wherein a finished text is cut into single words which then are rearranged to form a new text). Cole's version of Cut-up is akin to tarot reading or divining the I-Ching: using free or random books, she blindly drags her left hand through the pages until something stops her when she is pointing to a single word on that page. After repetition, the selected words are layered to generate titles and even full narratives for the artworks.

Cole's Cut-up has applications beyond only words. In a manner similar to seeking random or free books, her dolls are made from donated fabric. She cuts the material into intuitive shapes, which she sometimes sets aside for use at a later time. When creating a doll, she will select scraps, stitch them together into limbs and then layer more fabric on top. This method means that no two dolls are alike yet they all share fragments of the same fabrics— leather, bright yellow vinyl, and rough canvas are just a few examples— like a strand of common DNA that connects a family. Like any family, the dolls have an ancestry: some are years older than others, with layers hidden under their exteriors that have accumulated as a result of adding, destroying, or repurposing their limbs. Cole views the dolls as protectors. They are part sentinels of dreamscapes, part talisman and part mischief-making spirits that remind us of the embodied playfulness of childhood. Most significantly, the dolls are imperfect because, like people, they are a product of a series of choices mingled with the randomness of the universe. Each patch of fabric underwent an entire journey before winding up on one of the dolls.

Creating artwork in the way that Cole does is markedly different, almost an inversion of, "typical" art-making. Usually, the artist holds tightly on the reins of the project as even a minute relinquishment of control invites chance which can lead the creative process astray. This is a very Apollonian style of creating that is based in logic, plasticity, ordered construction, forms etc. There is an ideal to be striven for and a linear method to achieve it... the most extreme example is an architect building a house from blueprints. By contrast, Cole's process is thoroughly Dionysian in the sense that it involves fragmentation, mining for meaning, layers of creation, destruction, and recreation. The artworks in this exhibition flourish from loss of control. They would not even exist if it were not for randomness and chance. As a result, there is a being-in-the-world quality to the works which is as simple as the difference between Cole being gifted leather remnants from a friend-of-a-friend local shoe designer in Tesuque, NM instead of ordering her choice of fabric from eBay. In *Slingshot Through the Bellows*, we are asked to look at the artwork differently, asked to consider the myriad circumstances that had to align for it to exist. Is it possible that something beautiful which arose *from* embracing chaos instead of fighting it off is a little bit more significant because of it?