

Jill Berelowitz

Spoons play a large part in Jill Berelowitz's life. She is a collector and has a passion for them; sitting at her dining table you are confronted by a wall hung with large ceremonial and practical examples, plus shelves and a mantelpiece loaded with more ornate and delicate offerings. For her they are a beautifully simple metaphor of femininity: a vessel for carrying substance, a warm and natural shape that holds and protects, but also, as her collection suggests, a hugely practical and variable object with different purposes, histories and wear. Berelowitz is an artist who carries her ideas in much the same way, holding them within her, caring for and nurturing them in her mind. They are not codified by being set down on paper, restricted and confined to two dimensions; the idea is allowed to change and be manipulated an infinite number of times before finally an armature is constructed and then the idea is rendered, complete and immaculate.

The sensual *Submissive* depicts a female body reclined and sexually overt yet its physicality is exploited and incomplete. There is a slit that runs from the shoulder to the sternum that is phallic and abstracts the figure, whilst the head and limbs are also cut off striking the figure of her identity. The ends of the limbs and neck are left rough quoting the fragmented sculptures that remain from antiquity, this engagement with art history and the submissive pose immediately brings to mind an entire cannon of imagery depicting women, reinforcing the assumed views of women seen throughout sculpture and painting from Praxiteles to Titian and Ingres. This serves to draw our attention further to the essence of the figure's femininity and it is at this point that it reasserts itself. The lithe figure twists but also splits, the smooth surface of the split seems tranquil as it unwinds in the face of the absent limbs suggesting that the whole figure might flow and wrap and cover any person that touches it. The medium too is important, working in coloured resin means that light is refracted through it. It is the literal element in Berelowitz's assertion that "woman is a multifaceted being."

The female torso is also the inspiration for *Core Femme*, one of the artist's most famous works. Again the body is left incomplete with rounded off ends where the limbs and head should be, this shape is then cast in resin at different sizes, which are stacked and wired together. The result is an organic composition reminiscent of a backbone where the individual torsos become vertebrae. The six meter version of *Core Femme* is now permanently located outside Charing Cross Hospital where it is the perfect compliment to the large Henry Moore sculpture for 1962 that is also stationed there. Both artists explore the essential character of the body and for Berelowitz the composition also asserts the strength and stability that women provide. Whilst the female form is important to Berelowitz, her figures are not exclusively female. In *Tree of Life* and *Tumbleweed* male and female figures climb and hang together. The figures are elongated inspired by the tribal art of her native South Africa, and due to the proscriptive stereotypes of gender and sexuality, their slight forms are more readily ascribed as female but there is ambiguity in this and their function in the works is more squarely human. Their androgyny is merged with the organic forms of apple tree

branches, chosen for their texture and symbolic association with Genesis and the Tree of Knowledge. For *Tree of Life* the connection with Adam and Eve is self-evident but for *Tumbleweed* the concept of knowledge and experience is synonymous with travel and in particular the African diaspora. For her own part Berelowitz left Africa nearly 30 years ago. She is from a medical family in Johannesburg and that upbringing -- with its inherent attention to anatomy -- inspires a new work: *Enigma*. A headless torso holds four small parcels located where the heart would be. Berelowitz explains that they literally represent the chambers of the heart but also metaphorically herself and her three siblings. These four parts can be removed from the work and separated much as her family are, the interaction – or even intervention – of the viewer to move the parts of the heart highlights the vulnerability and fragility of our human relationships. Such works showcase the exceptional sensitivity and emotion of Berelowitz's oeuvre.

Another series of works called *Moving Forward* combines varying numbers of sleek humanoid forms that like *Submissive* curl and twist with feminine elegance. Yet in contrast to that work this series is made in bronze and the languid poses of the figures is closer to the tribal figures of *Tree of Life* and *Tumbleweed*. It is an unflinchingly positive work whose title enforces this fact. There are a number of different compositions mostly using only two figures but each work is unique with individually cast models held in relation to each other. It is tempting to see a work like this as wistful or nostalgic, as somehow to see each figure as static and entrenched in dire isolation, yet for the smaller models the proximity and fluidity of the pairs is the natural progression of the division of the single human figure in *Submissive*: independent and yet enthal to another, a life-affirming study of humanity. In the life-size versions of the series Berelowitz has gone even further still, in one series of seven figures she has mounted each of them on ball bearings so that the viewer can rotate and arrange them, drawing the viewer into the artwork.

Berelowitz's work finds it's ultimate synthesis in a new work that moves away from the figurative and takes the quotidian form of the hourglass. Laid out on an under-lit table stand a vast array of hourglasses, each of which is cylindrical and has roughly the same proportions but they are different in size, and colour. The chambers inside them vary as well so that the time taken for the sand to run though each is different. A huge variety of patterns and timings can be constructed through the viewer picking them up and turning them, the trickle of sand elapsing and restarting like a silent orchestra. These are also undoubtedly feminine objects: the hourglass form is imbued with cultural relevance having been the dominant quantifying description of the ideal female body for centuries, whilst locked away in their resin casings the voids become the symbolic womb. However, not all of the cylinders contain sand, one contains Berelowitz's version of a fertility deity, another a three-dimensional depiction of her DNA all of which impregnate the work with maternal sentimentality. The shape of the cylinders evokes that of specimen jars and their presentation is akin to a Victorian curiosities cupboard. Berelowitz's own passion for collecting shows itself in this work and much like her Victorian forbears both her personal collections and her artworks show sensitivity for nature's variety. They are a joyous celebration of

life, change and for the endless potential of humanity, as is the case with all of Berelowitz's work.

Jill Berelowitz was born in 1955 in Johannesburg, South Africa. She developed her passion for art at a very young age and studied from the age of 12 under renowned Finnish artist Karen Jarozynska and then at Johannesburg School of Art. After graduating she set up her own studio in Durban and worked and taught there until moving to London in 1985.

In London Berelowitz has established herself as one of the City's most innovative and prominent sculptures. She has monumental works installed outside Charing Cross Hospital and at Henley-on-Thames, and has been commissioned to make the Investec Challenge rugby trophy plus works for the Goldsmith's Guild, Unilever and Old Mutual. She has been exhibited at Sotheby's and Christie's as well as the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, Heathrow Terminal 5 and on Cork Street for Rado and Elizabeth Arden. Other exciting projects also include commissions for Westminster Council's 'City of Sculpture' programme and for the entrance to the London 2012 Olympic Village.

Berelowitz lives and works in North London.