Beyond: The art of Tim Lowly

Tim Lowly
Chicago, Illinois, USA

I make paintings: trying to get out of the way. Most of the work that I have done in the last 30 years has been realistic towards the goal of engaging the viewer. That said, this "clarity of representation" has generally featured subjects that I regard with wonder. And as such the viewer is invited not into certainty, but beyond.

Beyond, © 2004
Acrylic on panel, 10" x 10"

Dad/bed, © 2001
Acrylic on panel , 9" x 12.5"

Despite the fact that my father was for many years the administrator of a hospital in South Korea, my work as an artist has had relatively little direct connection to the world of hospitals. Two paintings that are exceptions in this regard are *Beyond* and *Dad/Bed. Beyond* is a painting based on a photograph my father took of my daughter Temma and myself while she was still in a coma in the neonatal unit after having a cardiac arrest two days after her birth. I decided to paint the photograph 19 years later, finding that the way the figures were blurred in relation to the sterile clarity of the medical context echoed the sense of dislocation and confusion I had experienced at the time.

Dad/Bed was painted from a photograph taken shortly before my father died from a stroke after his cancer had worsened. While this image marks a difficult time of loss it is also ironically meaningful for me. After his stroke my father was (for those few days) much like my daughter Temma: totally helpless, beyond conventional communication, and in need of attentive care.

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Zoom, © 2002
Acrylic on panel, 16″ x 24″

Lifted 1 & 2, © 2002
Ink on panel, 15″ x 9.5″

Zoom and the diptych *Lifted 1 & 2* are works that reflect on Temma's care and caregivers. *Zoom* is from a series of images of Temma sitting with her mother Sherrie. Sherrie wrote the following comments about this series: "it marks a movement of the heart in me, as mother of Temma, from feeling like the guilty inflictor of suffering to being the companion of a profoundly other being."

Lifted 1 & 2 are images of Temma with one of her caregivers, Amy Trebian. The pair of paintings is suggestive of the transformative experience that some who have cared for Temma have had. That is, in the act of caring—here literally carrying—the caregiver becomes a companion on a journey into mystery; this is implied by the movement from the painting on the left with its literal clarity to the one on the right with its "mystical" blur. My friend Riva described Temma as a "perpetual cipher": like a baby—a "nothing" holding promise in the mystery of its being—always. In her being Temma always draws the ones who care for her back to the start.

Carry me, © 2002
Mixed media on panel
108″ x 48″
Private collection, Chicago
The following North Park University students provided collaborative assistance with this work:
Robin Spencer, Yoonhee Kim, Amanda Hasse, Michelle Ness, Heather Yanul and Krissa Harwood

Carry Me and *Without Moving (after Guy Chase)* are two large scale works that propose a community of care for the profoundly other. *Carry Me* was made with the collaborative assistance of a small group of advanced drawing students. In the image the students carry Temma; their common action (both in holding Temma and, beyond the scope of the image, in their participation in making the painting) serves as a metaphor for a community of care. Further, by their gaze, the women invite or implicate the viewer into this community of care.

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Without moving (after Guy Chase), © 2010–Present
Acrylic on panel
75″ x 120″

The central figure of *Without Moving (after Guy Chase)* is Temma floating ambiguously but undoubtably present in a dark void. The viewer's experience is transformed when they see, upon closer inspection, a complex, perhaps even exuberant field of tiny dots that is slowly filling the darkness around her. The dot painting is an on-going component of this work and takes place whenever the work is exhibited. During the course of an exhibition (most recently in the exhibition *Testimony to Being* at Swedish Covenant Hospital) participants[1] paint black dots on the dark grey field. The dots are counted as they are painted and are depicted close to each other, but without touching. Thus the act of painting the dots is a careful, intentional act; one that renders a concrete record of the presence of my collaborators. In that way the record of the presence of the participants in this project meets and surrounds the representation of the presence of Temma.

Note

1. So far over 40 people have participated, including students, artists, non-artists, friends, and strangers.

TIM LOWLY is a Chicago-based artist, curator, musician, and teacher. He was born in Hendersonville, North Carolina in 1958. As the son of medical missionaries he spent most of his youth in South Korea. He attended Calvin College and received a BFA degree in 1981. In 1981 he married Sherrie Rubingh. Their daughter Temma was born in 1985. She is profoundly disabled (cerebral palsy with spastic quadriplegia) and has been a frequent subject of Lowly's work. His work has been featured in numerous one person and group exhibitions and is in many private and public collections (including the Frye Museum in Seattle, the Arkansas Art Center, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC). Since 1995 Tim has been affiliated with North Park University in Chicago as gallery director, professor, and artist-in-residence. He is represented by Koplin Del Rio Gallery in Los Angeles. See more at http://www.timlowly.com and http://www.flickr.com/photos/timlowly/.

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