

THE BELGO REPORT

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CITIES BY THE RIVERS AT SBC GALLERY

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Anna Boghiguian

Cities by the Rivers

SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art

October 31, 2015 – January 16, 2016

www.sbcgallery.ca

In a fifth floor gallery on Saint Catherine Street, a honey bee rests on the beak of a paper bird. Its wings flicker, antennae quiver, but no one will harm the creature: through January 16, SBC Gallery is the bee's space perhaps more than it is ours. In "Cities by the Rivers," artist Anna Boghiguian transports us to Egypt, India, Ethiopia and Brazil through an ambrosia-scented living diary of her thoughts and encounters.

With closed eyes, the trellis of honeycombs deceives us to imagine lands exotic and far from where we stand in downtown Montreal. With eyes open Boghiguian shows us experiences specific to her and her interpretations. The trellis is a wooden frame with plates of honeycombs and glass, some pressing dried leaves and some with paintings done in beeswax on rough, torn paper. The raised wax technique makes her dark figures, Modigliani-esque portraits of military men baring crude pink teeth, more tangible. Like visiting a garden in an unknown place, we want to touch stems and ridges and veins in order to understand.

More of these pages rest on shelves, lie on tables, stand as cut-outs on wooden poles, and hang from string. These act as the characters of Boghiguian's

play as we move through the trajectory of her travels in miniature. The paper bird is one of the many cut-outs around the periphery of the gallery. These figures, "officers rendered in beeswax" or children cut from French newspaper, make shadows on the wall. The shape of two men and a camel becomes the backdrop of a line tracing Africa to Belgium to Italy to North America. This line is part of the writing scrawled across the gallery "in black and pepto-bismol pink Boghiguian tells a story of her journey and a lineage of humanity. The words "œganga," "œimpose," and "œgoddess" are commanding. She speaks frankly about revolution and conquest, and we wonder how this connects to more ambiguous pieces in the show (the fallen disco ball, for example).

Examining the details of the exhibition, there is a literal layering that mimics the complexity of origin. Some of Boghiguian's beeswax pieces include elements of collage, like a tiny photograph of a nautilus shell taped to the page. A table showcases photographs and postcards paperclipped to paintings with the spiral notebook fringe still intact. These feel "in progress." There is the idea that it is impossible to unveil the full story of a history and that this is Boghiguian's way of making some sense of it; it doesn't have to look "finished."

"Cities by the Rivers" is a story of journey, for an individual and for humanity. Boghiguian invites us to witness the reflections of an artist in transit, and to pause in the ephemeral like a honey bee on a paper bird.

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