

MEREDITH MORTEN: RE:STRATA

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The Carpathian Basin stretches out across Hungary, rolling across the landscape like a long, flat highway. Over the centuries this highway has played host to trade, invasion, and movements of people. At times, it has been a murderous geography, where great armies have clashed. More recently, a calm has descended.

Meredith Morten finds the region intrinsic to her work, but her interests lie in the distant past, more archaeological than historical. Specifically, she mines Neolithic, Copper, and Bronze Age artifacts that she has seen in Hungary to fashion contemporary forms with a sturdy, surging vitality. Morten looks back in time using objects from the past to summon rational, up-to-date summaries of the unknowable by bestowing upon them a currency that plumbs an object's history while at the same time reintroduces it to the world.

Catalogued and titled like archaeological artifacts, Morten's red clay earthenware sculptures at first seem whimsical, a musicality of jovial notes struck by curving fossil-like sea-

creatures frozen in time and tools seeming almost too delicate to use.

The whimsy slides away, however, as one stays with the sculptures, exploring the finely worked surfaces filled with character and incident. What at first glance seems insignificant gathers force in an array of phallic-shaped fertility pieces that often have female orifices and can be read as either shamanistic totems or prehistoric sex toys.

Likely this understanding of Morten's work is simplistic because her notion of fertility is intertwined with history, as indeed there is a certain codependence involved between the two. More important, she is concerned with how objects survive over time, both in a physi-



Meredith Morten, *TC14_CB09*, fired earthenware, with stain and glaze, 14½ x 2¼ x 1½".

cal state and as a conductor of ideas. *TC16_CB09* if imagined standing upright is shaped like an untenable, unbalanced vase, lightly stained and glazed and suggesting multiple genders. The elongated shape with a female opening on one end, either implies a unity of purpose or a degree of separation. The sculpture seems to have been just pulled from the earth after a centuries-long sleep, and this "time collapse" as Morten calls it reawakens the mysteries of the past and makes them modern.

—Robert Moeller

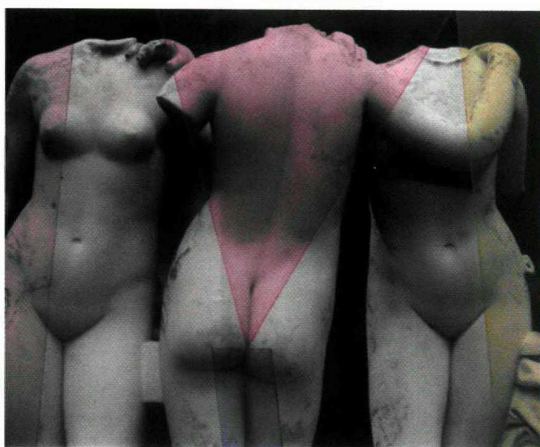
BETTY, CHARLIE, FRANCESCA AND GEORGE

Samson Projects • Boston, MA • www.samsonprojects.com

This show of the Woodman family (mother, father, daughter, son) is alternately giddy and somber, formal and playful. It gets sadder the more you find out about it. This family of artists seems to trace the history of twentieth-century art in their varied approaches.

Betty is the matriarch and her colorful painted sculptures make the first impact. Obviously enamored with Matisse, her shapes in two and three dimensions recall his playful silhouette cutouts. She makes vases and the bases and frames for them, rendering two-dimensional still lifes back into three-dimensional form, but in her own terms with contours that swell with energy.

Husband George is the more formal and rigorous painter, having a career as a geometric abstractionist behind him. These works, altered photographs of mostly Italianate scenes, find him in a playful mode. The beauties of ancient statuary, timeless nudes, and secluded gardens become excuses for transparent stains of geometric color, highlights that frame



George Woodman, *Classical de Stijl*, 2007, oil paint on gelatin silver print, 16 x 20".

and enhance the idealized female nude figure.

Son Charlie's austere videos take a more minimalist approach, isolating certain figural movements and effects of light in monochrome frames. His images slowly evolve, in shades of gray, before our eyes, and then repeat, loops that isolate

introverted moments otherwise lost in time.

Daughter Francesca's photographs are on a smaller scale than her father's and show us a young feminist intent on exploring the female body as a presence and identity within conceptual processes. She is her own model, and sometimes nude, but the focus is seldom on her face. Rather these modest black-and-white images explore a solo figure in action. She stretches her arms through strands of hanging flypaper or covers her torso in safety pins. In one print she coils nude beside a bowl holding a snake, and in another she half-submerges herself in the roots of a tree growing on water's edge.

One photo finds her nude in a corner, her body obscured by hanging skeins of yarn so black they look like marks made on the negative itself. Francesca Woodman tragically ended her own life in 1981, but her legacy is a series of work intent on exploring a distinct female identity in an era of pressing social change.

—Shawn Hill