

Curatorial text

Written by Rosanna Vibe.

Entre deux eaux. Between Two Waters.

Tegnerforbundet – The Norwegian Drawing Center is thrilled to present the work of Kitty Crowther, with her first art exhibition in Norway. Kitty Crowther is an acclaimed Belgian illustrator, author and artist. She has built a remarkable and widely celebrated career in children's literature, known for her enchanting and vivid illustrations, often fearlessly tackling emotional subjects. The exhibition features drawings and monotypes from recent years, a relatively unknown side of her prolific production.

The title of the exhibition, *Entre deux eaux. Between Two Waters* reflects the experience of existing and observing from a space between, a notion which is echoed in Crowther's background. Born in Brussels to an English father and Swedish mother, she was imbued with a sense of dual identities, simultaneously local and foreign. She also grew up with a hearing impairment, a trait that often required her to deduce meaning through other senses. This made her adept at building bridges between her experience of the world and what those around her seemed to be communicating. She built a rich internal universe in the process, which she expressed from an early age through drawing.

The exhibition features two main series of works. The first series is a sprawling display of intricate pencil drawings of faces, under the title *Face the day*. This series, comprised of over 150 pieces, was born during the pandemic; a product of the confusion and isolation of the time. It mimics the feeling of standing, perhaps for a little too long, in front of a small mirror above your bathroom sink – seeing hallucinations of a face reflected back at you, forming and unforming. The second group of works is a series of monumental monotypes. These larger faces branch off from the first set into their own powerful expression, a visceral, raw confrontation of color, each one with its own unmistakable identity.

For Crowther, these faces are neither portraits nor masks. Rather, they are a calling forth of some entity, a charge that she directs into a form both familiar and strange, all in a language she is intimately familiar with. Her lifelong habit of the close observation of faces has armed her with a vast vocabulary of expressions. The variation in this series is a demonstration of the impressive elasticity of the form of the face, still readable thanks to a deep, instinctual recognition present in us all.

When drawing, Crowther always starts with the eyes, placing the mouth and nose in roughly the same place each time; yet within this convention, a universe of infinite variation is opened. The artists' intention is for the viewer to have a dialogue with the work. As we observe the face in front of us, we co-create the image. What we are left with is inextricably linked to what we project from within ourselves in our individual sensorial capacity, in between the oceans of making and looking. Crowther describes

drawing as a massage for her eyes. As viewers, our eyes continue massaging the expression into view.

Interspersed among the faces in the gallery, there is also a selection of other monotypes. Some of them feature hybrid creatures on the spectrum between plant and animal, carrying notes of simultaneous growth and decay. These vegetal structures might belong under or over the water, or be creatures caught between the forms of flower, sunburst or starfish. All of them challenge the categories of classification, embracing the blurry boundaries and living textures of the natural world.

As a medium, the monotype is a liquid expression that channels the muddied ocean floor, capable of capturing the way form might appear and re-appear amongst the swirls and layers of built-up sediment. Crowther makes use of the tendency of the monotype to hold on to the previous imprint, making various versions of each print, building new images on the ghosts of the old ones. In contrast, her drawings in pencil are sharp and bold against the amorphous body of the monotype, giving a rich display of her expressive and energetic wielding of the drawn line.

When Crowther calls forth these images, it is as if she has searched for the form through her gestural strokes of ink or pencil, likening it to the magnetic tension between two people approaching each other in a room. She finds a path through her materials, cutting through the space toward the other, whose form is already defined and waiting – allowing us to witness an impressive balancing act of intuition, energy and sensitivity.

Kitty Crowther (b. 1970) is renowned for her evocative work, primarily in both writing and illustrating children's literature, where she combines intricate drawings with deeply emotional narratives. With a career that includes over forty books, Crowther's work has been widely translated and distributed internationally. Crowther has been recognized through numerous awards, including the prestigious Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA), which praised her for blending imagination with reality, and for her mastery of both line and atmosphere. As an artist and illustrator, she has held solo exhibitions at galleries and venues across the world.