

Léa Beloousovitch: On Feeling & Felt

Léa Beloousovitch's works on felt start with a photograph, an objective record of visible reality. She chooses photos of scenes of human suffering that, if we were to see them, would elicit sympathy from the viewer. But we do not see these photos.

Beloousovitch strips the various elements in these images of their outlines and definition so that the original image becomes indiscernible. What was once a photograph showing women wearing headscarves anxiously huddled together is now an abstract scene of colours and shapes on felt.

She's like the optician who shows us an image and then asks us if various lenses make the image more or less focused, in an attempt to perfect our vision. But her intention is not to leave us with a sharper image but one we can't be certain of.

With photographs of suffering, there is a basic and understandable correspondence between what we see and how we feel. However, Beloousovitch has changed what we see but maintained our emotional response. Her abstract artworks manage to maintain the pathos of the original photo.

This would be easily explained if Beloousovitch presented her work as a time-lapse video of her process. If we the viewer were faced with a scene of suffering and then watched it vaguen into a nebulous scene of coloured shapes. We might then naturally retain the feelings conjured by the original photo. Equally, it would be explained if we saw the photos next to the work, and could make the connection between, perhaps, a woman dressed in pink cradling her child and an abstract equivalent of that colour in the artwork.

But Beloousovitch doesn't show us the photographs that inspired the art. On first viewing her work we're not even aware of her process. Her titles reference Pakistan, Somalia and other parts of the world that tend to only appear in western news cycles for reasons of extreme human suffering, but the titles alone aren't enough to explain the profound reaction the works provoke.

While Beloousovitch sublimates the visible reality recorded in the photos into non-figurative scenes, she preserves the emotional landscapes captured in the originals. The new image, the artwork, has become the new host for the pathos that the photo contained. We look at these swirls and blobs of colour and feel *human* sympathy for them. (The works function like thermographic images of suffering, where certain passages of colour tell us that what we are looking at is the site of strong feeling, in these cases, pain.)

She has managed this because her technique of vaguening is weighted to perfection and her choice of material is inspired. Though we can no longer discern it, we can still just about *sense* and reach for the realistic scene. If it were any less blurred, it would simply be irritating, the mind would keep trying to focus something that seemed just off. If it were any more blurred we wouldn't be able to attempt the pareidolic leap back to the original. But with Beloousovitch's idiom, the scene of suffering that served as a starting point for the abstract artwork is *just palpable*.

Her chosen medium, felt, naturally lends any image a blurred quality and so when we first see the works we initially don't question their aura of unfocus. At first, we assume it be exclusively a phenomenon of the material. It's only by continuing to look at the work that we start to see that there is something more to this blurring. If we look long enough, we begin to sense a human scene and then feel a human reaction.

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