

Judith Roston Freilich: Release

By Bruce Thorn, July, 2018

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Life is a process of constant change wherein all living things are subject to age, decay and death; because previous life forms provide the basis of physical nourishment and evolution for all that is new, regeneration and bloom coexist alongside senescence and degeneration. This cyclical, existential and holistic process has long been a major theme of the arts and religion.

As the past gets obliterated from memory and buried under earth's dust, archeologists, scientists, historians and artists work to excavate, discover and interpret that which was forgotten.

With an eye for nuance and beauty that is simultaneously introspective and universal, Judith Roston Freilich utilizes the language of abstraction to explore the drama, mystery and joy of time's imposition upon organic life. Her work and vision have been remarkably consistent over a lengthy career going back to the early 1970s and has remained focused upon mixed media drawing, soft sculpture, installation and textile art.

The disciplines of these different mediums have continually informed one another. From her exquisitely embroidered textiles celebrating life's advancements, Roston Freilich achieved virtuosic control of the threads that appear in her drawings. Forms found in *Pod Installations* reappear in soft sculptures. From *Wall Installations* and *Silver Threads and Golden Needles*, come even stranger evocations of things that

might be imagined as cocoons and chrysalises, perhaps even mummified plants or small birds and animals.



Judith Roston Freilich, *Myofacial Release*, 2018, mixed media, joint compound, crackle paint, fabric and fiberfill on sanded paper, 74x63"

The main attractions at this time are the mixed media drawings, which begin with gestural washes of color over

heavy paper before being modulated with an electric sander. Multiple pieces of paper are sometimes conjoined to form human scale supports with irregular or torn edges. Through applications of joint compound, fabrics and batting, these works become somewhat three-dimensional or bas-relief.

Process is visibly fundamental to Roston Freilich's work and is never obscured. When sewing needles or pins get stuck in the work, they get left in place as artifacts of evolution. Layering, digging, scratching, stitching and color applications are presented with action and movement. Everything is subject to ambiguous metamorphosis.

Surfaces display a weathered, textured and transitional look. While isolated areas of metallic paint and gold leaf might be the only hints of anything shiny or brand-new, the emergent use of fresh but complex pastel colors anticipates hope and ecstasy. Hues belonging to dusk and dawn suggest the marathon of day and night. Roston Freilich's most successful works incorporate expanses of black darkness and contrast to reveal enigmatic forms.

A visceral materiality resolves into atmospheric storms and tides sometimes reminiscent of J.M.W. Turner's stormy seascapes. Given the abundance of fleshy colors in her work, the appearance of stitching can resemble sutures, as if to suggest that the personal is a microcosm of creation.

Roston Freilich was born in Evanston, Illinois and went to New Trier High School, alma mater of Ivan Albright, Chicago's iconic painter whose myopic fascination with the inevitable, silent hand of time highlights dramas of aging flesh. In high school, she immersed herself in music and performed in the school's

symphony orchestra. A kind of symphonic movement is apparent in her visual works that echoes a love of music.

Roston Freilich's family background set the stage for personal and creative development. Her paternal grandfather, a European tailor, left Europe and came to America with nothing but his own resourcefulness. He settled in Chicago, establishing a corset manufacturing company that was passed on to her father and uncles. Her affinity for the fabrics that were always present came naturally.

While her father exemplified an engaging, curious approach to activities ranging from horticulture to calligraphy, her mother was a schoolteacher who practiced a very forward thinking, personal approach to childhood development and later opened a children's bookstore.

Roston Freilich earned an MFA in printmaking from IIT, working with master printmaker Misch Kohn, and worked at Landfall Press. Though printmaking was left behind immediately following graduation, a thorough appreciation of its meticulous processes and layering remained.

Ignoring standard art school orthodoxy, she chose family life and raised four children, who in turn studied music and developed artistic sensibility. The cycle of life found in family structure is similar to the metaphysical issues addressed in her art.

Looking at Roston Freilich's drawings from a distance, one feels the powerful movement of tides and galaxies; but the works reveal themselves in endless close up details. There's a very intense, personal quality to the linear aspects of the drawings similar to drawings by Cy Twombly and William T.

Wiley. Cracked joint compound sometimes suggests parched earth; at other times, passing clouds. There is a hint of eternity in mold-like black minutiae. In many instances, one discovers references to plant parts and anatomical fascia. Her interests are found deep below surface appearances. These are works to live with that will take time and silence to reveal their secrets of expansive and ethereal equilibrium.

Bruce Thorn is a Chicago based visual artist and art critic.