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## Mandala Snowflake: Tina Poplawski

April 9 to May 28, 2006

Donald & Pamela Bierstock Gallery



Snowflake Mandala - urethane casting resin, plant roots, clay

### TINA POPLAWSKI: MANDALA SNOWFLAKE

For several years now Tina Poplawski has explored and been inspired by events in her family's history, placed in the greater context of world events. In particular she has referenced and responded to the aftermath of her parents' abduction by the Russians during World War II. At that time they were living in Poland and one night, while supposedly sleeping safe in their beds, the house was stormed into and her parents and other family members were arrested and sent to the gulags in Siberia. They eventually escaped, traveling first to England where Poplawski was born and then to Canada. Within Poplawski's work, it hasn't been so much the actual events themselves that have inspired her artmaking, but rather the after-effects and ramifications within her family. In particular these were things that were not spoken of, despite the fact that they had undoubtedly caused stress and trauma that were still being experienced.

In Mandala Snowflake, Poplawski has created an environment where the world has literally become "uprooted". Central to the exhibition is the image of a spherized snowflake that alludes to a mandala. The surface is thick with ash - very textural with many cracks,

fissures and pieces of charcoal protruding from the surface. The clay provides the only colour break besides the grey black and white of the image.

Poplawski has stated that she began this project thinking about clay and the expression "feet of clay". The phrase originated as a biblical reference. "The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar dreamt of a statue whose head was made of gold; but lower down the statue, the material got progressively more base, until the feet were part iron, part clay. The statue was shattered and destroyed by being struck on the feet, its weakest point. Hence colloquially, the expression "feet of clay" has come to mean that someone or something regarded as an idol has an underlying weakness or fault.

If the mandala is a representation of the unconscious self according to Jung, then these

mandalas, with its 'crude matter' has some issues. However it has also managed to coalesce into an image of wholeness out of ash and out of 'crude matter'. The central installation is will be comprised of urethane castings of snowflakes shapes, all of them clear, looking like ice and referencing not just the frigid weather of Siberia but frozen and locked emotions. From the centre of each protrudes various lengths of root that have been coated in clay. As the viewer looks upwards towards the ceiling s/he will see the bottom of the snowflakes, roots pointing down.

The installation brings forth various associations – but most especially the vulnerability at the roots, if roots refer to one's past culture or history. Ultimately the work remains hopeful however. Rather than falling down, the roots appear to be pulled upwards, an ascension into the light and realm of the spirit.

Tina Poplawski attended the Fine Arts programme at York University in the 1990s and the New School of Art in the 1970s. Poplawski's work draws upon the themes of her earlier exhibition Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep which dealt with memory and imagination, particularly the preservation of memories of events that were not, or could not be spoken of.

Tina Poplawski is represented by the Lehman Leskiw Gallery, Toronto, ON.

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