



The interior, visual qualities of Barker's drawings show exceptionally patient attention to detail. Even more to their credit, they are executed in a free and sensitive manner. There is neither stiffness nor excessive coldness as a cost for such precise lucidity. It takes weeks of carefully patient rendering by Barker to do a single drawing of some few square centimetres, a process which requires a tremendous ability to know the steps of the process in advance, and to deploy them at exactly particular moments. There is no trace at the end of a drawing that shows any indecision, corrections, erasing or almost of the making itself.

The meaning of the show resides in good part in Barker's questioning, in manifesting the duality of his grandfather's identity, and his own in distinction to his forebear's, as well as in the vacillating ocular qualities of the works.

There is an overflow of content, upbeat and humorous in its tenor, that quietly emerges in "Legacy." *Self Portrait as Robinson Crusoe* (where Barker seems bemused to be caught wearing a hat and fake beard which appear to have been made from a loaf of bread), or

Little Axe (in which a hand holds a tiny axe) both possess their own sort of quirky emotional atmosphere (*Little Axe* seems Lilliputian, and so maybe there are more references to the 18th-century English novel here than it seems—with attendant, questionable romantic explorer-type tropes). The show balances on a productive edge, between closed cipher and open book, where that initial mimetic ambiguity takes on a greater importance. Here, at least, in the possibility of our deception about the past or about history, about ourselves and our families, is a narrative smokescreen that reveals some truths in the act of exposing the closeted nature of the past. Maybe our anguished, contemporary, ruined sense of the real, or what's real, our fear of, but also our possible revelling in, simulated reality is what the real already is, and always was. ■

"Legacy" was exhibited at Galerie Laroche/Joncas, Montreal, from November 17 to December 22, 2016.

Benjamin Klein is a Montreal-based artist, writer and independent curator.

VISUAL ART

Nika Fontaine

by Benjamin Klein

A lot of baggage can be said to attach to the term "spirituality." In the context of contemporary art, it seems fair to say that bringing spirituality directly into the conversation is rare, and for many reasons is generally considered to be maladroit, even inappropriate. Putatively, we know that many, if not most, people would suggest they have a spirituality of some kind. Probably even those of us who give the matter little thought do as well, to some degree. But any approach to manifesting it in the art world is generally mediated by layers of intellectual presentation and justification. At most, our artwork is expected to theorize our spirituality, not present it straightforwardly, much less embody it.

Which is why Nika Fontaine's work is so refreshing. Her exhibition "Heimat" at Galerie Joyce Yahouda in Montreal, curated by Yahouda and François Dell'Aniello, showcases several different but interconnected bodies of work, all of which are self-evidently unafraid of censure for having injected a strong dose of kitschy materials and mystical subject matter—as well as actual mysticism—directly into the matrix of the artwork. Her paintings can even be said to bring kitsch and spirituality into collision, at least for the artist, and to erase the boundaries between them without irony, in the hope that a form of transcendence will take place and become clear and accessible. Her work represents a defiant stance against embarrassment and shame with respect to supposedly respectable art norms, exposing some of their dignified self-regard as potentially rote academicism, perhaps even as arrogance. This is the position Fontaine has staked for herself, and is defending.