

*Roots/Radici*, New Works by Kikki Ghezzi

Root: n. “the subterranean part of a plant; the organ of absorption and food storage; the means of anchorage and support;” v. “to furnish or give an origin or place to; to pull, tear out or remove by force; to poke or dig down into, usually in search of something.” Webster’s Third new International Dictionary

A root is a plant’s most primitive part, both lifeline and anchor. It begins as a pale, slender finger tentatively probing downward, then fattens and branches out, grabbing the surrounding earth and grounding the showier flowers and foliage above. Not meant to be seen, roots are an organism’s dark shadow, a twisted reflection of its upper, sunnier parts.

In her recent series of paintings and drawings, Kikki Ghezzi examines the root as metaphor. Unearthed and isolated, her roots generate a wealth of poetic associations, beginning with the artist herself, who left Italy to live in the United States. In a sense, her works can be seen as self-portraits, an expression of personal deracination. Pulled from their native soil, Ghezzi’s roots have ragged edges and torn, broken offshoots—scars that suggest a painful extraction.

Because Ghezzi exploits the anthropomorphic qualities of her subjects, her roots become stand-ins, not only for herself, but for the human figure in general. Finding the human form in their bulbous trunks and distorted limbs, Ghezzi uses her motif to evoke aspects of body and mind. In *Root #17*, a pale hieroglyph suspended on a deep-blue ground reminds of a ghostly female figure, with flowing hair, legs and arms, one of which seems to encircle a child. Vaporous and wraithlike, the root suggests the after-image of a charged female presence—a disturbing symbol of Woman and Mother.

Ghezzi’s drawing is searching and urgent, her brushwork varied. Although heightened for expressive impact, her color remains loosely tied to the natural world. Her inky blacks, saturated blues, frigid whites and wide array of earth tones create landscape-like spaces—primordial ooze, Mesozoic beaches, barren plains and crystalline skies—

appropriate settings for her primal forms. Several of the roots have the bleached, brittle appearance of skulls or driftwood—calcified relics from another life. Others, dark and moist, resemble squelchy viscera ripped from the body for inspection. Often Ghezzi exaggerates the creatural, sub-human nature of the roots. *Root #13* and *Root #15* appear as odd, beached sea creatures—exotic life forms that have crept out of the depths like primitive urges from the unconscious. In fact, Ghezzi digs up and examines her weird, suggestive forms in a process analogous to the intense self-scrutiny of psychoanalysis. The work can be seen as an unsparing exploration of self, as she trawls deep beneath the surface, looking for and finding new life.

Nancy Grimes