

Mary Temple /Bloom Magazine Issue 16

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“What is real?” asks the Velveteen Rabbit in Margery William’s classic children’s story. It is a question that most people grapple with in different ways and at different stages of their lives beginning early in childhood. As people walk into a Mary Temple exhibit, they look around. They see shadows of leaves and branches on a wall. For a few moments, they believe the shadows are real. They move their eyes to search for the light source. Temple reports that people instinctively know where the light should be coming from to produce such a shadow. Upon discovering no source of light, their logic begs them to look a little closer until perhaps they discover a brush stroke and know that the shadow they’re seeing has been painted by an artist—that artist is Mary Temple.

Mary Temple is a Brooklyn-based conceptual artist. People often comment about the “gotcha” moment in her work, the moment when belief is suspended and they realize the shadow they’re seeing is a work of art. But it is the moment just before that that is most interesting. It’s Temple’s mission to create a shadow that’s believable. Just like the actor on the stage, or the novelist on the page, a believable world must be created, or the viewer won’t be given access to the bottomless sea of experiences and ideas that live not just in their memory but in their viscera. In that moment of belief, whether it is for a few seconds or a whole minute, there is wonder, there is magic, there are questions.

Generally, people notice the beauty of light when they are open and unguarded. Seeing one of Temple's exhibits can bring a person back to such an open place. In that place they might ask themselves, "Why do I suddenly feel elated, melancholic, mad, enamored?" Shadows, or the depiction of them, aren't real; or are they? Shadows can be seen but not felt. They can't be put away in gilded frames or stored in golden boxes, and yet somewhere inside of ourselves we remember them. The presence of a shadow can incite fear or wonder or inspiration or love. Light is a living thing—it's fluid, not fixed. As light and the shadows it creates moves, we too move between doubt and knowing, remembering and forgetting, questions and answers. And as we do, that kind of questioning makes us more certain of what we *do* know, taking us back to the age old question, What is Real? "Real is something that happens to you," replies the Skin Horse to the Velveteen Rabbit. Real is an experience—it is something that, often, we define for ourselves out of the things we've seen and the moments we've lived. Mary Temple's work gives us access to what's real for each of us.