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HollyJo

### **Tracing the Guts of a Ghost**

October 18 – November 16, 2019

*Tracing the Guts of a Ghost* acts as a public ritual of mourning and transformation. It is a process-based work, which grieves both physical death and loss through familial estrangement. Calling on the echoes of lost culture and home, this is work of return and transmutation. Death and loss are welcomed back from their exile; they are returned to their rightful place as part of the fabric of our lives. The familiar and the (e)strange(d), the everyday and the always unspoken, the comforting and the taboo, HollyJo invites us to occupy the tension between these seeming opposites, and to inhabit the space where they overlap. We are invited to face the things we hide from, to speak the things we do not say.

Situated within the lineage of an Italian Canadian immigrant family, *Tracing the Guts of a Ghost* takes us to Salemi, Sicily, returning with the tiles from the artist's mother's birth home. These ruins provide the ground we stand on, a beginning which is already tied up with loss. Atop the tiles lies a traditional Sicilian cookie that celebrates fertility with an egg wrapped in pastry. Here, instead of an egg, is a plaster cast of the artist's daughter's urn. Birth, death, home, and loss occupy a single space, rather than being in conflict these realities

build a productive tension. They require witness and a willingness to be with what is. They offer an opening into a different way of being with death and with loss.

Here, in the room, the artist's mother is hiding behind the curtains, her feet peeking out at the bottom of familiar fabric. The feet are a mold of the artist's mother's feet, which the artist took in her hands and covered in plaster. Travelling to her estranged mother to carry out this intimate act is a process that occupies the space along with the feet themselves. Like the journey to Salemi to retrieve the tiles from the ruins of her mother's birth home, the trip to Sudbury, Ontario to mold the mother's feet is a journey to find roots, and to return. Intimacy and estrangement are two sides of the same coin. Secrets are part of the fabric of family. Hiding in plain sight, present and denied, the pain is passed down, generation after generation, until someone takes it in their hands, names it, witnesses it, speaks it.

Through mourning the death of her daughter, the artist moves backward in time, being transported both to her own childhood and to her mother's childhood. Through speaking the unspeakable grief of the death of her child, the artist offers us all the gift of grief work. We are invited to go back, to return to that which we have left behind us, perhaps too hastily. We are invited to be with what we are rushing away from, to face that death and loss are always with us. By being with death and loss intentionally and consciously we begin to unravel the secrets which burden us. We no longer keep our pain secret from ourselves. We step out from behind the curtain, take the plastic off the furniture, face the ruins of our lives, the fertile ground of the present moment.

Grief is a process of undoing. The experience of profound loss changes us irrevocably. We come apart and are driven into a space of death-like oblivion. In order to move through grief we must be willing to be changed, to be unlike the person we were before the loss. This transformation is some of the hardest work of

our lives. All too often we are alone in our grief, not feeling welcome to bring our pain into our day to day lives. HollyJo's work of public mourning breaks the binary of public and private, inviting all who enter the space into a conversation on grief and mourning. While this work is about the artist's own process with grief, it simultaneously opens space for all of us to be with our loss. It carves out a much needed space of community empathy in which we can together witness and hold the grief in our own lives.

*Tracing the Guts of a Ghost* is the intimate act of facing what is hidden, of saying the things we are forbidden to speak, of placing our hands inside of the immaterial, bringing it back to corporeal form. Through this public ritual of mourning we are called on as witnesses and invited into our own processes of grief. We are reminded that the journeys we take to return to ourselves will necessarily take us through the landscapes of our loss. When we integrate these losses, when we offer them time and presence and care, we begin the work of healing, for ourselves and for the world.

- Clementine Morigan