

*For Want of Wonder**

DIANNA FRID

/// BY Lori Waxman

**From a quote by geneticist mathematician J.B.S. Haldane: "The world will not perish for want of wonders, but for want of wonder."*

The Ancient Greeks had a word for the sense of amazement that can be felt before the confusing puzzles of the universe: *aporia* (ἀπορία). It corresponds to the word wonder, but wonder in contemporary usage has two forms: the noun retains the meaning of the Ancient Greek, while the verb connotes curiosity, the desire to know how things function. In our era, brimming with rational explanations for everything (see Wikipedia for instantaneous answers) and stable maps of everywhere (GoogleMaps now charts the world's oceans), curiosity has triumphed over amazement.

What if, instead, a sense of *aporia* could be restored, even momentarily, for certain common natural occurrences—occurrences that once astonished their witnesses, but now wane under the dull patina of mechanistic scientific understanding. What if clouds and snow and thunder and the rays of the sun and the air we breathe could be made strange again? Children and philosophers may need little help here, having long been acknowledged as privileged marvelers; the rest of us can turn to poets and artists to arouse wonder—like Dianna Frid.

Frid's body of work takes as its subject the phenomena listed above, as well as the moon, asteroids, craters, the weather, and shadows. That these are the representational content

of her sculptures and drawings is evident because she often gives them deceptively clear series titles, including *To the Moon, Fortress & Asteroid and Crater & Transport*. Deceptive because names can be deceiving, by giving a false and often unfortunate sense of knowledge, ownership or comfort over the things they name. Naming is knowing. But what happens when the thing to which a name is attached rejects, supersedes, confuses or contradicts its name?

In her recent series *The Vertical Shadows and Engines of Weather*, 2008, various climatic and celestial happenings materialize in forms whose idiosyncratic and visionary nature belies their usual systematization and familiarity. A small taxonomy of meteorological events—fair weather cumulus, cumulonimbus, fog, lightning bolts—appears not as the stuff of the weather channel but of living dream. The ephemeral, remote matter of suspended water molecules and electricity becomes extraordinary again via its transmogrification into human-size statues of riotous pattern, color and shape. That wonder can be manifested and retained at human scale and close proximity is no paradox: the rapid change of dimensions from the atmospheric to the anthropometric is breathtaking, the vast distance breached between there and here never domesticating. Wonder arises alternately in the associated

works on paper, where bits of colored paper and fabric, paint, and scraps of foil play into abstract designs whose resemblance to molecular diagrams and microscopic matter—stuff invisible to the naked eye—contradicts the ordinariness of their titular subjects: snow, air, thunder, clouds, rays, orbits. The commonplace might not be so common after all—a notion seconded by certain drawings' vague resemblance to the emblems of secret societies.

All this marvelous is made from banal, accessible means. Cardboard, metal, cloth, plastic, paper, aluminum foil, acrylic, ink, wax, Plasticine, rubber, and papier-maché, put together via the techniques of drawing, measuring, cutting, stitching, pasting, plastering, sanding, painting, layering,

stacking, and so on—nothing but the basic materials and processes of art today. And yet, from them, Frid creates objects that arouse a sense of wonder in the viewer—not unlike the feat performed when water drops suspended in the air refract sunlight to make a rainbow. The rainbow effect has been understood since at least as early as the thirteenth century, and yet this phenomena continues to evoke amazement in observers, a situation attributed to the fact that rainbows transpire only on rare occasions. Conversely, most of the phenomena depicted by Dianna Frid occur on a quotidian basis, with no rarity of their own on which to depend. Hence the need for Frid's particular representational tactics, which—to borrow from the title of one of her drawings—return the power of dislocation to snow.

WORKS CONSULTED

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