

JUDITH RAPHAEL AND TONY PHILLIPS

THE CONVERSATION: TWOSOME

January 31– February 27, 2016

Curated by Anne Harris



Tony Phillips, *The Child and the Man*, 29.5 x 41.5," pastel on paper, 1990

Thoughts on Twosome

Thirty-one years ago, Chicago artists Judith Raphael and Tony Phillips purchased the north half of an old warehouse in Pilsen. This became their living and painting domain. Light filled, their ground floor studio is psychologically divided by a stairway, but is otherwise open. In addition to home and workspace, they share a penchant for meticulous craft, precise description, allegory, and narrative.

They both depict parts of stories, moments that range from conversation to play, to wonder, to impending drama. As Tony describes in his recent writing, "A storm is brewing in the third act."¹ Both artists create situations that must be dreamed. Floating and distorted, gravity matters not at all. There are though, contrasts in mood. Judith's characters are children who fly, play, and compete in evenly lit pristine landscapes. She likens them to Demeter's daughters, but their world has no Hades. Persephone is forever free, brave and safe. Tony's work however, moves from disconcerting to foreboding. In the light of dusk he reimagines mythic creatures akin to griffons, sphinxes and fauns. A remarkable goat (my very favorite) fixates us with cat eyes. And a male protagonist appears, mortal and sometimes naked, to serve as the artist's vulnerable surrogate. Tony's work is dark, ominous and surreal, while Judith's is bright, lilting, and ephemeral.



Judith Raphael, *Down to Earth*, 42 x 44," acrylic on panel, 2009

As with many contemporary figurative artists, we see a range of historical influences from Fra Angelico to Watteau to Magritte, flavored by the contemporary artistic soup we all swim in. But also, there's a whiff of the very best 19th and 20th century picture-story-tellers. I'm reminded of Maurice Sendak's *Wild Things*, Lewis Carroll's Mock Turtle in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and F.D. Bedford's drawings for the original *Peter and Wendy*.

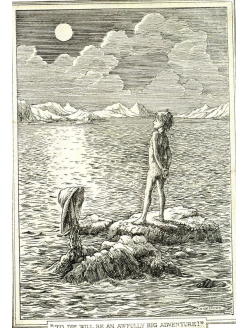
These illustrators share with Tony and Judith a particular quality of still movement. Indicators of motion, such as flowing hair, floating parachutes, flipping bicycles and steaming trains all pause in equivalent clarity. Their even-ness of description compresses space. Scale collapses. Life-size is just a passing thought, as anything could be a doll or monument with the flip of a mental switch. All is within touching distance, yet nothing in either painter's work is tactilely connected to our reality. There is always the sensation of the worked material. Tony's pastel figures feel soft and friable. Judith's painted girls are creamy liquid. In this respect, we are always brought back to invention—that the basic stuff of art is transformed into magical and unanticipated worlds. These are, in the end, compelling works of fiction.



Maurice Sendak,
study for *Where
the Wild Things
Are*



Lewis Carroll, *Alice's
Adventures in
Wonderland*



F.D. Bedford,
Peter and Wendy,
by J.M. Barrie

--Anne Harris

¹ Phillips, Tony, *See No Evil, Speak No Evil, Think No Evil, Dream No Evil*, Chicago: n.p., 2015. Print.



Judith Raphael, *Surveying the Universe*, 26" x 41", acrylic on panel, 2013

Surveying the Universe

Joseph Campbell, the American mythologist, frequently discussed the dilemma that human children experience of having to trust that their caretakers will keep them safe. We are the only creatures on the planet that need nearly 20 years of nurturing outside the womb to mature. That's also a lot of time for things to go wrong. Judith Raphael's painting, *Surveying the Universe*, seems to embody this conflict acutely. The two small children, a boy and girl, stand in front of the cosmos, seemingly woken in the middle of the night, or maybe just dreaming. The little girl in her polka-dot pajamas looks worried and has her arm wrapped around the older boy, whose belly is bare and innocent, and whose face is a mixture of bravery, fear and uncertainty about what to make of this reality. Reminds me of moments with my own kids when they have fallen down or had their feelings hurt—sometimes the only thing a parent can do is be a witness. This is what Judith's painting insists the viewer do. In the stellar background faint lines form amongst the galaxies and seem to connect the dots of stars, as if the children's thoughts are attempting to find order in the universal chaos. The surface of the painting is matte and soft like a sheet or a blanket, which is interesting since the painting is about the size of a baby or toddler blanket. It is so full of grace and tenderness it squeezes my heart.

--Natalie Jacobson



Tony Phillips, *A Family*, 41.5" x 29.5", pastel on paper, 1989

A Family

As customary gender-specific roles and responsibilities end to blur in the flourishing culture, men seem rather more ponderous and awkward, primitive and regressive, while women seem more vital and alert, involved and progressive.

The *Diplodocus* had a marvelously long neck that afforded him an advantage of seeing afar. The worldly perspective of men is no longer theirs alone. And kids are more able take on forms of their own as they adapt to evolving circumstances. Pray this moon may see what's yet unseen.²

--Tony Phillips

² Ibid

About the Artists

Judith Raphael received her BFA from the University of Mississippi, and her MA from Northwestern University, where she studied with Ted Halkin. Her work has been seen locally and nationally at such venues as The Art Institute of Chicago, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA; The Frye Museum, Seattle, WA; and the Lyons Wier Gallery, New York, NY. Awards received include the Adolph & Clara Obrig Prize from The National Academy Museum, a Rockefeller Foundation Resident Fellowship in Bellagio, Italy, and also grants from the NEA and the Illinois Arts Council. She taught for decades at both SAIC and Moraine Valley Community College, retiring in 2002. Her most recent solo exhibition was in 2015, titled *Coming into Bloom*, at Elmhurst College.

Tony Phillips received his BA from Trinity College, Hartford, CT and his BFA and MFA from Yale University. His work has been shown locally and nationally at venues ranging from The Art Institute of Chicago to The Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA; The National Academy Museum, New York; The Islip Art Museum, Long Island, NY; and Lyons Weir and Marianne Deson Galleries, Chicago. He's received numerous awards including the Jacob and Bessie Levy Prize from the Art Institute of Chicago, multiple NEA Fellowships and Illinois Arts Council Grants, as well multiple residencies at Yaddo and MacDowell. He began teaching at SAIC in 1969, where he retired in 2001 as chair of the painting department. He still teaches a course there now as Professor Emeritus. Presently, Tony's work is on exhibit at The Museum of Contemporary Art in *Surrealism: the Conjured Life*.

About the Curator and Gallery Assistant

ABOUT THE CURATOR & GALLERY ASSISTANT

Anne Harris serves on the board of the Riverside Arts Center, is Chair of its Exhibition Committee and has curated numerous shows here. Harris also teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her paintings and drawings have been exhibited at venues ranging from the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery to the Portland Museum of Art, and are in such public collections as The Fogg Museum, The Yale University Art Gallery and The New York Public Library, and have been recognized by such awards as the Guggenheim Fellowship and the NEA Individual Artists Fellowship. Harris lives with her husband, the photographer Paul D'Amato, and their son Max, in Riverside, IL.

Natalie Jacobson's paintings and works on paper have been exhibited at such venues as The Hyde Park Art Center, The Rockford Art Museum, the Arena Gallery, and Dogmatic Gallery. In 2015 she co-curated *Finding Prospect in Myth*, at the Hyde Park Art Center, as part of the Curatorial Practices Course conducted by HPAC and The University of Chicago. Jacobson is also the recipient of a 2003 Illinois Arts Council Grant. She lives with her husband and two kids in Oak Park, IL.