

Positive Space – Esther Woolfson

Pinned on the wall in front of my desk, is a quotation from the writer Isaac Babel. 'No iron,' it says, 'can pierce the heart with such force as a full stop put in the right place.'

Both plea and directive, it asks for simplicity, for a sense of understanding the relationship between what might be and what is. Whether we work in words or in fire and metal, the decisions we make lie in balance as we try to tell whatever story there is to be told.

In her work, Helen tells complete stories, ones which move far beyond the physical forms of the creatures she creates, into the totality of their lives. If Helen's hunting dogs are still, they're holding their power, waiting until as one, they'll take off, pursue. Her otter, momentarily terrestrial, will disappear if we turn away and slip back into its invisible, aqueous realm. Her birds know the air, fear and flight. They're solitary or social, wary or bold. A group of magpies stops its earnest, concentrated chatter as we pass.

Every time I see a creature of Helen's making, I think again about what gives it such rich life but know the answer is in her genius of discernment, her fine understanding of the positive and negative. It's her knowing what to leave out that is, like the full stop in the right place, the iron that pierces the heart.

Esther Woolfson

2013