

In the 1950s and 60s, jazz music was marked by a vivacious, liberating sense of experimentation. New sounds, new expressions, and seemingly no sense of direction. It wasn't music for the sake of crowd-pleasing or sales. It was music for the sake and spirit of expression.

Feldsott
Healing a Fragmented World

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Feldsott Untitled w/ Offerings at the temple of lies 2020 Mixed Media on Paper 30 x 22 in courtesy of the artist



Untitled w/ offerings at the temple of lies. 2020
DIAZYS
FELDSOTT

“I was inspired by these guys that went out, and, without a certain kind of structure, things would emerge,” painter and sculptor Feldsott remembers. “You were seeing art made right before your eyes. You were inside the creative process with them.”

Even further, the spirit of improv and these jazz musicians letting the music decide where the show goes gave the musicians a feeling of release. The musicians weren’t trying to control the music. They were simply trying to facilitate it. “They weren’t always completely clear where the music was headed,” Feldsott says.



Feldsott Medico 2013 Mixed Media on Archival Paper 40 x 32 in courtesy of the artist

written & interview Victor Sledge

It was a raw artistic experience that let the voice of the art speak for itself. And that’s what it feels like to experience Feldsott’s visual work. As an artist for the past 50 years, Feldsott has grown to embrace this same raw, free spirit in his work, and, in a lot of ways, his own life.

There was a point in Feldsott’s early career, when he was on the rise to success. He had reached historic milestones very young, having become one of the youngest exhibitors ever at SFMOMA in 1975, and his career was working impressively in his favor. However, in the midst of all of that success, Feldsott decided to leave the art scene. The business of the art world had jaded his experience making art, so Feldsott stopped selling and exhibiting his art altogether.

During his hiatus, Feldsott traveled to South America. There, after he at one point became swept up in a chaotic time of unrest involving drugs, politics, and uprisings, he eventually began a spiritual journey that would take him to Ecuador. Once there, he became a teacher and healer, studying environmental issues and traditional medicine for over 25 years. During that time, he was painting every day but still kept his work private. It wasn’t until 2002, when the National Museum in Quito, Ecuador, offered him his first solo exhibition since he left the art world, that Feldsott finally made his return.

Even now, Feldsott as a person seems to be operating on a different, more liberated plane. He’s continued to travel and learn, expanding his horizons in ways that inevitably seep into his art. He is still in a somewhat peculiar relationship with the environment around him, now, for example, having regular contact with wolves. “I don’t know if ‘pet’ is the right word,” he jokes about the wolves. “It’s more of an interspecies social experiment.”

Whatever it is, that unbound, unfettered attitude also speaks to him as an artist. Feldsott’s art is liberated through him, making him more of a conduit than a commander of the work.

In fact, at one point, Feldsott didn’t even feel full ownership over his work. “For many years I refused to sign my work,” he remembers. He didn’t feel like he created the pieces of art he produced, but rather he listened hard enough to the energy around him to let the art present itself through his talents. It’s something only an artist with an extreme respect for art itself would think. Feldsott’s ego seems to be the last thing he considers in his process. Instead, he seems to open himself up and submit to wherever his art wants to take him, like the jazz musicians he was inspired by so early on in his career.

When he works, it’s almost as if what comes to him arrives when it wants, and he’s humble enough to not assume that he was the one in control of it. “I feel like I am just in the moment to experience and participate with this ‘thing,’ but I’m not the author of it,” he says.

This “thing” he refers to has no real name. It isn’t something material or tangible. It’s more of an energy, a frequency that everyone has the potential to hear but few are quiet enough to perceive. “I work on keeping myself pretty quiet internally,” he says. “I’m trying to drop through these layers of consciousness and noise.”

For Feldsott, the energy found beyond all this noise is something that connects us all across the world and across generations. You can see it in his raw style. Feldsott’s work is filled with primal images that feel like the images of folklore. They are forms that can belong to any group of people at any point in time, and what the images depict are also interconnected human experiences that in some way could be relevant to any group of people at any point in time. “We live in these times

where there’s so much capital put into what makes us different,” Feldsott says. However, he believes if we returned to a place of deep collective remembrance that strips us down to our natural human essence, we’d see that these energies that reach him through his work are entities we all have in common. They connect us on quintessential levels that are much more profound than the things that separate us in our society today. “Everybody is lining up on different sides of this line and that line doesn’t seem to be doing a whole lot of good,” he says. “Everything’s fragmenting, but in the end, I think there’s more healing to be done by understanding our collective connection.”

In viewing his work, that idea comes through clearly. In many of Feldsott’s pieces, the people he depicts don’t always feel raced or gendered. They don’t always feel classed or as if they belong to some superior group. Instead, they feel ubiquitous, as if, for the most part, one figure is essentially the same as the next.

This creates an experience within Feldsott’s work where any viewer can insert themselves in any painting. The scenarios in which these figures are immortalized are as likely to happen to one viewer as they are the next, no matter what superficial, worldly divide we may choose to assume saves one person from that reality. That idea speaks very clearly through his series, COVID Diaries, which came out of his experience in quarantine. “My sense of COVID was informed by a different world view,” he explains, referring to his previous travels and experiences with spirituality and more traditional forms of medicine. “I understood it less on a viral level and more on an energetic, ‘world out of balance’ level.”

The series feels less like a comment on the physical paranoia of germs and sickness of the last few years and more like a record of the psychological weight of the death and panic of the times. And the series shows that that weight doesn’t discriminate. “In all of my years on this planet, this is the first phenomenon that everybody has some experience with. It’s on everybody’s mind,” he says. “Whether somebody is an identified COVID patient or not, we’re all witnessing the fragility of how we’ve built this whole thing like a house of cards.”

And that’s the type of commonality Feldsott works towards. He’s able to move past the surface of what we see and sit in the eye of the storm long enough to reveal the essence behind it all. It’s less about the weight of the moment itself and more about what fueled the moment in the first place. His work doesn’t ask why the dog bit the man. It asks what it is that’s making the man want to bite back. Working from that angle, seeking to be in conversation with the breath that’s flowing through all of us instead of what we decide to use it for — that’s what makes Feldsott’s work so timeless and universal. Feldsott is an artist of longevity because what he works with transcends time itself. For decades, he’s been drawing back and listening, letting this universal energy say what it needs to say through his primal instincts. The ideas in his work feel complex, and even unattainable at times. However, the grounding element is the universality in every piece. Once you sit with these ideas, you realize that they’ve been concepts that have floated through the world forever and have been complicated by our own divisions.

You can’t argue with his work. You can’t gripe and grieve over what he has to say or how he chooses to say it because Feldsott lets the energy of time speak for itself. On one artistic level, there is something to be said, to be debated, about every happening in human history. Polarizing politics, vehement opposition on any side of any issue—it’s all a part of the world we’ve created, and artists are always going to be grappling with that in their work.

However, for Feldsott, he isn't concerned about the world we've created but perhaps what was here before our existence. That's the level he's on. Feldsott's work seems to contemplate what was here before the divides and before the noise. Through his work, we are forced to lie with the bones of our times and the times that have come before.

We're forced to see and hear what we've shadowed and quieted for so long, as well as the energy behind it. And as long as Feldsott is keeping quiet, as long as he's tapped into the frequency of that plane, his work will always be relevant to our time and anytime before or after it.

Feldsott Untitled w/ 200,000 2020 Mixed Media on Paper 30 x 22 in courtesy of the artist



Untitled w/ 200,000

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Feldsott