



Michael Amar
There and not there

March 20 to May 8 2021

 **MODERNFUEL**

Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre is a non-profit organization facilitating the presentation, interpretation, and production of contemporary visual, time-based and interdisciplinary arts. Modern Fuel aims to meet the professional development needs of emerging and mid-career local, national and international artists, from diverse cultural communities, through exhibition, discussion, and mentorship opportunities. Modern Fuel supports innovation and experimentation and is committed to the education of interested publics and the diversification of its audiences. As an advocate for contemporary art, as well as for artists' rights, we pay professional fees to artists in accordance with the CARFAC fee schedule.

Modern Fuel is situated on the unceded ancestral territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg peoples. We acknowledge the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg peoples as the past, present, and future caretakers of this land. We also recognize the Métis peoples and other nations from across Turtle Island who have called Katarokwi / Kingston home for generations upon generations. We are grateful to be able to live, learn and make art on this land and be in such close proximity to the waters

of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. To acknowledge this traditional territory and waterways is to recognize this city and country's longer history pre-dating confederation and the work that must still be done in decolonizing our spaces and relations. We at Modern Fuel strive towards respectful relationships with all of our communities in hopes of walking a good path together.

We at Modern Fuel want to state unequivocally that Black lives matter, Indigenous lives matter, and that the lives of People of Colour matter. Modern Fuel strives to ensure that members and visitors feel safe and welcome in our space and at our events. We do not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or violence including but not limited to ableism; ageism; homophobia and transphobia; misogyny; racism and white supremacy. It is also important to us that Modern Fuel not only continues to present works and programs that support Black and Indigenous artists, members and visitors, but invests in the work of becoming an inclusive, anti-racist organization. We feel it is only then that Modern Fuel can advocate for artists and foster community with care and respect.

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Window Gallery

Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre
305-307 King Street West
Kingston, ON K7L2X4

Gallery Hours
Tuesday-Saturday
12-5PM

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Acknowledgements

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About Michael Amar

Early Years: SHAPING OF A LIFE: Study, Preparation and stories

At the age of eight, Michael Amar emigrated with his family from Morocco to Canada in April 1957. One of eight siblings, his family settled in Toronto in the College and Spadina neighbourhood. At that time, that part of the city extending to Kensington market and also including the area around the Art Gallery of Ontario was primarily a Jewish community of immigrants from Europe. Members of the Jewish community of the area provided friendship, acceptance, comfort and encouragement to the family as his parents questioned their choice to start a new life in this new country.

Michael remembers being in the market with his father who drew attention to a merchant, a holocaust survivor with a number on his forearm. This experience was forever imprinted in his memory.

Living in downtown Toronto as a child was a rapidly personal growing period. Adjusting to a new language and culture he felt the

pressures and stresses of his parents as they tried to adjust to a new way of life in a new world.

He entered the public education system by first attending Lansdowne Public School on Spadina Ave. Not knowing or understanding the English language but eager to learn, put him at a disadvantage in the early years. The family lived on Spadina Ave. above a textile shop named Gwartzman's which later became a major art supply store to artists. Michael's escape was to explore the colourful neighbourhood: the bustling of the wide avenue, merchants of dry goods and clothing, poultry processing places, butchers, delicatessens, sewing and fabric shops, horse and buggy for delivery of ice and dairy products, streetcars, cars, synagogues and alley ways.

These vivid images were his first impressions of life in Canada. After a few years, the family moved to an Ontario Housing Project in the north part of the city, Lawrence and Bathurst area. There he attended Flemington public school and later Lawrence Heights Junior High. His favourite subjects were math, music, art and baseball.

His art teacher in junior high, Miss Hamilton gave Michael much encouragement and offered to pay for classes at the Art Gallery of Ontario on Saturday mornings. The walls of the art room were covered with posters of paintings by the Group of Seven. He was drawn to his art teacher. She had a way of acknowledging and paying attention to the challenges he faced as an immigrant. Everything slowed down in the art room. It was a time of creativity and imaginative thinking and the beginnings of a sense of belonging.

In the early 60's Michael entered a new special high school art program at Downsview Secondary School. The post secondary art program was especially designed to provide an extensive art education from grade 9 to 12. All the subject areas of art were covered: photography, ceramics, drawing painting, art history and design. The uniqueness of this program was the only one of its kind in Ontario. The head of the art department, Mr. William Firth who taught art history and drawing, made a strong impression on Michael. The voice of Mr. Firth's lectures, the darkened art room and the projection of slides was the beginning of a long magical journey of study of art history for Michael.

Upon graduation Michael entered Central Technical School. This 3 year post secondary art program covered a broad range of subjects with a focus on studio practices. The uniqueness of the program was in part the requirements that art teachers were practising artists. Sculpture became a major area of interest and his sculpture teacher Wyndham Lawrence was inspiring and provided constructive criticism. After graduating from the three year art program he shared a studio with Wyn Lawrence.

Robert Ross, who taught life drawing and Doris McCarthy, were inspiring teachers and devoted artists. Having teachers as practising artists provided an insight into the enormous passion each individual had for their discipline. Mr. Ross's approach and style of drawing was to impart a learning experience of rendering form in a manner of a "less is more" philosophy. Doris McCarthy's teaching was of still life study: acute observation was emphasized in drawing, watercolour, composition and colour theory.

At the time the David Mirvish gallery on Markham Street and being in walking distance from the school, held exhibitions of the work

of New York artists. The works of Frank Stella, Clifford Still, Helen Frankenthaler David Smith and many others were shown in the gallery. Michael would visit the gallery frequently. This experience significantly broadened Michael's experience and learning about modern painting and sculpture. Colour field paintings, abstract expressionism and constructivist sculpture were the emerging styles of that time. The "newness" of this experience was energizing and a major shift from the traditions of landscape and representational painting that Michael learned at that time in art school at Central Tech.

Soon after graduating from CTS Michael travelled to Europe and Israel visiting numerous galleries and museums. In Israel he lived and worked on a kibbutz named Ruhama. The expectation of visitors (most often young students from abroad wanting to learn a new language and experience another culture) in the community was to provide labour in exchange for learning the Hebrew language.

In the kibbutz he met an artist, who was the shepherd in the community. Jehuda Bach, was a young Jewish

man who had escaped German occupation in Austria to flee to Israel. As they slowly got to know each other, Jehuda set him up with stone carving tools in an abandoned chicken coop as a studio to work with stone. As well, a small group would get together for life drawing sessions. In exploring the countryside, Michael would walk out on the land and sometimes stumble upon an intact mosaic floor from ancient dwellings. This kind experience left Michael with a very unsettled feeling: the passing and fragility of human life and the fragments of lives that remain idle in time. The history of the land was rich, immediate and full of surprises.

A year later he returned to Toronto and applied to the fine art program at York University where he was admitted. His primary focus was sculpture. His instructors were accomplished artists and art historians: Ted Bieler, Hugh LeRoy, David Samila, Ken Carpenter. Michael had great respect for individuals that held a deep passion for their work outside of the institution. Soon after graduation, it became clear that one had to follow their own intuition and creativity and set aside what he/she

learned in order to define their own direction and practice as an artist. After 3 years of study Michael worked as a sculpture technician at York and later as a teaching assistant.

In 1981, Michael left Toronto with his young family to work in the Canadian Arctic. He was employed by the government of the NWT to work in the hamlet of Pelly Bay as artist in residence. There he initiated new programs for Inuit artists. He helped to develop printmaking and drawing programs for Inuit artists. The people of that particular region of the arctic are known as the Netsilik, meaning people of the seal. Their way of life was nomadic and one of their art form was traditionally the carving of very tiny ivory carvings. As a hunting culture, there is the practice of leaving a small carving as an offering at the sight where a seal or caribou would have been hunted and killed. This religious practice was a way of thanking the animal for giving its body for sustenance and survival and for the regeneration of its soul and body.

The Arctic experience broadened Michael's experience and understanding of the role

of art in society. One of the most talented artists in the community was Augustin Anaituq who carved tiny ivories with a subtle sense of humour and realism. He would often polish his small carvings by putting them in his mouth and would swirl them. After a while he would release them with a very fine smooth finished surface. Fabian Oogark, also a very talented elder carver but debilitated by rheumatism arthritis was encouraged and managed to do drawings of his life experiences on the land.

The northern Arctic experience placed Michael in a very peculiar crossroad of aesthetics. The survival way of life of the Inuit in the harsh Arctic landscape contrasted sharply with the southern civilized technological, mechanized world that he had experienced to date. The arctic experience revealed the true reality of daily living: the dance of life and death is present in every moment in one's life. Living alongside Inuit people he questioned the purposes and value of art making. In the "wasteland" of the arctic the making of art was essential to survival of the spirit. In the far north the experience of the nakedness and rawness of existence is softened with art, love the human voice

and music.

The following year, Michael and his family moved to eastern Ontario in a rural community. This provided time and space to focus on his art. Living in the countryside, nearness to nature provide inspiration and insight for his work. The cycles of nature, the idea of the "wild", the phenomena of change and violence in the natural world within the context of human presence are themes that naturally evolved in the development of his art. Since the early eighties to the present Michael worked and exhibited as an artist in Ontario. In 1988, he applied and was admitted to Queen's University to obtain his teaching certificate. Life came to a full circle: he became a visual art teacher at Central Technical School. This school had solidified his choice as a practising artist.

In 2008, he retired from teaching to devote his time to sculpture, drawing and painting. All the forgoing stories enriched his work as he devotes his time completely to sculpture, drawing and painting.

Drawings by Michael Amar.

MICHAEL AMAR

**There and
not there**

the darkness of the shadow
deepens
and then disappears

seeing a form
touching it
the thing is not there

in time framed
a presence is felt
in absences

everyday with breath
there and not there
the fullness of a void emerges

place is always in question
moving from place to unknown place
with uncertainty

water running through
like memory unable to hold
all references fade into a darkness



Michael Amar, "There and not there"

Lost meaning

black birds on a tree branch
fly away in my presence
disappearing into the grey sky

bricks and mortar that housed
my immigrant parents in 1957
remains standing at Spadina and College

a flock of pigeons speeding overhead
fades in the distance
some sound is heard

Fisher Creek now bone dry this summer of 2017
we walk on the creek bed moving
in the ghost of flowing waters

The shadow deepens in time
only fragments remain
pieces of this and that

fragments of broken glass jars
rusted and flaking,galvanized pails in an old pit
become a measure of time

continually searching for
the missing pieces; they are the treasures we seek
unknowingly an obvious meaning has slipped away



Michael Amar, "Lost meaning"

In the soil

Lao Tzu
the way
endlessly transformed to an unknown

listening to the silence
of an erratic wind imprisoned and intertwined
in tall grasses, shaken

truths become the lost treasures
that open to an innocence
within a blue sky

the dreams raised many questions
music chords filled the night, an escape
the heaviness of the day softened by music

the weight of felt absences
comes and goes
and never truly leaves

the appearance of images in day and night
form one turbulent river
all boundaries fall away

there and not there
soils suffocating under pavement
golden rods waving in the wind
my life
your life
our lives



Michael Amar, "In the soil"

Geometry

waters of the swollen river dance in early spring
a man walking
absorbed by a darkness
falls in the water

spaces within structures of a snowflake
evenly distributed
from beginning to end

geometry of words spoken with
voids evenly distributed
from beginning to end

the dark soil blankets
every cell of our living earth
from an endless origin

horses in a field
stand motionless
to the roar of transport trucks
no one notices

can not see
can not feel
losing touch with my meaning

sitting with the fire
on a winter's night
reveals a warmth
of five hundred thousand years



Michael Amar, "Geometry"

Free

birds in flight
how brief their presence
coming and going
like the fading sound
of a piano key

distances forever change
never knowing where I am
subways jammed packed
engines endlessly burning fuel
the rapid pace
to nowhere is noticeable

I seemed to always have been
aware of my weakness from a very young age
I learned far too late, by accident, that it was my
strength

the old self
comes to haunt me
memories appear
things do not fit

there is a bird
wanting to be free
caught in my hand and held
the fragility of its thin bones differ
from those of my hands

the world is thin.....next to nothing
next to nothing we exist
such is the way, as thin as a rose petal
where language survives as the veneer of the living



Michael Amar, "Free"

Tears

a lightning storm
a shooting star
this is the way

a dying old man
a newborn child
this is the way

a place to live
a breath taken
this is the way

all is mind
or mindless
this is the way

in my dream
i created a large sculpture
to commemorate the holocaust
the rabbi breaks down in tears
when he sees what I ve made

to my horror
the sculpture is in the shape
of a walk-in furnace.



Michael Amar, "Tears"

Singing

How quickly it's forgotten
what is it that stays outside of memory ?
a printed page perhaps, stumbled upon
she came from Tokyo dressed in a kimono pulling a
suitcase on wheels
never again, never again
was the name
Hiroshima, Nagasaki
never again never forget

where does music come from
the question came in a dream
melodic sounds expressing a language
in the shape of a human form
the searching never ends
there
and not there

coyote prints in the snow'
their howling kept me up
their presence affirms mine
like the call of the whippoorwill in the night

standing in the open field
green shoots carpet the earth
a cool air current in early spring
moves along with the winter sun

forgotten days
forgotten dreams and
forgotten nights resurface
sitting quietly on a winters evening
remembering old times
leaping flames of a wood fire nearby
singing their own language
inviting me to the warmth



Michael Amar, "Singing"

Bones

nothing fits
youth has come and gone
no distinction between senselessness and old age
broken glass jars
rusted galvanized pails flaking away in time
like my body
the news of 1937
is no different than of today

thoughts move along
like currents of a river
in my mind images form endlessly
into the shapes of white clouds
not sure where I am heading

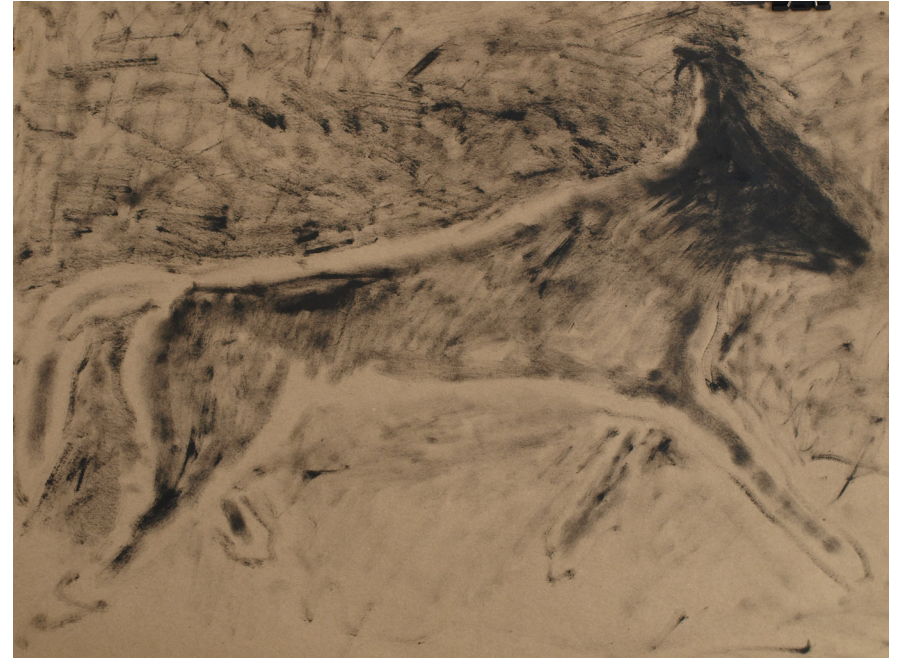
sculptures fashioned from steel
images heavy like paint
the weight of the evening newscast

in each and every moment
with the expansion and contraction
of lungs and lakes
though always nearby
the spiritual evades me

a black cloud moved so very slowly
overhead
bringing with it a disease
from sea to sea
from shore to shore

the spirit is not
but hidden
revealed in dry bones
time passes along with me
in the permanence of stillness

five deer came to the feeder
suddenly stood motionless
a frozen stare for a nano second
and then vanished



Michael Amar, "Bones"

Intangible self

a closeness between myself and I
that sense of being watched
when alone in the woods

the closeness
of a silence and warmth
between mother and child
no words for this timeless moment

the closeness to
the intangible self
is carried
in an undercurrent of primeval times
in our bones
resides an ancient time as ancient as the night
i ask
what is my name
and then I hear
my name spoken in my parents' voices

night
darkest of nights
emerging with waves
of light from distant stars
receiving one blinding light

the sound of a shattered glass
suddenly awakens
a life, a soul, a breath
I am

bending steel with fire
heating, beating, breathing and
listening to the hissing of flames
the birth of a new form begins

pain, fire, and beauty informs
the life of the artist
in isolation stripped to touch the earth



Michael Amar, "Intangible self"

Nothing fits

when did your sense of beauty emerge
not in five thousand lifetimes
the pain of there and not there
absence of mother and father
bringing a pain that transforms
to an endless search for beauty
fuelled by fire
a hoar frost this morning of January 10th
white icy lines vibrating in the backdrop of a deep blue sky
of a winter dawn
the world is thin, like frost
our existence much much thinner

where does beauty begin
trembling with awe
in early morning while lying in bed
wondering where did I come from
nothing fits
like a senseless spiralling wind
coming out of nowhere suddenly fading

images of the past resurface as memories
this intangible self
no matter how approached
moving through time like water
in a turbulent river
knowing no logic
must be more to this work

the things that should have been said
never were
existing only as thoughts forever
in our heart
the things that should have been said
never heard
existing only in silence



Michael Amar, "Nothing fits"

Things fly apart

music brought me to tears
so deep and so full
as the vibrating energies of a cello
caught me off guard
within a space of collapsed time

moments pass
there and not there
doves flying flying
wings sending a gentle whistling in the air
as they disappear in a purplish grey sky

Giotto's
the miracle of the spring
the miracle of thirst
a prayer for healing

carried in the womb
carried in the arms
carried in the heart
carried from the cross
carried by a shapeless form
the weight of the world
the weight of the child in you and me
appearances hovering over the waters
now fading fading fading



Michael Amar, "Things fly apart"



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