

Way of the Arrow October 2008 Australia Galleries

'If kai (completing the draw of the bow) holds the essence of kyudo (archery), then hanare (release of the arrow) reveals its mystery. Hanare is a thing of wonder; it lies on the edge of understanding.'

Once, when living in Japan, I attended a display of Japanese archery, known as 'Kyudo'. It was mesmerizing: the archers, in ceremonial dress and split-toed leather socks, performed a lengthy series of graceful, ritualized steps in preparation for the drawing and release of the arrow from the bow. The Zen art of archery is about concentration, aim, breath, strength and preparation is about a readiness of body and mind and spirit. It is a disciplined, but at the same time intuitive movement towards the moment of release, the archer in a sense becoming one with the arrow seeking its target. That experience was, in a very true way, like watching a mind take flight.

Barbie Kjar is a symbolic thinker; her art reflects this. In *Way of the Arrow* the dominant symbol is the arrow. Archaeologists estimate archery has been around for fifty thousand years. Along with the wheel and the taming of fire, archery has been posited as one of the three great liberating ideas of primitive man, affording greater success in hunting and consequently allowing more time for other pursuits. Australian aboriginal culture is the only culture not to have developed the bow and arrow, perhaps because the woomera fulfilled a similar function. In other words, the bow and arrow have been around, both physically and in the human psyche, for a very long time indeed.

Now wonder then that the bow and arrow immediately bring to our Western mind a plethora of associations. Cupid, Diana the Huntress, Zeus's lightning arrows. The arrow appears in the universal sign for maleness. Arrows point direction on many of our everyday signs, not to mention on our computer keyboards and screens. We might equally contemplate the geometric trajectory of an arrow's flight, the scene of flight itself or the sport of archery. In Japan, archery is considered an art rather than a sport. And in some parts of Asia the bow is seen more as an instrument of magical sound which reaches into the world of the spirits, while arrows symbolize sacred power.

A symbol arises in Barbie Kjar's work because, at an intuitive

level, then at a more emotional and intellectual level, it resonates with the artist. It is not only to do with embedded meanings but also an intrinsic aesthetic. The bow and the arrow are works of art in themselves. Bows, for example have been crafted in many forms from materials as diverse as whalebone, bamboo, and fiberglass, the bowstrings from silk, hair and hide. There is also an aesthetic associated with function – the science and beauty of flight, trajectory, and target. The arrow shares this functional aspect with the dart, which also features in *Way of the Arrow*. An elemental symbolism and aesthetic also resides in the one who releases the arrow – warrior, hunter, archer.

This combination of meaning plus aesthetic allure has drawn Barbie Kjar to the bow and arrow, as it has to symbols featured in earlier work: the tattoo, fireworks, the bull, dance, the maze, the lighthouse. *Mexican Milagros*. Naturally, an artist responds to aesthetics, but Barbie Kjar clearly finds a personal connection to her symbols, in this case perhaps seeing parallels between the archer's aspiration to the pure flight of the arrow and her constant effort towards the best realization of her own work.

Barbie Kjar is renowned for her flair in portraiture. In that regard, this exhibition reinforces her reputation. In some mysterious artist alchemy, she combines the qualities of her subject models and those of the bow and arrow, emphasizing human capacities for strength, power, spirit, flight, direction. We can't help but equate the journey of the arrow with human life journeys. How fortunate we are to witness the outcome of this alchemy.

2008 Kathryn Lomer