

Ben Wilson, Mosaic Tile, 2020



## A BEN WILSON RETROSPECTIVE: CORRESPONDENCES

Hoxton Gallery, London  
22 – 30 September, 2021

Curated by Chiara Famengo, Ben Wilson's first retrospective show, presented by the Hoxton Gallery in East London's Shoreditch, celebrates the life work of the artist who is familiar to many as "The Chewing Gum Man". Famengo met Wilson whilst reading anthropologist Tim Ingold's book, *Correspondences*, which contains a series of essays and conversations that express Ingold's acute sensitivity to his surroundings. Famengo recognised a similarity with Wilson's views of his own community and environment and how his art responded to it. This show is the outcome of that chance meeting and the title was chosen to reflect both men's outlook on life.

Selections from each of Wilson's creative periods stand proud against the stark white gallery walls. Photographs of his huge sculptures from the 1980s, which he left in woods for unsuspecting ramblers to chance upon, are displayed next to assemblages that he made from discarded objects including broken furniture. Works from debris that once littered the streets, such as the painted cigarette butts and chewing gum pictures on bricks, have a compelling quality and are complemented by the more traditional techniques of the paintings on mosaic tiles and canvases nearby.

Most striking is the montage of Wilson's thousands of street chewing gum pictures, an ongoing series which began in 2004 and for which the artist, lying on the ground in all weathers, paints on the discarded blobs of gum that blight London's pavements. By working on litter, Wilson circumvents graffiti laws and in the process transforms the uncouth into something meaningful. The work is born from the requests of strangers wanting to see their personal stories depicted and shared. The photographs provide important documentation of the ever-changing social landscape, taken against the backdrop of the different seasons, and will exist long after the chewing gum pictures themselves have succumbed to the wear and tear of city life.

The white cube of a gallery space offers the visitor the chance to examine each



Ben Wilson, Minibeast, 2019

facet of Wilson's oeuvre, but it is on the nearby streets that the exhibition really packs a punch. From Arnold Circus to the top of Rimmington Street, a trail of chewing gum pictures and tiny mosaic tiles await discovery by eagle-eyed passers-by. These joyful treasures, fixed in the crevices of the urban landscape, are small rebellious victories that reclaim their environment from suffocating corporate blandness and the bombardment of garish adverts. It is a trail of tales expressed through art by an artist who lives to make a difference to his community.

**VIVIENNE ROBERTS**

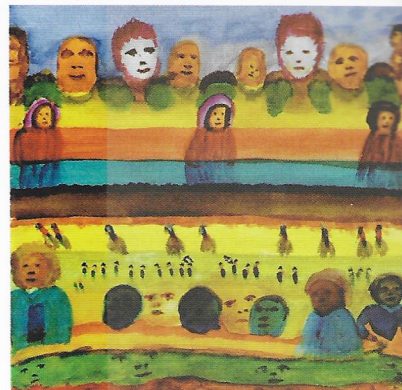
## AGATHA WOJCIECHOWSKY: SPIRITS AMONG US

Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York  
September 8 – October 23, 2021

On entering Andrew Edlin Gallery for "Agatha Wojciechowsky: Spirits Among Us", you saw a small dresser just to the left illuminated by an antique lamp, a framed photograph of a woman with an arresting gaze catching your eye. Alongside was another photo – this one of a morning glory flower, a representation of one of her spirit guides who revealed that the dead were not gone but all around us, all you had to do to see them was to allow an unseen hand to take over yours. Once Agatha Wojciechowsky let the spirits in, she drew and painted the endless faces that were unveiled, creating clouds of them in rapid lines of pencil or landscapes where visages were obscured below vivid fields of colour.

The recreation of a place where she conducted séances through these personal artefacts set the tone for the first exhibition of her art in New York since 1972. While the vibrant works on paper on the gallery's white walls allowed a close examination of the incredible details, the faces emerging from rich layers of watercolour and pastel, the context of her deep involvement with Spiritualism as a respected medium was emphasised by curator Aurélie Bernard Wortsman as essential for understanding why and how she created.

Wojciechowsky was born in 1896 in Germany, and moved to the USA in 1923 with no intention of being an artist. She had experienced visions since childhood, but



Agatha Wojciechowsky, Untitled, 1974

suddenly her hands would not stay still. A medium urged her to try automatic drawing and – with a pencil strapped to her hand with a rubber band – she waited, and the visages manifested through her on to the paper. She described looking out her window at a bare wall and witnessing "thousands of faces and heads. Nothing but faces. Nothing but heads."

Like other spiritualist artists, she did not claim the art as her own but a collaboration with another realm. Years after her death in 1986, there is now a reconsideration of artists who had these powerful artistic practices yet were mostly ignored by art institutions, and recently there have been retrospectives on **Georgiana Houghton** and **Agnes Pelton** who similarly used their work to try to access meaning beyond the physical world. (Wojciechowsky is featured in the touring "Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art") There are elements of abstraction in Wojciechowsky's work, and in her lifetime she was sometimes considered a Surrealist. Recognising the spiritual influence in her work is crucial to not just viewing her art but also to recalling that there are many artists like her, some still waiting to be remembered, who approached art from a desire to visualise the intangible.

**ALLISON C MEIER**

## BOSILJ: TALES FROM PARALLEL UNIVERSES

Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York  
June 3 – September 8, 2021

The dreamlike scenes in the paintings by Ilija Bosilj Bašičević – where winged beings soar alongside rocket ships, and birds with fantastic foliage perch on the heads of two-faced figures – are so evocative of a fully formed universe that it is surprising to learn that he came to art late in life. Born in 1895 in Šid in what is now Serbia, he spent most of his years as a hardworking farmer before he turned that tireless energy to painting. It was then that he took on the pseudonym "Bosilj" and mined the vibrant imagery of myth, Biblical stories, nature and folklore.

"Bosilj: Tales From Parallel Universes" was the first exhibition to be presented by Cavin-Morris in the gallery's new space. The compact show surrounded viewers with art