

SONJA FERLOV MANCOBA and ANOUSHA PAYNE

The Small Things/ From The Lowest Land

December 6, 2024 — January 30, 2025

*o great happiness
great happiness have they got,
who were born in the lowest country – everywhere you can see them wandering
loving
crying –
everywhere they walk,
but in their hands they carry little things from the lowest country.
– Gustaf Munch-Petersen, The Lowest Country*

Objects carry a spirit—a resonance that surpasses their physical form and outlasts the passage of time, dwelling in a realm of meaning that speaks to memory, essence, and transformation. In *The Small Things / From the Lowest Land*, the works of British artist **Anousha Payne** (b. 1991) and Danish sculptor **Sonja Ferlov Mancoba** (1911–1984) converge in a dialogue that transcends generations and geographies. Mancoba, a central figure in Danish modernism, crafted sculptures that delve into the existential and cultural conditions of human life, reflecting her utopian belief in art's power to inspire social change. Her connection to the revolutionary surrealist movement and her involvement with groups such as Linien, Høst, and Cobra underscore her fascination with non-Western cultures, particularly African imagery—a thread woven throughout her practice and echoed in the work of her contemporaries.

Payne's practice resonates with Mancoba's focus on human existence, using glazed ceramics, bronze, found objects, and the fluid gestures of watercolor, ink, and oil on canvas to explore the universal language of form. Together, their works interlace themes of spirituality, storytelling, and the shared human condition into a tapestry of meaning. These creations murmur with a quiet potency, resonating with unspoken truths and enduring as timeless echoes of our collective consciousness.

Reflecting on this shared dialogue, Anousha Payne shares her perspective on the exhibition:

**"The exhibition stems from an affinity and an ongoing conversation; the striving to depict the 'inhumanly human, humanly inhuman.' I first encountered Sonja Ferlov Mancoba's work five years ago at her retrospective at SMK in Copenhagen. I was initially drawn to what I would describe as her sculptures of 'prehistoric emojis'—a kind of universal, simplified version of a face, abstracted to the point of being unplaceable in time. These forms could belong to 2024 or 1604.*

*Her aim to create images that transcend temporal and cultural boundaries, offering a universal language of human connection, deeply aligns with my own practice. Mancoba's interest in imagery from other ages and cultures sought to convey the human body as a universal presence, embodying experiences that extend beyond the individual. This resonates with my own work, as I strive to develop shared codes and languages that connect to the essence of what it means to be human.."**

At the heart of *The Small Things / From the Lowest Land* lies the concept of the ready-made, or *objet trouvé*—found objects reimagined as integral elements of art, challenging and expanding traditional notions of artistic creation. Rooted in the Dada and Surrealist movements of the early 20th century, this approach, pioneered by artists such as Hans Arp and Kurt Schwitters, influenced Mancoba's early sculptural assemblages. Today, this legacy finds renewed expression in Payne's works, where found objects are seamlessly integrated into biomorphic sculptures imbued with personal narratives and symbolic resonance.

As Payne explains, these objects act as vessels for memories and symbols, bridging her personal experiences with broader, universal ideas. Her sculptures, blending human, animal, and mythic forms, create a space where folklore and spiritual symbolism merge with a contemporary interpretation of the *objet trouvé* tradition. These works embody André Breton's notion of *objet trouvé* as a "random encounter" with objects that resonate with one's innermost desires, forging an evocative connection to both the tangible world and the intangible realms of meaning and memory.

The practices of Anousha Payne and Sonja Ferlov Mancoba reveal striking parallels, grounded in a shared belief in art as a universal language that fosters connection and community. Both artists intertwine personal narratives with collective symbolism, delving into themes of transformation—where figures merge with animals, found objects reflect humanity, and the interconnectedness of all things comes to the forefront. Their works transcend temporal and cultural boundaries, demonstrating the capacity of visual language to communicate beyond words. As Sonja Ferlov Mancoba aptly wrote, "... *Only through each other can we live and breathe, and no-one creates alone ...*"

§

Anousha Payne (b. 1991 in Southampton, UK.) graduated from Camberwell College of Arts with a BFA in 2014. Her work has been exhibited across Europe, the UK, and the USA. Recent solo and group exhibitions include LISTE Art Fair, solo booth with Sperling, Basel (2024); A Faint Glow, a Stone and a Shark's Tooth, Sperling Gallery, Munich (2024, solo); La Chimera, Alina Foundation, Warsaw (2024); Tender Mooring, Deli Gallery, New York (2023); Material Art Fair, Deli Gallery, Mexico City (2023); Potheads, Swivel Gallery, New York (2023); Cheirometa, Sperling, Munich (2023); Stronger than Language, Romero Paprock (2022); Thick Mud, Slowly Oozing, Stellarhighway, New York (2022, solo); I Take What is Mine, Arusha Gallery, New York (2022); It is Better to Be Cats Than Be Loved, Tabula Rasa, London (2022); A Midsummer Night's Dream, Alkinois, Athens (2022); Tangled Toes Twisted Ears, Public Gallery, London (2022); and As She Laughs, collaborative show with Anna Perach, Cooke Latham, London (2021–2022), among others. The artist lives and works in London.

Sonja Ferlov Mancoba (b. 1911 in Copenhagen, Denmark, d. 1984 in Paris, France) was one of the most distinctive and influential Scandinavian sculptors of the 20th century. During the 1930s, she aligned with leading international art movements, particularly Surrealism, alongside her contemporaries. These contributions helped lay the foundation for a unique abstract art movement in Denmark, culminating in the emergence of expressionistic spontaneous abstract painting that would later define the pan-European CoBrA movement. In the post-war era, Danish art saw a strong shift toward concrete and constructivist styles, yet Mancoba's work thrived in the intersection of these contrasting tendencies. Her practice navigated the boundaries between expressionism and constructivism, establishing a deeply personal and enduring legacy that continues to resonate within the history of modern European art.

We thank the Estate Ferlov Mancoba and Mikael Andersen Gallery for facilitating this collaboration and supporting the presentation of Sonja's work in the gallery..

***The Small Things / From the Lowest Land* is on view from December 6, 2024 to January 30, 2025. Opening hours are Wednesday through Saturday from 13:00 to 18:00 hrs.**