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Retablo Catalog Essay

What does it mean for saints to reside in the commonplace? To breathe in the commonplace? To be worshipped in the commonplace? What does it mean for worship to be commonplace? What does it mean for the divine to be represented by the autodidact? The *unschooled*. What does it mean for saints to exist not only on and in exquisite surfaces and materials—lush, thinly-veined marble, the imaginary tongue of God—but to exist in the quotidian? What does it mean for the divine image, that which guides the worshipper through tribulation and trial, through famine and drought, through harvest and birth and illness and death, that which guides the worshipper through the capricious and indifferent hands of a ravenous earth, to be painted on an industrial material, an abundant material? A *cheap* material? What does it mean that the retablo reached its apex with the availability of tin in Mexico? That most common of elements. That most simple of elements. What does it mean that the divine can reside in the common, the cheap? What does it mean that the autodidact can represent the divine on cheap, abundant materials? What does it say about the proximity of the saint to the worshipper? Who is the saint, after all? Where is the saint, after all? Retablo says perhaps the divine is not above us. Says the divine is not apart from us. Says the divine is in my hand. The divine is in this scrap of metal. In this cast-away scrap of metal, in this clumsy,

calloused hand—which is any hand—the light of worship. The light of mystery.

*Behind the altar.* Yes the physical placement of the retablo, but more importantly the deep spiritual knowledge that is not in the altar or of the altar, but which is behind the altar. Retablo shows us this. The unknown. The knowing which is more than the known, more than the front of the altar or the altar itself. Behind the altar. The mystery of light and the light of mystery. Retablo. The divinely common. The commonly divine. Retablo.