

CARSON FOX
APRIL 7 TO 29, 2006



Carson Fox's works are dazzling and ebullient displays of color and form. They are unabashedly and unapologetically beautiful. Large orbs and shaped wall sculptures, thick with candy-colored flowers, birds and butterflies reflect her girlhood fascination with glittery surfaces. Lacy hair-like constructions have delicate patterns. And prints with images of fantasia inspired animals are fancifully narrative. But it is more than mere surface beauty that informs these eye-defying works. Upon closer examination her garden of delights hints at a more complicated and darker core.

Growing up in the American south, Fox was exposed to a southern gothic aesthetic and a folk art tradition. After the sudden death of both of her parents in 2001, she began to express her loss by creating works which served her well artistically and therapeutically. The repetitive and labor intensive aspect of her works provided solace. The use of common and humble materials in her created sacred sites was a personal artistic indulgence, an intentional reaction to the hegemony of high art. Aligning herself with early feminist artists who explored "women's work" she employed traditional craft materials. By considering her message as well as her chosen media, she has continued to subvert the hierarchy of established art making while engaging new postmodern dialogues.

Contradiction is the operative in these works and they provide both visual pleasure and the source for critical investigation. High and low art convene as perfect and precise technique is employed in the service of kitschy craft store materials. Imagery provides symbols rife with the potential for analysis. Flowers abound in many of these works. They offer beauty, and hold out the possibility of nature's perfection. Used in celebrations of joyous life occasions; births, weddings, and anniversaries, they also take their place in funerary rituals to mourn death. Birds and butterflies, among the gentlest and most delicate of animals, have their own fundamental life forces which compel them, when necessary, to be predatory and even poisonous to each other. Beautiful color and form can be immediately overshadowed by the inclusion of jarring words.

In Fox's lushly floral covered spheres reminiscent of craft store "kissing balls", birds and insects are entwined in a potentially perilous battle for existence. Nature's bounty has been supplanted by the artificial variety as silk flowers, birds and butterflies have been painted and glittered. In wreaths and wall sculptures, inspired by road side memorials, gaudy glitz and sentimentality is jarred by barely hidden one word imprecations. Prints, with design elements taken from Victorian paper works, present animals like the colorful wild boar in *Bully* which introduce a more aggressive expression and often symbolize life's most odious traits. In recently completed installations inspired by crochet, thin wire has been woven and appears lacy and lovely. These works reference Victorian mourning jewelry, crafted from the hair of departed loved-ones, and worn, sometimes for years, to proclaim the wearer's mourning status. In Fox's pieces, design and patterning are intricate, and shadows are cast which envelop and bespeak their own hushed tales of love and loss.

Carson Fox has described her interest in beauty, but also her mistrust of it. The artistic world she has created reminds us to question the shimmer of purely retinal attraction and to consider the contradiction between beauty's seduction and reality's plight.

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