

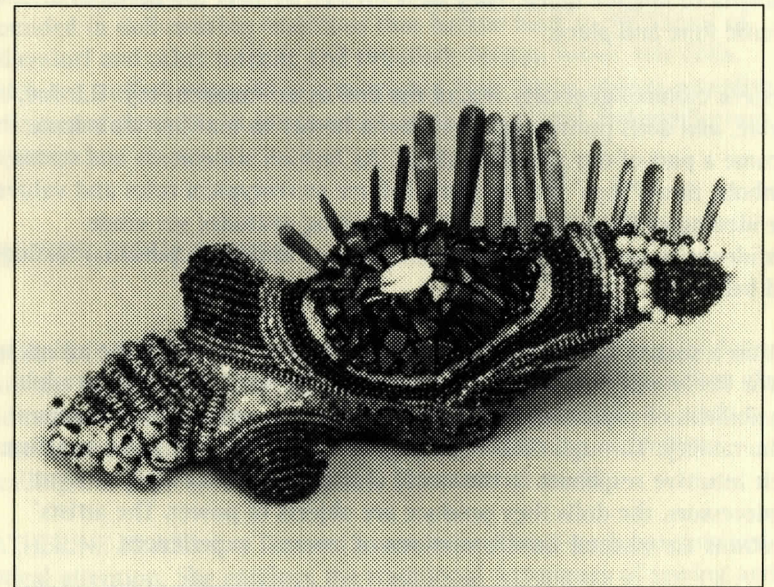
Dolls: Reclaimed

THE CRAFT GALLERY

January 9, 1997 - March 2, 1997

Laura Donefer, Catherine Heard,
Mimi Holmes, Stefanie Marshall,
Diana Thorneycroft

Exhibition Curator: Lois Schklar



TURNING DESIRE, Mimi Holmes, 8.9 cm x 17.8 cm x 7.6 cm, mixed media, 1993

Photo: Nell Ytsma

DOLLS: RECLAIMED evolved from a personal quest to understand why people make dolls today and how these objects serve our current needs. In 1994, a call for entry yielded over 40 submissions from doll makers across Canada and the United States. *Dolls: Reclaimed* focuses on five artists who examine the doll as it relates to contemporary issues of self discovery, identity, and empowerment. Laura Donefer, Catherine Heard, Mimi Holmes, Stefanie Marshall, and Diana Thorneycroft challenge us with the power of their material creations. Their works provide an opportunity to reconsider "the doll."

Dolls are charismatic, symbolic figures that have had an enigmatic influence on the social and cultural development of peoples around the world. In so called "primitive" cultures, dolls were often made from bone, clay, stone, wood or twigs; materials born from an intrinsic relationship to nature and survival. They reflected the traditions, mores, and souls of the people who made them. These figures were not classified as dolls by their makers or by ethnographic authorities. Rather, in various cultural contexts, they were regarded as healers (Japanese Hoko-San, Pennsylvania Hex dolls), talismans and fetishes (Ashanti and Ewe dolls of West Africa), teachers (Japanese paper dolls), and spiritual guides (Kachina or Mojave dolls). They were created to meet the needs of a specific time and place.

Western cultures generally regard the doll as an innocent toy. G.I. Joe, Barbie, and dolls portraying comic book heroes or matinee idols have become a part of our popular culture. As fashion statements and status symbols, these "toys" mirror and reinforce stereotypical roles and values. The ideologies they represent echo prevailing attitudes yet erode confidence in our inner sense of things. They obfuscate personal feelings and beliefs.

Within a society that feeds into and is fed by consumerism, the artists in *Dolls: Reclaimed* dare to trust their innate processes. Drawing on adult sensibilities of suppression and disclosure, these artists explore human vulnerability. Through their work they reclaim a basic impulse to affirm their intuitive responses to the world around them. Like their ancient predecessors, the dolls they produce are objects of power. The artists' creations are visceral transformations of internal experiences.

The dolls in this exhibition challenge traditional hierarchies and classifications that separate art from craft. Although the artists use the sympathetic language of craft (sewing, wrapping, beading, embroidery, glass-making), they also seduce and confront us with a myriad of

emotional and intellectual stimuli. The latter are generally considered to be in the domain of the fine arts. Donefer, Heard, Holmes, Marshall, and Thorneycroft do not make distinctions between art and craft. Their works are not easily framed by the conventions of either practice. They use what they need to express themselves. The artists' obsessive manipulation of materials draws the viewer into the intimate relationship between maker and object. Attractiveness and technical achievement are juxtaposed with an equally strong sense of repulsion. This duality acts as a catalyst for dialogue between artist and audience. By placing this work in The Craft Gallery popular notions of art and craft are placed into question.

The artists in *Dolls: Reclaimed* search for a deeper understanding of themselves, of others, and of social relationships. They call upon the viewer to do the same.

Lois Schklar
Curator

LOIS SCHKLAR is a respected fibre artist and doll-maker who has exhibited throughout Canada and the United States. Schklar's dolls are grounded in doll-making traditions that harken back to the Venus of Willendorf and other totemic and ritualistic human forms. Her dolls, which are stuffed, wrapped or constructed from found objects actualize feelings and thoughts in forms which evoke emotional and intellectual responses.

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

LAURA DONEFER is a respected glass-maker whose experimental forms push the boundaries of the medium. Her dolls are made from molten glass and combined with other natural materials like bones, grasses, and stones. Donefer's dolls seem to reference female bodies in motion recalling our physical relationship to the material world.

CATHERINE HEARD is a Toronto based artist whose work has received critical attention. She employs the traditional techniques of sewing and embroidery in her meticulously crafted constructions. Heard has researched medical and philosophical attitudes around the issues of female sexuality. In using the doll she draws attention to the alterations and corrections performed on women throughout the ages.

Catherine Heard

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CONFESSIOAL (excerpt), Catherine Heard, 63.5 cm x 53.3 cm x 10 cm,
Fabric from hand-embroidered christening gown, c 1840, appliqued over
wool, wire, wood structure., 1995

Photo: Simon Glass

Child / Woman
Innocent and full of grace
you arrive at the gates of sin
to be probed
poked
punctured
until your flesh becomes marked territory;
a map
depicting years of future degradation.

Richly embroidered skin
covers your naked soul
revealed now and known to be
corrupt.
Meticulously sewn into existence
you are named and claimed by others,
a keepsake.
Clinically restructured
with each stitch
a step
closer to the abyss.

Stretched pale and vulnerable on a cold, steel slab
you descend into your sister's house,
the dark repository
of small gestures
of nervous reflexes
of thwarted dreams
and wait.

Lois Schklar

Diana Thorneycroft

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MEMORY QUILT, Diana Thorneycroft, 91 cm x 91 cm x 5 cm, mixed media, 1996

Photo: Diana Thorneycroft

Carefully controlled contours
induce disturbing paradoxical reactions.

Hold me. Don't hold me.

Obsessively rendered surfaces
define dense regions of the
unknown.

Touch me. Don't touch me.

Truths are revealed
through elaborately encrusted facades.
Deep inside concealed compartments,
asylum to unsettling fears,
emotions
whisper secrets.

Hear me. Don't hear me.

Urgent confessions
tempered by reality
transformed by desire.

Desire

buried in seductive containers

Turning

with physical longing
yearning for release.

Desire
freed from fear
freed from the past
can be examined.

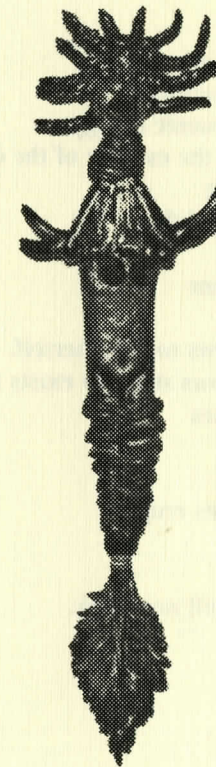
Free me. Don't free me.

Laura Donefer

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EARTH ANGEL 2, Laura Donefer, 66 cm x 25.4 cm, glass / mixed media, 1996

Imagine: Glass
fluid in a blazing glory hole
Skillfully blown moving forms
dance to silent mysterious rhythms
that cannot be rushed.
Process becomes metaphor.
Molten glass,
the "*embodiment of the earth's magic core.*"

Imagine: Bones
animal bones
found by women warriors.
Boiled, cleansed, purified
invested with dynamic energy.
Empowered with the essence of the donor
protection against
the terrors of the night.

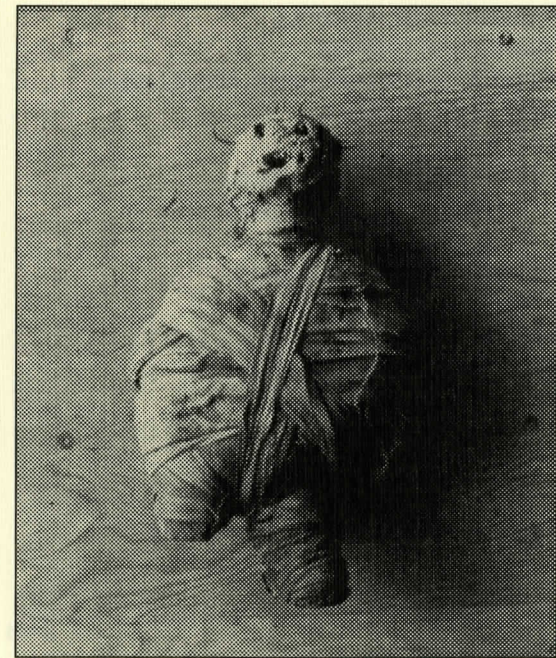
Imagine: The Crone
the wise women
the one who knows to trust herself.
The one who knows strength exists in contradictions.
Enticing the senses
through texture
through colour
powerful emotions erupt.
Exposed.
Fragile.
She knows she will not break.
She is earth
angel

Stefanie Marshall

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DOLL, Stefanie Marshall, 40.6 cm x 21.6 cm x 7.9 cm, mixed media, 1995

We are formed in the moment.
More than just appearance
the manifestation
of spirit
of person
of place
lies deeply within us.

Coded messages weave stories.
Numbers, tattoos, written strips of fabric
reside in/
visible beneath a complex surface.

Collected matter from the living and the dead
fuse colour and smell in
the act of remembering our descent;
beget power and protection:
our legacy
partially obscured
struggling to emerge.

Wrapped adobe memories.
Fragments of clothing
steeped in earth, bone, urine, blood, ashes
sticky sweet molasses
are layered with
the sound of women ancestors,
an uncertain edge of recognition.

The slow repetitive movement
of bandaging bodies
creates a ritual,
heals wounds and hides scares.
We must be
held
inhaled
heard.

We must be unravelled to be revealed.

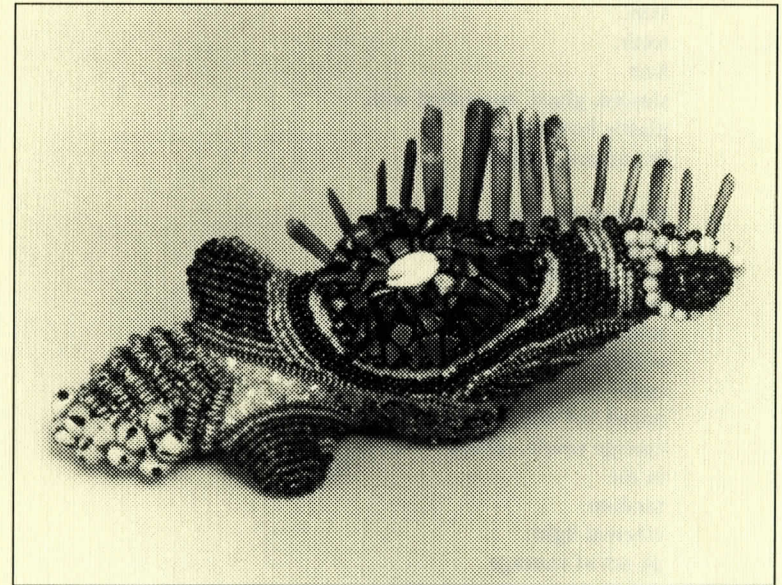
Lois Schklar

Mimi Holmes

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TURNING DESIRE, Mimi Holmes, 8.9 cm x 17.8 cm x 7.6 cm, mixed media, 1993

Photo: Nell Ytsma

Moment in time:

The self

recorded in fragments

an assemblage of assorted parts;

bodies,

limbs,

faces

embellished with fine, delineated scratches

(making marks / being marked)

reassembled

as memories.

Moment in time:

A gothic patchwork

of painful patterns

permanently etched into skin,

tattoos of recognition.

Bone,

skin,

teeth,

hair

stapled, glued, enmeshed with

plastic bodies

bound and gagged.

Moment in time:

Silent screams punctuate dreams

asleep / awake

remembered / forgotten.

Infants

altered

egos

naked but not passive

emerge whole, reborn

in the

random

ethereal light;

an act of courage.