

# CANDACE HICKS

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## *MANY MINI MURDER SCENES*



## WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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SEPT 29 - NOV 8, 2018

AUSTIN, TEXAS





Above: *Boat*, 2018, wood, acrylic, 15¼" x 22¼" x 52"

Cover Panel: *Shot (rug w/bloodstain)*, 2018, Canson Mi-Teintes Paper, 25¼" x 30½"

## MANY MINI MURDER SCENES

"Today, anyone can be an amateur sleuth. For those who watch popular forensic television programs, the meaning of luminol and the significance of trace evidence is common knowledge."<sup>1</sup>

Candace Hicks' installation provides viewers the opportunity to step into the role of investigator. The premise of *Many Mini Murder Scenes*, that Hicks read only murder mysteries for a limited time, led to an installation of exquisite miniatures and painstakingly crafted sculpture. Her cut paper wall pieces riff off pulp murder mystery book covers, and the dioramas depict crime scenes from mystery novels created at dollhouse scale. Additionally, the artist provides viewers with a handmade book complete with a bookmark that includes 3D glasses and a UV light which allows them to discern hidden text in the book and in the dioramas. Through the narrative printed in the books, Hicks describes details about the murder mysteries she has read and the repetitions she has found despite the books having been chosen at random. She writes, "It is often said that there are no coincidences in mystery novels. Every individual fact snaps into place in an overarching construction with no extraneous information left dangling outside." Yet Hicks notices many such coincidences between these novels and in many other aspects of her life; her questions about their presence and meaning are explored in her work.

The attention to detail in the dioramas creates an immersive experience, plunging viewers into the mysteries and the coincidences that Hicks points to in the guidebook and that are made manifest in miniature repetitions. Close examination reveals that two dioramas both include tiny Russian

nesting dolls, added because Hicks read two books in a row that mentioned them. Baseball bats, stereotypical murder weapons, recur in two scenes, albeit three inches in length. Hicks' dioramas contain layers of clues, many of which point to tropes of the murder mystery genre.

While murder mystery novels inform the exhibition, the dioramic form is inspired by the work of Frances Glessner Lee who created 20 intricately detailed true crime scene dioramas in the 1940s called *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*. Although Lee was born into a wealthy family in 1878, she was denied a college education by her family on the basis of her gender. However, despite her lack of formal training, she played an important role in developing the science of forensics in the US. So successful were her dioramas in training homicide investigators, they remain in use almost 80 years later. Lee's consideration of detail was so extreme she "knit stockings with needles the size of ordinary straight pins, a task so arduous she could only complete a few rows at a time." Hicks notes that Lee's work "prompted me to revisit dioramas as a form through which I could explore a stereotypically feminine practice to inspect the ways that female death permeates genre fiction."

Hicks was actually introduced to Lee's dioramas through the work of Corinne May Botz who photographed the *Nutshell Studies* and published her images in 2004. Botz's photography evokes an atmosphere of mystery by emphasizing shadows and dark corners. In the same way that Hicks traces the connections between the books she reads, her artwork reaches back to Botz's experience of the *Nutshell Studies* and plays with the original purpose of the nutshells. Rather than training forensic detectives, Hicks' dioramas serve as literary criticism.



*Cabin*, 2018, wood, acrylic, paper, polymer clay, fabric, brass findings, 13" x 13½" x 57¾",

In turn, Hicks omits something Lee depicted in gruesome detail: the dead body.

Instead Hicks leaves a bicycle on its side at the bottom of a ravine, an empty row boat floating on water, or a shovel standing in a hole in the sand. Each scene seems recently vacated. In *Bachelor Pad*, Hicks has constructed a kitchen, dining area, and living room complete with an office desk. The viewer must use a black light in order to read hidden text on the walls: *No sign of a struggle except the TV was found face down and a man beaten to death on the couch*. In the gallery, visitors work singly or in groups to puzzle over the clues Hicks has left. Blue white lights flash like spotlights throughout the dim gallery.

In *Townhouse*, a viewer might be drawn to the four-story, freestanding structure because of nostalgia for dollhouses. Or perhaps they ponder the knocked over vase of white roses—water pools on the tabletop and floor. Another viewer might be charmed by the dot paintings on either side of the third story sitting room (a sly reference to the work of art star, Damien Hirst). Still another viewer might question the significance of the grey curtains billowing out of the house as if the windows of the fourth floor space (one that the viewer

cannot see) have just been thrown open. The absence of the human body gives viewers space for the powerful element of their imagination. As one viewer's attention is pulled to the gemstone necklace in *Cabin* (that looks similar to the necklace in *Smothered* which appears to be made of the same gemstones mixed into the sand of *Tent*), another viewer may trace the presence of white flowers from *Forgotten* to *Townhouse* to *Cucumber Patch*. Hicks provides clues, coincidences, and allusions but also provides space for the viewer to make their own connections.

Melanie McGrath writes that women, "drink in dread with our mother's milk," alluding to women's consumption of murder mysteries. She continues, "What better metaphor for the feeling of annihilation which follows the common female experience of being valued primarily as the sum of one's body parts than a murdered woman on a slab?"<sup>2</sup> Throughout the dioramas, the hidden texts call attention to the casual misogyny in the mystery novel genre. Though men are much more likely to die violently than women, women are the preferred victim in novels,

television, and movies. The absence of bodies in the dioramas leaves room for the viewer's own biases, desires, and voyeurism. The scenes she depicts ask us to imagine what we may but don't absolve us of our visions.

In the wall pieces, Hicks does render the human body; the paper sculpted skeletal remains and fragments of the body are crisp, neat, and stilted. In *Strangled*, the lower half of a female victim in green lace underwear, nearly hidden by the ferns growing around it, unsettles by its artificiality. Hicks diffuses the menace of the illustration by using paper to shape the bodily forms. The precise folds increase the mental separation between real skin and the object—the unmarred paper contrasts with the idea that a strangled body left in a ditch or on the side of the road would be bruised and torn. Her renderings of murder victims with their smooth, unmarred surfaces can be read as coolly detached, but the labor evident in their construction lends an elegiac tone.

Every victim is contrasted with living flora and fauna that include a variety of flowers, plants, insects, and animals, a sharp contrast to the cold and pale, though sanitized, dead



*Townhouse*, 2018, wood, acrylic, paper, polymer clay, fabric, 19" x 26¼" x 69"

flesh. In *Stabbed*, we see only the crown of the victim's head, slumped over a table near a vase of flowers that fills the composition. *Beaten*, dominated by shrubbery blooming with large red flowers, displays the torso of a woman lying beneath. The only trace of the victim in *Shot* is the blood that stains a rug patterned with predators and prey. The picnic beach scene of *Embolism* includes a single ant and a crab, while we see only the bottom of the victim's high heel and abandoned ham sandwich.

Under the surface of her sculptures and with the aid of the artist-crafted gallery guide that provides an insight into each scene, one uncovers layer after layer of the violence our society repackages as entertainment. Though Hicks keeps heavy didacticism from the presentation of her work, the coyness in which she presents a murder scene underlines their ubiquity in our lives. Women are at once the victims and consumers of their own objectification.

Thao Votang is a writer based in Austin. She co-edited *Conflict of Interest* and co-founded Tiny Park.

1. Botz, Corinne May. *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, (New York, The Monacelli Press Inc., 2004), 31.

2. McGrath, Melanie. "Women's appetite for explicit crime fiction is no mystery." *The Guardian*. 30 June 2014.



*Fountain*, 2018, found statuette, ceramic, static grass, 24¼" x 24¼" x 55½"



# Candace Hicks

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *Many Mini Murder Scenes, Women & Their Work*, Austin, Texas
- 2017 *Egress*, Pump Project, Austin, Texas
- 2016 *The Locked Room*, Living Arts, Tulsa, Oklahoma  
*The Perpetual Motion Machine*, Fort Worth Community Art Center, Fort Worth, Texas  
*Napoleon's Wallpaper*, Louise Hopkins Underwood Center for the Arts, Lubbock, Texas  
*Rooms by the Sea*, Proxy Gallery, Culver City, California  
*Read Me*, Tarrant County College, Arlington, Texas  
*Napoleon's Wallpaper*, Delta State University, Cleveland, Mississippi
- 2015 *Read Me*, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, Texas  
*Napoleon's Wallpaper*, Box 13 Gallery, Houston, Texas  
*Candace Hicks*, Abecedarian Gallery, Denver, Colorado
- 2014 *Super String Theory*, Post-Studio Projects, Houston, Texas
- 2013 *Fabrications*, Featured Artist Project, Center for Book Arts, New York, New York  
*String Theory*, 500X, Dallas, Texas
- 2012 *Compositions*, Lawndale Art Center, Project Space, Houston, Texas
- 2010 *The Impossibility of Doing Nothing*, The Reading Room, Dallas, Texas  
*The Impossibility of Doing Nothing*, North Central College, Naperville, Illinois
- 2009 *Common Threads*, North Harris College, Houston, Texas  
*Candace Hicks: Recent Works*, Tarrant County College Southeast Library Exhibition, Janet Key Reference Library, Arlington, Texas  
*MFA Thesis Exhibition*, Moudy Gallery, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas
- 2007 *Candace Hicks*, Maria Elena Kravetz Gallery, Cordoba, Argentina

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *University of North Texas Libraries' Biennial Artist Book Competition*, Willis Library, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas  
*Boundless: an exhibition of experimental artist-made books*, Central Features Contemporary Art, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- 2016 *Beyond Bindings: The Book as Art*, Galveston Art Center, Galveston, Texas  
*I AM AN IMPORTANT GIANT*, Antenna Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana  
*Ink and Paper: A Collaborative Exhibition of Book Arts and Letterpress Prints*, Main Street Arts, Clifton Springs, New York  
*Household*, Clyde H. Wells Fine Art Center Gallery, Tarleton State University, Stephenville, Texas  
*Little Boxes*, Georgetown Art Center, Georgetown, Texas

- 2015 *A Thousand Invisible Threads | Mapping the Rhizome*, The Herndon Gallery, Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio  
*/mit da deta/: Source Materials Visualized*, Center for Book Arts, New York, New York  
*Transmissions*, Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, Texas  
*Every Day is Ordinary*, Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, Texas  
*What Ought To Be: Envisioning the Impossible*, Box 13, Houston, Texas  
*Personal Histories*, Redland Museum, Queensland, Australia  
*Approximate Exactitude: The Diagram and the Book*, A Southern Graphics Conference International 2015 Conference Exhibition, Emporium Art Center, Knoxville, Tennessee  
*Error: 7th International Triennial Vilnius 2015*, Vilnius, Lithuania
- 2014 *Diamond Leaves: Printing in Progress*, The Museum of Printing History, Houston, Texas  
*Gallery Director Invitational*, Abecedarian Gallery, Denver, Colorado  
*Silence Unbound: The Artist's Lexicon in the Making*, Center for Book Arts, New York, New York
- 2013 *Under the Wings of Artemis: Scholars, Artists and the Places Between*, Special Collections at the University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington  
*Narrative Threads*, Abecedarian Gallery, Denver, Colorado  
*Press and Release 2013*, Phoenix Brighton Gallery, East Sussex, United Kingdom  
*To Preserve and Protect*, Booklyn, Brooklyn, New York
- 2012 *Multiple, Limited, Unique: Selections from the Permanent Collection of the Center for Book Arts*, Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania  
*Tell Me How You Really Feel: Graphic Novels, Journals, and Travelogues*, Center for Book Arts, New York, New York  
*Diamond Leaves*, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China  
*Bound by Silence*, SUNY Cortland, Cortland, New York

## AWARDS AND GRANTS

- 2017 Stephen F. Austin Foundation Award for Research
- 2016 Ise New York Cultural Foundation Grant
- 2015 Research/Creative Activity Grant, Stephen F. Austin State University
- 2009 Kimbrough Grant, Dallas Museum of Art
- Gallery Representation: Booklyn, Brooklyn, New York



*Cervical Fracture*, 2018, Canson Mi-Teintes Paper, 25¼" x 66½"

## Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 40th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,904 artists in 317 visual art exhibitions, 128 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 30 literary readings and spoken word performances, and 652 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, The New York Times, ArtForum, and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Women & Their Work reaches over 700 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



women & their work

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