

MEG LANGHORNE

P a P a D o



W O M E N & T H E I R W O R K

OCTOBER 5 - NOVEMBER 11, 2000

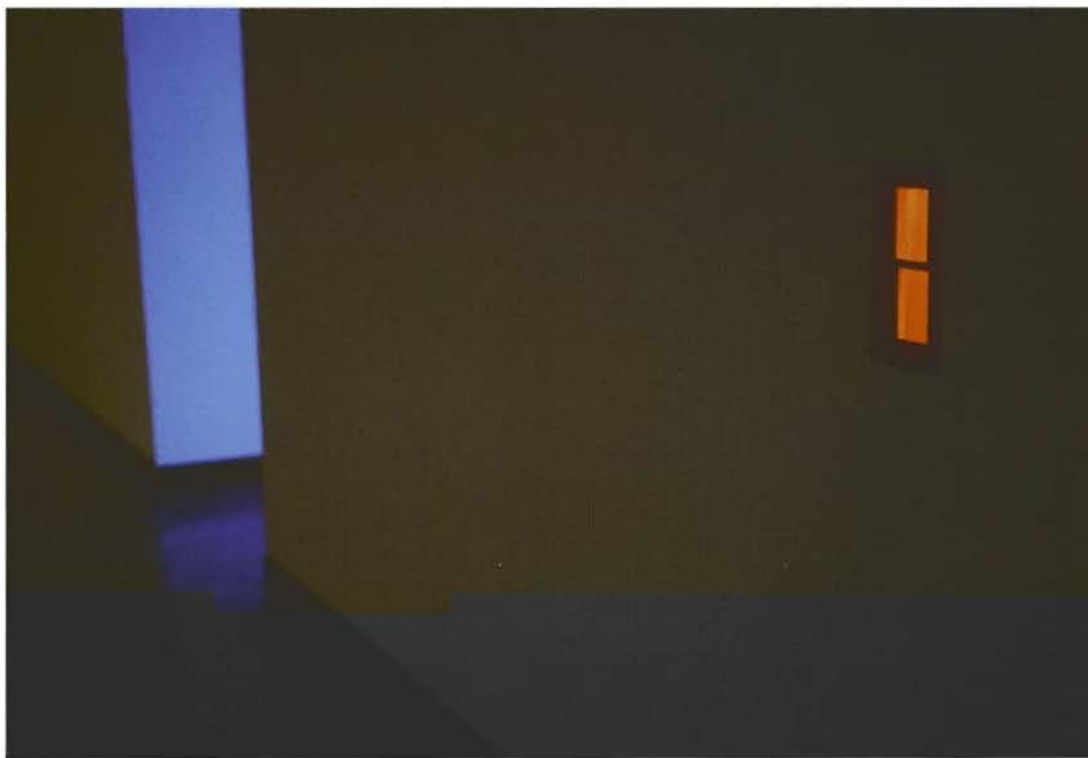
AUSTIN, TEXAS

MEG LANGHORNE'S GARDEN PARTY

For her installation of sculpture at *Women & Their Work*, Meg Langhorne has created a garden party. Although the four works have quite different personalities, they form an amiable ensemble. Created from unusual art materials using diverse strategies, they nonetheless speak eloquently to each other, and the mix of languages makes for an engaging conversation.

Langhorne has a history of spinning quiet mysteries when she gathers her sculptures. Within her installations, the parts never seem to fit too perfectly together. One senses only a truce of togetherness, a co-existence *in spite of* their differences. This impression comes from the way unexpected methods and media congregate within a single exhibition, and from Langhorne's attraction to the most unassuming, inexpressive, mute, muffled, even "dumb" materials. Cement, soap, dried moss, wax, rubber, and felt are all matter that conceal emotional expression. There's rarely bright color, seldom glossy surfaces, and the shapes or forms she uses tend to be familiar, not clever or invented, as if the artist doesn't necessarily want to draw too much attention to them.

For this exhibition, Langhorne darkens the room, selects works that seem so dissimilar that one might mistake them for a group show, and offers only cryptic titles as clues to content. The artist has titled this show *Pa Pa Do*. "I think of the name *Pa Pa Do* as the beginning of a question. I like the playful, musical sound of it," she states. The sparseness and understated simplicity of this project



Second Story, (Installation view) 2000.
Doll house window, electric light, rose oil, 5 1/2" x 3 1/4".

certainly leads the visitor to questions—not answers. While the works are diverse and the relationship between them is left largely unexplained by the brief artist statement, there is nonetheless an uncanny energy, an interconnectedness at work in the room. The magic of Langhorne's installation happens not as we consider each work, but as we stand and look and think in the *gaps between* the works. In this territory she's set up subtle implications, like traps for our thoughts and deeper feelings. We might begin by asking ourselves, "why?" but our skepticism dissipates, leading us to ask ourselves, "why not?" From there, we must let our imaginations tumble, Alice-like, to a liberating sort of freedom of association.

But you can't get to this state without studying the sculptures. I first came into the gallery from the bright sunlight, and

it took a few seconds for my eyes to adjust to the darkened space. But other senses were immediately stimulated—a faint scent of roses and the ambient sound of frogs.⁽¹⁾ My eyes were soon drawn to *Glade*, a low-lying, forest green Plexiglas platform several inches off the floor, which supported an array of flower blossoms cast in soap. The artist explained that the work was inspired by a pond she had created a few years ago in her garden, and by some soap flowers she had created for a tabletop sculpture in a San Antonio exhibition earlier this year. By placing it on the ground, she brings it closer to the actual floating gardens to which it refers (I think of lotus ponds in Asia or Monet's gardens in Giverny). But the plastic plinth is more minimal, leading us back as far as Donald Judd's 1960s Plexiglas boxes placed directly onto the floor, or as near as Hills Snyder, the artist's husband, who uses this material

almost exclusively in his installations. For Langhorne, the shiny, transparent platform becomes a container for reflected green light, a bright visual foil for the dry and chalky floating forms. A glade is an open space surrounded by woods, and Langhorne captures the special nature of such oases. But Glade is also the name of a popular home air freshener with artificial nature scents; and with her sculpture's plastic platform and soaps, she also allows us this reference to commercial products which amplify obsessions with sanitary cleanliness.

If *Glade* is placed to be seen first from the entrance to the exhibition, *Pa Pa Do* is meant to quietly dominate the room, primarily by sheer scale, but also by its elegant aloofness. Fabricated at the maximum scale possible for this room, the giant bear might have been made more ferocious, but it is modeled after the bear-shaped plastic jars that honey is sold in. Much taller than any human and lit obliquely with one spot light, it is given a mysterious mood, but any sense of danger is defused by the soft and fuzzy texture of sphagnum moss, which suggests the fur of a teddy bear. Actually, the dry planting material has been stuffed into a chickenwire armature, barely visible as sparkles of metal. Langhorne has used the same type of moss in an earlier installation, *Invitation*, at Sala Diaz in San Antonio. For that work, she covered a long dining table with the moss, anchored it with chicken wire, and then suspended two soap apples from the ceiling at each end. The strategies for both of these works suggest an interest in the earth's immense productive potential for supporting growth—and the way humans harness it, sometimes squelching fertile promise. Langhorne adds the references to honey and apples in these installations;

such seductive elements bring the tension of a decidedly human drive: desire.

Just barely out of reach from the mossy bear at *Women & Their Work* is the gooey offering that we know he is drawn to. Langhorne appropriated the classic cement birdbath from her own garden and brought it to the gallery, filling it with honey that glints golden. That viscous nectar is also a trap, a lure, not only for any bear (what about Winnie the Pooh?), but for the light, and for our own longing for a little more sweetness in the world. (One wonders how many gallery visitors have succumbed to the temptation to dip in a finger for a taste.) Lifted aloft in a chalice-like bowl, the precious commodity seems at first to be presented in an unprecedented quantity, until we consider the scale of the bear it might be meant to satisfy (or from the mammoth bottle out of which it was poured).

The fourth element in the exhibition is less a presence than an absence, a hand-sized hole in the wall that has been filled with a window. A few feet off the floor, perhaps at the height of a three-year old child, the miniature fixture from a doll house has been added, reminding us of the liberating, playful, toy-like aspects built into the artist's other works, as well as her shifting of scale relations and the addition of another layer of fantasy. But beyond the world of child's play, by adding this window Langhorne taps into the late twentieth century practice of sculptural intervention into the gallery space. Bruce Nauman, Michael Asher, Jackie Windsor, and Anish Kapoor, among others, have cut into or otherwise transformed the walls of the white cube. Langhorne has lit the wall from within, so when we bend over or kneel to look through her window, we see into the

structure of the space. There is little to see there but studs and plywood: an underwhelming, nondescript view. Instead, perhaps we are intended to stop looking *at* the window or *through* it from outside, but rather imagine shrinking enough to slip within the walls, into this protected observatory to look *out from* the aperture. In discussing this element, the artist links it to her childhood memories of looking out onto the world from her upstairs bedroom window, a privileged view of the world.

Langhorne's installation celebrates the sensual and cerebral wonders of the world around us; *Pa Pa Do* is a homophone for Papa Dieux, French for "God," an indication of the spiritual inclination of the work. Langhorne explains, "It is about my love of the natural world, that I feel accountable for how I am in it and that I want to do what I can to make it a gentler place." By inviting us into the stimulating garden party that this sculptural ensemble forms, Meg Langhorne achieves her goal of building a tribute worthy of nature's quietly mysterious splendors.

Dana Friis-Hansen
Chief Curator of the
Austin Museum of Art
October 2000

1 Rose oil is added weekly to the tiny window sill, and the sounds of bullfrogs and crickets are played on tape on a twelve-minute time cycle.



Pa Pa Do, (Installation view) 2000.

MEG LANGHORNE

Born Bartlesville, Oklahoma
Lives in Helotes, Texas

EDUCATION

- 1989 M.F.A., University of North Texas, Denton, Texas
- 1975 B.F.A., Texas Christian University,
Ft. Worth, Texas

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2000 **Pa Pa Do**, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
A Very Happy Unbirthday, Periodic Table,
San Antonio, TX
- 1999 Sala Diaz, San Antonio, TX
The Project Room, San Antonio, TX
- 1998 The Valve Room, Finesilver Gallery,
San Antonio, TX
- 1994 Texas Lutheran College, Seguin, TX
- 1992 Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
- 1991 Houston Art League, Houston, TX

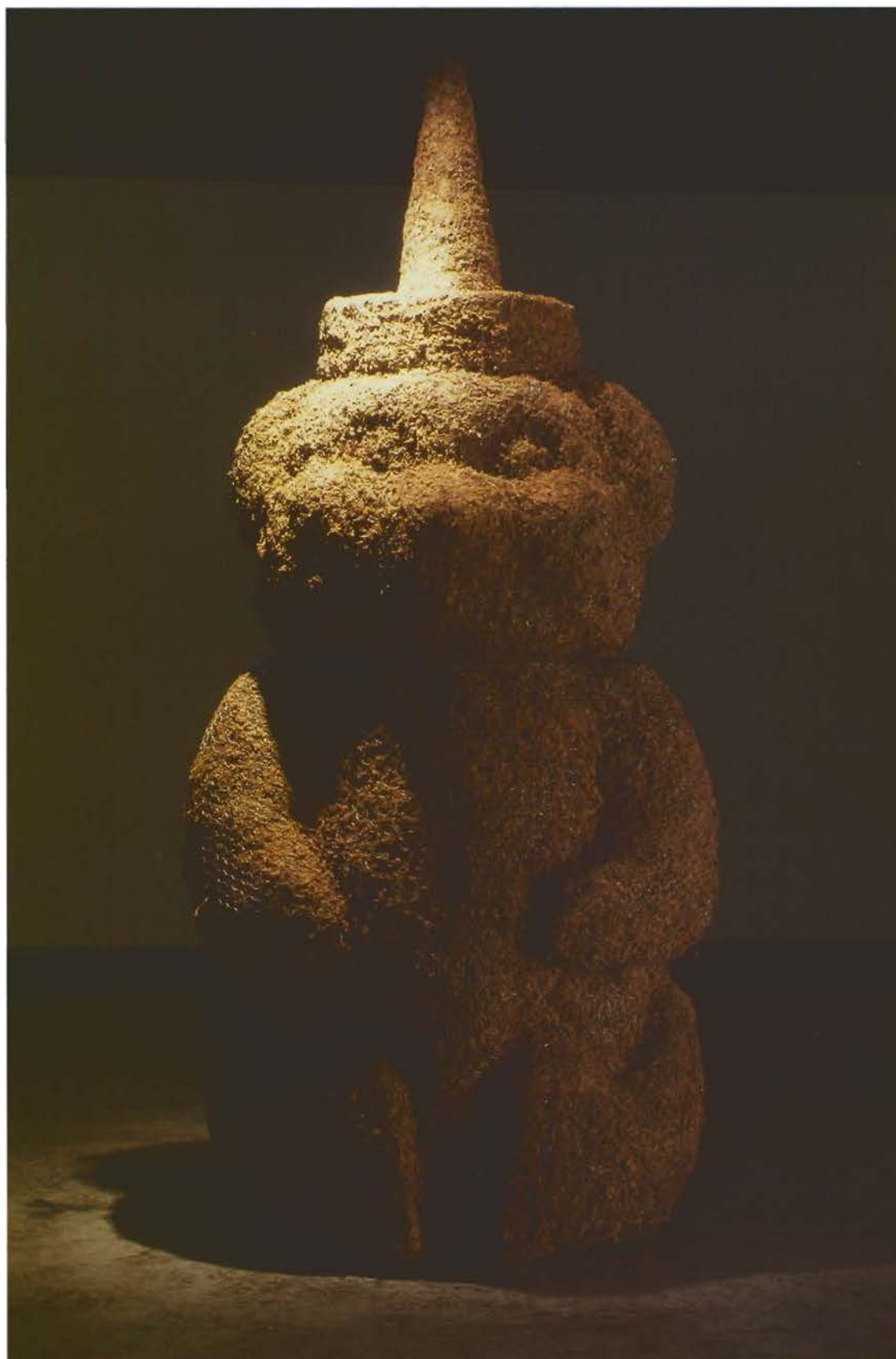
SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2000 **Infinito Botanica**, Simon Says, N.Y.
San Antonio Spring Show, **A Flower**
Invitational, Finesilver Gallery,
San Antonio, TX
Embracing Grandeur: Collective
Resurrection, Seven Oaks Resort,
San Antonio, TX
Art Chicago 2000, Navy Pier, Chicago, IL.

- 1999 **Blurring the Line**, UTSA Satellite Space,
San Antonio, TX
- 1997 **Texas Art Celebration**, Cullen Center,
Houston, TX
- 1996 **Double Trouble: Mirrors/Pairs/Twins/Lovers**,
Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, TX
- 1995 **Magic and Mystery**, Laguna Gloria Art
Museum, Austin, TX
- 1994 **Accumulated Evidence**, San Antonio College,
San Antonio, TX
Exquisite Corpse, McKinney Avenue
Contemporary, Dallas, TX
- 1993 **Four**, Lubbock Fine Arts Center, Lubbock, TX
Blue Star Eight, Blue Star Art Space,
San Antonio, TX
Texas Biennial, Dallas, TX
- 1991 **Ship Shapes**, Galveston Arts Center,
Galveston, TX
Healing Hands, Lubbock Fine Arts Center,
Lubbock, TX; D-Art, Dallas, TX
- 1990 **Meg Langhorne and Hills Snyder: Crossing**
Niches with Knacks, Ida Green Gallery,
Austin College, Sherman, TX
Generic Obscure, 201 East First, Austin, TX
Precious and Grace, The Pilot Hole,
San Antonio, TX
Counter Signals, Hickory Street Annex,
Dallas, TX

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2000, pp. 16-18.
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News, July 14, 1996.
- Oleson, Jill. "Tangibly intangible," *Austin American-*
Statesman, January 18, 1992, p. 12, Time Out section.
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January 16, 1992, p. 24.



Cover Panel: *Glade*, (detail) 2000. Plexiglass, soap, 5" x 43" x 62".
This Panel: *Pa Pa Do*, 2000. Sphagnum moss, chicken wire, steel 9 1/2' x 3 1/2' x 3 1/2'.
Back Panel: *Base*, 2000. Concrete, honey, 33" x 25" diameter.
All Photographs by Ansen Seal.



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Now celebrating its 22nd anniversary, Women & Their Work presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, 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 1595 artists in 197 visual art exhibitions, 100 music, dance, and theater events, 19 literary readings, 12 film festivals, and 159 workshops in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *ArtForum* and 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 5,000 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.



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