

Ann Wood

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*Violent Delights*



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WOMEN & THEIR WORK

October 4 - November 17, 2012

Austin, Texas



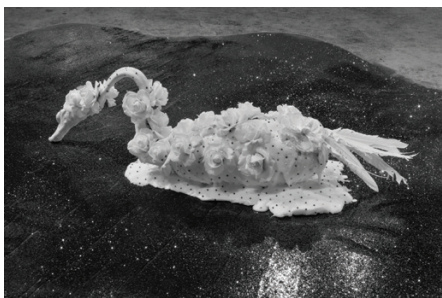
*The Kill.* Embroidery Thread, Puffy Paint, Scrapbook Paper, Poured Plastic, Wallpaper, Collage, Canvas, 84 x 83 x 5 inches, 2012.

Cover Panel: *Cluster, Detail.* Taxidermy Mannequins, Fake Flowers, Foam, Pushpins, Thread, Poured Plastic, Glitter, 123 x 144 x 204 inches, 2012.

**Ann Wood**  
*Violently Delightful*

Encountering Ann Wood's work is akin to being enveloped by a modern-day Grimm's Fairy Tale: the work seduces you with its loveliness and charm, and then just like Hansel and Gretel, you find yourself under its saccharine spell and you realize too late that things might be just a bit more ominous than at first glance. The power of Wood's work hinges on the tension created by combining opposition and contradiction into a single, mutually exclusive set. A relatively short list of disparate descriptors would include: love and hate; life and death; nature and artifice; attraction and repulsion; whimsy and apprehension; fine art and craft; male and female; desire and obsession; ridicule and reverence. As evidenced by the installation's title *Violent Delights*, Wood's work straddles the metaphorically thin line that separates these notions.

Like Wood's previous installations, the entire tableau is composed of both wall-dependant works and three-dimensional sculptures, and is thoroughly entrenched in the Rococo tradition with its emphasis on decoration and extravagant use of ornament. Wood's work provides no place for the viewer's eyes to rest. There is a distinct sense of horror vacui wherein the work's entire surface is decoratively adorned. In the four wall-mounted



*Cluster, Detail.* Taxidermy Mannequins, Fake Flowers, Foam, Pushpins, Thread, Poured Plastic, Glitter, 123 x 144 x 204 inches, 2012.

works, the central figures are surrounded by or placed upon layered strata built of scraps of printed-paper, cutout stencils, appliqués, puffy paint, and poured plastic. While these may be considered paintings in the conventional sense that they are two-dimensional framed canvases, they are also tapestries in that subjects have been embroidered rather than drawn or painted. This distinctly feminine tradition of hand embellishing with thread alludes to both aspects of what has often been considered "women's work" and/or craft. The obsessive compulsiveness of the work recalls the early installations of American artist Liza Lou, who used the craft material of glass seed beads to encrust an entire room (*Kitchen* (1991–96)) in sparkling splendor, a dazzling homage to domesticity. While Wood's nod to feminism doesn't go quite as far, one should note that the female character in all of her work is typically denoted by a flower placed behind the ear (a feature often identifying the artist herself).

Wood credits her childhood spent amidst the rich outdoors of California as the basis for her adult obsession with nature and the way it is depicted in art, especially the traditions of Dutch, Flemish and Spanish still life paintings of the 17th and 18th Centuries. Decorative portrayals of baskets of fruit or vases of flowers eventually led to compositions featuring the spoils of the hunt, flayed carcasses waiting further butchering, or lavish feasts of glistening meats. These paintings served as both literal illustrations of the luxuries afforded the upper class while also being thinly veiled reminders of the consequences of gluttony. Wood equates the genre with darkness and masculinity and says that her work is an attempt to make something that is initially very feminine in appearance, while continuing to explore morose subjects such as death and decay. In *Still Life with Love Birds*, a fattened sow hangs upside down, suspended by a polka-dotted bow (another



*Still Life With Love Birds.* Embroidery Thread, Puffy Paint, Scrapbook Paper, Poured Plastic, Wallpaper, Canvas, 82 x 52 x 5 inches, 2012.

nod to the still life tradition where animals were often tacked to a wall), which simultaneously serves as a fashion accessory. Glittered flies buzz about and a pair of black birds talk of love (suggested by the tiny hearts around them), seemingly oblivious to the victim hovering above. These birds, symbols of menace and omens of a darker presence, could also be harbingers of death, and are frequent characters in Wood's work.

The birds, as well as the bow, reappear in *Til Death*, wherein two wild dogs are tethered together in a show of teeth-barring mutual aggression, prepared to fight until death. Their ferocity is offset by the sweet, meadowy green background, pink garland and pastel blossoms. Tacked on the wall in the artist's studio adjacent to the work, a scrap of paper offered a biblical verse warning of the danger of malicious thoughts or words that may be conveyed by a bird whispering in your ear. In this case, whatever account was proffered has led to the bloody demise of one bird, while the tattletale continues to provoke with an inflammatory rumor secret-

ly whispered into the female dog's ear. We find a similar canine couple in *The Kill* who have presumably worked together to take down their prey rather than turning on one another. Blood oozes from the ill-fated elk, but all is well in the world where the grass is green, food is abundant, and butterflies soar. The golden sky conjures Byzantine religious icons and is yet another foil to captivate the viewer with splendor only to repel with gore and guts. In Ann Wood's world, the grotesque is tempered with glitter; the hideous is festooned in flowers.

In the most overtly paradoxical piece in the exhibition, two young deer lay with their heads in a pool of blood, their bodies twisted in agony, having met an unspecified end. Like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the doomed cervine lovers of *Triumph* are immortalized at the exact moment wherein passion has proven to be deadly. The proof of their love—tiny red glittered hearts—is congealed in the ooze of blood. Wood plays upon the idea of deer as the huntsman's trophy and of love being the ultimate reward. The title of the exhibition itself alludes to a verse from *Romeo and Juliet*, "These violent delights have violent ends and in their triumph die, like fire and powder, which as they kiss consume." Here Romeo is warned that love, like fireworks, leaves nothing behind once the ecstasies have faded. While *Triumph* illustrates this notion of living fast and dying young, the viewer is left with a powerful memory of love's lost labor.

The pinnacle in Wood's investigation of the natural world is the large, yellow sculpture in the center of the gallery. As much wedding cake as equestrian monument, *Cluster* is the three-dimensional embodiment of the characters and themes of Wood's paintings—on a grandiose scale. Using bare taxidermy forms, Wood cloaks her surreally feminine version of nature in synthetic flowers, poured plastic and foam,



*Cluster, Detail.* Taxidermy Mannequins, Fake Flowers, Foam, Pushpins, Thread, Poured Plastic, Glitter, 123 x 144 x 204 inches, 2012.

and candy colored quilter's pins. Unlike the work of Houston-based artist Elaine Bradford, who uses crochet to create new creatures from mounted animals (like Long-neck, a monster-sized python-cum-antelope wearing a striped cardigan sweater), Wood's animals retain their essential nature as horses, or coyotes, or stags. However, they now look like they've been frosted in lemon butter cream icing and decorated with fondant roses and sugar sprinkles.

Like the proverbial "deer caught in the headlights," the moment is frozen in time.



*Triumph.* Embroidery Thread, Puffy Paint, Scrapbook Paper, Poured Plastic, Wallpaper, Canvas, 126 x 50 x 5 inches, 2012.

Two coyotes have momentarily ceased their feast to examine the intruding viewer, giving the large stag just the moment needed to craft an escape. The mare (note the roses behind the ear) lies on the ground, having already been killed by her predator, her essential fluids pooling beneath her. Oblivious to the adjacent turmoil, a graceful swan cranes its neck as it glides over a pond of glittered cerulean water. No military dignitary sits proudly astride the confectionary stud; no lost German children shove fistfuls of cake into their mouths. Yet an underlying sense of menace is clearly there.

Wood's wonderfully paradoxical journey introduces the viewer to an ominous yet saccharine reality where death smells like a bakery and carrion sparkles like diamonds. Her contemporary take on death and decay has a decidedly feminine sensibility, yet does not back away from the violent delights or their inevitable violent ends. If a cake melts in the forest, does anyone hear it?

Alex Irvine is the former Executive Director of the Galveston Arts Center.

<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 10:20, "Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird in the sky may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say," *Holy Bible*, New International Version ©1973

<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

<sup>3</sup> This work was included in Bradford's exhibition *Freaks of Nurture*, held at Women & Their Work, Austin, February 24–March 31, 2007.

# Ann Wood

## Selected Exhibitions

- 2012 Women & Their Work, *Violent Delights*, solo exhibition, Austin, TX  
Three Walls, *Still. Life.*, solo exhibition, San Antonio, TX  
Participating venue Contemporary Arts Month  
Art League, *Flying Solo: Six Emerging (Unrepresented) Artists* (scheduled), Houston, TX
- 2011 Galveston Arts Center, *Garnish*, solo exhibition, Galveston, TX. Curator: Clint Willour  
Participating venue in the 2011 Texas Biennial  
San Jacinto College Black Box Studio Theatre, *Hush*, solo exhibition, Houston, TX  
Anya Tish Gallery, *Guns and Roses: Shannon Cannings and Ann Wood* (two person), Houston, TX
- 2010 Lawndale Art Center, *Spoiler*, solo exhibition, Houston, TX  
Anya Tish Gallery, *Creature Comforts*, Houston, TX
- 2007 *Flycatcher*, solo exhibition  
University Art Gallery, University of Massachusetts, *Science, Religion, Art: Greater New Bedford Artists Responding to Johan Jacob Scheuchzer, "PHYSICA SACRA," 1731-35*, Dartmouth, MA, Curator: Dr. Lasse Antonsen
- 2005 Women & Their Work, *A Stitch in Time*, Austin, TX  
Curator: Joan Davidow  
Hera Gallery, *Cornucopia: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Still Life*, Wakefield, RI
- 2004 San Antonio College Visual Art Center Gallery, *Into the Arena: Three Select New American Talent Artists*, San Antonio, TX  
The Dallas Center for Contemporary Arts, *Piece Work: Fiber and Multiples*, Dallas Texas. Curator: Joan Davidow
- 2002 Arthouse, *New American Talent: The Seventeenth Exhibition*, Austin, TX (catalog)
- 2000 UTSA Art Gallery, *Neo Rococo*, San Antonio, TX  
Curator: Dr. Frances Colpitt
- 1999 The Arkansas Art Center, *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Delta Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture*, Little Rock, AR (catalog)  
Craighead-Green Gallery, *New Texas Talent V*, Dallas, TX

## Education

- 1999 MFA University of Texas at San Antonio  
2003 BFA California State University, Chico

## Selected Reviews

- 2011 Britt, Douglas. **Guns and Roses.** *Houston Chronicle*, Section 29-95, P. 28. July 2, 2011.  
Klaasmeyer, Kelly and Troy Schulze. **Guns and Roses.** *Houston Press*, Volume 23, Number 21, p. 35.
- 2010 Klaasmeyer, Kelly. **Bless Their Hearts, Part II.** *Glasstire Texas Visual Art Online.*  
Kroll, Jordan. **Creature Comforts.** *Visual Seen: Extending Art Online.*  
Nick, Paul. **Spoiler Alert.** *Houston Press*, p.22, May 20-26, 2010.  
NPR Front Row Interview. KUHf. May 26, 2010.
- 2007 Perdue, Beth. **Art 3: Three artist installations open at Art Works! tomorrow.** *The Chronicle*, p. 12, January 9, 2007.  
Boyce, David B. **Impressions of ArtWorks! Installations.** *The New Bedford Standard Times*, p. C04. January 14, 2007.
- 2005 Hesser, Martina. **Wakefield's Horn of Plenty.** *Mercury*, June 15, 2005.  
Rodriguez, Bill. **Slices of Life: The thing's the thing at Hera Gallery.** *The Providence Phoenix*, p. 12. June 17, 2005.
- 2004 Daniel, Mike. **Fiber art at Dallas Center for Contemporary Art.** *The Dallas Morning News*, Guide, p.56. January 30, 2004.  
Montemayor, Natalia. **Exhibit exposes three Texas artists.** *The Ranger*. January 30, 2004.  
Heinkel-Wolfe, Peggy. **Gallery Watch: Fabric Art Illustrates the Fiber of Life.** *The Fort Worth Star Telegram*. January 31, 2004.
- 2002 Lara, Jerry. **Artistic Threesome show skills: Diverse Stylings Seen at SAC.** *San Antonio Express News*. Section H. February 4, 2004.  
Puelo, Risa. **Stitch in time: Women and Their Work.** *Art/les*, #49, Spring, 2002.
- 2000 Atwell, Wendy. **Neo-Rococo, University of Texas At San Antonio Art Gallery,** *Art/les*, #26, p. 88. Spring 2000.  
Goddard, Dan. **Arts: 'Girly' Art Challenges Stereotypes,** *San Antonio Express News*, sections E, N. April 12, 2000.  
McBride, Elizabeth, **New American Talent.** *Art/les*, number 36, p. 68-69 Fall 2002.
- 1999 Bokamper, Jerry. **'Expo '99' at 500X Gallery.** *The Dallas Morning News*. Guide, p. 4. January 8, 1999.  
Arend C. Zwartjes, **Andrea Caillouet, Ann Wood, UTSA Satellite Space,** *Art/les*, Number 23, p. 59 Summer. 1999.  
Navarro, John. **Crush,** *Voices Of Art*, October-November, p. 19-23. 1999.



*'Til Death.* Embroidery Thread, Puffy Paint, Scrapbook Paper, Poured Plastic, Wallpaper, Collage, Canvas, 72 x 72 x 5 inches, 2012.

## Women & Their Work

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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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 34th anniversary. Presenting 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 1,865 artists in 277 visual art exhibitions, 119 music, dance and theater events, 14 film festivals, 23 literary readings and 481 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, 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 950 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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