

DENISE PRINCE

OBJECT LESSONS



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

SEPTEMBER 28 – NOVEMBER 10, 2017

AUSTIN, TEXAS



Object Lessons, 2017, oil on canvas, 84" x 84"

Cover Panel: *They Smiled at the Good*, 2016, chromogenic print, 30" x 30"

THE PLAYGROUND OF DENISE PRINCE

‘Well, just because I’m in my teens and I still go to school/Don’t think I dream childish dreams: I’m nobody’s fool.’

Helen Shapiro, 1961, from the song “Don’t Treat Me Like a Child”

My mother convinced me that while I slept, my dolls came to life and frolicked and played dress-up and squabbled and held hands and danced—apparently her mother told her this story when *she* was a girl, and this underworld was true for my mom growing up. Denise Prince’s universe has the same autonomous heart, spinning like a carousel after the fairgrounds are shut down and locked, animated far beyond what she makes immediately seen to us.

When I look at this multimedia exhibition, I see a record of life—the frolicking, the fighting, the dressing up—being lived somewhere past this stolen glimpse. I see the documentation of a whole galaxy of emotions and relationships and sexuality, of cakes and chandeliers, of aging and loss, of badminton games and black gloves, of love. When we leave the gallery, these creatures continue with their mornings and their midnights, their teas, their kittens and irons and cherries. They keep running up the field and coming back and running again—infinitely.

Fantasy or science-fiction worlds are true when they’re built on internal logic, mythology, and a meaningful system of laws, and Denise Prince’s world grows truer with each exhibition. This current work includes new artifacts from Denise-Prince-land, and the scale of what looms

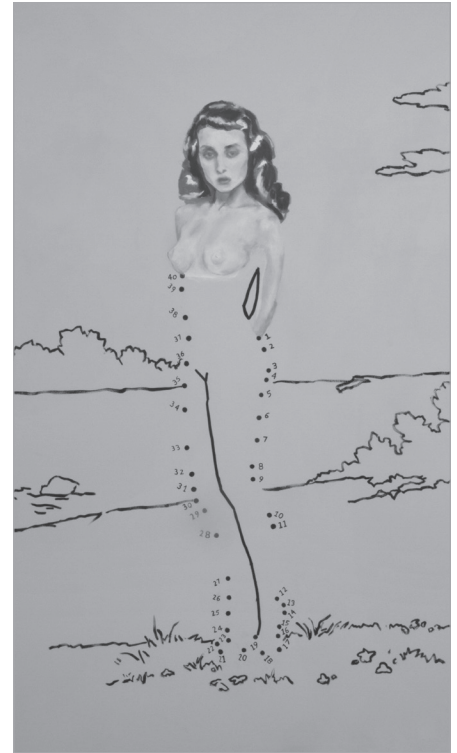
beyond the visible is testament to the accuracy and power of these pieces.

There’s no exact date and time where we can locate this world, but many clues put us in a slightly futuristic, slightly nostalgic moment. The characters in this work all seem to be visiting from the late 1950s or mid-1960s, having just walked off the set of some French film or perfume commercial or an advertisement for biscuits. Or this is a future that is basically *that* world blown up and then stitched back together. The fact that the film is 16mm and slowed down enhances our sense of a lost and fluid era.

In a similar way, the place setting is “Frankenstein-ed” (as Prince would say) out of Los Angeles, Paris, an anonymous American suburb, Times Square, Texas, and a colony on Mars. It has beds from *Madeline*, and fields from *Catcher in the Rye*, too. Rooms that would make David Lynch or Wes Anderson feel at home. It’s a vanished world that we get to see again, even if it never actually existed except in our imaginations and in our favorite books and movies and magazines.

Its citizens are sewing-pattern models, paper dolls, characters out of storybooks or off salt boxes, creatures invited out of the collective mind of girls and women. This is who we should be, this is what we should look like, this is how we should act. And in particular: this is how we should grow up and who we should become. These are fantasies of identity, which are not always welcome but are too frequent and too omnipotent to avoid.

In the spaces between all these exact objects and exact faces, the narrative



Real Isn't How You Are Made, Said the Skin Horse. It's a Thing That Happens to You, 2017, oil on canvas, 84" x 67"

blooms, somehow not exact itself but truer *for* that. Just as a dream makes perfect sense—in your blood, in your bones—until you try to understand it.

It’s sort of like Prince makes a full revolution, starting the Lacanian cycle (that she’s used and discussed in past work) in a preverbal reality that is forced into symbols and language, but which she then miraculously brings back to its original state.

It’s proof of Prince’s authority that she turns all these postures and performances and personae, these knickknacks and antiques and knockoffs, into something real. She tells a story, through stick figures and schoolgirls, that is tender and irrefutable, that transcends words.

What this story pivots around, this way and that, is the fantasy we're told as kids about the wonders and miracles of adulthood, and how we're tricked, and how we can become bitter. This evolution can affect the core of our souls. We see in the film a chain of girls and women who trade places in being ambassadors to each other, being caretakers, chaperones, sisters, betrayers, mothers and grandmothers, rivals, daughters, best friends. We see secrets and rituals handed down from one generation to another. We see a girl looking up to and away from her predecessor, with adulation and fear and eventually even disgust. This is a very complex system of expectations hinging mostly on gender and partly on class.

There's a sense of being hoodwinked, of the disappointment that results, and of being abandoned, and yet everything in *Object Lessons* at the very same time conspires to make us safe. Even the color palettes—which change from scene to scene in the film, or from painting to painting—soothe me. One color scheme will viscerally import an ice-cream shop in Italy, then it will molt to a hosiery drawer at some luxury store, or tropical feathers, or gum drops, or brand-new toys. And each set triggers feelings of innocence, promise, even if the character there looks oppressed or doomed.

Out of something confounding, Prince makes meaning for all of us. She establishes



Dress Me, 2017, photographic print on steel and magnetic vinyl, 68" x 38" x 24"



Dress Me, 2017, photographic print on steel and magnetic vinyl, 68" x 38" x 24"

space for the mystery, builds a cradle (or twelve) to hold us in our vulnerable and baffled state. Or even better—she's created a playground, where we get to work it out; we get to interact with the possibilities, the loss, the beauty.

In this way, she makes up for whoever led us astray to begin with. She makes up for whoever forgot to tell us about the dark side of growing up, of desire. Or whoever pressured us to be someone besides ourselves. With her symmetry, and perfect asymmetry, her juxtapositions and framing and angles, and brilliantly interlocking colors, she's constructed a sturdy place where we can experiment with our memories, and our true and false selves, and our futures. The artist will watch over us so we don't get hurt.

Jardine Libaire is a writer based in Austin, Texas. 2017

Denise Prince

SOLO EXHIBITIONS/PERFORMANCES

- 2017 *Object Lessons, Women & Their Work*, Austin, TX
2016 *L'enfant Terrible, Justine's Secret House*, Austin, TX
2014 *Tractatus 7*, University Park, Austin, TX
2013 *A Talking Cure for the Delusion of Meaning*, performance and solo exhibition, SRT, Austin, TX
2010 Performance For C.Q. and Others for *Low Lives*, projected in real time at Fivemyles, Brooklyn, NY; Diaspora Vibe Gallery, Miami, FL; Labotanica, Houston, TX
2009 *Beyond This Thing Between Us*, Effearte Gallery, Milan, Italy
Municipal Shadow, Solo performance, Downtown, Marfa, TX
2008 *Intimate Distance, Soldier/Adulterer*, Solo performance, Bridge Wynwood, Miami, FL
2007 *Things I Never Told You*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
Bubble, Performance, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
2004 *Women*, Plan B, Austin, TX

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS/PERFORMANCES

- 2015 *It Came From CalArts*, CentralTrak, Dallas, TX
Saatchi Art's Western Reflections, Wally Workman Gallery, Austin, TX
2013 *Bazar*, Barbarian Art Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland
That Mortal Coil: Rebuking the Ideal in Figurative Art, CentralTrak, Dallas, TX
Low Lives in the Vault, Spaces, Cleveland, OH
2011 *Provocation*, New York Photo Festival, New York, NY
2010 *Women's Work*, Kopeikin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
ART MOSCOW, Barbarian Art Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland
PHOTO Colectiva, E8 Galeria, Madrid, Spain
2008 *Treat*, Apama Mackey Gallery, Houston, TX
You Are Here, Coe Gallery, Dayton, OH
2006 *New American Talent 20*, Wichita Falls Museum of Art, Wichita Falls, TX (traveling exhibition)
Me, Myself and Everybody Else, Galleri Urbane, Marfa, TX
Biennial Southwest, Albuquerque Museum of Art & History, Albuquerque, NM (Juror: Neal Benezra, Director, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA)
2005 *New American Talent 20*, Arthouse at the Jones Center, Austin, TX (Juror: Dan Cameron, Senior Curator, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY)
2004 *New American Talent 19*, Arthouse at the Jones Center, Austin, TX (Juror: Jerry Saltz, Senior Art Critic, The Village Voice, New York, NY)
The Significance of Bricolage, Bliss Gallery, Pasadena, CA
Los Americanos, Arcaute Arte Contemporaneo, Monterrey, Mexico
1991 *Speaker Death*, Performance, Parker-Zanic Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1991 *Gold In Unison*, Performance, The Other 45 Minutes, Los Angeles, CA
1990 *Speaker Death*, Performance, Raji's, Los Angeles, CA

SELECTED SCREENINGS

- 2014 *Captivating Not Captive*, International Zizek Studies Conference, screening for Parallax Future(s) in Art, Design Ideology, and Philosophy, Cincinnati, OH
Performance and short film premiere for the Art Alliance Austin, Scottish Rite Theater, Austin, TX
2010 *Home Movies Short Films*, Rooftop Film Festival, Brooklyn, NY
Beck and Soldier, video screenings, Festival De Cine Internacional De Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
2009 *Soldier*, video screening, San Francisco Short Film Festival, San Francisco, CA
Beck and Soldier, video screenings, International ArtExpo-Essence/Borders, Istanbul, Turkey
1999 *The Deep End*, Anthology Film Archive, Feature Film Screening; Co-wrote, co-produced and actor, produced by Cary Woods, New York, NY

SELECTED PUBLIC ART INSTALLATIONS

- 2008 *Celebrity Topiary* public art commission for Art City Austin, Art Alliance Austin, Austin, TX (Jurors Laurence Miller, Fluent Collaborative, Austin, TX; Eva Buttacavoli, Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX; Annette Carozzi, The Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX)
1991 *Good for Amusement Only*, Pick Me Up, Public Art Installation, Produced and programmed short films for a coin-operated film booth, Los Angeles, CA
Good for Amusement Only, Purple Panther, Public Art Installation, Film booth installation, Los Angeles, CA

SELECTED LECTURES/PRESENTATIONS

- 2016 *Art of Narrative*, The Contemporary Austin, Austin, TX
2015 Talk on *Tractatus 7*, Saint Edwards University, Austin, TX
2014 Presentation to Textile and Apparel Design Department in the College of Natural Sciences for the University Fashion Group, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX

COLLECTIONS

- 2013 Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, TX
2010 Stratus Properties, W Hotel, Austin, TX

SELECTED RESIDENCIES

- 2009 Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT
2007 Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME

EDUCATION

- 1989-1991 California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA
1988-1989 School of Visual Arts, New York, NY
1982-1986 Booker T. Washington High School for Performing and Visual Art, Dallas, TX



Untitled, 2017, (gallery view), 16mm film transferred to video, stereo sound, 16 minutes

Women & Their Work

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This project is supported in part by the Cultural Arts Division of the City of Austin Economic Development Department. Additional support is provided by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Art Works. Thanks to BAH! Design.

Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 39th 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 1,897 artists in 310 visual art exhibitions, 125 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 30 literary readings and spoken word performances, and 614 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 650 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 and
their work

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GINNY'S

