

Martha Glowacki: If Only We Had Met – Six Stories



Martha Glowacki

(above) *If Only We Had Met – Six Stories*, 2013

(below) *If Only We Had Met – Six Stories* (detail), 2013

Mixed media

Varied dimensions

Photography: Jon Bolton

Martha Glowacki's poetic installation in RAM's Windows on Fifth Gallery, *If Only We Had Met – Six Stories*, contains a series of tableaux inspired by historical photographs found at Wisconsin flea markets and antique shops. Drawing on her interest in natural history and science, "the power of objects and artifacts," and the psychology of collecting, Glowacki fuses found images and items with elements that she crafts with great care and attention to detail. In so doing, she creates complex and compelling narratives that explore the relationship between human beings and the natural world.

From an early age, Martha Glowacki demonstrated a curiosity about the world around her as well as a desire to study, build, collect, and create that was encouraged by her parents. Glowacki's interest in photography stems from spending time with her father, an amateur photographer, in a darkroom he built himself. Taught to print photographs at the age of seven, Glowacki has subsequently nurtured her interest in the history and processes of the medium, often incorporating photographic materials into her artwork.

With an MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Glowacki crafts provocative sculptures and installations, utilizing various techniques, including etching, woodworking, and metalworking. Her subject matter reflects her long-standing interests in the historical. She also explores the relationship between human beings and the natural world and the residue of what is left—from living creatures, ideas, historical records—as time passes.

Through hours spent re-touching found photographs, Glowacki fosters an intimate connection with the mostly anonymous individuals in her Windows on Fifth exhibition. The title of the installation, *If Only We Had Met – Six Stories*, hints at an intangible connection that the artist makes with the subjects. Glowacki describes how the process of finding what are, in essence, abandoned images, triggers a response in her. She states: "I often feel a sense of regret for the person in the photograph and want to give the photograph a safe home in my collection. Maybe I can give them a new life in a piece of sculpture."

Rather than offering a definite story to follow, Glowacki uses the photographs as starting points to structure individual scenes that suggest larger, open-ended narratives. She combines her long-standing



interest in the natural world, science, and the acts of collecting and cataloging with the mystery and potential romance of found images of people who lived in another time and place. The constructed tableaux—with lines purposefully blurred between what was created and what was found—pay homage to cabinets of curiosities and old machines whose use and purpose may be lost to most today.

– Lena Vigna, Curator of Exhibitions

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(above) **Martha Glowacki**
Study for RAM Installation (detail), 2013
 Digital collage on paper
 Varied dimensions
 Photography Courtesy of the Artist

(center) **Martha Glowacki**
If Only We Had Met – Six Stories (detail), 2013
 Mixed media
 Varied dimensions
 Photography: Jon Bolton

(bottom) **Martha Glowacki**
If Only We Had Met – Six Stories (detail), 2013
 Mixed media
 Varied dimensions
 Photography: Jon Bolton

Artist Statement

For several years, I have made sculpture that concerns human observation and description of the natural world. I am particularly interested in developing themes and images from the history of science and scientific illustration, including the background of public and private collections of natural history specimens. I have also developed a personal symbolism of death and rebirth expressed through images taken from nature and scientific illustration.

I currently have two ongoing bodies of work. One is based on the idea of a cabinet that houses a collection of objects or "curiosities." These cabinets are in the form of a piece of furniture with drawers that contain assemblages of objects and text, or in the form of a larger room filled with artworks and objects that becomes, in a larger sense, the cabinet. My other ongoing series are dioramas built behind antique frames. My visual references for these pieces are Victorian shadowboxes and 19th-century natural history museum display practices. For me, the power of natural history specimens and Victorian artifacts such as hair jewelry often resides in the juxtaposition of beauty with physical decay. Part of my intent with these pieces is to use beauty in the creation of art to better understand and express my own feelings about the substance and transience of life.

I use both found materials and constructed objects in my sculpture. Found materials are generally reworked; constructed objects are often made to look like found objects. The ambiguities between old and new and found and constructed are an important part of the work. To make my sculpture, I utilize many traditional art processes and materials as well as processes used in museum diorama building and taxidermy.

Artist Biography

Martha Glowacki holds an MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has shown her work at the Chazen Museum of Art, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, the Michael Lord Gallery in Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Art Museum. She has twice been a resident in the John Michael Kohler Arts Center's Arts/Industry program. Glowacki was director of the Gallery of Design at University of Wisconsin-Madison and is currently co-director of the James Watrous Gallery of Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters. She lives near Sauk City, Wisconsin.