



## Twenty-First Century Heirlooms

April 28 – September 15, 2013

### Artist Information

Visually and conceptually drawing on eighteenth-century porcelain figurines, **Chris Antemann** develops tableaux that examine male and female relationships. With fancy dinners and garden party scenes, where potentially questionable acts are unfolding in an aesthetic language that exaggerates and builds on historical models, Antemann plays with “domestic rites, social etiquette, and taboos.”

**Lucrezia Bieler’s** papercuts combine a centuries old papercutting tradition with the artist’s interest in the natural world. Using a single sheet of paper and a small pair of scissors, while relegating herself to a traditional monotone composition, Bieler explores the contemporary, the personal, and the historical through compelling and complex roundel scenes of animals.

**Melanie Bilenker** uses her own hair to create compelling and intimate jewelry that depicts domestic narrative scenes. While once a popular way to keep a loved one “close,” jewelry made with hair is not widespread today. Bilenker’s “first person point of view” scenes offer a contemporary look at personal moments. Her work does share something with historical pieces as they both draw connections between the personal—the artist’s own body and life—and the public, with the display of these connections and moments through the jewelry.

**Ashley Buchanan’s** jewels—part silhouette, part image, part object—encourage viewers to think about how we attach value to both materials and their representations. In an exaggerated context, they play with the notion that a depiction of something—here, a photograph of a gemstone or the silhouette of an iconic necklace—could be just as important as that thing. They are the twenty-first century’s rendition of costume jewelry.

She states:

*My current body of work is a series of hand-cut, powder coated metals that examines our perceptions of value in jewelry through material and image reproduction. I am interested in a reality that exists through images and representations and how the appearance of an object can substitute for the original. By focusing on iconic shapes and referencing common jewelry motifs I seek to create an environment where the silhouette of a pearl necklace or the image of a diamond on a ring is elevated to the status of an actual pearl or diamond.*

Working from the “belief that domestic objects are social propaganda,” **Linda Cordell** responds to the use of animals as symbols in historical figurines. Subverting what she perceives as the original intention of the use of animals—for cuteness or “noble savagery”—she offers humorous and/or surprising narratives for her creatures, such as two squirrels caught in the act of mating.

Using recycled American pressed glass—now unwanted, but once quite desirable—**Amber Cowan** creates sculptural objects that simultaneously investigate ornament, utility, and beauty. Cowan’s basins, mirrors, and wall installations also draw attention to the role of historical objects in a modern world, which has different dictates of fashion and value. The wall installation, *Peach Bloom*, reflects a nineteenth-century uproar about a Chinese porcelain piece, the *Morgan Vase*, crafted in shades of pink and white that sold for \$18,000 in 1886. The vase sparked a fad for porcelain and glasswares of similar color and shape. Cowan reverentially incorporates work from that time period—produced by some of the best known, but now defunct American glass factories—into her dramatic installation in a way that has been described as both “subversive and patriotic.”

**Kim Cridler** creates vessel forms that link her personal interest in and memories of objects to a broader social and cultural history of use. Cridler accents her grid-like vessels, which operate as metaphors and symbols not intended for practical use, with natural materials and crafted images that link to nature and ornament.

She states:

*I love objects. As a child growing up in rural Michigan, I learned my family history through utilitarian and decorative objects rather than photographs. I came to know those who crafted, repaired and used these objects through the pieces themselves. It is no coincidence that I chose to study craft, an area whose ties to labor, the sensual, the utilitarian, and the real and everyday actions of life have not been entirely severed.*

Well-versed in the language of European figurative ceramics, **Jack Earl** uses a similar framework to tell his own either slightly fantastic or incredibly mundane stories. Earl’s early schooling introduced him to the narrative qualities of porcelain figurines, particularly favoring those manufactured at Meissen during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He has since developed a strategy of response to those traditions. Playing with that older work, Earl often includes animals as characters and uses titles—sometimes paragraphs long—in a way that either adds to or complicates the story of the piece itself.

**Michelle Erickson’s** biography outlines a career dedicated to recovering, preserving, recreating, and contextualizing techniques and uses for ceramic art. In addition to making her own ceramic sculpture, she is a partner in a “firm specializing in the reproduction of 17th- and 18th-century decorative arts, museum quality antique prints and ceramics and contemporary ceramic art.” Erickson’s pieces reflect her desire

to look at contemporary social and political issues through a historic lens, linking past and present in dynamic ways. Her puzzle jugs are updates of objects once popular in British pub drinking games while the squirrels in green allude to Moravian flasks once produced in North Carolina. Often, Erickson employs the same techniques the historical potters used with materials indigenous to the area of the original object's creation, not just echoing the form of an original object.

**Diane Falkenhagen** creates jewelry of metal and mixed media that is meant to be sensuous, beautiful, and precious. Using art historical references rather than gemstones to focus viewer's attention, Falkenhagen also plays with perceptions of memory and place. Her work addresses an "enchantment" with what she regards as iconic and picturesque images. For example, *Dalliance*, 2009 is a glorious brooch that re-imagines **Jean-Honore Fragonard's** painting *The Swing*, 1766 as the framing mechanism for a reflective central mirror.

With a nod to her mother, who the artist credits with embedding in her images of domesticity inspired by mid-twentieth-century models, **Susan Taylor Glasgow** creates sculptural objects in the shapes of garments, shoes, and other women's fashions. Her *Chandelier Dress II* not only pairs a decorative and opulent item of home décor with a woman's garment, it also underscores Glasgow's roots as a clothing designer and seamstress. With her nostalgia-tinged pieces, Glasgow explores, what some might regard as outdated, models for feminine behavior.

**Joanne Kliejunas** (Heirloom Couture) refashions antique textiles into modern wearables. Only repurposing items—or portions of items—that can no longer be used in their original state, Kliejunas extends the life of a quilt or linen. In doing so, her work preserves segments of history and hand labor. Long a lover of textiles (she took her first sewing class at the age of 9), Kliejunas has also been an avid collector and, now, the creator, of garments.

With the *Pearl Clasp Necklace* series, **Yevgeniya Kaganovich** upends traditions long associated with jewelry and, in her words, creates a "new kind of precious jewel." Her "pearls" are porcelain slip cast into pearl shapes that are magnified and transformed, sometimes with a transparent blue glaze.

As she describes below, these transfigured forms suggest a new language for jewelry: *The Pearl Clasp Necklace series utilizes altered images of a traditional pearl clasp and porcelain "pearls." The clasps flatten, inflate, gradate and deform, losing their function in this transformation and becoming decorative elements. Porcelain is slip cast into images of pearls...Fusing of the two precious materials, fresh water pearls and porcelain, changes both, creating a new kind of precious jewel.*

Trained as a glass blower, **Beth Lipman** creates still lifes that both echo and upend a long tradition combining objects and imagery. Lipman's glass tableaux allude to a past that used still lifes as metaphors for social and cultural events as well as for aesthetic purpose and personal posturing. Her C-print photographs—which capture still lifes that no longer exist—pose questions about representations, artifice, and the meaning of objects. Since Lipman destroys and recycles the pieces that she uses for the photos, the life-size C-print—as ghostly as it is—is the only existing record of the items depicted.

Drawing on a “connection” with the past that was born of personal interest and time spent living in Italy, **Maggie Meister** creates adornment that responds to history. Whether her work recalls ancient art, such as fragments of Roman columns, mosaics, and frescoes, or more modern times, inspired by the nineteenth-century stage and early film actress Sarah Bernhardt, Meister's glass bead neckpieces, earrings, and bracelets echo the images, forms, and motifs of historical pieces.

Of these inspirations, she states:

*The love of ancient history, color and patterns have followed me throughout my life and my designs have come to fruition during the time my family and I lived in Italy. In looking back, beads have always been a part of my life – from playing with Mardi Gras beads or collecting semi-precious stones as a young girl to my love of ancient and ethnic jewelry as I became older.*

Interested in—using her own words—“manipulating nostalgia through objects,” metalsmith **Myra Mimplitsch-Gray** challenges traditional notions regarding the meaning and practical use of heirloom objects and tableware, such as serving trays, silverware, and candleholders. With her manipulations, silver bowls and chargers melt into puddles while candleholders appear to deflate, and serving trays are rendered “useless” by fractured and uneven surfaces. What she creates is, almost, alien—familiar yet strange; comforting yet unsettling.

Of these objects, she states:

*These wrought objects are contingent, reflecting the anxiety of service. Gestural forms embody a sense of baroque decadence as they erupt, evolve and succumb to their own excess. Bittersweet, this work portends silver's demise but also its rebirth, as the material has been transformed throughout history to reimagine new societies.*

**Susan Myers** uses recycled silver-plated serving trays to create works based on Chinese take-out containers, stamping them with patterns pulled from decorative and functional pieces from times past. Works from Myers' **Disposable Series** challenge contemporary concepts of value. Referencing what many regard as throw-aways in silver slyly challenges viewers to consider “what we consume, how we consume it, what we discard and disregard.” Myers also uses the found metal to create a complementary series of works on paper that act as a sort of memorial to forgotten objects. The incised and textured surface of the original serving trays is turned into a bold graphic representation through the printmaking process.

Motivated by the gift of a number of LEGOs many years ago, **emiko oye** began to make jewelry—primarily neckpieces—based on historical royal examples. The irony of recreating luxurious examples in a democratic, commonplace material is humorous, yet also poignant, and suits the artist's exploration of how and why we value certain items. Her latest series, *Les Voyageurs de Temps* (time travelers) pushes the boundaries of the idea even further. With these works, oye plays with the concept of "fragmented reality" by exaggerating the idea of a neckpiece and purposefully re-imagining iconic imagery, such as Cartier gemstone jewelry, through a material that upends visitor expectations.

**Donna Sharrett's** mixed-media collages are full of memory and meaning. Representing rituals in the form of mandalas and mementos, her works incorporate found objects (such as guitar-strings that serve as dedications to her now-deceased brother) and stitching techniques learned from her family. Each piece is a combination of the personal and cultural, a memorial to connections among human beings past and present. She states of her role as an artist, "I have become a custodian of memories with my works serving as repositories for keepsakes."

**Christina Smith**, who describes herself as a "fourth generation Californian" imbues her silver objects and jewelry with elements of her personal history. Silhouetted forms are positioned in tableaux that purposefully suggest a larger—although ambiguous—narrative. Smith shares moments, sometimes rather intimate ones, that inevitably speak to the human condition as a whole.

Of this work, she states:

*My work embodies isolated memories in sterling silver. Each piece is based on a moment in my personal history...The format is not purely realistic, but abstracted, as would be the recollection of incidents in the past.*

Through her Society for the Prevention of Unfinished Needlepoint (or SPUN), **Mary Smull** "rescues" unwanted and incomplete needlepoint projects from auction sites, thrift stores, and rummage sales. Her efforts to finish these pieces—but only in white thread so that the original stitches are distinguished from her additions—question the value of labor and the meaning of objects created through handwork. While she finds and "completes" needlework in a range of subject matter, she has recovered several examples based on fine art painting, such as the work of French Impressionists Paul Cézanne and Vincent Van Gogh. With these choices, Smull is also highlighting the legacy of shared cultural imagery and encourages us to consider why we would even translate the work of such artists into a stitched, mass produced template for a hobbyist fiber project.

Of SPUN, Small states:

*In addition to finishing unfinished needlepoint myself, I have formed The Society for the Prevention of Unfinished Needlepoint (SPUN). SPUN is a textile welfare organization dedicated to eliminating the worldwide phenomenon of unfinished needlepoint. Through the SPUN website, members can give away their unfinished needlepoint or pick up an unfinished project to complete. Stories about the origin and history of specific unfinished needlepoint projects can be shared. Images of completed works can be posted. Through our combined efforts, SPUN can eventually eliminate something else – itself. When the last piece of unfinished needlepoint is finally completed, SPUN itself will rest in peace.*

**Kimberlie Tatalick**, who has a strong connection to the idea of heirlooms through childhood memories of altars to family military efforts, reconfigures opulent jewelry from the past, sometimes using modern printing technologies. Interested in historical concepts of luxury, Tatalick creates jewelry that visually echoes earlier ostentatious and grand objects but that challenges how we define ostentation and wealth today. Brooches from the *Mourning Luxury* and *Modern Luxury* series, with their “frameworks” of metal and over-sized ribbons, are almost skeletal reminders of their predecessors—royal and heirloom jewelry as well as commemorative and sentimental treasures.

Wondering about how human beings negotiate both nature and culture, **Jennifer Trask** has engaged in a series that combines antler and animal bones with ideas about ornament, nature, and historical models of understanding the world. Through sculptural forms, wall pieces, and adornment, Trask explores the relationship between a human tendency to both revere and idealize, and between engineered and actual nature. With the use of bones, her work takes on a memorial quality and links her to historical traditions of **memento mori**, which are visual reminders of the inevitable demise of organic forms and human life. Her use of the chrysanthemum, as in *Botanical Object: Mum*, connects to the idea that peonies and mum hybrids have been modified in China and Japan for over 2000 years. The plants have become “ornamentalized” through pattern, image, and human manipulation. The neckpiece, *Marion’s Morifolium*, brings nature to the body as both a celebration of form and a link to both the past and the larger world.

**Jonathan Wahl’s** larger-than-life scale renditions of Victorian mourning jet jewelry reveal his interests in “scale and perception.” By dramatically shifting size and materials, and turning an object so connected to sentiment and personal meaning into a flat image, Wahl honors yet transforms the meaning of the original object. While the jewelry represents love and intimate bonds between people, what does the oversize non-wearable version represent?

Of the work, Wahl states:

*I am intrigued with how the viewer relates to or perceives these historical objects of jewelry when rendered larger than life, out of scale, and how this shift from three dimensions to two parallels a rift between jewelry and fine art. The jet jewelry and objects that were the models for my drawings were made during the mid to late 19th century, carved by hand from jet, a fossilized material similar to coal but more durable. They were worn during a woman's period of mourning after the death of a loved one when wearing conventional precious jewelry would have been deemed inappropriate.*

**Stacey Lee Webber's** family history with blue collar labor directly influences her sculptural objects and jewelry. Whether using U.S. coins to create "mundane" tools, such as a hammer, wrench, and tape measure, or embroidering the surface of a dollar bill, she complicates the conversation of heirlooms on both a personal and cultural level. While the tools symbolize the labor of her family—and perhaps that of many other American families—the money is a cultural touchstone, connected to a shared social history as well as concepts of value.

Of her work, she states:

*I come from a lineage of laborers—men and women who worked corn farms, printing presses, beer trucks, and construction sites. I value skilled physical labor and am proud to follow in their footsteps by using my hands in everyday life...Through technique my artwork manipulates materials that evoke American iconography, working-class heroes, and national pride. My objects are celebrations of American families and the blue-collar work ethic that binds the heart of the United States.*