

# Once Upon A Time: Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Contemporary Art



(above)  
**Francisco X. Mora**  
*Capurecita Roja (Little Red Riding Hood)*, 2011  
Acrylic  
19 x 17 inches  
Racine Art Museum, The Ruth Miles  
Memorial Purchase Award  
from *Watercolor Wisconsin 2010*  
Photo: Courtesy of the Artist

(below right)  
**Jessica Calderwood**  
*Bloom*, 2012  
Enamel, copper, fiberglass,  
earthenware, paint, and plastic  
48 x 24 x 24 inches  
Courtesy of the Artist  
Photo: Courtesy of the Artist

Fairy tales can be magical, wondrous, humorous, and frightening. They can also be moralistic and educational, with roots in real life situations and circumstances. Contemporary artists who create fantastical stories and works based on fairy tales use the narrative framework to investigate personal, social, and cultural issues, such as gender roles, ethics, folk and familial traditions, history, politics, the environment, and the complexities of human nature.

**Once Upon A Time: Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Contemporary Art** features artists that use a variety of media and techniques to craft stories that emphasize the human condition through exaggerated, surreal, perplexing, imaginative, or dreamy scenarios that are rooted in the traditions of fairy tales,

legends, and myths. These works reflect the imagination of the artists as well as a significant investment of time in making—exemplified here in most cases with laborious craft-based processes such as enameling, glassblowing, and papercutting.

Artists whose works are featured include: **Jessica Calderwood**, **Emily Cobb**, **Patty Grazini**, **Erica-Lynn Huberty**, **Jerome Karidis**, **Elsa Mora**, **Francisco X. Mora**, **Rachel Rader**, **Ruth Ann Reese**, **Bill Reid**, **Red Weldon Sandlin**, **Heather Ujii**, and **David Walters**.

Drawing on the use of flowers as historical “symbols of the feminine,” **Jessica Calderwood** (WI) creates sculptures, jewelry, and wall reliefs that combine fantasy with an exploration of gender and identity. As Calderwood suggests: “I created these works to be

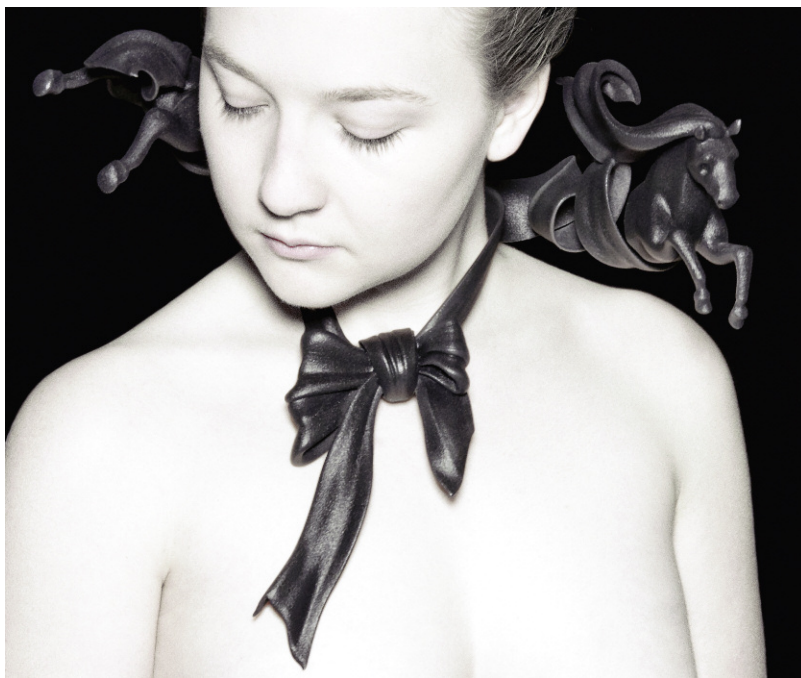


**Racine Art Museum**  
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intentionally humorous and ironic. These human/plant hybrids are large, voluptuous, headless, and armless... These anthropomorphic beings are at once, powerful and powerless, beautiful and absurd, inflated, and amputated."

Sculptural yet wearable, each piece of **Emily Cobb's** (PA) recent series of illustrative jewelry is based on a personal fable that uses an animal as a central character. Purposefully fantastical, Cobb's jewelry presents challenges to any potential wearer as it both frames the human form and limits maneuverability.

With her magical and evocative paper sculptures, **Patty Grazini** (WA) draws on stories long forgotten. With a background in sewing and an ability to manipulate paper to suggest various textures and materials, Grazini sculpts portraits of historical characters using ephemera she has collected from various places. Lavish, period-inspired costuming, exacting detail, and compelling subjects contribute to an overall feel of the fantastical—despite being rooted in history. For example, *Sold Love Charms that Didn't Work – Elizabeth Auber* is from a series featuring animals in the guise of real criminals whose stories were reported in *The New York Times* between 1885 and 1915.



Interested in historical images and objects, as well as in an exploration of the value of labor, artist and author **Erica-Lynn Huberty** (NY) creates narrative works using found textiles, painting, collage, and embroidery. The fantastical scenes and figures she depicts—rendered more intimate and sweet than scary and dark—are inspired by the imagery of historical decorative and functional fibers.

**Jerome Karidis** (1924-2010), considered one of the Magic Realists that gained some fame in the post-World War II American art scene, created paintings and collages of fantastical subjects. Also a costume designer, Karidis brought an air of theatricality to his work by combining seemingly disparate elements that suggest dramatic and mysterious narratives.

A creator of dolls, illustrations, paintings, jewelry, artist's books, sculpture, and papercuts, Cuban-born and raised **Elsa Mora** (CA) lends a fairy-tale quality to all of her work.

(above)  
**Emily Cobb**  
*The Bowed Horse: Untied*, 2011  
 Nylon  
 12 1/2 x 11 x 7 inches  
 Courtesy of the Artist  
 Photo: Courtesy of the Artist

(left)  
**Heather Ujije**  
*Adam & Eve*, 2013  
 Archival digital print  
 38 1/2 x 30 inches  
 Courtesy of the Artist  
 Photo: Hitoshi Ujije



Often populated with human beings and animals interacting in whimsical or poignant narratives, Mora's work draws on the wonder, mystery, and magic of childhood. Visual interests include (but are not limited to) historical dolls, art jewelry, henna tattoos, children's illustrations, decorative wallpaper and patterns, and vintage clothing—all of which she references in her own work.

Inspired by the imagery and content of folk stories and music from his native Mexico, **Francisco X. Mora** (WI) constructs his own fanciful narratives that are a blend of personal and cultural references. He incorporates characters that are derived from excerpts of Mexican mythology, popular stories, or his own dreams and memories. In addition to producing prints and paintings, Mora writes and illustrates children's books that include adaptations of folk tales and legends.

Drawing on her "obsession" with nautical mythologies and the mysteries of the sea, **Rachel Rader** (NY) has created a story about an

underwater kingdom called the *Coquille Empire* that vanished when the inhabitants overthrew their *Queen Scarletine*. The tale is told through what Rader calls a "decadent display of escapism," in this case, lavish sweets and royal adornment made of sculpted, flame-worked, and cast glass, polymer, coral, crystal, freshwater pearls, wool, and cubic zirconia. As with many fairy tales, there is a veiled moral lesson—while compelling, these objects represent a "tale of decay" where the sweet turns sour, and luxurious becomes excessive.



(above left)  
**Elsa Mora**  
*The Search*, 2014  
 Paper and glue  
 20 1/2 x 30 3/4 x 1/2 inches  
 Courtesy of the Artist  
 Photo: Courtesy of the Artist

(above right)  
**Ruth Ann Reese**  
*Dowager of the Sea*, 2011  
 Earthenware  
 25 x 24 x 25 inches  
 Courtesy of Susan Wiegand  
 and Jeffrey Weitzel  
 Photo: Patty Sheppard



(left)  
**Rachel Rader**  
*Her Majesty's Crown*, 2011  
 Glass, polymer, and coral  
 5 1/2 x 7 x 6 1/2 inches  
 Courtesy of the Artist  
 Photo: Daniel Fox

With porcelain work that has been described as “sci-fi fabulous,” **Ruth Ann Reese** (MO) blends human, animal, and plant forms to create fantastical hybrids. *Dowager of the Sea*, for example, appears human in the face but has a sea creature’s lower body. Reese’s grafting process—the purposeful combination of tentacles, faces, beaks, and feathers—creates monsters and beasts that are timeless in a certain sense (think of the snake-like Medusa of Greek legend) and contemporary in another (modern science allows for the unexpected, such as a pig heart replacing a human heart).

Combining a clever wit with a compelling aesthetic, **Bill Reid** (WI) creates brightly-colored painted steel sculptures, automatons, lamps, vehicles, and two-dimensional cartoons featuring a cast of animal characters. Provocative titles utilizing humorous wordplay add to the fantastical and folkloric qualities of Reid’s menagerie.

Interested in the idea that as people mature the stories and “truths” learned in childhood are given new and expanded meaning, **Red Weldon Sandlin** (GA) creates engaging interpretations of children’s stories such as teapots based on *Dr. Doolittle* or *Charlotte’s Web*. Her objects, which have the “air” of the decorative and domestic, are clever investigations into how human beings gather knowledge and information. As Sandlin suggests, “Two objects, the book and teapot, occur in almost all of my work because they represent containment. A book contains stories, information, and lessons. A teapot, metaphorically, holds ideas that are filtered, brewed, steeped, and poured out for fulfillment and understanding.”

Combining hand-painting, drawing, stitching, and printing with large-format digital print technologies, **Heather Ujii** (PA) creates large-scale “tapestries” that are based on historical prints, wallpapers, and stories. Drawing on the idea that both fictional and non-fictional tales can chronicle the complexities of human nature, Ujii creates allegorical narratives that examine growth, beauty, loss, and decay through the lenses of imagination and history.

While he does not draw exclusively on fairy tales or children’s stories for the content of his work, **David Walters** (WA) will often use characters associated with them for their “familiar and often sentimental associations.” Working primarily with blown and enameled glass, Walters creates narratives about the human condition—our capacity for indifference, neglect, and darkness as well as our capacity for hope and renewal.



Lena Vigna  
Curator of Exhibitions

(above right)  
**Bill Reid**  
*Piper of the Gates*, 2011  
Steel and paint  
26 x 19 x 11 inches  
Courtesy of the Artist  
Photo: Jon Bolton

(left)  
**David Walters**  
*Look No Strings*, 2009  
Glass and enamel paint  
15 1/2 x 19 x 8 inches  
Courtesy of Austin Art Projects  
Photo: Russell Johnson