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Believing is seeing

Robin Akkerman

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, robinakkerman25@gmail.com

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BELIEVING IS SEEING

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University
and Art and Design College In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Masters of Fine Arts

In

The School of Art

by

Robin Akkerman AFA., Houston Community College, 2003 BFA., University
of Houston, 2006 May 2010

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ABSTRACT

Fantasy art is often described as being connected to the imagination. My work defines fantasy themes in combination with modern culture and real life experiences. During the creative process I have overcome a struggle with composition development and color relationships. Paintings mimic a puzzle strategy. I come up with a basic idea by inserting and taking away imagery on order for the whole image to be cohesive. Subject matter includes women of different cultures in dress, animals, pattern, sweets, and childhood experiences from the 80's. My characters are a personification of myself as I often dream of being dressed up in a distant place. All paintings are large, stretching from floor to ceiling. Color concept was based on the theme initially written before the drawing process was started. I work in layers, first with a written idea, then proceeding with a drawing and several layers of painting. All 3-D forms are based off the paintings that include cut paper, T-shirt wrapped pillows, collections of fantasy figures and toys from the 80's that I've been collecting since I was a child.

BELIEVING IS SEEING

Some things have to be believed in order to be seen. My work stems from an imagination that is inhabited by mythical creatures and formed by research into culturally determined elements of fashion, costume, pattern, ritual and female representation. Creating my own characters puts me in an imagined experience. These elements are combined with images of natural and artificial forms to create imagined characters in fantasy environments that are a reflection of everyday life experiences. My inspiration comes from movies and fairytales such as Labyrinth, Legend, the Last Unicorn, and Ever After, the paranormal, and works by artists such as Boris Vallejo, Julie Bell, Louis Royo, and James Christenson. My process often begins with a simple word or sentence that provokes associations. These associations direct my research of images toward magazines, on-line sources and my own library of books and catalogues of art historical works from the Renaissance, Gothic, Medieval, and Victorian eras.

From this research I have gathered a collection of images that are variously incorporated into my work. These images are laid out on six to eight foot tall sheets of canvas with charcoal and pencils. This process was like putting together a puzzle; combinations of images are tested and either used or discarded. An under painting in acrylic is then applied to the completed drawing. The paintings are built up in many layers of images over an extended period of time, with many layers of paint applied to finish a piece. Another aspect of this body of work is a large installation composed of paper, magazine images

and stickers. Color, pattern, nature, women in costume and equine imagery are the common threads linking the installation to the paintings.

The work I create is one of the most important and critical relationships I will ever be in. A painting or drawing is like a child, husband, friend, or relative that I talk to and watch grow on a weekly basis. A big part of making these works is to patiently sit back, observe, listen and be patient to what they communicate to me. Sometimes I know an image won't fit because the thoughts that are building the piece tell me so. By respecting and honoring the work, I grow with it. Like a relationship there are good and bad days. There are times when we totally embrace one another and other times we argue and don't get a long. Sometimes I need a break or breather to allow me to make a more rational concentrated decision. Usually this leads the drawing or painting to communicate what it needs to become a completed unity. There is often a difference between what I initially think should happen and what needs to happen in my work. For example, I might really like a particular image for a piece, but realize it's no longer relevant to the work, and I decide to remove it after a long and agonizing decision has been made.

The art is the heart of the artist. These are the passions, desires and beliefs I have tried to live by through many criticisms in art school. I have realized that staying true to myself advances me further as an artist and an individual than conformity to other peoples' ideas of what they claim is best for me. Staying true to myself leads to honest answers, and self-accomplishment. A comment made to me as an undergraduate student fueled the fire of my belief. I was challenged in regarding the role of fantasy in my life and art works. From this questioning I became even more convinced of the necessary role that fantasy and imagination

play in our “real” lived experiences. Unicorns are real to me. They exist in my heart in a place few are able to touch and keep. They are rare, unique and sacred. In this world and beyond lie things undiscovered, places in the mind for wonderment, mystery, hope, and imaginative thought. There is a process that would be non-existent if we were all told to look, talk, and act the same way.

I’ve come to the conclusion that the most important person to please when it comes to my work, is myself. I have taken everything with a grain of salt, stayed true to myself and not allowed anyone to hold me back. Asking myself important, deep questions through my graduate school experience has helped me arrive where I am today.

The five most important forms of imagery are women in dress, pattern, mythical creatures, candy/cupcakes, and nature. Some of my works are based on themes from Greek myths, legends, childhood memories or a combination of these. Within each piece I have strategically placed a toy that was of importance to me as a child. These toys, from the 1980’s, have played an important role in my life by nurturing my growing imagination. Including them in my work allows me to have that continuing sense of childlike playfulness. By narrowing down the images, to these, I have been able to explore various permutations and image arrangements. These image arrangements have assisted me in developing unique settings that reinforce a fantastic and mythic sensibility.

The extravagant and elaborate accessories adorning my characters more accurately relate to my everyday style of dress. Easy access to thrift stores allows a wide range of inexpensive accessible fashion. I relate the way I dress to how I paint. Both consist of planning,

experimenting, matching and constructing in layers. As my characters demonstrate a fluffiness or puffiness in the way they are dressed, I take on a similar concept when dressed in layers of skirts. When I walk I float on air. Such details and care in dressing are also influenced by the Art Nouveau movement. Design and balance between shapes and forms are necessary. Alfonso Mucha has taught me that overlapping forms creates a collage with depth.

My work is my life. This body of work has become my connection to myself. Outside of my connection to God, the connection that I have to my work will never abandon me. A good lesson learned in the time spent here is to have faith in myself and believe that I have the power to create endless wonders; then anything and everything becomes possible. Like I've been told, God never gives you more than you can handle, but makes you stronger through earthly tribulations.

VITA

When Robin Akkerman was young her parents discovered that she had a talent for the arts when she entertained herself one night at dinner by copying a restaurant's mascot onto a paper napkin. From then on she was enrolled in art schools. Robin always knew that the fine arts were her vocation. Her interests for a specific kind of art were in fantasy themes, artists who illustrate inspired by and fantasy oriented movies. Drawing was her passion, but creative concepts were expanded when she was introduced to acrylic paint in college. Throughout Robin's experiences in art school she has learned a different way of seeing and communicating with her work and herself. A belief that held strong for the subject matter that she loved has brought a newly found understanding and appreciation in creating art.