

Ornamental Instincts November 23, 2007- February 10, 2008

Siona Benjamin, Nancy Friedemann, Cristina de Gennaro, Skowmon Hastanan, Tamiko Kawata, Janet Koenig, Eva Lee, Rachel Selekman, Julio Valdez, Mansheng Wang, Lynne Yamamoto

In anticipation of bleak winter days hastened by nature's transit from colorful blossoms and bountiful harvests to a monochromatic veil of darkness and decay, we as a culture are compelled, as if by instinct, to surround ourselves with grand displays of ornamental flourish. The language of repeating forms and rhythms interwoven with patterns of light and color exude abundance and hope, a comforting notion equating consumption with survival during the unreliably lean winter months of past generations. In our current materially-overloaded culture, ornamentation reflects multifaceted perceptions of social and spiritual survival complicated by universal holiday traditions of giving and getting. Contemporary conflicts between conservation and excess reveal an enduring collective nostalgia for ritual consumption in the coldest and darkest time of the year.

Ornamental Instincts features eleven new, site-specific installations by artists who have previously exhibited at Wave Hill. Returning to the rich architecture and nature of Wave Hill that served to inspire previous works, **Siona Benjamin, Cristina de Gennaro, Nancy Friedemann, Skowmon Hastanan, Tamiko Kawata, Janet Koenig, Eva Lee, Rachel Selekman, Julio Valdez, Mansheng Wang, and Lynne Yamamoto**, transform portions of Wave Hill House's historical interior for the winter season, revealing the poignancy and persistence of ornamental notions in contemporary art practices. These artists are compelled through process towards a discourse with architectural spaces and ornamental surfaces to create new works that explore and expose traditional notions of perception and identity. Such a gathering of diverse practices and materials within the charged seasonal environment blurs established boundaries between artistic disciplines, multiple cultures, and personal and collective histories.

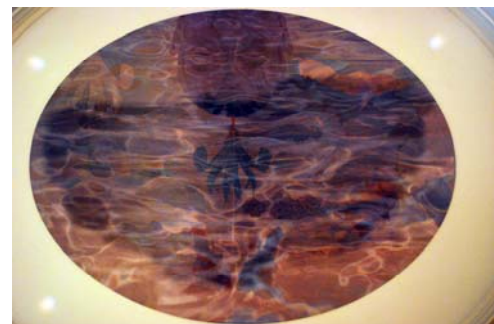
-Wennie Huang, Guest Curator

FOYER

Past, present, and future converge in **Cristina de Gennaro's** mixed media and sound installation. *Janus Doorway* is punctuated by clocks and wishbones that adorn the curved interior of the Wave Hill House Foyer and create visual patterns reminiscent of wallpaper. The installation calls attention to our cyclical perception of the passage of time, and yearly renewal through the familiar rhythms of seasonal rituals and traditions. De Gennaro's overlapping arrangements of objects and sounds represent the emotional polarities of celebration and obligation, a symbolic accounting of gains and losses with the approach of the New Year. www.cristinadegennaro.com



An ever-changing ebb and flow is echoed in the imagery of water suspended overhead in *Mirror of My Heart / Dreamers with Lost Memories*, **Julio Valdez's** painting of the world beneath the ice. Set within the elegant curves of the oval rotunda, Valdez reverses the traditional intentions of allegorical mural paintings, popular allusions to wealth and prosperity painted as ornamentation within the



mansions of the Hudson River elite of the 19th-century, by transforming the rotunda into a metaphorical mirror reflecting historical and economic relationships between the river and the slave trade. Migration and mortality become mythic themes represented by Valdez's image of the human form frozen between transparent layers of colors and textures; fractured identity and stilted freedom within the rigid strata of class and society.
www.juliovaldez.com

TEAROOM

Transparency is a matter of perception in **Eva Lee's** video installation, *Winter's Veil*, a meditation on the ever-changing qualities of light and matter that continues her fascination with science and notions of reality within the microscopic world of particles. Lee's animated video punctures the mirrored surface of the Tea Room's looking glass, alters our point of reference, and effectively replaces the illusion of reflection with the illusion of transparency. A view through a microscopic lens now resembles a view out a window, revealing the surprise of an imagined sequence of journeys into the inner world of invisible matter. The dimensional shifts, a virtual record of the movement of Lee's hand, resembling both cosmic forms and tiny atoms in the stark monochromatic tones of winter snow.
www.christiansonlee.com/evalee.htm



CAFE

In her three enamel paintings on mylar installed within the Wave Hill Café, **Nancy Friedemann** traces intertwining patterns of lace underneath the brittle textures of barren tree branches. Resembling accretions of snow, puddles on pavement, or the movement of clouds in the gray winter sky, the artist's intricate brushstrokes reenact the motion of sewing and embroidering stitches, enlarging the intimate gestures and rhythms of domestic creation to the monumental scale and complexity of the natural environment. Referencing her Colombian roots, Friedemann combines lace patterns depicted in 18th - century colonial painting with local flora and fauna, a practice which locates the persistence of domestic traditions in contemporary representations of nature.
www.nancyfriedemann.com



RECEPTION AREA

Janet Koenig turns our gaze to the plight and survival of small creatures in winter. Inserted within recessed crescent spaces resembling tiny shelters out of reach above each of the doors of the reception area.

Overwintering features three scenes which contrast ways that smaller creatures cope with freezing winters. In one scene, a solitary insect, soon to be a Swallowtail butterfly, passes the winter in the dormant state of a pupa anchored to a twig in an urban park. In another scene, a cluster of Monarch butterflies congregate into large, relatively inactive groups following an exhaustive annual migration to remote mountainous regions of Mexico, now tourist destinations. Lastly, the small creatures that seek to survive the cold in warm, human habitations are represented by the house mouse and the house spider. Meticulously crafted from molded polystyrene foam, paper and wire, the realism of Koenig's highly detailed dioramas invites us to share the solitude, struggle, and strength of these small animals, each a visual fable reflecting the various ways that we humans survive the holidays.



Illuminating the wall of the gallery area, **Siona Benjamin's** framed and curtained lightbox, *Pantomime in Pardes*, recasts characters that appear in her paintings in reference to the traditional 19th-century popular theatrical genre performed around the holiday season. *Pardes* means "garden" in Hebrew, or "secret orchard," and also "foreign land" in Urdu and Hindi. As guest appearances in the pantomime tradition were standard, the artist inserts her great-great-grandfather among the masses of blindfolded figures created in her own self image.

Benjamin's synthesis of various ancient and popular styles, from Indian and Persian miniature paintings to Bollywood billboards and Amar Chitra Katha comic books on pop-Indian mythology reflects not only her bicultural Jewish and Hindu/Muslim background, but also her attempts to recover the fragmented narrative of an identity neither fully in the past nor the present.

www.artsiona.com



Rachel Selekman announces winter's arrival with *By the Fire*, a roaring blaze created from multitudes of colorful, overlapping artificial leaves adorning the fireplace mantel. Evoking opulent textiles worn by generations of European nobility, now ubiquitous staples of winter fashion, layers of lush suede and embroidered velvet leaves exude sensations of comfort and the spreading warmth of a lit fireplace during the coldest months of the year. Through site and substance, *By the Fire* refers to the tradition of family crests, a codified system equating forms in nature to inherited qualities of human character. Selekman's meticulous arrangement of flame-like



leaves, heraldic symbols of hope, joy, strength and renewal, merge craft with meaning. The tactile surface invites touch even as our instinctual fear of fire's destructive force is ignited by archetype. Here, fire and nature are domesticated, tamed by Selekman's hand into exquisite ornamentation indicative of welcome holiday traditions.

www.priskajuschkafineart.com

STAIRWAY

A swarm of crystal monarch butterflies inhabits the staircase, clinging precariously to hovering, disembodied branches in **Skowmon Hastanan's** *Butterfly Migration*. The work recalls observations by pre-Hispanic Mexican civilizations explaining the arrival of the monarch butterfly in their winter habitat at precisely the same time every fall during the corn harvest, and coinciding with the Mexican holiday of *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) as confirmation that the butterflies are souls of their ancestors returning for an annual visit. By instilling within the materials and techniques of contemporary decor indigenous associations of remembrance and reunion, Hastanan's *Butterfly Migration* sustains the past within the present, reconciling geographic, cultural, and economic disparities with nature's potent and enduring embodiment of spiritual legacy.

www.skowmon.com



LARGE GALLERY

Lynne Yamamoto's spectral installation of suspended children's christening gowns at the Large Gallery's east end permeates the height and grandeur of the surrounding space with ominous implications for historical evidence. In *Inheritance*, Yamamoto's placement of dried moths, a selection originating from West Africa, within the hollow shell of each starched, moth-eaten gown completes a nesting pattern suggesting enduring connections between the elaborate homes along the Hudson River and the region's role in the most notorious of trades. Questioning the ambiguous role of religious doctrine on notions of human bondage, Yamamoto extracts a cryptic message from the past: "... for the sake of that which ye have unlawfully gotten; it will be a moth in your estates which will certainly eat them up, either in your own, or your children's time." (Sermon, William Beveridge, 18th c.). *Inheritance* provides our passage through the darkest days of the year illuminated by the artist's examination of collective history. Like a tapestry conservator, Yamamoto's



exacting gaze retrieves hidden or broken threads from within the fabric of our social consciousness, extracting them for deeper clarification before carefully weaving them back into place in the restorative act of mending our fractured past.

For artist **Mansheng Wang**, the direct physical process of rubbing and smudging ink and paint delivers a return to once familiar lands. Wang's monumental painting, *Snow Mountain*, installed within the Large Gallery, offers a view of distant snow-covered peaks reminiscent of those he encountered on travels in Tibet in the early 1900s. Recollecting the Tibetan belief that each mountain is a spirit, Wang divides his gaze between the painted surface recording the accumulated gestures of his hand, and his memory of the sight of natural phenomenon. Transforming the gallery walls with the sheer scale of his painting, Wang invites our entry into a shared vision of untouchable nature, an ideal eclipsed by current implications of the irreversible effects and accelerated momentum of global warming. Manshengwang.com



Tamiko Kawata's *White Winter* provides a whimsical and economical solution to the gradual disappearance of snow around the holidays. Selecting as a personal symbol of peace and reflection the hypnotic experience of watching snow fall, Kawata distills winter's visual sound by replicating patterns of white paper dots. Adhered to the glass doors and windows of the Large Gallery, Kawata's *White Winter* suggests a range of emotional and conceptual responses to nostalgic pursuits. Her commitment to collecting and methodically arranging materials rendered nearly invisible by their ubiquity allow for multiple levels of engagement with society's collective tendency towards waste and environmental neglect.



WREATHS

As an extension of their site-specific installations, **Cristina de Gennaro**, **Tamiko Kawata**, and **Rachel Selekman** adorn the doors of the Wave Hill House, Perkins Visitor's Center, and Glyndor House with festive wreaths made of materials unique to each artist's working process.



Public Programs

December 2, 2 pm, *Exhibition Reception*. Meet the artists of *Ornamental Instincts* and the curator who selected them, Wennie Huang, and learn about the artists' approaches to brightening the indoors through nature for the holidays.

December 7, 10 am, *Art Workshop: Holiday Sampler-Monotype Greeting Cards*. Create unique holiday cards while exploring the painterly qualities of monotypes with printmaker Julio Valdez. \$40 Member; \$55 Non-member. Registration required; call 718.549.3200x305.

December 8 & 9, 1 - 4 pm, *Art Workshop: Snow and Mountains/Nieve y montañas*. Explore the use of Chinese brush and mixed media techniques to create winter landscapes with guidance from Mansheng Wang.

December 14, 10 am - 3pm, *Art Workshop: Holiday Sampler - Collage*. Explore a variety of collage techniques and materials to create unique visual narratives with Christina de Gennaro. Bring your own photographs, drawings, paintings, small "found" objects and other low-relief materials to include as well. You may bring your lunch or purchase it in the café. \$40 member; \$55 Non-member. Registration required; call 718.549.3200x305.

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