

DOLL: GROUP SHOW

TOWER GALLERY
78 CITIES OF GOLD ROAD, POJOAQUE

Keri Ataumbi's *Elephant Girl*

(and the story she tells) is a gem among many strong pieces in this group show. The doll is inspired by a day in the artist's early childhood when an adult friend of her parents makes it clear that she isn't really going to grow up to become an elephant. Crushed by this intrusion upon the boundless world of her childhood imagination, she examines herself in the mirror, lamenting that her nose will never grow into a trunk and that her ears won't ever become the big, flapping ears she'd looked forward to. The sweet sadness of this loss of childhood innocence is magically imbued in the white elephant-girl doll created by Ataumbi. We are approaching a day when an adult may well feel compelled to tell a child, not only can you not grow up to be an elephant, but you may never grow up to see one alive.

Many of the best pieces in the show share similar elements of autobiography and attention to detail. Overall, the show creates a point of return to childhood imagination as a source. All the work in the show is figurative. All are near the same size, and all are literally dolls or images of dolls. A return to the intimate figure of the doll as a way of confronting the real world negotiations of adulthood is a common sub-theme.

The Negotiation of Youth, by Marty Two Bulls Jr., is perfectly realized. The small deer sculpture is concise in execution and materials, but as long (if not longer) on implications than any Bruce Nauman sculpture. Encapsulating a moment of initiation into adulthood, the deer is anatomically accurate and formed around what could be bullets that have been removed, leaving out-of-scale cylindrical absences in the running animal, whose back legs appear ready to crumple like the tinfoil from which the sculpture is made. The humbleness of the material in contrast to the strength of the piece puts a fine edge to certain questions concerning what art actually is and where it actually resides. In Two Bulls' childhood, tin foil was used by the adults to make toys for the children. The associations of this simple medium and how it is being used here are multiple and meaningful. They include the decisive moment between the hunter and the hunted, the decision to take life, and that decision made for food vs. the accidents of war and warriors. Do humans grow up and return to harmony with nature, or will we smother ourselves in our childish delusions?

In *Adaptation*, by Ginger Dunnill and Cannupa Hanska-Luger, we see a couple who have converted to a more natural form of costuming and lifestyle. These amazingly crafted figures sport a neo-native look predicated upon the post-apocalypse and the moment beyond the collapse of everything that's collapsing right now. They're stepping out and re-starting the world with serious style. *Snow Erika*, by Erika Wanenmacher, has a similar vibe. She stands dressed all in white wool, but her teeth are chattering and her lips are raw with cold. These are visitor dolls from other times and places.

America Meredith's beautifully painted image of a traveler holding hands with a stuffed *Wild Things* doll is the only painting in the show. This piece subtly up-ends stereotypes of indigenous peoples as so-called "savages," by reframing the title of Sendak's book *Where the Wild Things Are* as a question. Given the horrendous genocide enacted upon the native populations of both Americas, or the current policy of endless war pursued by Bush and Obama, we might do well to figure out just who exactly the "wild things" are, and just where the barbarous behavior really resides.

Eliza Naranjo-Morse presents a doll that is also a standout (while lying down). *Made Passed Away. It's OK.*

presents a small, pathetic figure formed primarily of nylon pantyhose material. The figure is twisted and broken, evoking the kind of creepy intimacy that characterizes the work of Louise Bourgeois or Kiki Smith, giving the piece power well beyond its size. The idea of bringing a figure to death rather than to life is an interesting twist on concepts of sculptural presence, with ramifications for everything from abortion issues to how the mainstream handles death and dying. The poignancy of this broken figure and the empathy it evokes is palpable.

Similarly, Rose Simpson, who is also the show's excellent curator, presents an oversized dead wasp in a fetal position. She created it in response to finding a dead wasp curled up on an earlier sculpture she had made of a human being in the same position. The rhyming of the forms intrigued her and in *Empathy* she elevates the utterly mundane into the realm of art, amplifying her intimate experience, stressing the importance of small things. This is what *Doll* does best.

—JON CARVER



Keri Ataumbi, *Elephant Girl*, Barin-tanned buckskin, porcelain, fabric, 2k Keum-boo on fine silver, 2011