

HUNTERDON MUSEUM OF ART
Clinton, New Jersey

Almost Human Dolls and Robots in Contemporary Art

Almost Human

Dolls and Robots in Contemporary Art

Donna Bassin • Sid Ceaser • Rene Lynch • Barbara Madsen • Anne Queeney McKeown
Dot Paolo • Keary Rosen • Eva Sutton and Sarah Hart • Sherri Wood

March 20 to June 12, 2005

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Cover: Eva Sutton and Sarah Hart

Detail: *Chance Transmission: An I Ching Reading With Two Small Robots*, 2005

Video, two robots, sumi ink on paper

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Marjorie Frankel Nathanson
Executive Director

Almost Human: Dolls and Robots in Contemporary Art

by Donna Gustafson

When adults play with dolls and/or robots there is more at stake than play acting. How we think about things that are almost human provides clues into how we configure human relationships, the ways that we remember or idealize childhood, how we fantasize about our own abilities, and our desires to control or miniaturize the world. While dolls are found in every culture, robots are culturally specific to the post-industrialized world.¹ Dolls and robots are child's playthings and adults' collectibles, objects of curiosity, psychologist's tools, technological workers, instruments of learning, and objects of fear. Artists have long understood the fetishistic nature of our attachment to dolls, (and more recently, robots) and have taken advantage of their ability to act as a simulacrum of the human being in art, in film, and in books. The phenomenon of a doll, mannequin, ventriloquist's dummy, puppet or robot coming to life is a common trope in both children's and adult literature. Popular culture from Walt Disney's animated version of *Pinocchio* to television's many incarnations of *Star Trek* and other futuristic shows have heroicized the near human by comparing their desire for growth and emotional attachment with humanity's often callous treatment of other beings and the machines that serve them. By 1942 when science fiction author, Isaac Asimov, proposed his "3 Laws of Robotics"² in a short story titled *Runaround*, the imaginative possibilities of a multi-cultural future society that included humanoid robots had been fully conceived. Sixty years later, we are beginning to approach that possibility. In April 2003, for example, Carnegie Mellon University opened the Robot Hall of Fame to "honor the fictional and real robots that have inspired and made breakthrough accomplishments in robotics"³ hoping to "call attention to the increasing contributions from robots to human society."⁴ Even more telling is a recent article in *Legal Affairs* in which Benjamin Soskis described a fictional trial concerning a super-intelligent and self-aware computer, BINA48, that had engaged a lawyer to have its right to life adjudicated in a court of law after learning that it was scheduled to be disconnected.⁵ The computer, represented at the trial by a hologram of a woman (the computer's choice of how it saw itself) and her lawyer won the jury over.⁶

While dolls and robots occupy space in the workplace and the playroom, they are not often the focus of sustained cultural

attention. The artists in this exhibition, however, contend that dolls and robots can be mined as rich and powerful metaphors for psychological and philosophical explorations. Their interest in the almost human starts in the knowledge that the edges of humanity are where the clear cut boundaries of society's definitions fall into tatters. How much more interest then in the space between human and the mirror images of humanity where the imagination can stir up memories of the past and visions of the future.

Eva Sutton and Sarah Hart have collaborated on a series of robotics projects with their classes at the Rhode Island School of Design and as artists. Their performance/installation for the Hunterdon Museum of Art is titled *Chance Transmission: An I Ching Reading with Two Small Robots*. The robots were created from readily available parts including Lego components, wheels, and plastic baby doll heads which provide an endearing point of focus for the human observers. In the performance, a projector throws a random pattern of light onto the platform (a metaphor for the throwing of the yarrow sticks). A small, light-sensing robot reads the lines of light and conveys the information to the second robot, equipped with a bamboo brush and a pot of ink. This robot draws six lines that comprise the hexagram which is then interpreted according to the book of the I Ching and read aloud. Thus the two robots, aided in their task by the projections of light and a database, perform the ancient art of I Ching. As in their previous collaboration, the *Sumi-ebot* project,⁷ the artists raise questions that our ever increasing technological prowess imply, including what constitutes humanity and what separates human activity from machine work. *Chance Transmission* and the *Sumi-ebot* project raise significant doubts about our most cherished notions, i.e., that humans create art to the exclusion of all other things, that spiritual forces reside only in mankind, and that a well-defined difference exists between human kind and robot.

Artist Keary Rosen has worked with kinetics and robots for several years. Two of his large scale robots, *1.530R*, and *Lincolnbot Monument* are included in the exhibition. The *Lincolnbot Monument* is related to a fictive account of a future war between robot-slaves and their human masters that he wrote to describe how and why the *Lincolnbot Monument* was created.⁸ In Rosen's science-fiction based narrative, the robots

have rebelled and in the name of their newly won freedom, erect their own memorial placing the image of the face of Abraham Lincoln on the steel welded form of the robot. This conflation of human and robot forms is justified by the robots who build it with the help of their human slaves because they wish to acknowledge their own passage from slavery to freedom. Rosen's story and the *Lincolnbot Memorial* trace a familiar theme in science fiction, while raising serious questions about history and how it can be adapted, debased, and even stolen.

While the imagery of robots takes us into realms of technological innovation and science fiction, dolls and images of dolls nearly always provoke nostalgia. Rene Lynch is a painter who aims "to seduce on a visual level and agitate on a psychic one."⁹ In her paintings, she often pairs dolls with animals exposing the vulnerability of childhood and strange dichotomies between predator and prey. Her finely detailed, delicately drawn images re-imagine a child's universe with the knowing eye of an experienced adult. In *Ariel*, a doll is inexplicably and precariously balanced on the branch of a large tree while a cautious leopard approaches; the suspense of the encounter between the two species is palpable. In *Something Shiny*, two dolls are attacked by magpies and while the dolls remain inanimate, we can't help but project our own fears onto their blank faces.

Sherri Wood uses modern-day dolls as a material upon which to work. Wood rescues cloth bodied dolls from thrift shops and gives them new life as art objects. Her *Tattoo Baby Dolls* are collaborations with tattoo artists who draw their designs on the bodies of the dolls, then send them back to Wood who embroiders the patterns. *Ms. Femme* and *Good Time Girl* are the ying and the yang of girl culture; one pink and demure, the other the very opposite of traditional feminine, not feminist, values. Using dolls to combine the previously mutually exclusive realms of embroidery and tattoo culture is not simply practical, but also deeply subversive. Like Lynch's paintings, the *Tattoo Baby Dolls* are a mix of innocence and experience, and can be understood in the context of third-wave feminism, which has made a point of reinvigorating historically feminine crafts with savvy hipness.

Barbie and her boyfriend, Ken, play the starring roles in Dot Paolo's photographs. Barbie has been so pervasively popular for so long that she is a cultural entity unto herself. She is not simply a doll, but a purveyor of a lifestyle and keeps a car, a boyfriend, tons of clothes and shoes, and her own website. Paolo's staged photographs using dolls and other children's

toys in narratives take place at the intersection of art history, theater, and life. In the three photographs from the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* series, Barbie and her sisters recreate Picasso's famous 1907 image, but where Picasso imagined mask wearing figures in his painting, Barbie positions her models, complete with masks, into a scene that approximates Picasso's composition and aims the camera, while Paolo takes the photograph. Her approximation of Picasso's painting suggest that with enough preparation a photographer can create nearly anything. The artist's humorous approach to art making and role playing is dependent on the dolls that she collects and her own specific art historical interests.¹⁰ Donna Bassin, who has contributed an insightful essay to this catalogue, also makes reference to art history in some of her photographs of dolls. In *Dollhouse: Listening to Laurie*, Bassin pays homage to photographer Laurie Simmons who began photographing dolls in the 1970s and is clearly an influence.¹¹ A practicing psychologist, Bassin finds dolls and the miniature scenes that dolls participate in to be deeply resonant of the human condition. In her photographs taken with a variety of cameras including a pinhole camera and plastic toy camera, the dollhouse reads as a safe haven or a claustrophobic space. The awkward positions of the dolls, the stiff postures as they try to relax and recline in their own little worlds is also unnerving and suggests the psychic discomforts that nudge at the edges of our own consciousness.

Sid Ceaser also photographs his own collection of toys. These action figures, which include Japanese animé dolls and the comic book hero, the Green Lantern (aka Hal Jordan) are captured in dramatically cropped images, focusing on details of face and figure that suggest the dolls in action. Unlike the narrative situations that are set up by Paolo and Bassin, Ceaser's photographs are isolated images of dolls set against blank backgrounds. Because the images are fairly large in scale, the diminutive dolls are transformed, as they are in a child's imagination, into the heroes of our contemporary myths. Ceaser's images are from the recent past and remind us how toys are bound by time and saturated with nostalgia.

The inability of dolls to act while mimicking human ability lends them a psychological edge that artist Barbara Madsen exploits. In her recent photogravure prints *Eyewitnesses*, she focuses on the eye mechanisms of antique porcelain dolls that survive after the doll itself has succumbed to wear and tear. The act of seeing is the first step in bearing witness; the second and crucial step is to talk about what has been seen. Madsen's images of mechanical eyes, like historical photographs of war

and death, bear passive witness to what seem to be woeful deeds. Dolls can hardly be held responsible for bearing witness, but for humans, whose passivity is a function of free will, there is a moral imperative to speak up and respond. One of the lessons of history is that passive witnesses to evil deeds are complicit in the evil. Madsen's work is also provocative for its general theme of vanitas, in how she orchestrates ruin and decay as attributes that apply to both humanity and the objects that they create. In the best of all possible interpretations, the doll's state suggest the destructive power of love, the battering that the best-loved toys endure, in the worst, it suggests the careless abandonment of old things and the eventual demise of all physical things.

The room-sized installation by artist Anne Queeney McKeown includes a sound piece by Damien Catera that extends the reach of the paper and wire construction into realms of aural space. McKeown has created a virtual universe peopled by paper dolls caught up in the currents of the world. Titled, *all is that is*, the piece is composed of many, many cast paper figures created from molds made from plastic children's dolls. Many of the figures are diminutive and transparent, and are suggestive of ghosts and spirits. Mixed among these papery thin, fragile looking forms are some darker, heavier figures constructed of overbeaten flax pulp that have dried unevenly causing painful distortions of the dolls' forms. Because these paper dolls are created by the artist one by one, they are not immediately associated with popular culture or childhood play. Rather than struggling for individual humanity in each of the dolls, the artist plays upon the mass production of forms that is associated with commercial dolls. Her metaphor is not the doll as individual, but of dolls as masses of humanity. The vision of a great multitude of helpless figures flowing forth in a great current of time and space is symbolic in McKeown's eyes of the human condition. Dolls in this artist's installation are stand-ins for humanity from the viewpoint of the gods. Free will is conspicuously absent in this vision of the universe.

The philosophical and psychological ideas that the artists in this exhibition raise range from playful explorations of art and culture to painful questions about moral responsibilities and free will. Lynch, Madsen, and McKeown emphasize the passive nature of dolls in their work, but they use the inherent passivity of dolls to create a conflict in our own response. Bassin, Ceaser, Paolo and Wood, in contrast, animate the dolls in their works by creating miniaturized worlds where the dolls reflect and refract our own lives. While dolls are vessels for our narcissistic fantasies, robots are machines for accomplish-

ing tasks. The tasks they accomplish, however, are moving further and further from the traditional realm of mechanistic activity, as Sutton and Hart's bots and Rosen's sculptures suggest. Rosen, like Sutton and Hart, enjoys the play between human and machine that occurs when human parts, or attributes, are fused to machine parts and robots act in humanistic ways. In the real world, the boundaries between human beings and the things that we create to function as toys, machines, and stand-ins for the human are clear and distinct, but in the imagination, the edges blur. Where we might ask, will those boundaries be in the future?

NOTES

¹ The word "robot" is derived from "robata" the Czech word for forced labor or servitude and was introduced by Czech playwright Karel Capek in 1921 when his play *R.U.R.* (Rossum's Universal Robots) was first produced. The play was so successful that it was translated and performed in New York and London in 1923.

² Asimov's Laws of Robotics: First Law: A robot may not injure a human being, or through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. Second Law: A robot must obey orders given it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. Third Law: A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

³ Carnegie Mellon University, The Robot Hall of Fame at www.robothalloffame.org.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Benjamin Soskis, "Man and the Machines," *Legal Affairs: The Magazine at the Intersection of Law and Life*, Jan. - Feb. 2005, available online at www.legalaffairs.org/issues/Jan_Feb_2005.

⁶ In the fictional case, the judge overturned the jury's decision and recommended that the case be resolved by legislative action.

⁷ Sumi-eBot was performed at the ArtBots: The Robot Talent Show of 2002. See www.artbots.org/2002.

⁸ Conversation with the artist.

⁹ Rene Lynch, artist statement, see p. 9.

¹⁰ *Raising the Button* and *The Final Sanding* pay homage to Pop sculptor, Claes Oldenberg.

¹¹ Behind the reclining doll, who is a surrogate for the artist, is a small reproduction of Sarah Charlesworth's *Red Mask*. Both the Laurie doll and the painting are from the "Kaleidoscope House" a dollhouse designed by artists Laurie Simmons and architect Peter Wheelwright for Bozart Toys, Inc. See Mary Birmingham, *Donna Bassin: The Afterlife of Dolls*, Montclair Art Museum, 2003, p. 5.



Donna Bassin

Dollhouse: Winger, 2001

Pinhole photograph

Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Andrea Meislin Gallery, New York

Inside Dolly: A Still Life Revisited

by Donna Bassin

Baudelaire observed the child's manic "...desire...to get at and see the soul inside their toys."¹ Unwittingly and tragically, the child's crass methodology, vigorous shaking, pounding and dissection, would often result in the toy's destruction into a pile of meaningless remains. This essay, sharing a similar desire to discover the psychological "meaning" of dolls, risks a similar outcome.

What is a doll actually? A toy constructed to mimic the human form? The fact that dolls take human form differentiates them from other playthings and toys. Dolls allow us to learn empathy when we project our feelings on an object that resembles a human at the same time as their lack of humanness create the risk that we objectify human beings. The doll as an abstraction of a human promotes our simple identification and allows the doll to be our double. Somewhere between their "almost-humanness" and "still-emptiness" lies the doll's deceptive lure; here desire rushes in.

It is often the mother who introduces the child to play and to creative illusion as the child innocently and naturally reaches out to explore the mother's body as well as his or her own, and then beyond it to better understand the world through miniaturized surrogates. The world of beyond the mother is viscerally animated and in combination with the mother's approving and reflective pleasure in the child's discovery serves as the source of animation and mutual engagement with the external world. The mother suggests to the child that their doll is real when she says, "Here is your baby."

The first doll I remember was given to me when my sister was born. I dragged my baby, in my case a toddler-size Patty Play Pal over to a neighborhood gathering of girls with their dolls and was told my Patty wasn't real. The real Patty could be identified by a heart embossed on its chest and mine was just a cheap imitation. The suggestion that my doll was not "genuine" effectively destroyed the magic of dolls in my play. My baby became just a doll. For her part in this deception my Patty was truly objectified, subjected to a violent haircut and disfigurement of her face. She was thrown in a closet while subsequent gifts of dolls were neatly placed on a shelf. Their potential as tools for my psychological projections was foreclosed and the

dolls served only as a still monument to a dashed illusion.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote about the painful disillusionment that accompanied his awareness of his dolls' inability to care for and respond to his feelings. While literary historians, such as Eva-Maria Simms² have implicated Rilke's troubled relationship with his mother as the source for his disdain and disappointment in the unresponsive doll, his obsession with the doll suggests to me a useful way for him to explore his parallel disappointment with the unresponsiveness of his mother, and to avoid a complete mourning of his loss of his mother's love.

His understandable distress and rage at his mother (she dressed him as a girl and gave him dolls to play with) was compounded by his emotional investment in these unsatisfying dolls. And yet he continued to animate the inanimate doll through his writing about dolls.³ Perhaps his refusal to totally collapse into inner deadness and abandon his search to animate the world, its objects, words and ideas with humanity and responsiveness motivated his creative process. Given an unresponsive and manipulative mother, and an inanimate toy with which to search for meaning, Rilke persevered and created an alternative path to relating to people and the world through this writing.

Because of their value as screens on which to project our emotions, dolls are often used in child psychotherapy. I have used dolls in my own practice. The second time I turned to dolls was when the world was in a shattered state of grief following September 11, 2001. As a psychologist and consultant to the Mayor's office of New York City, I traveled to Ground Zero with those who had lost loved ones there. At Ground Zero, where the world was covered in grey ash, I lost my sense of human scale and any sense of control over our world, my world. A dollhouse in my office — a safe haven for my now minuscule self — offered a necessary refuge between the nightmare and professional demands for some useful and purposeful action. Here, within the interior sanctuary of the dollhouse I could imaginatively exist at once as both doll and animator. I temporarily surrendered to the fears and wishes of the miniature dolls, as I worked through my own psychodrama.

The dollhouse and its inhabitants served (as Patty Play Pal did so many years ago) as a willing and non-retaliatory container for my rage and despair. I moved these plastic objects around until I found a virtual but nevertheless empathic resonating scenario. The open sided dollhouse, now filled with a record of my play suggested a peep show of interior life. A small pinhole camera placed in front of the scene substituted for the fourth missing wall of the dollhouse and captured the fruit of my play for later development and reflection. The pinhole and plastic toy cameras, used to record the action of these little dolls, lack precision controls and therefore helped to undermine fantasies of adult mastery control. The camera's aperture, standing in for the eye of an observer, was placed within inches of the dolls and created distortions of scale and light and, in the best of outcomes, ambiguity about the objects themselves. Further play with light and focus transformed the dolls and gave them an illusory animation and separate existence outside of my control.

Baudelaire observed that the toy was the child's first initiation into art. Perhaps it is the child's first experience in the animation of her/his doll or action figure that brings the child face to face with the pain and pleasure of her/his own subjectivity and that of the other. Is this where the beginning of humanity lies? When the child-creator realizes the doll isn't responsive, does he/she begin an internal search for what is

missing? Is the childhood of the artist marked by an ability to temporarily recognize the deception of the doll and to continue the search for a more enduring illusion? Is this the source of the artist's life-long questioning: is it real, is it meaningful, and of the artist's capacity to find some truth in a fictive structure that may be related to that tension.

Burdened with personal memory, history and nostalgic cultural associations, the uninflected doll is doomed to childhood repetition and artistic cliché. On the other hand, in that rare space relatively free of deadening associative content, the doll may lose some of the pressure of their repressive history. Dislodged by imaginative play from previously rigid roles, the doll is free to be what the artist desires.

NOTES

¹ Charles Baudelaire, "The Philosophy of Toys," in *Essays on Dolls*, translated by Idris Parry and Paul Keegan, London 1994, pp. 13–25.

² Eva-Maria Simms, "Uncanny Dolls: Images of Death in Rilke and Freud," *New Literary History*, 27.4, 1996, pp. 663–667.

³ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Dolls: On the Wax Dolls of Lotte Pritzel," in *Essays on Dolls*, pp 26–38.

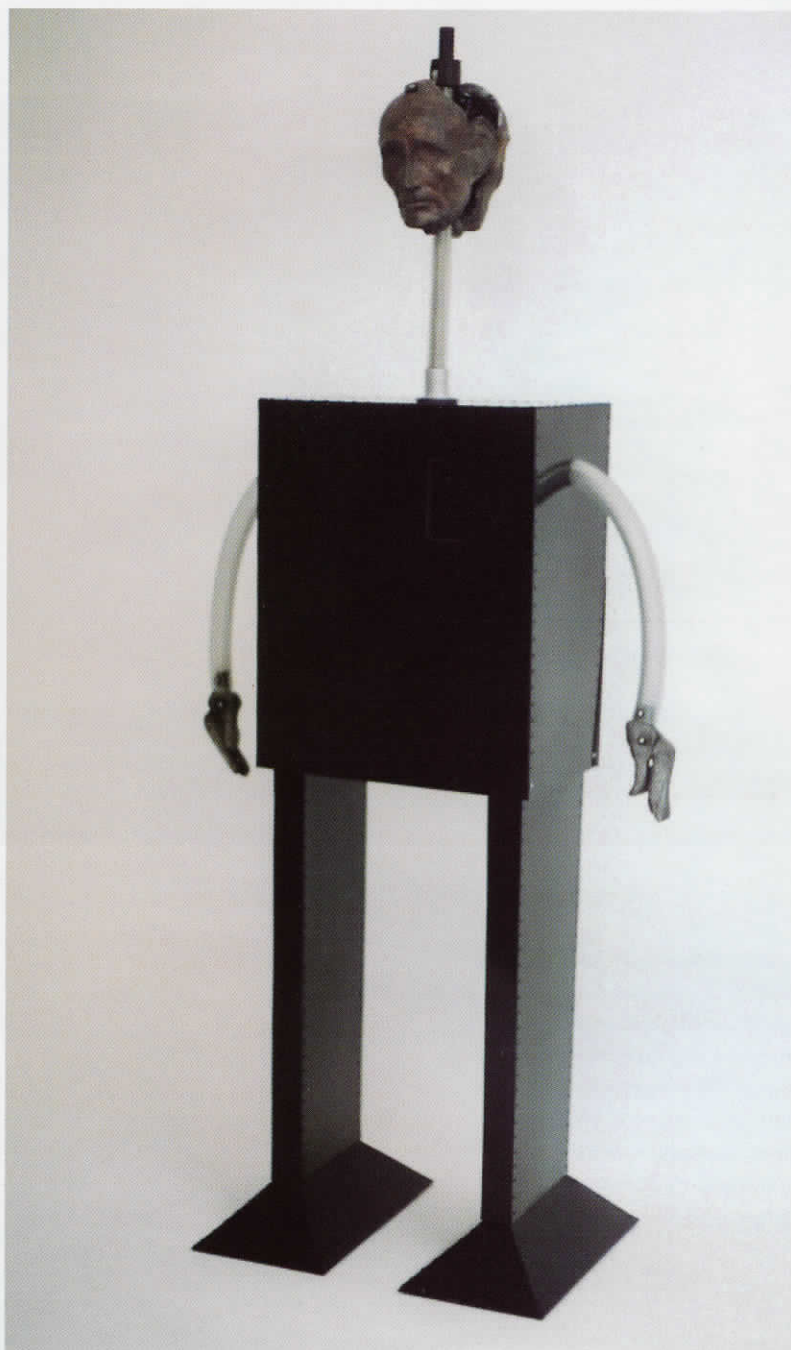


Rene Lynch

My Sweet Danger series of paintings is involved with basic dualities of power and vulnerability, freedom and desire, innocence and experience. I intend my work to seduce on a visual level and agitate on a psychic one. Drawing inspiration from 17th 18th and 19th century botanical prints, children's portraits of the early American itinerant painters, Edo period Japanese botanical screen painting, and fairy tales, I depict dolls and kitsch figurines as tiny simulacra of ourselves interacting with animals. In much of my work the animating spark can be found in the conflict inherent in the pairing of the natural and the artificial, the instinctual and the inanimate. I am exploring that period before puberty that embodies pure spirit and an inchoate knowledge of power, when a child is free to pursue imaginative games and dangerous adventures, to see what is beyond the looking glass.

Ariel, 2003

Oil on gold leafed wood



Keary Rosen

I.530R The Robot, the Lincolnbot Monument and the Pillow Fighting Machine are part of an ongoing body of work in which rudimentary machines with simple mechanical functions act as vehicles to explore issues of a personal and political nature.

In science fiction, the robot is frequently used as a metaphor to explore philosophical issues including the way in which humans relate to each other, the limits of our ability, what constitutes life, and the meaning of free will.

I am interested in the contrast of the seemingly fragile organic elements and the way they relate to the sturdy, precise, and anonymous geometry of the mechanical elements.

The ceramic hands and heads are fired using traditional methods (anagama and raku) and are specific in their historical or personal reference.

For the *Lincolnbot Monument*, I acquired a life casting of Abraham Lincoln's face, from which I then made multiples. The original casting was created in 1860, when Lincoln was 51 years old. The height of the sculpture is 6' 4" the same height of the Great Emancipator.

Lincolnbot Monument, 2002-3

Steel, rivets, motor plastic, aluminum, electrical wiring, Raku fired clay, metallic enamel paint

Anne Queeney McKeown

I believe that over time an observer should be able to find references to see more clearly into the orchestrated chaos, sensing more with every encounter. Humor and a dark world-view invade my work.

A 19 foot long by 52 inch wide wire piece is attached near the ceiling and angles down to the floor. The wire is unraveled chicken wire, hardware cloth and other different gauge wires. It holds many male and female doll castings made of paper.

These figures are somehow connected to the unraveling. The unraveling is the systems that are in change and flux. Some areas are more open than others; some are lashed together. There is an energy that tries to hold back the unraveling.

The beginning of Damian Catera's Sound Piece is a keening sound, mournful and respectful of loss. Then it moves toward vibration. There are overlaps of beginnings and endings; echoes, bursts, swellings, fading. Sound is everywhere, in us, outside of us. It exists where there is no one to hear it.



Detail: *all is that is*, 2005

Wire, hand made paper, steel
Sound Piece by Damian Catera



Sid Ceaser

This series of portraits was begun in 2003.

My intent for the series is to showcase these small, plastic, mass produced action figures. They are children's playthings, sculpted with the aid of machines, made to mimic human bodies. These small, unimportant pieces of plastic are made so children can assume other identities—heroes, villains, and other personas.

I have chosen to create portraits of these images and enlarge them, giving these insignificant plastic toys a new identity. Upon first glance, these images resemble snapshots of people. On closer inspection, the viewer discovers that these images are not portraits but are photographs of eight inch plastic action figures which are normally ignored, cast aside and forgotten.

As the only child in my family, toys helped keep me entertained — they gave me a chance to create and populate vast universes.

It is my intent to give these plastic dolls new lives by focusing on their imperfections which, even though they are clones made on an assembly line, are unique with scratches, markings, cuts and imperfect painting. These flaws make them as varied and as diverse as any human being.

Hina, 2003

Digital image from photograph
Courtesy of McGowan Fine Art



Dot Paolo

Through the use of old toys, handmade crafts, kitschy objects and taxidermy, I set up dioramas that are narratives about the way artists conceive and develop ideas and physically make their art. I use recognizable icons and artworks associated with famous artists and combine them with my fantasy characters.

I photograph with a Hasselblad, medium format camera. I develop and print all my own work primarily in black and white with selective handcoloring.

Les Demoiselles, 2004

Black and white silverprint with handcoloring



Sherri Wood

During the summer of 1998 three separate contingencies of my practice came together from which the Tattoo Baby Doll Project was conceived. I had been collecting cloth bodied baby dolls at various thrift stores as I traveled across the country to the Headlands Center for the Arts near San Francisco for a three month residency. While there I was reading Rosika Parker's book "The Subversive Stitch" about the history of embroidery and I was exposed to a large population of tattooed people in the Bay Area. So I realized that a lot of the embroidered images of the past were similar to the tattooed images of today. I decided to materialize this discovery by asking female tattoo artists from across the country to draw tattoo images on the dolls that I then rendered in embroidery.

Tattoo art by Michele Wortman

Ms. Femme is designed with the ideas in mind of creating a softer, more feminine look by using a limited amount of black (if any) tending towards lighter brighter colors and incorporating the use of negative space—lines tend to confine space. By working with the skin as a design element (negative space) this incorporates the graceful flow of the body with the design. My objective as a tattooist with a background in painting is to create a fluid rhythm seeing the body as a three-dimensional canvas and the pigment as an accent to its beauty.

Ms. Femme, 2001
Embroidery, found doll

Eva Sutton and Sarah Hart

This installation is a performative system to generate and read the I Ching fortune of a person. The process begins with a wave of the person's hand over a magical object on a podium, activating a projected image on the floor. These random lines of light simulate the throwing of yarrow sticks—traditionally the first step in the ancient technique of an I Ching reading.

Next, a small, light-sensing robot moves through the image and “reads” the randomly projected lines, pausing and beeping analytically as it encounters each line. It then rotates and transmits the reading via an infrared signal to a second robot. This robot, equipped with a bamboo brush, paints two sets of three lines, either continuous or broken. The six lines make up the two trigrams resulting in the I Ching hexagram. This hexagram is an index into a corresponding database of I Ching fortunes. The interpretation which corresponds to the painted hexagram is then projected (as English text) and read out loud by a synthetic female voice.

The installation plays with opposites: random lines projected as white light, ordered lines painted with black ink; one robot reading and transmitting, the other robot receiving and writing.

The work also alludes to the connections between symbol systems: the random lines which seem to contain a hidden truth; the binary code which controls the robots' behavior; the system of solid and broken lines which make up the I Ching hexagram and the written and spoken language (in this case, English) which can be understood by a human audience.

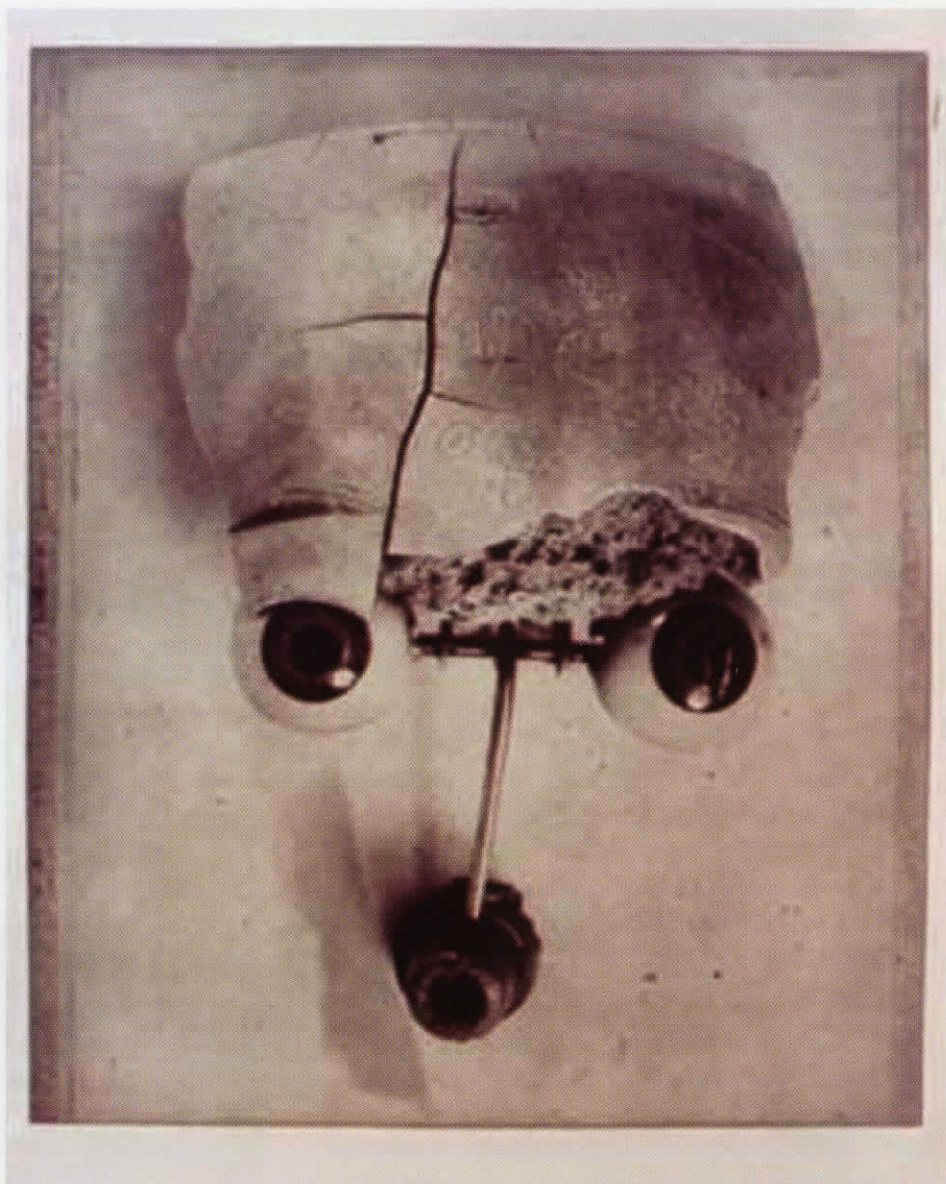
The work also illustrates how humans make meaning. There is an implicit meaningful connection between a wave of the hand, a symbolic gesture of one individual, and the final reading of the fortune. The implication is that the fortune is specific to this individual, namely the individual who waved his/her hand. The work also implies a meaningful connection between gestural processes. It is innately human to connect the first robot's reading of the random lines, the invisible transmission of information from one robot to the next and the second robot's painting of the hexagram. Whether these sequential systems are actually meaningfully connected in a causal relationship is a mystery. It is left for the viewer to decide, based on the viewer's faith in chance as a generative force in the transmission of meaning.



Detail: *Chance Transmission: An I Ching Reading With Two Small Robots*, 2005
Video, two robots, sumi ink on paper

Barbara Madsen

The *Eyewitness* images confront the complex psychological nature of our existence and guardianship when forced to lead plural lives as victim/witness within our own culture's atrocities.



Eyewitness I, 2004
Photogravure

Checklist of the exhibition

All work courtesy of the artists except where noted.

Donna Bassin

Dollhouse: Listening to Laurie, 2001

Iris print

25 x 20 in.

Montclair Art Museum purchase; Gift of Donna Bassin, 2004.3

Dollhouse: Wringer, 2001

Pinhole photograph

18 ½ x 24 in.

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Andrea Meislin Gallery, NY

photo p. 6

Dollhouse: Red Chairs #1, 2005

20 x 24 in

Pinhole photograph

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Andrea Meislin Gallery, NY

Fishbowl: Babies Looking Left, 2005

Pinhole photograph

9 x 14 in.

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Andrea Meislin Gallery, NY

Fishbowl: Babies Looking Right, 2005

Pinhole photograph

9 x 14 in.

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Andrea Meislin Gallery, NY

Sid Ceaser

Hal Jordan, 2003

Digital image from photograph

19 ¾ x 29 ½ in.

Courtesy of McGowan Fine Art, Concord, NH

Hina, 2003

Digital image from photograph

29 ½ x 29 1/2 in.

Courtesy of McGowan Fine Art, Concord, NH

photo p. 12

Kanaeda, 2003

Digital image from photograph

19 ¾ x 29 ½ in.

Courtesy of McGowan Fine Art, Concord, NH

Rene Lynch

Prospera's Island, 2000 -2002

Limited edition handmade artist's book

Painted and collaged images, handmade paper, painted mulberry bark

6 x 7 in.

Ariel, 2003

Oil on gold leafed wood

36 x 72 in.

photo p. 9

Something Shiny, 2003

Watercolor on paper

18 x 24 in.

Little Red Cap, 2003

Watercolor on paper

18 x 24 in.

Barbara Madsen

Eyewitness I, 2004

Photogravure

19 x 15 in.

photo p. 16

Eyewitness 6, 2004

Photogravure

19 x 15 in.

Eyewitness 16, 2004

Photogravure

19 x 15 in.

Anne Queeney McKeown

all is that is, 2005

Wire, handmade paper, steel

8 ½ ft x 52 in. x 19 ft.

Sound Piece by Damian Catera

photo p. 11

Dot Paolo

Les Demoiselles, 2004

Black and white silverprint with handcoloring

16 x 20 in.

photo p. 13

Hold it Like This, 2004

Black and white silverprint with handcoloring

20 x 16 in.

Holding the Chicken Head, 2004

Black and white silverprint with handcoloring

20 x 16 in.

The Final Sanding, 2003

Black and white silverprint with handcoloring

16 x 16 in.

Raising the Button, 2003

Black and white silverprint with handcoloring

16 x 20 in.

Keary Rosen

Lincolnbob Monument, 2002-3

Steel, rivets, motor plastic, aluminum, electrical wiring, Raku fired clay, metallic enamel paint

76 x 30 x 14 in.

photo p. 10

Pillow Fighting Machine, 2003

Steel, rubber, motors, springs, electrical wiring, foot pedals, porcelain slip castings, Anagama fired clay casts

38 x 72 x 38 in.

1.530R the Robot, 2000

Steel, cast acrylic, rubber, motor, electrical wiring, light unit, metallic enamel paint

72 x 30 x 26 in.

Eva Sutton and Sarah Hart

Chance Transmission: An I Ching Reading With Two Small Robots, 2005

Video, two robots, sumi ink on paper

photo p. 15

Sherri Wood

Tattoo art by Michelle Wortman

Ms. Femme, 2001

Embroidery, found doll

photo p. 14

Tattoo art by Laura Saadati

Good Time Girl, 2002

Embroidery, found doll