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A conversation with Jessica Weiss – November 2006.



*The works included in your solo exhibition, entitled **Replay**, are all based on –and in some instances even incorporate- vintage wallpaper or textile designs that appear to date from 1940s-1950s. Can you tell us how this fascination came about and how long you have used wallpapers as inspiration? Are all the wallpapers of American origin? Do you have a set of criteria to pick which to use?*

JW: The images and patterns in my work are taken from wallpaper, **Replay** refers to my giving these images a second life or new playing field. Some of the images I use come from childhood wallpapers. I am interested in memory and believe that play, the work of childhood, imprints the brain for life. I hope that my work addresses the playful possibilities of making paintings.

About 10 years ago I started to incorporate wallpaper as a collage element in process- based abstract paintings that had the feel of weathered walls. I had for a long time, admired the "**Nouveau Réaliste**" painters, such as **Villegge** and **Hains**, who in the 50's collaged torn billboards onto their canvases. Wallpaper was my more intimate, domestic voice in dialogue with these artists. Wallpapers, mainly from the 50's, 60's, 70's (my formative years), were chosen for their colors and patterns. Over time I became intrigued with particular figures and abstract patterns depicted in the wallpapers and I moved away from collage and began to simply paint these images.



There is a fairy tale aspect to your work-at least in the works I have viewed at your studio-the paintings ignite or rather are evocative of a fantasy narrative. Can you comment?

JW: In many of my canvases I introduce an archetypal figure into the topography of an abstract pattern. My attempt to create a believable scenario out of the unrealistic has a connection to the design of fairy tales and fantasy.



Of the recurring themes in your paintings, the toy soldier figures are particularly disturbing- wether depicted in groups or individually-the long veins of paint drips, the lack of defined features (the dot-like eyes) or of a complete body-appear to translate a lost in control in a traditionally controlled conscription or vocation. Were these paintings inspired by the contemporary political climate in this country?

JW: The soldier paintings are my response war and violence and the plight of the innocent soldier in over his head in an incomprehensibly horrific situation.



I notice you layer several techniques in your works on papers-can you describe your work process?

JW: Working on paper provides a more immediate and direct way to combine two disparate images. My printing press is the laboratory where I mix monoprint, etching and collage in pursuit of unexpected scenarios. These visual discoveries, often through chance occurrence, inform my paintings.



"Deer", "Revolver/Pistol" are prints that seemed "peeled" from beneath the surface-in the first instance the deer from the forest, in the other from a faux-bois wall treatment. When you depict the lone soldier, his presence is either jailed through the natural bars of forest trees or drowning in fish-filled aquariums. In

"Play" "Event" and "Calling" gentle looking bears and cubs or stylized flowers -symbols associated with harmony and friendship-, are incorporated in elaborate pastiche-like compositions-above or amongst figures of hunters or toy soldiers-all point to superimposed ideas of peace and war, innocence and violence, reality and fantasy, nature versus industry. I sense a recurring dichotomic search, a tragic world deceitfully depicted in bright colors -and at times sprinkled with glitter.

JW: I hope my paintings address some of the dichotomies of life, both tragic and wondrous.



The surface of your paintings is laboriously worked -in unevenly applied layers-as a result the paintings retain an unfinished sketchy quality. I sense that you are never really completely "done", the questions are not answered in the so-called finished painting-they merely introduce another set of queries or problems and as such are perhaps later addressed in other related paintings. When do you decide a painting is completed? Or do you see your paintings and works on paper as all belonging to a related cycle?

JW: A painting is finished when I have created a convincing space for my images to inhabit. I continually hope this will come about quickly but that is rarely the case. Often I work on the same canvas on and off for a year, although I hope the finished work does not seem labored. I do believe that all my work is related in its intention.



There has been a trend amongst contemporary artist to incorporate dysney-esque cartoon figures in their work -often that type of iconography is immediately identifiable to those well versed and familiar with American popular culture. One aspect of interest in your work is that you don't work with a familiar iconographic vocabulary. Yet the figures you use as subjects or participants in your compositions seem familiar in a collective memory kind of way. The same could be said of your palette of colors, which could be construed as related to what one would expect to find on mid-20th century mass-manufactured plastic toys. How would you interpret your choice of hues (which I associate with a very modern industrialized world) and do you identify with a particular school of painters?

JW: Wallpaper is a piece of cultural fabric and I have excavated my figures from this decorative interpretation of the collective unconscious. I am interested in memory and the ways in which memories exist in the present. Through color I try to create a sense of light. My initial thrill with painting was the magical transformation of a physical substance (paint) into light which I believe occurs in all good painting.



What are you working on now?

JW: I'm working on two canvases that didn't get finished in time for the show. I look forward to what will happen in the studio after seeing my work in your gallery.



Thank you Ms Weiss.