



Left: Jane Gennaro, *Intelligent Design*, 2008, hen eggs, cheesecloth, gesso, 18 x 18 x 5". Right: *Brides of Bone*, 2003, deer ribs and bones, vintage nightgown lace, gels, paper, 14 x 28 x 10"

Articulate Remains: Reliefs, Sculptures and Assemblages by Jane Gennaro at Rogue Space in New York

by John Mendelsohn

A performer in a gallery reads a dramatic monologue about her confrontation with wild geese. She acts out her attempts to drive the geese away from her home by shaking the eggs in their nest. She winds up at one point physically fighting off the birds. Both funny and tragic, the monologue is a vivid piece of confessional theater that reveals complex feelings of hope, guilt and responsibility.

The monologue, written and performed by Jane Gennaro, recounts the epiphany of her fraught connection to nature. It also marked the beginning of a large and varied body of visual work exhibited at Rogue Space in Chelsea. (Full disclosure: I wrote essays for the show.) The performance of the monologue made clear the visceral emotions that spurred Gennaro to devote herself over seven years to the highly charged works on display. In a sense, the pieces are the artist's way of processing in material terms questions of mortality, loss and transcendence.

The viewer is struck upon entering Gennaro's exhibition, *Articulate Remains*, by the presence of whiteness.

The reliefs of the Egg and Bones series incorporate actual bird's eggs, alone or in groups, trapped by string and veiled in cheesecloth, along with insects, pods and other objects. The effect is elegiac, as if a kind of visual mourning is taking place. The eggs, caught and held, seem to allude to the human body, the maternal breast, the self bound and waiting for release. In addition to the reliefs, five free-standing and hanging sculptures use found objects including a cradle, a set of mattress springs, and a hive of knitted fabric, all with their own poetic associations.

There is a strong sense in Gennaro's work that the drama being worked out is both physical and spiritual. Along with a sense of vulnerability and a bleaching out by death comes an intimation of rebirth. The viewer is reminded in the white reliefs of the shrouded Christ and the imagery of the first communion: the white dress, veil and missal case. The artist has cited the formative influences on her work of her childhood discovery of nature and her Catholic upbringing.

In a revealing comment, Gennaro

has noted that, "Resurrection is a big part of what the work is about, as well as worship and forgiveness. I'm also fond of the ritualistic aspects of creating work with ephemeral materials. When I was little, I wanted to be a nun and/or a veterinarian and doing this work makes me feel like both."

Also on display is the series *The Brides of Bone*, sculptures with the appearance of wraiths, part human and part animal. They are assembled from deer ribs and other bones, partially covered with gauze and paper. They are painted white, personages in a



Jane Gennaro, *Nipped in the Bud*, 2007, Eisenhower era handkerchief, coloring book, snake skin, squirrel claw & tail, baby bird skull, mouse tooth, deer bones, hen eggs, gesso, enamel, on canvas, 20 x 20 x 5"



Jane Gennaro, Model 27, 2009, scissor cut magazine on paper, 14 x 17"

netherworld between death and resurrection.

The exhibition's title, *Articulate Remains*, refers to the artist giving voice to the objects that she finds in nature. Gennaro has written that, "The process begins with observation and culminates in storytelling....The impulse is to save these things and transform them into personal yet universal narratives that will seduce and disturb." This is never more true than in the *Kinderdraussen* series, the artist's invented word for "children outside." In eleven 18"x18" works on canvas, she combines 1950s illustrated handkerchiefs and coloring book imagery, with insects and the remains of small animals.

The work is a melding of sweet and creepy, with a quality of innocence under duress. The found images of children and nature at times visually rhymes with the remains of living things. The result is like a narrative that seems both strange and familiar, just

beyond the literal retelling of a story.

Robert Mahoney has connected the *Kinderdraussen* work with Marina Warner's writing on fairytales and their "riotous shape-shifting." He goes on to quote her observation that this quality, "...creates a huge theater of possibility in the stories: anything can happen." What seems to be happening in Gennaro's pieces is a fictive reflection of her own encounter with nature, a child-like wonder and an awareness of mortality inextricably bound together.

Characteristic of the *Kinderdraussen* work is *Nipped in the Bud*. Radiating both charm and menace, it is composed of a handkerchief with sea green and café au lait flowers on which sit two real eggs. Also on the surface are coloring book images of a diapered baby, a toddler, and a pair of scissors and spools of thread. On one margin is a swag of snake skin, and among the items collaged on the surface are a squirrel claw and tail, bird skull and an

animal tooth. It is left to the viewer to compose their own rebus from these lovely, scary elements.

Another *Kinderdraussen* piece is *Albrich's Symphonic Nap* in which a little girl sleeps in a world of apple green and pale aqua. She is surrounded by flowers, each with a large bumble bee, while her dreams are haunted by an actual tortoise skull with a pink interior and blue eye sockets.

Also in the exhibition are two groups of work from Gennaro's series *Hair and Models* series, which focuses on the human body. The surreal *Hair* works use her own hair to create the drawings' linear structure. She constructs free-floating, fantastic worlds that are part human and part creature, a moving mass of interconnected shapes and beings. The *Models* works use images from fashion magazines. Gennaro has cut away most of the image, leaving an anorexic, yet liquidly dancing essential self. These works read as a feminist commentary on commercial imagery and the promise of liberation.



Jane Gennaro, Nureyev sand crab, string, gesso, cardboard 5 x 2 x 2"