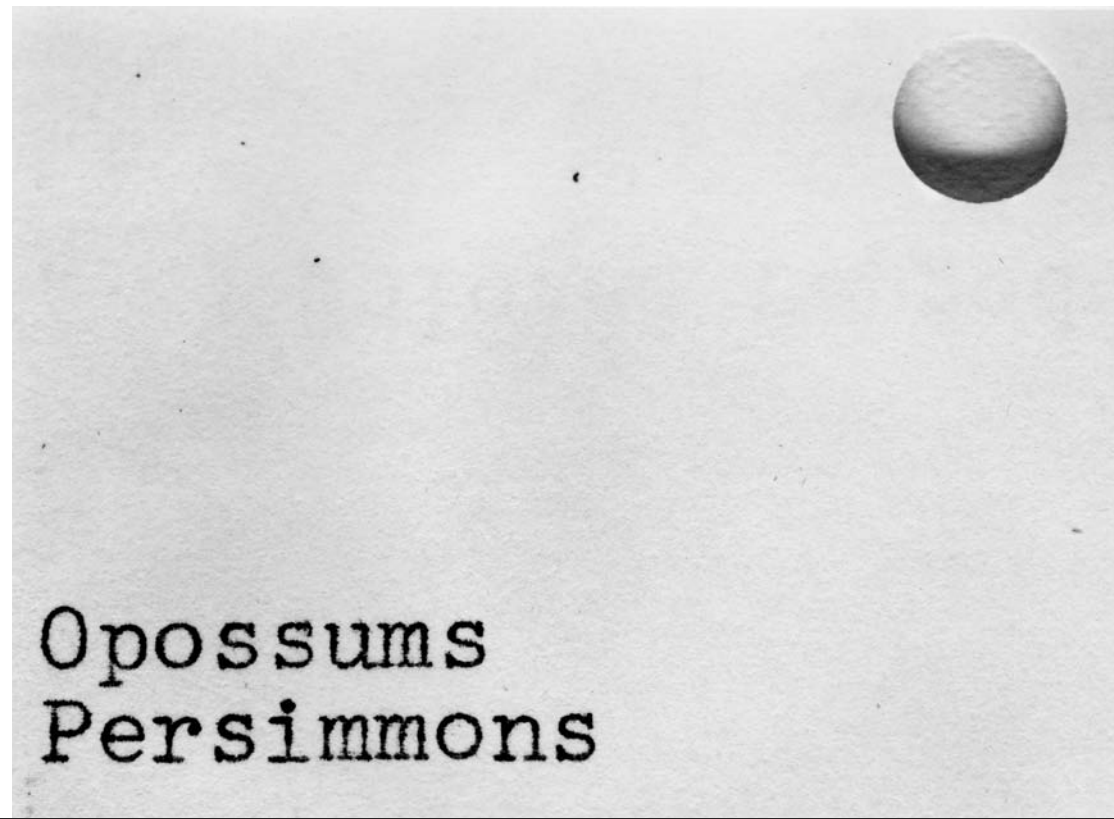


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Erica Baum, *Untitled (Opossums Persimmons)*, 1998

February 27 - March 27, 2011
Opossums Persimmons

Gabrielle Giattino interviews Nancy de Holl and
Esther Kläs for Opossums Persimmons

GG: I want to ask you first about subject matter and setting. I think for Nancy, we clearly see in most of her works in the past few years, a central object or group of objects depicted, but I would certainly not minimize the importance of the backdrops or supports behind/around those depicted subjects. While Esther's work enters the 3rd dimension, we also have a similar, central focus, and an equally considered support. I'd like to ask you both about the tension between subject and support and how it functions in your work.

NdH: It's different every time, but decisions about a backdrop are generally secondary or complimentary to the main object or figure that interests me. It's like a formal outgrowth of the subject. It's satisfying for me to simplify a picture by coordinating all of its elements, reducing it to a tight set of rhyming colors or shapes that delineate some sort of stripped psychological state. So often the backdrop is just an abstract re-iteration of the figure/object. With the paintings, I find as I am working that I will re-integrate some background information back into the central subject. So there is a playing with camouflage and the potential for the subject to be locked into or merged with its environment.

I heard once about an amazing kind of worm/parasite in fish that will embed itself into the fish's mouth. Over time the fish's tongue is attacked and atrophies to the point where it can't

really eat. The tongue shrinks and the parasite grows larger and larger. Eventually the worm reaches tongue-size and stops growing. The fish can then kind of use the parasite as a prosthesis for its tongue. It is able to eat and become “healthy” again. I can’t remember if the fish eventually dies or if it is a totally symbiotic relationship with a happy ending. Apparently the only way you can tell that a fish has this parasite is if you look into its mouth and see that its tongue has a pair of eyes! So great!

EK: Thank you Nancy for the animal introduction.... I once saw a documentary about sex and wildlife and they were talking about which animals stay with their partners for life - or if they cheat. After all, the only ones who don’t cheat are amoebas because when they meet, they turn inseparably into one. That’s like my work.

GG: Esther, could you talk about the idea of scale in your work? There is a tension which puts your sculpture in an interesting play between statue and domestic.

EK: What is between statue and domestic? What is domestic? Does domestic refer to size? We relate to our chair and we relate to our table, but we don’t relate....to the statue of liberty, we just look up. So, “one is to look at and one is to use” and when the sculpture is to look at and not to use but has the size of something you might be able to use in your house, then there is friction. I am now thinking about the rat. And how the rat is not supposed to be domestic. But the rat is also not a statue.

GG: Are you intending this friction? Is that space between something to use and something to gaze at particularly interesting to you?

EK: I am not intending the friction. I was actually thinking about it as a feeling that occurs (because of the discrepancy between domestic and statue). I am not interested in it as such, but I am interested in the possibility of having several points of view, without setting up a whole buffet of interpretations.

GG: Nancy, for you there is a kind of operation of obfuscation in the translation from photographed still life to painting. In your earlier still lives as well, a digital hand performed a destabilizing action - where we could almost not read illusionistic space and something ‘out of this world’ started happening. In the paintings, you have more liberty, but it seems you stay true to this interest in a kind of other-worldly still life. We’re seeing a push-pull between depiction and invention. In Peoples and Cultures, there is almost a wool pulled over our eyes - where what seems like depiction of found artifacts are, in fact, sculpted subjects by the artist. Are these invented figures and artifacts? Are they based on things you’ve seen? Did you make them with the intention of photographing them?



Esther Kläs, snapshot

It was somewhere in Chinatown and we ordered red bean and green tea ice cream for dessert. Both are great colors. We moved them back and forth trying to determine the best taste and then color played its role. I don’t remember the result but I remember that they were both really good. Maybe it was even the combination of it all. The pattern of the table cloth, the hands, cups... beautiful.

NdH: You’re right about the push-pull hybrid aspect of the still lives. I’m glad for you to point that out as one of the links between the photos and the paintings. Although I have ambitions to be able to generate imagery entirely from my mind/thoughts, I do rely on found source images – from magazines, books, ebay, and collect them with the idea that they will show up at some point when I need a vehicle. Most of my work has a cultural specificity, although I think of these references as being like overtones or impressions that are subordinate to the overall effect of the image. With the Peoples & Cultures series, I was interested in the way museums can so effectively re-mystify artifacts with lighting and atmosphere, almost to the point where you no longer care about their historical context. They really start to have their own life... the museum display contributes and layers onto their already powerful aura. I made the objects knowing I would photograph them in a similar way.

GG: Esther, tell us more about building up and inventing forms. And how that relates to inventing supports.

EK: I build up the forms with a very specific idea for how it should be and the support is part of it. For the more figurative type of work I use casts because it ties it all together. Especially in my newest pieces, I use many different materials to build up the form. In the end the decisions about which material I use is determined by the subject matter. The sculpture determines the place of the viewer in the space around it. But it is also about making work, which doesn’t need the viewer. Imagine the work all alone in the space at night when it’s dark and it would still be fine because it has a life and a place on its own.



Nancy de Holl, found image

This image is from a collection of found photographs of mine. The majority of them I found in a dusty section of the UCLA library where older books were still shelved according to the Dewey Decimal system. I was struck by the image because to me it had a lot of power, as commercial images can have or strive to have. This not just in terms of conjuring a feeling of desire..I felt like there was something else going on. Besides the fact that there is a watch being presented, it seems to be about time. It has a hypnotic quality, like a spell is being cast or the viewer is being bewitched into another dimension. William Burroughs believed he could travel through time via a photograph. At a certain phase of his life, whenever someone took his picture, you can see evidence of this conviction. While most people tend to be preoccupied with their self-consciousness when having their picture taken, he would gaze deeply into the lens. It was like he was staring into the future and meeting the gaze of all of those who would lay their eyes on him, surpassing the momentary representation that he was frozen within. I feel like this model, whether consciously or not, was/is on this level.