a cup of Coke, and a bottle of ketchup—all made of tightly threaded beads.

In terms of technique, Sohi is inspired by traditional Iranian embroidery; as for design, she is in the Western Pop art tradition. Strangely, her images are more appealing than the original objects they represent. Even the burger looks attractive, with its chunky layers of bright orange and green beads for the cheese and lettuce, respectively. Painstakingly put together, almost as a form of meditation, they suggest that what is wrong with Western life is less the design than the materials: the high speed at which everything is manufactured and consumed.

In the next room is a series of skulls wrapped in a layer of colored beads that spill over onto the ground. They are made by French artist Jim Skull (a.k.a. Jim F. Faure); the clue is in the name. There are also three works by the American artist David Chatt: a stack of letters, an cassette player, and a group of kitchen objects, all of which are wrapped in a layer of white beads. What did the artists intend with such works? Mølgaard suggests that it is partly a question of process. "When they came here, they all said that they were interested in the methods of ... how do you actually control it, how do you actually put it on a string?"

The third room contains the most ambitious works of the exhibition, by the Japanese artist Shige Fujishiro. His pieces include "La Primavera," a collection of women's evening dresses and men's suits, and "Shopping Bag Project," a group of bags for all budgets, from Tiffany to Ikea. Fujishiro threads his beads onto safety pins, which he then hooks together to create a glittering, textured material that is stiff enough to hold its form without needing to be sewn onto an internal armature. His two dresses are sculpted to suggest the sinuous curves of the wearers. His beaded shopping bags make a Burger King wrapper look as luxurious as a Gucci purse.

Many of the beaded flowers in Ragnar Levi's collection were made by anonymous women, while a few are by contemporary bead workers such as Deborah DiJusto. His installation, "Sow Flowers on Your Path," includes two flower arrangements in vases designed to echo Dutch still lifes; a single long artificial flowerbed edged with barbed wire and containing an arrangement of 99 flowers; and an elaborate "immortelle," or beaded flower wreath.

The flowers are technically skillful, but are they sufficiently creative to be art? One of the messages of the exhibition is, as Mølgaard puts it, that "craftsmanship and people's ability to work with their hands is not valued enough any more" in contemporary art, which has become too theoretical. When pressed about the flower collection, though, he admits, "Whether it is [art] or not, naah, I don't know. But it's beautiful!" Perhaps that's enough.

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## Erica Rosenfeld

**"REVERIE FOREST: SANCTUARY FOR STRANGE CREATURES"**
**HELLER GALLERY**
**NEW YORK CITY**
**SEPTEMBER 13–OCTOBER 19, 2019**

We are living in an era of endless access to information. Yet when anyone with a smartphone can become an "expert," the truth becomes hard to identify. Anxiety and distrust permeate most aspects of our society, including food and water safety, technology and digital security, privacy, and, of course, politics. At such junctures, it's important to remember that history has many lessons.

It's for this reason that Erica Rosenfeld turns to history, using mid-century society as a tool to challenge and critique contemporary culture. Her current exhibition, "Reverie Forest: Sanctuary for Strange Creatures," marries aspects of her previous work. This includes her 2015 solo show at the Heller Gallery, "Like Remembering a Dream the Day After," a surrealist landscape that meditated on the interplay of reality with

*Tiger-Girl*, **2018. Acrylic on canvas, paper, glass lens, glass crystals, acrylic frame. H 5 ¾, W 6 ½, D 1 ½ in.**
COURTESY: HELLER GALLERY

memories and dreams, and the effects of the passage of time. Elements of her Burnt Asphalt Family performance collective, which centers on the performative, sculptural, and social aspects of glass and food-making through a mid-century aesthetic and gendered take on food preparation, can also be inferred from the exhibition.

"Reverie Forest" is comprised of "Cake Tower Lights," floor-standing, tiered lighting sculptures; glass works repurposed from "Like Remembering," including *Twilight Cloud* (2015) and *Pink Bunny on a Hill Night Light* (2015); painting-collages of misfit animals reworked from vintage paint-by-numbers kits; original wallpaper; and a shrine constructed from a multitude of mid-century kitsch objects. By bringing all of these seemingly disparate aspects together, Rosenfeld has created a topsy-turvy riff on mid-century optimism that is fit for 21st-century cynicism.

Rosenfeld's interest in mid-century culture was born from a childhood spent in Southern California, where she discovered the joys of the period's design, retro color palette, and tchotchkes through the region's architecture and the personal collection of a beloved family friend. As an adult, Rosenfeld, whose artistic practice has become deeply research-based, is critical of the period's conservative values and the way its cultural output reinforced those ideals. The ethos is evident in the painting-collages that Rosenfeld constructs from refigured paint-by-number designs from the 1950s and which challenge the period's culture of conformity.

World War II was typified by patriotic propaganda and a necessary prioritization of country over the individual, which set the sociocultural foundation that defined the next decade. In the postwar years, the march towards progress, efficiency, and corporate culture became the marker of an increasingly technocratic society, and the disappearing spirit of individualism was lost in the comfortable but homogenous tracts of suburbia. Thus, those wildly popular paint-by-number kits[1] became the perfect product for an economically flourishing America trained to stay in the lines. According to the artist's research, the kits were particularly popular with women, who were unemployed in a postwar society that valued women only as homemakers. Suddenly isolated in the little boxes of suburbia, they benefited from advances in domestic technology that created more leisure time yet were frequently prescribed Valium or "Mother's little helpers" as a way to numb the boredom of domesticity.[2]

In "Reverie Forest: Sanctuary for Strange Creatures," vestiges of the paint-by-number kits used by Rosenfeld are reconstructed into her titular "strange creatures." The artist becomes Dr. Frankenstein, splicing and stitching together elements of animals, humans, saints, and art historical references, though the results are more celebratory than unsettling. Her forest is populated by colorfully rendered creatures such as *Cake Bear*, *Zebra-Dog*, *Rabbit-Bird* and *Deer-Saint* (all 2019), as well as a re-creation of the Last Supper, *Swan Cake Supper in the Treehouse*, in which the apostles have animal heads and Jesus is a distinguished buck. Thus, the artist creates her sanctuary to individualism by upending the very markers of conformity she criticizes. As she says: "I want to change the context of these traditional and almost saccharine looks at the culture and art at the time. These creatures are welcome into the forest, to live peacefully when they might not fit into other cultures."

The paintings and "Cake Tower Lights" are accompanied by a shrine to the artist's personal collection of mid-century objects, plastic toys and figurines, hair curlers, costume jewelry, and food tins, among other novelties. The nostalgia items have been arranged on the floor and on shelves of varying height, rapidly multiplying along the walls of a wide niche in the gallery and backed with original wallpaper designed by the artist from pastoral elements of the paint-by-number kits. The objects in the shrine were taken from the artist's home, where she had been constructing a sanctum with the materials since 2007. Although a burst pipe forced a deinstallation of this room, the timing allowed for the materials' seamless integration into an exhibition that benefits greatly from its inclusion. Taken together, each of these elements, historical references, and artworks—which Rosenfeld has woven together into an enticing experience—results in a strong exhibition that illustrates the intellectual examination and love of vintage kitch at the center of the artist's practice.

Rosenfeld's inquiries into and challenging of mid-century society are incredibly timely. The current sociopolitical moment in the U.S. is epitomized by an increasing polarization that is often articulated as a battle of values. In this climate, the 1950s are often idealized by conservatives as a period of correctly expressed morals, a type of nostalgia that Rosenfeld actively criticizes through her exploration into the darker side of America at mid-century. Her "Sanctuary for Strange Creatures" thus acts as a beacon of resistance against a dangerously rose-colored look at the past, and "Reverie Forest" becomes the precarious land of Faeries,[3] where we seek safety and distraction in the face of our uncertain times.

Glass *contributing editor* SAMANTHA DE TILLIO *is assistant curator at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City, where she is curating a midcareer survey of work by Beth Lipman (spring 2020), among other projects.*

1 Paint By Numbers was created (and many of the early kits drawn) by artist Dan Robbins. They were popularized by the Palmer Paint Company of Detroit starting in 1951. "Paint By Number: Every Man a Rembrandt," Smithsonian Museum of American History, accessed September 28, 2019, https://americanhistory.si.edu/paint/rembrandt.html.

2 Jonathan Metzl, "'Mother's Little Helper': The Crisis of Psychoanalysis and the Miltown Resolution," *Gender & History* Vol. 15, No. 2 (August 2003): 240-267, https://www.med.umich.edu/psych/FACULTY/metzl/07_Metzl.pdf; Taylor Prewitt, "Take Some Pills for Your Hysteria, Lady: America's Long History of Drugging Women Up," Vice, April 28, 2015, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/gqmx9j/here-lady-take-some-pills-for-your-hysteria-253.

3 The author is referencing the Faerieland of Celtic folklore, in which time slows down and humans lose connection with reality.

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No. 157 Winter 2019-20