

Teddy, by Patricia Thornton



Shortly after artist Patricia Thornton donated her drawing, *Teddy*, the enigmatic image inspired the 2007-08 collection exhibition, *Deep Play: Joyful Revelry and Subversive Whimsy* in the MAM Collections. Missoula audiences may be familiar with Thornton's drawings, paintings and photographs featuring what she calls "Misfits, Monsters, and Pretty Things", images inspired by growing up in a family of nomadic glass engravers. Life spent on the road and in 25 different schools was "full of fantasy, contradictions, wishes, boredom, addiction, hard work, fighting, lies, thefts, running away and nature," she explains. Her artworks also explore the years following this unusual childhood, "dedicated to Punk Rock, my obsession with getting formally educated, relationships and my love of the great outdoors, dance and film," she says.

Since arriving in Missoula from the Bay Area two years ago, she has shown her fantastic creatures in exhibitions at the UC Gallery, The Catalyst and Ceretana Studios, and is currently developing a line of stuffed animals based on her artwork. In October 2007, MAM asked Thornton some question about her work.

MAM: Many of your artworks incorporate your toy collection. What has this collection meant to you over the years?

PT: My first friend was imaginary. My next friends were my toys. When you move a lot, and work for a family business 12 hours a day, there isn't a lot of time for relationships outside of the family. I had to create a world of friends of my own. My toys were my much needed good luck charms and confidants. That's why I enjoy working with them now.

MAM: What was the source of *Teddy*?

PT: This is the first painting I did when I moved to Missoula. I was low on funds and thought to myself, "Why can't I paint bears and ducks and moose like I see in the windows of galleries throughout America?" The answer, of course, is that that would bore me to tears, and I did not become an artist to be bored. So I thought about bears, what they mean to me and how I would want to paint one. I remembered two stuffed animals that were very important to me as a child and decided to do a painting in honor of them. Both were of the carnival quality. They were my best friends.

MAM: How does the idea of play - adult play and child's play - appear in your work?

PT: When I make art it is often laughter that solidifies an idea for me. I love to combine delicately rendered lines, shapes, tones and expressions with the aggressive scribbles I made as a kindergartner, or I channel myself as a nine-year-old and draw a female creature that has a beard and hairy arms. I still crack up every time I see an advertisement where someone has drawn a mustache on a gorgeous super star. For me the great thing about playing as an adult is that I don't have the fears, worries and jealousies I did when I was young. I have learned to enjoy the play.

MAM: What do you think about the idea that play is natural and necessary?

PT: Playing for me is my most comfortable and natural state. My father is the same way. Even in hard times we managed to laugh. Most importantly we know how to laugh at ourselves which in my opinion is playfulness at its best.

Image: *Teddy*, Patricia Thornton, graphite, acrylic on paper, 2005, 30.5 x 23". MAM Collection, donated by the artist, 2006
Artwork (c) the artist. Image: MAM

The Missoula Art Museum collects, preserves, exhibits and researches art that is relevant to the culture of the American West with an emphasis on contemporary Montana artists. The museum began acquiring artwork in 1975, and established a formal collection in 1984. Between the Missoula County Art Collection, the MAMCollection and MAM Contemporary American Indian Art Collection, MAM is responsible for nearly 1,000 objects representing the best of this region's contemporary art. The growing significance of the MAM Collection was a major factor in the museum's decision to expand in size and professional capabilities.

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