

SIGHT LINES

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Between the Sublime and Decay: Ann Wood's "Quick and Quiet"

REVIEW | In a series of new work, the Galveston-based artist grapples with the recent death of both of her parents within six weeks each other

By Thao Votang, September 25, 2018

Isn't that how you want to die? Quickly and quietly?

Ann Wood returns to Austin with her vibrant sculptures in "Quick and Quiet" at Big Medium. If you remember her 2012 exhibition ["Violent Delights" at Women & Their Work](#), you will remember Wood's use of taxidermy forms, bright flowers, painstakingly placed sewing pins, and oozing sculptural forms.

At a glance, Wood's works are colorful and cheery; however, a closer look often reveals macabre themes. "Quick and Quiet" doesn't disappoint and the new work results from the Galveston-based artist's grappling with the death of both of her parents within six weeks.

Ten artworks are packed into the gallery — sculptures jostle one another for space. Wood does not confine herself to one method of presentation and her works are applied directly to the wall, presented in frames, spill across the floor, or tease the viewer from corners.

I edged around "Someday This Will All Be Yours" to view the wreath hung from a medallion from the ceiling. Next to it, I struggled to back up enough to read the text of "How I Hope to Die." A triptych of large floral ovals is mounted directly to the wall. Hundreds of cut-out flowers jut out from the wall with a push pin that becomes the center of the flower and its stem. Black script spells out the hopes over the floral mounds: "alone if lucky," "quick & quiet," and "with my mouth shut tight."

Across the room, "Nest" looms in your periphery. A deer blind covered in yellow doll hair, flowers, and pom poms, "Nest" looks like an oversized dollhouse smeared in cake icing with a chandelier hanging inside to complete the look. It is purposefully awkward, an object made for outdoors taken inside, and it looms in the gallery space. "Thoughts and Prayers" is installed in the corner like a terraced edge of a meditative pond with LED votives dispersed amongst flowers. Above this, two artificial birds, "Love Birds," are installed high on the wall as if in flight.

"Still Life with Dead Hares" and "Bouquet" most resemble past work by Wood. In "Still Life with Dead Hares," a taxidermy form of a rabbit sits on top of piles of foam on a table like a cake topper. A second rabbit hangs from the table by its feet onto the floor, a hat tip to old still lifes. In "Bouquet," Wood depicts two foxes on their backs by sewing their bodies with embroidery

thread. Collaged around the foxes are cut-out paper flowers and artificial pearls encased in poured plastic.

The exhibition feels like a scene in the movie “Annihilation,” based on Jeff VanderMeer’s homonymous novel, when a group of women enter a town to find that the people and flora have become mixed-up. People-shaped bushes blossom in the movie, flowers of all kinds grow from the same stem, and every living thing is mixed together in dissonance.

So, too, does the cacophony of reality shaken up by an alien force in Wood’s exhibition. The works on view do not quite fit together: the room too small, and the work too many in number.

Toward the back of the gallery, the exhibition pulls itself together. For “My Father’s Deathbed,” Wood covers a recliner in green and white cast flowers. A thin tree branch sprouts from a corner and breaks the natural shape of an armchair. On the floor like an oil spill is a pile which is made of black pom poms, artificial birds, flowers and plastic.

Between these two works, I am caught between the sublime and decay. I am reminded of Petah Coyne’s sculpture [Untitled #1103 \(Daphne\)](#) and of Karl Ove Knausgaard’s descriptions in his autobiographical novel “My Struggle: Book One” as he cleans out the house his alcoholic father barricaded himself into with his elderly incontinent mother (Knausgaard’s grandmother). He clears out bottle after bottle, scrapes up excrement, trashes decomposing piles of laundry, and battles the stench of stale urine.



On the back wall, “Trophy” includes a taxidermy form of a large cat and electric fireplace underneath the flowers, plastic, and paint. The fireplace is on and heat comes out of the vents. “Trophy” shows where Wood may be going with her work. In an exhibition so close to something so dear to her, I could not find the grief or pain until I stood in front of the heated fireplace.

Did her parents pass in the wintertime? Are the objects encased in the exhibition her parent’s objects that she has inherited? If Wood’s two birds mark the beginning of some cycle, where is the rest of it before the deathbed?

The scent and feel of the heat from the electric fireplace pushes “Quick and Quiet” into another realm, and I would love to see Wood do a full installation or incorporate new elements into her already strong body of work.

Surrounded by “My Father’s Deathbed,” “Pile,” and “Trophy,” I finally sense the feeling of brittle skin, foul smells, and lost thoughts that can mark death when it is not quick and quiet.

Installation images courtesy of Big Medium.