

Erica Rosenfeld

Statement

A Forest describes many dualities in life. It can be a place of danger and asylum, wild and calm, eerie and familiar, earthly and spiritual, deadly and beautiful simultaneously. All of these dichotomies create an unknown magical environment which can lead the its inhabitants into transformative places. I have used the forest as a realm for “Strange Creatures” or unknown species to live there safely without fear of judgement or shame for being different. All creatures are welcome in this sanctuary and can find refuge from societal constraints and social punishment. My newest paintings portray some of the inhabitants of the Reverie Forest as well as their journey to get there while my newest installation “Hypnopompia” describes the forest itself.

All of the imagery I use was appropriated from vintage Paint by Numbers paintings and “collaged” and painted into original works. Paint by Numbers was invented at a time in America when there was a political system that couldn’t tolerate opposition. Much like today, the government recklessly preyed on people’s hatred for outsiders and people’s fear of losing their free. I see these paintings as a window into the culture of the early 1950’s as they talk about mindless conformity, mass culture and mechanical performance.

Although they served as art for some, the paintings did not speak to emotion or inspiration. They describe the sense of uniformity and conformity that permeated America and its social norms at the time. The paintings “painted a picture” of idealized life that was unattainable by many people at the time. The imagery included dream vacation scenes, European Art, lovable animals and a sugar-coated reality. I wanted to create a new context for the subjects of these paintings by transforming adorable animals into beautiful mutants and the pastoral landscapes backdrops into peculiar habitats. Their perceived freakishness no longer exists as they have found a safe zone.

They also allowed people to feel like they were entering a world of art at a time when being an artist or a liberal was dangerous. They were a compromise between imaginativeness and rule following and seemed to blur the boundaries of art and craft. I like the idea of altering and reassembling this imagery to create a new context for its subjects.

I am fascinated by what makes people succumb to mindless conformity. Paint by Numbers was thought by some critics to be evidence of the mindless conformity gripping national life and culture. Adults were willing to be regimented into brushing paint strokes on miscellany dictated shapes all by rote and all while staying in someone else’s lines and offered a sense of accomplishment. Through this body of work, I am seeking to create