

# Art in America

## Bonnie Collura

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by Janet Koplos

Bonnie Collura is a creator of the sort of elaborate fictions that Stefano Basilico appears to delight in -- his gallery also shows the imagined worlds of Matthew Ritchie, Brian Tolle and Toland Grinnell. Collura's sculptures present shattered fragments of stories we know well, reassembled in ways we can barely puzzle out. The 10 pieces from 1997 shown here (most freestanding, one hanging from the ceiling) draw on the tales of Snow White and Persephone, invoking the styles of Disney and Bernini.

Collura embodies these traces in more-or-less figural sculptures that recall the junk artifacts of childhood, rendered in large scale. The complex, multipart sculptures are made of plaster gauzing, styrene, paper, glue, water putty and paint, and most incorporate prongs and holes that look like the linking mechanisms of plastic snap-together toys and models. Collura's process is paradoxical and disharmonious. Each element is hand-carved, but then smoothed and coated to give it a cheap, mass-produced appearance totally lacking in evidence of touch. The impersonal surfaces and garish colors bring to mind discount-store window goods of slapdash manufacture -- precisely the opposite of the solitary, hands-on, deliberative process by which she achieves her malignant and clever effects.

Collura's visual sources are as ill-assorted as her methods and effects. Baroque elegance can never be reconciled with the simplification of animated films, so the segments of her sculptures mix uneasily, dangerous shards in a postmodern trash heap. She is inspired by

stories with morals that have to do with love and loyalty. The implications can be lethal; the figures may appear to be dismembered or show such horrors as a pine branch penetrating an eye.

*Sleeping Death (Martyr Yellow)* is one of the largest works in the show at 78 by 58 by 51 inches. It's a jumble of elements on a thick pedestal, the base of which is strewn with ears of corn (associated with Demeter, Persephone's mother)

and brownish fallen leaves. The spiraling pedestal and nearly everything else on it is a faded, dull yellow. You first distinguish the head and neck of a young deer atop the heap, and then make out the torso and head of a swooning woman lying on her back with one hand to her breast. You might think of Bernini's St. Theresa -- or Disney's Sleeping Beauty. Other works include elements that allude to Snow White: a red apple, a puffy sleeve, a pinafore-blue color, the dwarfs' mining pick. None of the works make a unified statement, and a page of commentary on the sculptures that Collura prepared is so dense and jumpy that it seems free associational. She shuffles a deck of images and meanings, and in her game, one hand is as inconclusive -- and as provocative -- as an other.



Bonnie Collura: *Sleeping Death (Martyr Yellow)*, 1997, plaster gauzing, foam, paper, glue, water putty, paint, 78 x 58 x 51"