

An impressionist painting of a woman in a white dress and a large, light-colored hat, standing in a garden. The scene is filled with dense, textured foliage in various shades of green, yellow, and brown. The brushwork is visible and expressive, capturing light and color rather than fine detail. The woman is positioned in the upper right quadrant, looking towards the left. The overall composition is vertical and emphasizes the play of light and shadow in the garden setting.

ABOUT *The Bayberry Bush*



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Studio view of Collura's work in progress.

BONNIE COLLURA

Born in Port Jefferson, New York, in 1970. Lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Once Bonnie Collura overcame her resistance to the Impressionist style, she found abundant material in *The Bayberry Bush* to morph into shape. Collura builds her works from foam, plaster, putty, thick paint, and the surplus wealth of information in contemporary life—all funneled through her fascination with classical, folk, and indigenous mythologies, European art history, American popular culture, and the female protagonists throughout. The resulting sculptures are protean forms, caught between figuration and abstraction, at once futuristic and baroque. What pulled Collura (like so many other participating artists) into this project was material in the Chase Archives. In photographs of Chase's elaborately staged studio environments and *tableaux vivants*, Collura detected the sense of spectacle that has long attracted her to both Bernini and Walt Disney. Yet what really galvanized her was the notion that Chase's theatrics were preparations for the ultimate apotheosis—and the splashy Victorian funeral attending his death.

Out popped a three-part proposal, starting with a pair of 3-D glasses (Collura frequently works with triads) to be donned while viewing a sculp-



Photograph of a portrait of Helen Chase as Little Red Riding Hood, c. 1900. Gelatin printing-out paper, 2⁷/₈ x 2 inches. The William Merritt Chase Archives, The Parrish Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. A. Byrd McDowell.

ture (part two) suspended from the ceiling. The sculpture is based on the triangle plotted by the positions of the three girls in Chase's painting. On each of the points is an empty dress form, inspired by photographs from the Archives of girls dressed in the flowing robes of fantasy (as Red Riding Hood) and faith (in the devotional garb of Christian worship), and abstracted according to the reversing and doubling suggested by another Chase painting, *Alice in the Mirror*. Parts of the sculpture are painted in colors that Collura codes in her work as "abductor" red and "guardian" blue. These appear animated, alternately blocked and enhanced, by the 3-D glasses. The intended spectacle is of "ghostlike" forms—"inkblots"—tumbling through

the gallery space. The third part of the installation is a tiara to be mounted on a wall somewhere in the museum. It will be a mix of head-gear found in Chase's work and the Archives, and local plant life. Collura titles this element of her installation *Helmet for Helen*; she calls the red and blue hanging sculpture *Anaglyph*.

What is the meaning of Collura's strenuous stretching, extrapolating, and reshaping? Although she sometimes provides keys or notes to clue viewers in to her iconography, she could not expect to convey all the ideas that directed her process here. On the one hand, her work is about subversion, about using information to level the authority and meaning of information, thereby reducing it to the abject or formless state her melting shapes embody. On the other, it's about transformation and exaltation, about taking something marginal, minor, or obscured and metamorphosing it into something of potentially heroic significance. Here the little girls are literally lifted from the past, where they appeared as flat, charming attributes of their father's landscape, a place rendered considerably less pat as envisioned by Collura. The girls are pumped up and skyed high, charged with the dynamics of provoking wonder and awe. —I.S.

Readings

Douglas Fogle, "Interview," in *Dialogues: Bonnie Collura/Santiago Cucullu*, Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2000. Janet Koplos, "Bonnie Collura at Basilico," *Art in America*, September 1998. Kim Levin, "Masters of the Universe," *The Village Voice*, May 23, 2000. Dominique Nahas, "Heads and Tails: Bodies of Thought/Bodies of Knowledge," *Review*, May 1, 1999. Suzanne Weaver, *Concentrations: Anne Chu and Bonnie Collura*, Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1998.

BONNIE COLLURA, *Chain Reaction*, 1999.
Fiberglass resin and paint.

