

Kathleen Bitetti

Artist Statement

Since the early 1990s, my work has involved the creation of conceptually based sociopolitical objects and installations. In 1992 I began stenciling text by hand onto objects. Hand stenciled text and/or language has now become a very prominent feature in my work and I continue to use the same stencil and medium (graphite) that I used in 1992. The act of sewing, whether by hand or using a machine, is also very important in my art making practice. In my work, I deconstruct the American dream, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and lullabies that are part of our childhood and adult culture. My work also addresses gender roles/gender assignment, the fragility of family dynamics, domestic violence and the underlying threads of violence and danger that underpin American society. Usually these themes are combined into installations that feature mundane domestic objects, painted pure white or colors associated with childhood, that are often embellished with stenciled text. These colors establish a dream-like surreal quality, suggest notions of purity and safety, and formally unify the disparate objects in each installation. The text provides clues to content and interpretation. My "conceptual sculpture weds minimal form with maximal content" (Shawn Hill, "Bay Windows" Nov. 14, 1996 p.27). "Research, unassuming and often undetectable autobiographical references, historical references, contemporary sociopolitical issues, and humor" are often woven into my conceptual framework (Sophia Solar Michalski, Essay for the Contentment exhibition catalog, 2008).

My installations act as theater sets in which the viewers are the actors. These sets allow the viewers to enter into a deeper psychological space-in which the beautiful environments I have created have undercurrents of unease. It is an unease that is hard to determine whether the environment is safe or harmful, but rather it is somewhere between the two. Perhaps one of the most interesting spaces to be in. My environments and many of my other works, parallel fairy tales' original states: an adult story filled with fantastical places lurking with danger. It was these stories that were handed down countless generations to generations- long before they were changed into saccharine tales for childhood consumption and entertainment with the standardized ending: and they lived happily after all.

In 2000, I began to stage what have been called cultural interventions. I have been actively researching and placing my work in non-art spaces that are either outdoor/indoor public sites or indoor/outdoor semi-public sites. My research has lead to almost exclusively collaborative residencies in various kinds of community settings: a residency at a high-end clothing store and a museum, as well as a long term residency in a community based urban art center and its surrounding towns. These residencies are usually supported by the collaborating community or communities via in-kind help and donations, and small grants to cover project expenses. This in turn fosters strong community support for my residencies and projects. My residencies have also lead me to work with teens. Many of these staged cultural interventions directly result from my residencies and/or collaborations with non-arts organizations. One of my key goals of my residencies and for my work is to create a space for dialogue and for the sharing of ideas and resources. My interactions have proven to be quiet agents for social and public policy change on many levels: personal/individual, institutional/ organizational, community/ neighborhood, and state/national. My creative process has also benefited immensely. Some of the direct results are that in 2000 I began to reintroduce the use of color into some elements of my work, and I also began to utilize the world wide web as both an art medium and a venue.

I usually work on several bodies of work concurrently, and I often work in multiples and/or connected bodies of work. I also create site specific temporary installations for indoor sites. I have in the distant past created temporary outdoor site specific works. I often rework a site specific installation into a self-contained format that will enable the piece to be shown in another installation format/ environment. Many times elements from my sculptures, installations, and non-site specific work are utilized in my site-specific installations. In other words, my various bodies of work inform or cross pollinate each other. I do not view my sculptures or objects as static things. Rather I view them as characters that can make many appearances over time in different configurations. I am also staging/directing performances either in conjunction with an exhibition of my work or independently.