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ARTS NEWS

CONSTANTLY JOURNEYING

the creative imagination of Magdalena Taber



Through a Looking Glass
The Gallery at Boston Biomedical Research Institute
64 Grove St., Watertown
617-926-8040
Oct. 6 - Nov 30
Artist reception: November 3, 5:30 - 7:00

When Magdalena Taber's show "Through a Looking Glass" opens on October 6 at the Gallery of Boston Biomedical Institute in Watertown, it will represent a journey, and a return. She will be moving forward as an artist, and coming show her work at the company where she spent many years in another kind of role. After juggling the two careers eventually decided to devote her full attention to her art. Part of her large output will be on view at the BBRI exhibit November 30.

Taber has won acclaim for her photographs, receiving awards from the Institute of Contemporary Art, Radcliffe, the Museum, and other institutions. She has also been featured in the Boston Globe and the Cambridge Tab, and was by the Women's Caucus for the Arts.

The pages of her web site (<http://www.transartmt.biz/>), subtitled "A Photographic Journey," are a story whose images represent a search for new spaces, often inner spaces. The images, she writes, "never represent the actual photographic objects." Rather, they are "severed from old preconceptions" and become "a fertile ground for reflection on different human existence."

To understand and appreciate Taber's work, you need to know a few things about her: her background in biology tendency to anthropomorphize, and her belief in titling one's work ("I want to know what people want to say"). She owns with great care. Finally, there's the fact that she discovers the themes she captures in shots that she doesn't intend. This lack of intentionality is the reason Taber became a photographer rather than, say, a landscape artist. It seems interesting to focus, point, and shoot -- and then attach a new significance to the objects in the compositions.

Point and shoot is where it all began. Although Taber started doing visual art in her childhood in Poland ("All my sketches were modified by pencils") and has training in drawing, the art took a back seat to her university work in biology and biomedical research in the United States. "On and off I would take classes," but nothing had coalesced, until she became a photographer.

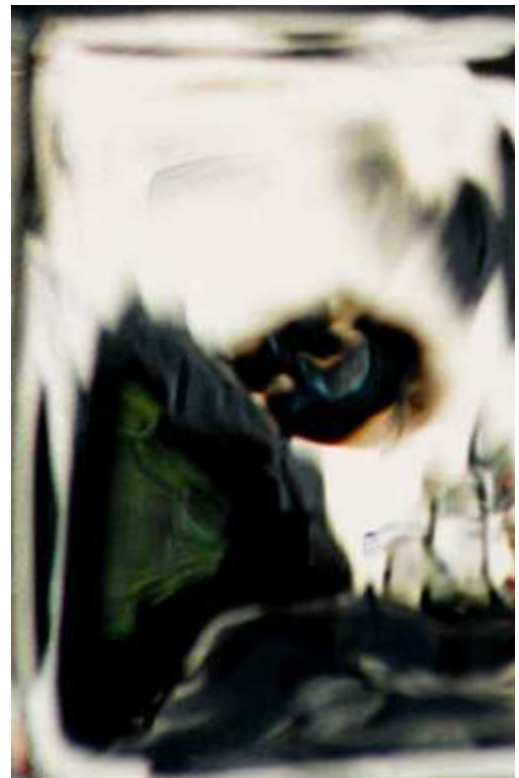
Initially, she joined a camera club with her Olympus point and shoot, which she will affectionately take up from its place in her studio to show you, like a much-loved and prized first child. In the camera club, she showed a superior eye winning awards, despite fellow members' preoccupations with equipment. ("I don't reject technology," Taber notes.) Other technological tools, like Adobe Photoshop and the Epson Perfection 3170 scanner, have pushed her

The only other camera she has used in her 12 years as a serious photographer is a Canon EOS Elan with a 300mm lens. She does close-ups of organic matter, which is not unsurprising considering her background in biology. Her travels have provided a lot of material -- from Niagara Falls, Key West, the Rocky Mountains, and Europe as well. Sometimes, she finds compositions of garbage, especially on the beach in winter. "I'll find a free pile of organic stuff, crop it, and find so much meaning." In general, she says, organization is a catalyst to her creativity. It "frees me to move on." All of her images have been converted to digital form in 2003-2004, although she hasn't as yet worked with a digital camera.

The themes of her work run the gamut of human experience--from the tiny, funny moment in "Bad Hair Day" to the "Origins," which looks like the Big Bang illuminated by an intergalactic lightning bolt. Moving through groups of photographs begin with "Karmic Journey," stopping at "Reality Check," making the "Stygian Crossing," pausing for "Celestial Wondering about 'the Future,'" and ending at an "epilogue: what about now?" The intelligent sequencing of her titles means nothing, of course, without equally sophisticated images, the negatives of which are scanned and enhanced in Photoshop.



It's cold out there



Who Said The Bomb Was Smart

In the series "Through a Looking Glass" and "Embracing It All," color flows from area to area of the images with a viscosity; the photographs are shot through thick, distorting glass blocks. Even more bizarre effects were created

doll behind the glass, as in the ghoulish "It's Cold Out There." (Taber loves to find the unusual, or grotesque, in th and vice versa.) In one of the anti-war photos, "Who said the bomb was smart?" a dark blob slumps toward the b frame like a felled victim.



My Father's Last Garden

The poignant "My Father's Last Garden" uses distortions for a gentler effect. The orange and tangerine-cream re upper torso of the artist's father in the last stage of his lung cancer. The black lower left strip suggests a surgeon' center the deep orange symbolizes both the heart, and a strawberry. (Taber's father picked strawberries until she death, and are a strong part of her memory of his last days.)



In The Field of Possibilities

Like all good artists, Taber is constantly growing and experimenting – with her eye, and her technique. Her Picas images scratched onto aluminum foil and photographed to catch the light of surrounding objects, unite the attributed drawing, three dimensional texture, and photographic light manipulation.

The theme of life and death is important to Taber. She shoots in cemeteries and Italian churches, and looks for “c statues,” she wrote me in an email. There, she finds the witnesses, the mourners, and the acceptant. She enhances portraits with Adobe Photoshop to create new interpretations (see http://www.transartmt.biz/from_dust_to_dust.hi

Recently, Taber collaborated with Dorothy Oja to create the Muses Calendar, in which twelve women were posed actual Victorian paintings, clothed with sumptuous fabrics, and shot to appear flying, their scarves creating loops of fabric in the air above them (on view at www.caladangallery.com through October 4). The women were actually suspended above, to preserve the illusion of flying but maintain control over placement of the garments. Clearly, these women – you may have seen them at the grocery store, but with less fabric around their bodies and more covering their faces. Creating this whimsical set of twelve goddesses involved a lot of “crafting” with Photoshop tools to imitate the original compositions.

I discovered Taber’s work at a show last summer curated by Paul Weiner at the New England School of Art and Suffolk University. In the show, “Flatbed,” she displayed portraits done with her scanner. The model rests his or her face directly onto the glass, and the resultant image is lightened, then distorted with filters to produce not portraits, but jangled metaphors for states of mind and moments in human experience.



Spilling It Over

“Spilling It Over,” about lovers’ union, is a work that Taber refers to casually as “The Kiss.” Arrived at intuitively, like it is a beautiful statement of romantic love.



The Third Eye

In "The Third Eye," a kaleidoscopic construct of melded faces, the artist appears to be commenting on the complex unconscious. The sensual and the intellectual radiate from the spiritual, which is represented by the shared, or the

The photograph also works abstractly as design. Two of the faces are inverted, adding symmetric balance to the composition. All the eyebrows extend into curlicues embellishing the cheeks, and noses of the adjoining faces form a maze of enlightenment.



I am The Universe

Similar in style is "I am the Universe," where the self-absorption of a head sharing the same frontal lobes speaks to human vanity. Again, joined, symmetrical design elements add to the surreal, almost scientific Photoshop distortion.

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As Taber continues her career, she wants to go in two differing directions: up close, and far away. She would like

microscopic photography, which would be coming full circle, combining her science background with her art. And she hopes to work in aerial photography, but for that, she says, she'll need a nice, rich patron.



King Without a Queen

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