

ture. Though they hang on the wall, they contain a hodgepodge of three-dimensional bits and pieces like tape measures, bingo chips and wooden frames, along with Victorian drawings of women. The repeating forms of the women, coupled with Kokin's disjointed bits of text offer a strange connection that question the look and role of women then versus now.

Throughout the entire exhibition, the palette was muted, with neutral browns, ecru and hints of black comprising the range of colors. When viewed as a whole, it gave the show a tarnished, half-dead look. Though the individual works were strong, and the artists' concepts generally successful, a few pops of color would have changed this impression entirely, and made the gallery atmosphere more vibrant.

Color aside, the work of this triumvirate came across as powerful and well-executed. They didn't fall into the trap of some feminist art, which sacrifices formal concerns in favor of an all-important concept, process, or social context. What the work is *about* isn't more critical than how it looks. Instead, Youdelman, Kokin and Kimpton balance backstory and message with a compelling finished product that includes carefully chosen reused materials, symbols of femininity, and a healthy dose of social commentary.

—Christine Brenneman

Women's Work: Laura Kimpton, Lisa Kokin and Nancy Youdelman closed in September at Donna Seager Gallery, San Rafael.

Christine Brenneman is a freelance writer based in San Francisco.

Kate Eric at Frey Norris Gallery

Kate Eric's *Stories for Bad Children* is the unconscious of fairy tales. The canvases are not quite formed narratives of childlike anxiety, bewilderment and tribulation; they are vibrant riots of emotion both explosive and contained—*No No Uncle's* face expands and melts into a fauvist blur of teeth and hair and ear; a slightly homely baby curls contentedly within a flowing skirt of translucent sea-blue in *No No Bug War II*; *Failure of the Fathers* pictures the infant again, sleeping peacefully within the belly of a giant snake. Kate Eric (the two-person collaborative team of Kate Tedman and Eric Siemens) reproduce memories that might be nightmares, or might be the confusing world of muddled truths and desires that children perceive and, more viscerally, feel.

Stories for Bad Children is based on the earliest memories of the artists—some

are specific recollections from their three- or four-year-old selves, others more generalized impressions of their past. The relentlessness of their unnerving vision may worry parents of young children—is this terrifying world really the one our kids perceive?—but it also focuses the viewer's gaze on the vibrant details that stand out in a muddied, mystifying ground. The scales of a snake glisten like jeweled pebbles, a tiny firefly is precisely etched, bird heads and octopus tentacles are rendered with meticulous care, while the background colors swim with thick ochres and khaki greens, arctic blues and glossy ox-bloods.

Ripped Seam and Other Delights (the title an homage to Herb Alpert's "Whipped Cream and Other Delights") renders this juxtaposition particularly acutely. It features a central figure that is something between a protective fairy, your crotchety, balding grandfather and Cerebus, the tri-headed dog of the underworld. It is one of Kate Eric's larger works, and the scale of the canvas allows them to provide a more complex narrative than some of the smaller pieces. Here, this odd and unsettling figure hov-



Kate Eric, *Nurture Does a Number on the Twins*, 2007, oil, acrylic on canvas, 64" x 44", at Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco.

ers over a tranquil baby (Is there some commentary here on the jealousy a three year old feels toward the seemingly uncomplicated world of her younger sibling?), nestled in the grasses like an infant Moses sure in the knowledge that the pharaoh's daughter will save him from a terrifying fate. This hydra-fairy meanwhile strangles two figures of fire and threat, while a flurry of bird-heads (they have the sharp, curving beaks of chickens or phoenixes), erupting from what could be petals made of fire or tulle, cascade into a wallpaper pattern against the dark background. It reflects a child's-eye view of the incomprehensible vacillation of adult threat and comfort, a

knowledge of the beauty of danger, and a fascination with a world with little context. In fact, the often indistinct backgrounds that set off Kate Eric's vibrantly detailed foregrounds also hint at that childlike lack of context, or the way memory slips or misappropriates its ground.

Some of Kate Eric's portraits recall Francis Bacon, but they are faces muddled by childish anxiety, not the drunken perspective Bacon gives us. For an adult, the physical world is more or less known, and her fears can focus themselves on the mysterious and potentially frightful motivations of other subjects moving about his world; it is more often internal than external. A child's fear is first physical, and then emotional. It is the physical world that still appears unpredictable and enormous; the volatility of others' and one's own emotions is like a patina over that physical world, or the invisible hand that shapes it. Kate Eric instill that fairy-tale fear of an unpredictable world—a fear that does not miss the beauty in it—its childlike due.

—Jakki Spicer

Kate Eric: Stories for Bad Children closed October 18 at Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco.

Jakki Spicer is a freelance writer based in Alameda.

Julie McNiel at Mohr Gallery, Community School

Looking into an unmarked expanse of a sheet of paper, I sense it as an open space, much like a landscape. I fall into it. The excitement and trepidation that arises from exploring this unknown realm, my making lines and marks upon it, feels much like setting out on an unexplored path through a wood, or urban alleyway." This telling statement by Julie McNiel, whose consummate skills as a master of drawing and graphic technique are everywhere evident in all her drawings on view at Mohr Gallery, clearly reveals the impetus and excitement that she brings to each of her drawings. Each work is indeed an exploration of uncharted space, a new locus of discovery and visual imagination that is literally "drawn out" of the blank paper, but also an exploration of character, the artist's personality, and her active and vivid manner of seeing. What she "sees"



Julie McNiel, detail of *Taking Her Measurements*, 2003, graphite, candlewax, colored pencil on rag paper on board, 13' x 22"; at Mohr Gallery, Finn Center, Community School of Music and Arts, Mountain View.

and re-creates for us to see is a fanciful and powerful world of characters, stories and imaginary landscapes drawn from all the "realms" and influences of her life, literary works, fairy tales and their illustrations, Medieval engravings and icons, comic books, German expressionism and written texts.

Besides the twenty-two drawings on view from several years of work, McNiel also created a site-specific drawing on three walls of the gallery, a triptych titled *Rock, Paper, Scissors*. The scale of this impressive drawing, which integrally incorporates three other small drawings (*Madonna of the U.F.O.s*, *Edge* and *Coming of Winter*), allows us to enter almost physically into the pictorial world and machinery of McNiel's imagination. Here, the head of a personage progressively alters into and out of concentric spirals and circles, in a synchronistic action sequence like old cartoons. *Madonna of the U.F.O.s* centers a suspended, erotic Madonna, her detached arms floating away from her like a broken doll, amidst various and sundry floating objects, including a winged Pegasus, a flying pig, a stork carrying a bundle, clouds and jet airplanes. She wears a signature ice skate with a whimsical scrolled blade, an image that also appears in other drawings on view—*Frog Princess*, for example.

The discoveries that McNiel draws out of the paper and her crowded mental space, full of literary influences and illusions, include fairy landscapes seen in the *Finland* series (I, II and III) and *Coming of Winter*. In them exist cartoon-like flat characters with unusual visual idiosyncrasies, like the line personage in *Unfortunate Literary Influences* an elongated sinuous woman with a thick monocle, a shoulder tattoo, smoking a cigarette in a holder while reading a book. The title of the work is handwritten large in pencil below this obdurate woman who obviously represents the artist defying the criticism of convention and influence.

Besides fantastic landscapes and characters, other works depict emotional and altered states of the imagination and rela-