

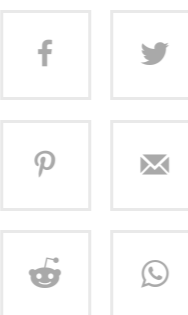


Dana Donaty and the Art of Pareidolia

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The wildly colored and densely populated art of painter and sculptor Dana Donaty arrives fully formed out of a most unusual process. A child of Depression era parents – a doctor father and an artist mother – she was taught and told to never waste anything.

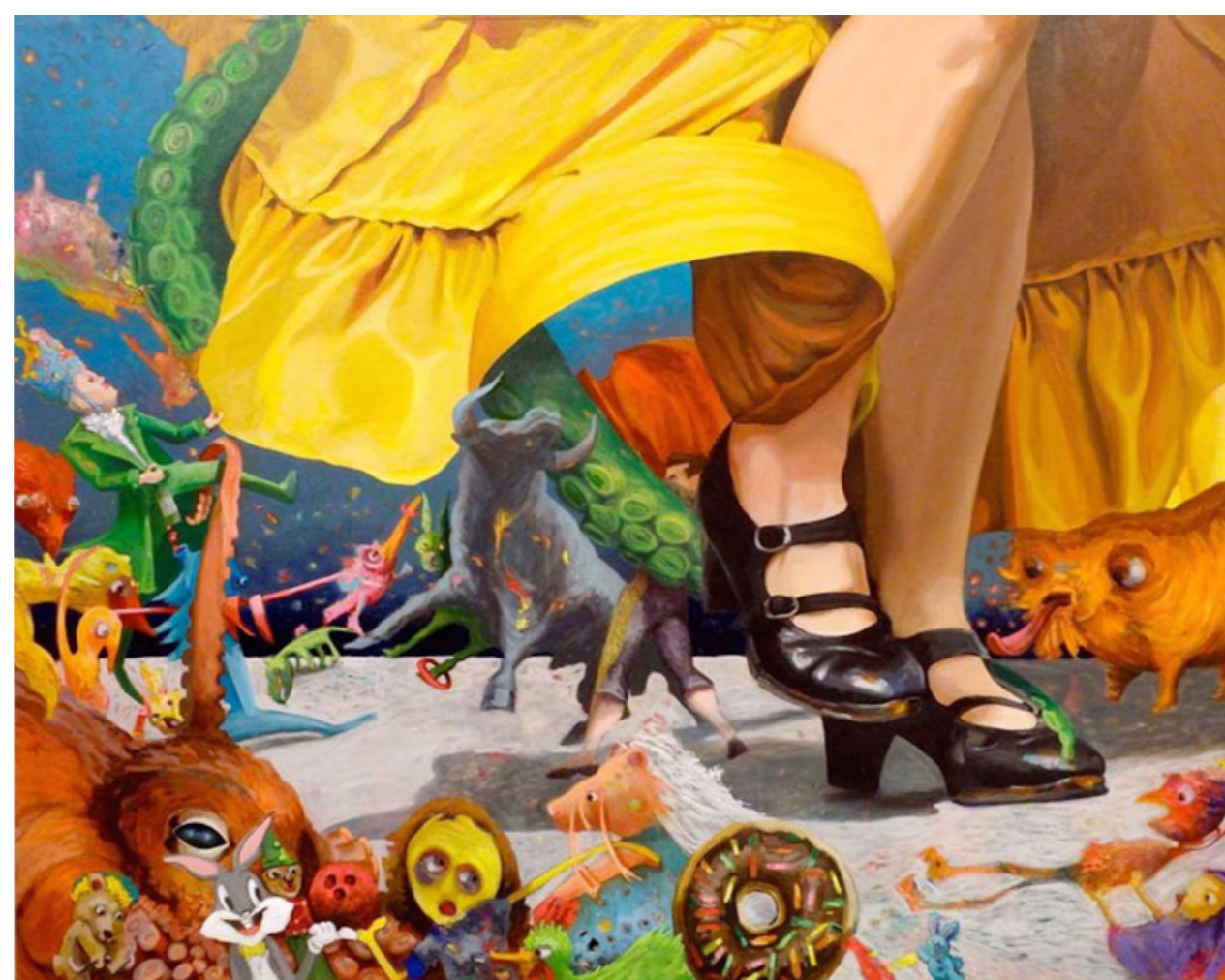
Taking that extreme lesson to heart, she splatters the leftover water from one painting onto a canvas to make another. After the layers and splotches of color begin to build up, she uses a term I had never heard before.

Sitting in 100 Degrees Gallery, a large Miami Design District space where she has a 10-foot high painting called RhinaCorn: Coming to a Theatre Near You Soon, on view through mid-January, Dana Donaty explains “Once I start a new abstract painting using the colored water from the last painting, I start to really look at it... and suddenly they’re in there.” They are the bizarre, cartoonish creatures that fill up her works, crowding into corners, yanking each others chain, piling up on top of each other, starting little squabbles, and making both big and little dramas in a rainbow kaleidoscopic way.

“This process actually has a name,” she says whimsically. “It’s called Pareidolia – a psychological phenomenon involving a stimulus (an image or a sound) wherein the mind perceives a familiar pattern of something where none actually exists. I see these little creatures and then just start teasing them out.”

By the time Dana Donaty is done teasing them out, there are full blown rhinos, Ewoks, Bart Simpson, cats, dogs, ballerina legs, cowboys, kangaroos and cartoon characters from the 60s such as Spy Vs. Spy.

“Well some of them are more obvious to me than others,” she laughs. “And some get developed and some don’t. It’s as if abstraction and figuration had a love child – and I’m not sure who did the seducing. I like that they are all related – they are all family at their pigmented heart. It’s definitely a dialog that goes on in my head and a lot of the voices are from my childhood when I read a lot of magazines like Highlights. I spent a lot of time in my father’s doctor office waiting room with these magazines and some of the stories like find the hidden picture really stuck with me. Another thing I do is I foreground everything – there is no depth where these creatures live with their mischief and larceny. Someone called my work whimsy on steroids, and I think that’s pretty accurate.”

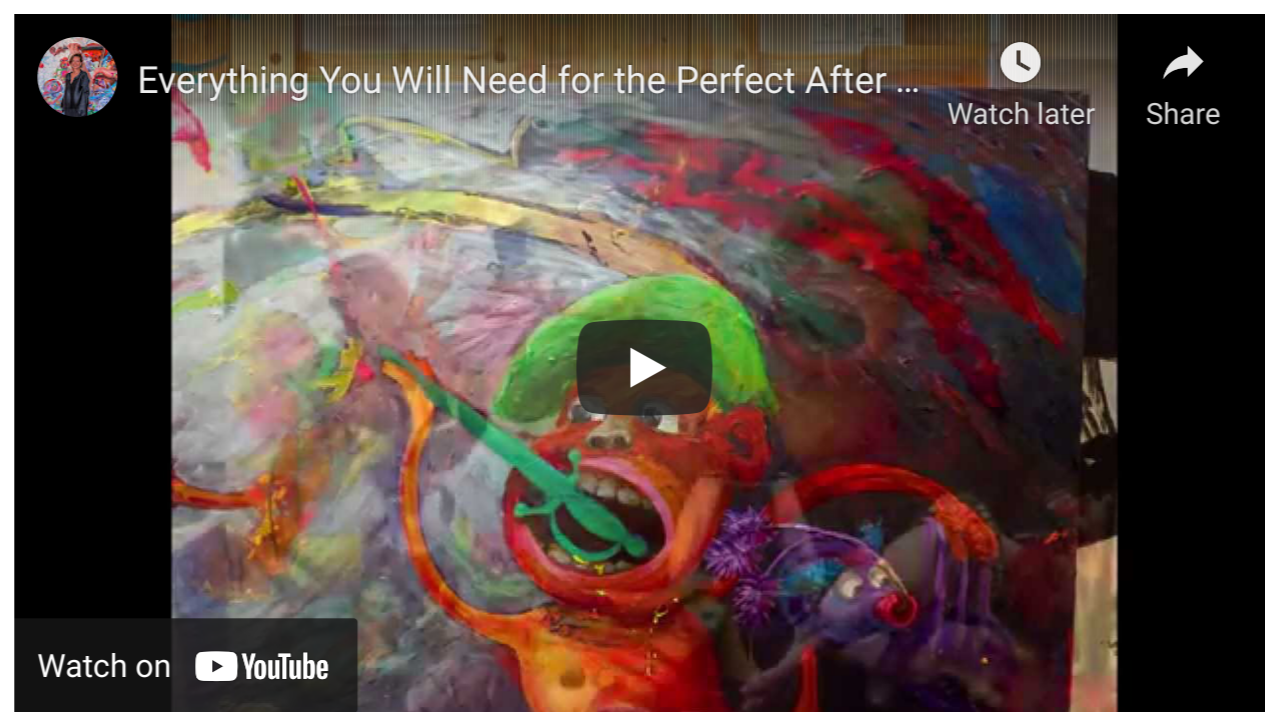


Ole by Dan Donaty: “Chaos ensues at the feet of a flamenco dancer.”

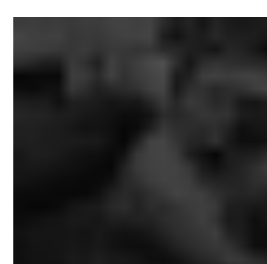
A recent exhibition director requested a narrative to go along with the painting, so Donaty conjured up a whole wild west scenario for her scene – replete with marrying muskrats, a long held grudge, a Wild West shoot ‘em up and a character named Hanker Chief. “It all just came to me as I was wrapping it up to ship,” she says. “I like when that happens because it forces me to go in yet another direction with the work. Make a fully formed story out of who these characters are and what they are doing.”

Lately the paintings have become 3D with sculptural elements popping out of them, a self taught method Dana Donaty developed using foam, fiberglass, resin and plastics while recovering from a recent operation. She also meticulously documents each step of her art – with photos and videos that show how she got from here to there. Future expansion plans include making animations and using motion sensors with sound for each creature.

“I think I’m really just heading towards television with them”, she realizes. You can see this whole process in a film Dana Donaty made:



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Another fetish of Donaty’s is legs and feet – images that appear often in the work and on her own well-shod tootsies.

“The sound of my dad’s shined shoes shuffling out the door and mom’s heels clacking in the hallway are very grown up sounds to me. So I use a lot of images of feet and shoes and then the creatures pile around that.”

Dana Donaty herself makes a daily statement with a wild collection of footwear – from a coveted pair of rare and pricey Star Wars themed heels to stilletos made of pandas, colored balls, various metallics, and iridescent leathers. She has an enormous custom made shoe closet and Instagrams her shoes constantly. She likes to be out in the world as much as she enjoys being in the studio. Even hearing negative or confusing feedback – like the person who said her painting was “disturbing” – does not change her path because “I feel at home in this work,” she says.

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Another unusual part of her process is her choice of what she listens to while she paints. Most painters choose jazz or rock or something with a beat – or off beat – to work by. Donaty listens to audio books.

“I love audio books!” she exclaims. “My favorites are biographies, stories on artists and how the mind works. You don’t have control on how information comes to you, things are not in sequence, but listening to books I can at least follow a narrative thread.”

Donaty received a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia in 1988. In the early 1990’s she moved to London, learning and expanding her client base in England and Europe.

After 12 years in England she relocated to Florida and established her art, making commissions – everything from large scale landscapes to pet portraits, exhibiting in highly regarded fine art shows, designer showhouses, and award-winning public art projects. She is currently an artist-in-residence at the Bakehouse Art Complex, in Miami, lives in Broward, and recently exhibited at the Armory in West Palm Beach.

Dana Donaty has been featured in national and international publications, is active in the arts community, and in collaborating with other artists. See more of her work at www.danadonatyfineart.com

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