



DANA DONATY

Bringing Imagination To Life.

BY JOHN D. ADAMS

*"Every child is an artist.
The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up."
~Pablo Picasso*



Dana Donaty

The brilliantly-hued denizens of a Dana Donaty painting are a wild bunch. Donaty's "creatures" whirl around more traditional figures (often legs, shoes and feet) conveying a thoughtful delight in the unbounded power of childhood imagination. "I'm interested in exploring the space that is occupied between childhood and now," said Donaty. "The work really is concerned about the life of the imagination and taking that imagination seriously... People often want a story or narrative for my paintings. But I can't give you that. I *can* tell you that my work shares similarities with literature. It is almost a form of automatic writing. There are at least two protagonists... As the iconography unfolds in the paintings, there seems to be a lot of mischief, playfulness, larceny, sarcasm, and maybe some other things. It is the grammar of fantasy. And there is an active role for the viewer."

HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

Donaty's work continues to grow and evolve. Her numerous private and public art commissions, design work, and awe-

inspiring trompe l'oeil installations, have allowed her to experiment with a variety of materials and construction concepts. "I believe that all informs the work that I do now in a way that makes it a stronger body. With commissions, people are looking for a reflection of themselves. This current work is my reflection."

As children, most of us at one time or another have sprawled across a swath of cool grass and stared at the billowy clouds scuttling by. What did you see? Look, there's a unicorn! Over here, it's Donald Duck! There's a word for this phenomenon – Pareidolia. When the mind takes in random stimuli, it instinctively begins to try and bring order to those random signals.

Donaty's creative process relies on, and indeed, embraces, this process. Tapping again into her childhood memories, Donaty adheres to her Depression-era father's mantra of "waste not, want not." "Nothing went to waste on his watch. And this is how I, on my watch, own that standard. I practice the same principle

by not wasting any available materials. So I will have all of these virgin canvases on the floor that I use as a cleaning surface for my brushes and palette. I even use my leftover water and at the end of the day that gets poured on there too. It's a very rich, mark-making process, all different types of marks are going down and not by using a brush. And all of that mark-making is the beginning of the next painting." Just as a child brings life to the clouds, Donaty seeks out her mysterious creatures amid those marks.

CREATURE COMFORTS

The canvases on the floor eventually work their way up onto the wall. Once one painting is finished, another comes up. Sometimes the figures are easy to find. Other times, they need to be teased out. Donaty's incredible process embraces the chaotic, the seemingly impenetrable canvas of what many would see as simply a mess. Donaty's random chaos gives way to a child's wide-eyed wonder and a search for secret meaning. "There's a lot of undeveloped real estate to work with on that canvas," remarked Donaty. "And as you begin to develop some areas then areas that aren't developed begin to show themselves. There are moments like that in every painting." It is at times like these when Donaty feels she is really skirting the boundaries of abstraction. "There are triggers that randomly act as mental files. Sometimes I acknowledge what I see and sometimes I don't. The process, by design, allows me to set up interactions with the unexpected and to find these chance associations. I'm interested in the space between childhood and now. Exploring the coexistence of seemingly random and planned actions."

Donaty's work urges us to delight in that sense of possibilities that many of us outgrow. "Listen to yourself. Take your imagination seriously. Like it or not, it has its own life. It knows things. You just have to trust yourself enough to let go and listen." ●





FEETFIRST

What you put on your feet often creates a psychological and physiological change. Donaty embraces those personalities (you'll notice she incorporates shoes in each of her paintings shown on this page). "Yeah, put on your new pair of Darth Vader shoes and let the party come to you! I like that shoes can give a different point of departure when you start a conversation. It's a more interesting exchange than 'what do you do for a living.' Suddenly, you're wearing something that starts a conversation. You're giving clues to your personality. You can be so many different things – daring, seductive, playful, irreverent..."

Undeniably, Donaty has a fascination with life below the knee. "What do you mostly see as a child? You are at knee level and lower. Adults are concerned with things from the knee up. The human in my pieces is the grownup... The shoes represent the sound of my mother going out. I didn't have to be told when my parents were going out for the evening. I knew the sound of it. The way those dress shoes click-clacked on the floor. For me, that sound creates a strong pleasure response. If the shoes were on, we kids knew they were going out. And five minutes after they left, I'd be straight into my mom's closet, playing dress-up, trying on shoes. When they went out, WE had a freedom to play and be crazy. That sense of joyfulness."

To fully appreciate Dana Donaty's creative process, watch her time-lapse videos on YouTube.

Visit Dana Donaty online at: www.danadonatyfineart.com

To view the art titles, go to www.southfloridaopulence.com/dana-donaty



Corrugated Curves VI
Artist Robert Steele
Corrugated cardboard

BY APRIL ERHARD