



Viewing the Muses

WHAT: *Seven Muses*, works by New Orleans female artists
WHERE: Heriard-Cimino Gallery, 440 Julia St., 525-7300
WHEN: Through June

As show titles go, *Seven Muses* sounds a tad old-fashioned, but it might actually be right on time. Few women have been around longer than the Greek muses, after all, and New Orleans has been flirting with them for quite a while, dating back to the last century, when some Lower Garden District streets were named after those ancient Greek divas of the arts. Seen in that context, *Seven Muses* makes a certain amount of sense as a title for an all-female art show.

Of course, summer traditionally is the time when group shows rule, so instead of getting a full-course spread, we have to be content with an appetizer tray. One way around it is to assemble a group show that is unusually cohesive and resonant, and *Seven Muses* scores on both counts. Not only is it almost as cohesive as a solo show, but its underlying resonance is as subtly yet pervasively feminine as one might hope. More intimate than monumental, it seduces with an unusual mix of coy intrigue and musky allure.

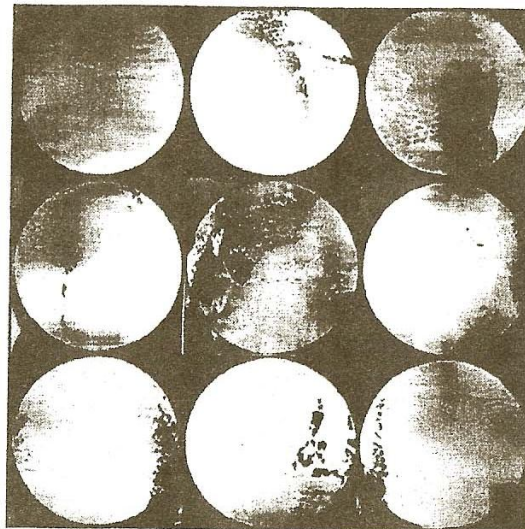
And don't forget the arsenic and old lace. Most guys are at least dimly aware that women can be a little scary at some deep, dark and largely unfathomable level, so it is actual-

ly reassuring to be reminded from time to time. Elizabeth Shannon does so in high style with her *Still Life With Lantern*; actually a voluminous glass urn filled with bones. It sits atop a polished round pedestal table, making for an elegant contrast of smooth, dark wood, crystal-clear glass and bleached white bones. Alligator bones. Shannon has a longstanding interest in alligator hunting, but this piece is eerier and more ritualistic than sporting. Not your typical duck print, *Still Life With Lantern* is an elegant memorial to the wild world, a cautionary allegory of nature reduced to bleached bones in a crystal decanter.

More bones, as well as hair, fabric and doll parts appear in Audra Kohout's box assemblages. *Dawning Apprehension* is classic Kohout, a tall, narrow box containing a stylized female form in what appears to be a state of decay, with bones exposed and only the head recognizably intact. Looking partially mummified, it evokes fantasies of those old

D. ERIC BOOKHARDT inside art

Victorian cast-iron caskets. But this box is much smaller, and the body is a metaphor constructed of doll parts, ceramics and lace, of time pieces, keys and other miscellany that have no logical meaning, but which relate to feminine identity at some deeply cultural and psychological level. It's like a junk-sculpture take on the old nursery rhyme that ends, "and that's what little girls are made of," only here it's not all sugar and spice.



DEBORAH PELIAS' MANDALA 11 IS SLIGHTLY MORE FORMAL THAN THE OTHER WORKS IN THE SEVEN MUSES EXHIBIT AT HERIARD-CIMINO.

Adelle Badeaux's collages are constructed of images instead of objects, yet the results are no less eerie, as we see in *Order by Mail*, a view of three babies' heads floating in space. They all have that warm, trusting, idealized baby look, and all have UPC bar codes placed prominently across their foreheads. This is typical of Badeaux, whose work often deals with the effects of consumer culture on fundamental human themes.

But some artists' work seems more formal. Looking at Deborah Pelias' *Mandala 11* is like facing nine full moons stacked in rows of three in the night sky. Each has a luminously complex surface, yet here, too, the resonance is somehow personal, perhaps because of those old mythic associations between women and the moon. On the other hand, Anastasia Pelias'

softly minimal, vertically striped canvases might seem even more formal than Deborah Pelias' glowing orbs. But look again, for there are some very subtle shifts taking place in the lines of demarcation between their soft, pastel tones. Once again, what we sense might say more than what we see.

More elongated pastels appear in Melissa Smith's paintings, only hers are horizontal. Actually, they are long, narrow, realist landscapes, fully detailed views of area bays and marshes, replete with blue sky and green trees. While sensitively and realistically painted, their panoramic scope allows them to seem

either abstract or realistic, depending on where you stand.

Yesim Jonsson's painted glass constructions are perhaps the most abstract works of all, if only because they have no formal boundaries. *Deep Blue* is roughly square in shape, but its numerous painted glass panels extend exuberantly beyond the edges. Deeply lucid, transparent hues of green, blue and red pigment appear in patterns reminiscent of both Rothko and Miro, an unlikely mix that Jonsson makes uniquely her own. It's just another surprise in this surprising *Seven Muses* show — an unusual mix of styles and artists, all of whom employ the language of the feminine to their own unique and subtle ends. ²

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