



WIDEWALLS

Bonnie Lucas' Explorations of Traditional Femininity Come to ILY2

Exhibition Reviews



As the feminist movement gained momentum, a growing number of female artists found the courage to delve into various aspects of the female experience from a critical perspective. Bonnie Lucas was among these artists - a skilled practitioner who gained recognition for her exceptional assemblages. In her debut solo exhibition in New York's East Village in 1984, she presented a series of pieces that she referred to as "feminine monsters" - a description that aptly captured the bold and striking nature of her work.

The artist still produces works with equal vigilance to address matters concerning femininity, childhood, domesticity, and identity from a feminist perspective.

The artist's first solo presentation on the West Coast recently opened at ILY2, illuminating the most important bodies of work Lucas produced throughout the last four decades. The visitors to this Portland-based exhibition space will have a chance to understand better the context of the artist's work, which seems very much relevant today.



Left: Bonnie Lucas - Spoiled, 1986. Assemblage on fabric, 52 x 37 x 5 in (132.08 x 93.98 x 12.7 cm) / **Right:** Bonnie Lucas - New Man, 1984. Assemblage on fabric, 29.5 x 15.5 x 1 in (74.93 x 39.37 x 2.54 cm)

A Long-Awaited Survey

Bonnie Lucas devotedly explores the notion of traditional femininity through her practice. The assemblages she makes constitute a form of well-versed criticism of the commodification of the female experience. Her style, dominated by a distinctly gendered color pink and a stereotypically feminine iconography, questions the construction of identity, which is at large affected by the capitalist patriarchy.

Lucas noted that shopping is a big part of her practice, and dime stores are the spaces she perceives as the most compelling sources of a literal indoctrination of women. That is why she buys girly objects, cuts, threads, stuffs them, and assembles them in peculiar constellations saturated with twisted nostalgia.



Left: Bonnie Lucas - White Rock, 1986. Assemblage on fabric, 49 x 34 x 4 in (124.46 x 86.36 x 6.35 cm) / **Right:** Bonnie Lucas - And This Too Will Pass, 1983. Assemblage on fabric, 35 x 16 in (88.9 x 40.64 cm)

Bonnie Lucas at ILY2

Most of the selected works are manually produced assemblages on fabric comprised of cheap beads, buttons, and pastel ribbons, beads, buttons. The earliest ones made of similar items stitched together in dense abstract compositions with titles like *Sweetness* or *Happy Together* reflect the artist's ambivalence and wit. Most recent works include dismembered parts of dolls, toys, and costume jewelry.

The exhibition also brings together Lucas's surrealist paintings reminiscent of children's book illustrations. The compositions featuring flower-headed dolls and headless women in mid-century dress act as contemporary extensions of the artist's explorations in the 1980s.

The exhibition pays tribute to Bonnie Lucas as part of the feminist art legacy. What sets her work apart is her remarkable ability to translate traditional female crafts, such as sewing, beading, and textile work, into an exceptional oeuvre. Her skillfulness in this regard is a testament to her creativity and vision as an artist, and highlights the important role that women have played in the history of art and craft.

The exhibition *Bonnie Lucas 1978-2023* is the inaugural exhibition in ILY2's new exhibition space at 925 NW Flanders in Portland's Pearl District, where it will be on view until May 27th, 2023.

Featured image: Bonnie Lucas - Spoiled, detail, 1986. Assemblage on fabric, 52 x 37 x 5 in (132.08 x 93.98 x 12.7 cm). All images courtesy ILY2.