

**The
College
of
Wooster
Art
Museum**

Ebert Art Center

Carrie Olson

FOLLIES

Ohio artist Carrie Olson examines the social and cultural construction of visual fidelity, beauty, anxiety, and truth by mining her interest in viruses and how they impact our psyches and our material environment. Embodying magical thinking—believing images and things to be powerful—Olson crystallizes a social obsession with the pandemics that can kill us. Her ceramic-based installation parses notions of material culture, the marketing and acceptance of beauty and fear, and how they intersect within a decorative and conceptual framework.

Objects are never neutral, but instead packed with meaning and often fraught with conflicting interpretations. Olson trades on the multiple meanings associated with objects and with porcelain, her chosen medium. For the past six years she has focused on making ornamental implants—simulacra of plastic surgical enhancements—which she presents in installation format.

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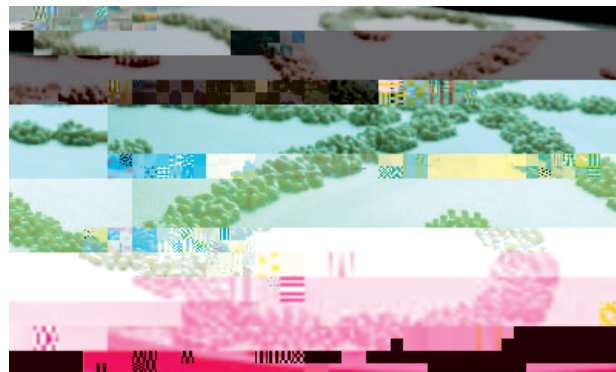
Follies, 2008 (digital rendering)
Paper, porcelain, and Plexiglas
13 x 27 x 35 (feet), gallery dimensions

desirable rather than fear inducing. If we have to use a respirator to save our skins, then we might as well look good, they seem to say. And yet, they are slightly creepy, suggesting something disquieting and unknown.

While the respirators are smooth and aerodynamic, Olson enhances the white disks with designs she has culled from microscopic images of viruses. By using Limoges porcelain—associated with fine china and therefore economies of class—Olson has created objects of beauty that embody and sustain anxiety. The media fosters that anxiety, she suggests, calling into question notions of truth, and of what is “real” and what is manufactured.

To highlight that question, Olson designs the patterned disks to imply the precise social and cultural choreography the media employs to alarm the public. Her exhibition title, *Follies*, extends the idea further by referring to 1930s choreographer, Busby Berkeley, whose dance routines created patterns of humans. Olson notes, “These types of dance routines (follies) were very

tightly choreographed to create purely ornamental human formations, where the individual is only important as a component of the collective.” For Olson, the work emphasizes our media-saturated culture and the dance in which the public participates. By adding vivid banners as backdrops to the decorative disks and respirators, Olson amplifies the spectacle or elaborate folly she has staged. The patterned banners emerge



Follies, 2008 (detail)
H5N1 Cakewalk
Hand-carved porcelain
1/2 x 23 (inches), diameter

from a decorative kernel; yet refer to commercial and political practice from the mundane to the provocative: banners fly in everything from a used car lot to a political rally. Their meanings shift with each iteration and location.

The works' titles, *Ebola Moresco*, *H5N1 Cakewalk*, *Marburg Galliard*

and germ-ridden white disks, that the economies of beauty, self-awareness, anxiety, desire, and a cultural zeitgeist of media supremacy coexist within objects that are always changing, and never innocent nor neutral.

Dana Self
Independent Curator
and Writer
Kansas City, MO

All artist's quotes are from an email exchange between Carrie Olson and Dana Self.



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