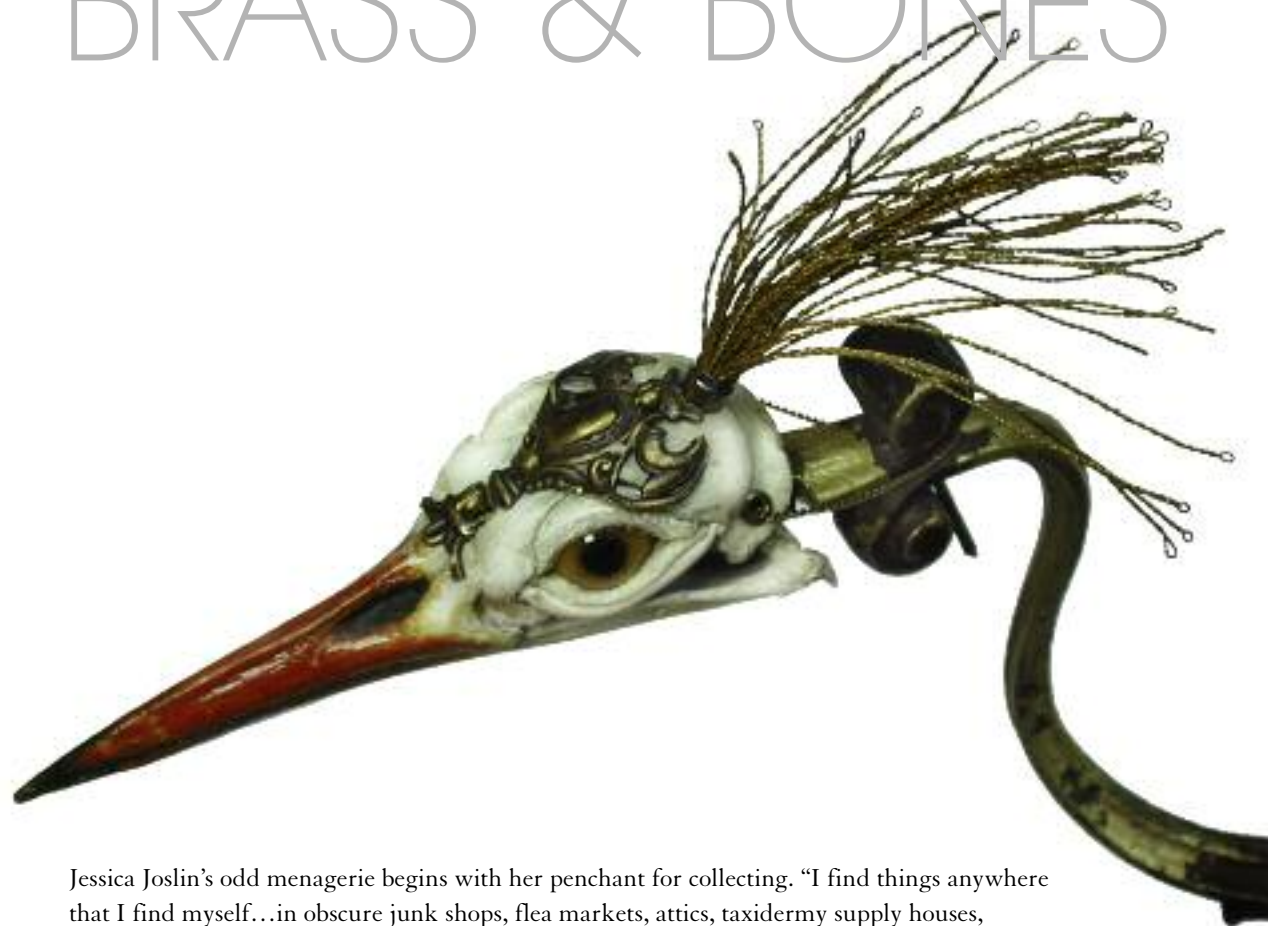


LISA SETTE GALLERY

2004-2005/FALL/VOLUME 7



BRASS & BONES



Jessica Joslin's odd menagerie begins with her penchant for collecting. "I find things anywhere that I find myself...in obscure junk shops, flea markets, attics, taxidermy supply houses, specialty hardware distributors... or walking through the woods." Joslin seeks out and puts to use those bright odds and ends that might catch one's eye in a box full of orphaned fixtures, or glinting up from the sidewalk. While each piece she employs in her eerie animal reliquary is delicately beautiful, it is also the detritus of human engineering and design: old brass buttons and gold braid, glass beads, clockwork cogs and velvet ribbon. Such items are reminiscent of the whimsical technology of a century past, one's grandparents' house, the dark interiors of old-fashioned movie theatres—and as such they have an intriguing, wistful quality. In other words, Joslin collects the things that all of us secretly want to, the shiny pieces that we might comb through, handle and admire, but ultimately force ourselves to put down; what would we do with such things? Where would we put them?

The bones Joslin uses were also once a vital part of miraculous and now forgotten mechanisms. Like the small treasures to be found in junk – shops and attics, bones are strangely appealing as well; who hasn't considered taking home the delicate deposit of tiny, reticulated spine beneath a leaf in the forest, or the browned and broken remnants of an unidentifiable skull, the way we instinctively pick up a seashell? For some reason we care for these souvenirs of small lives.

When Joslin puts the two nostalgic elements together, neatly inserting brass ornaments in bone-dry joints, implanting glass beads in brittle beaks, the result is startling rather than sweet—it is also almost irresistible. Her skeletal constructions give new life to the left-behind pieces she has collected and cared for. Joslin's little Cedric and Fritz and Scorel are as meticulously crafted as the machines and instruments that many of their parts come from. Joslin has an eye for the natural postures of beasts in unnatural circumstances: the pathetic organ-grinder monkey, the prissy-trained poodle, the haughty ostrich in a cramped zoo display. Increasingly, Joslin feels the beasts have taken on a life of their own. She senses that "the animals' postures are more fluid. They are bending and turning." Perhaps they are preparing for escape.

There is a slight relationship between these adorned anatomies and the skeleton displays we see at museums of natural history; we look at both and realize what an oddly spare and economic structure life is draped over. But in the museum of natural history one can look directly through the eye socket of a creature that once was and see the air circulating throughout its bony breadth. Joslin's creatures, on the other hand, no less ventilated, regard one deeply and emphatically out of glass eyeballs, and for some reason appear infinitely more worldly and substantial by the addition of small military medals and lamp chains and bijoux.

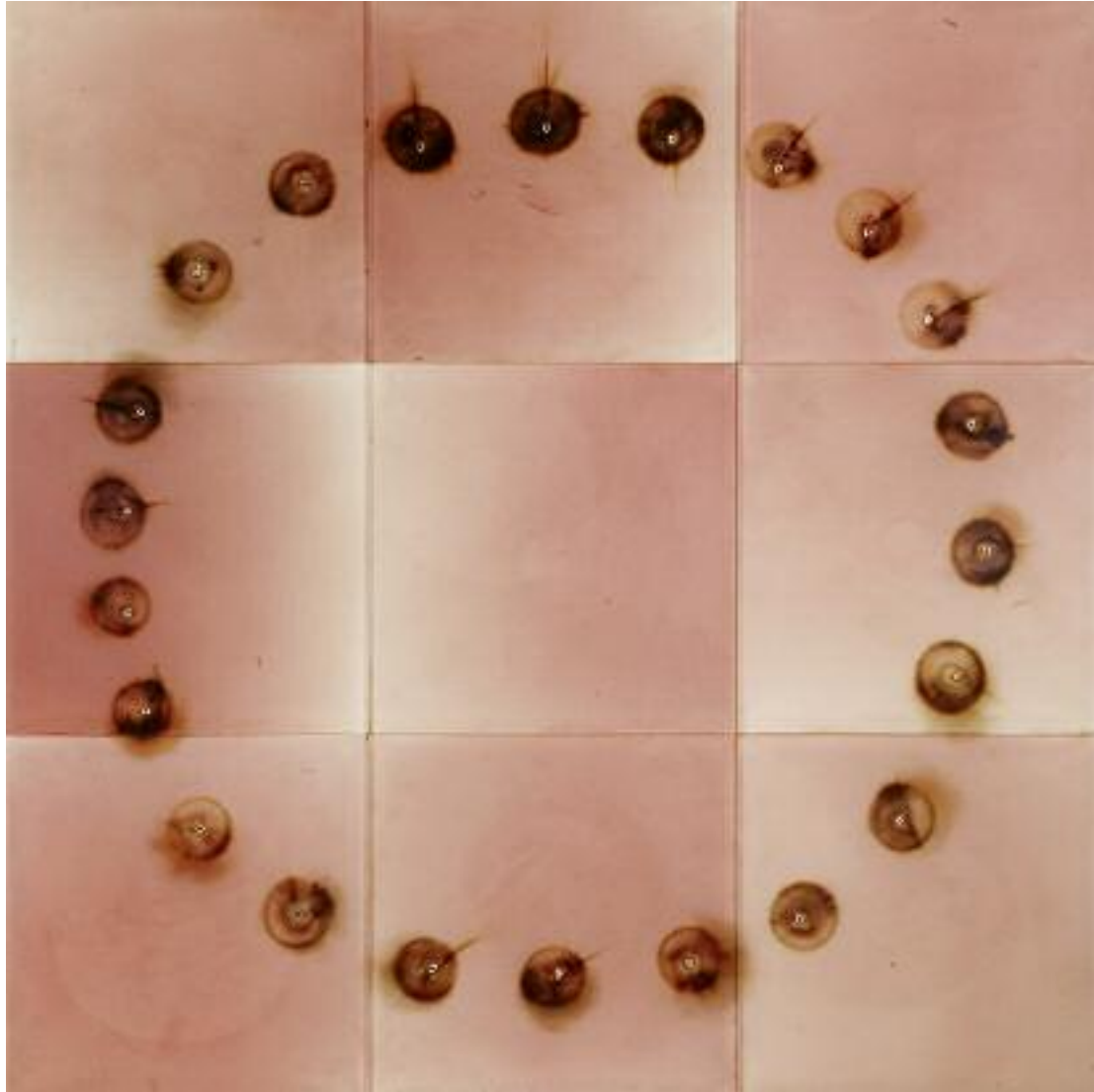
These are clearly not creatures that have lived out the biological or evolutionary imperative. Instead, they are survivors of a more treacherous environment: human civilization. It is not their scrappy existence in nature that is so attractive to us, but their feathers and beaks and bright unblinking eyes and onyx toenails and the soft, inviting leather of their ears or bellies. They are not quite living evidence of our intense desire to adorn the world we live in, make it even more bright and soaked with beauty and purpose. By encrusting the skeletons with so many charming discarded parts, Joslin reminds us of our capacity to treasure an object, and then utterly betray it when the next mechanism that promises to make our lives easier – or at least more elegant – comes along. And yet, in creating these beasts Joslin has made something lasting of all of the bits and pieces that we have loved and then discarded, and how we want to take them home and care for them!



Cover and opposite: *Ambrose*, 2004, antique hardware, leather, cast/painted plastic, glass eyes, 14" x 8" x 12"

Above left: *Sebastien*, 2004, antique hardware, brass, bone, armadillo shell, glass eyes, 31" x 12" x 14"

Above center and right: *Fritz*, 2003, brass, stone, steel, antique hardware and lamp fittings, springs, beads, antique ivory, 10" x 5" x 11"



Mayme Kratz
Marrou, 2004, resin, carbon from burned vertebra, bone on board, 44.5" x 44.5"



Rick Hards
Townsend, 2004, pen and ink on cabinet card, 14.5" x 11.5"



Marie Navarre
sound of this dream, film, paper, thread, 25.25" x 66.5"

With their serene, velvety surfaces and dreamlike hues, the photographs of Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin at first resemble pure visual parable, aglow with the satisfying moral symmetry of a fairy tale. While this vivid, storytelling sensibility is one of the pleasures of looking at the Gerlovin's photographs, a more intimate pleasure is that of discovering, upon closer observation, that each piece is in fact saturated with ideas, meaning and history.

The Gerlovin's photographic work, which the artists have called "still performance," draws on elements of sculpture, poetry and painting, and each of these mediums are layered into the photographs as a distillation of decades of artistic experimentation. Oblique and sometimes overt references to an extensive canon of Eastern and Western philosophical thought are also integral

DISTILLED LUSHNESS

to the work and add yet another layer of inquiry and erudition. Mark Sloan, a photographer and curator who has worked closely with the Gerlovin, compares their photographs to Zen koans, and the Gerlovin themselves have remarked that their works strive toward a kind of Gnostic epiphany: "Unity comes in a fusion of duality." Each photograph's singular,

gemlike beauty belies the fact that it is essentially part of a larger experiment in concept; each plays upon the other like units of meaning in a clever grammar of parable and transcendence.

As work that strives towards human revelation, the pieces' primary connection to their viewers is through the face at the center of each photograph. Anonymous and eerily familiar, each face seems to project outwards from a flat, inky-black background. The face represents the dimensionality of human experience; in the Gerlovin's words, it is "the looking glass of self-contained symmetry and balance of human proportions according to the golden rule," an "anthropomorphic poetry."

With her rosebud lips and epic hair, Rimma Gerlovina's porcelain visage is certainly that of the archetypal poet-heroine. Reminiscent of ritual masks or religious statuary, her gaze is at once direct and unfocused. In *Be-lie-ve* (1990), *Breathe* (1990) and *Birth of Aphrodite* (1992), her eyes are at the level of the photographs' viewers, yet nevertheless seem to penetrate distances existing only in dreams or myth. One might conclude, from the expression she wears, that this oracular vision is at once disconcerting and also perhaps slightly funny.

The Gerlovin's use of wit and visual pun points out that as poignant as the human search for divine revelation is, it is also humorous – a vast mission undertaken by tiny and limited individuals. Valeriy Gerlovin's rapt concentration in *Flask* (2001), lets the viewer in on the joke – though the alchemist/scientist scrutinizes intensely the contents of his flask, from our perspective there are no contents, and, in fact, no flask, just an illusion in pale relief. In *Oars* (1990), a woman afloat in her own hair rows her way towards happiness using red roses. While the viewer knows that she is anchored in her own corporeality and going nowhere, we nevertheless sympathize with her, and cling to the concept of a transcendent beauty. Our irresistible attractions to science and romance are shown, in these photographs, to be both noble and vain. Paradoxically, like any great allegory, the works specify no particular individual or experience, and yet invite us each to self-reflection.



Rimma Gerlovina & Valeriy Gerlovin
Translucent Book, 2001, C-print, 24" x 20"

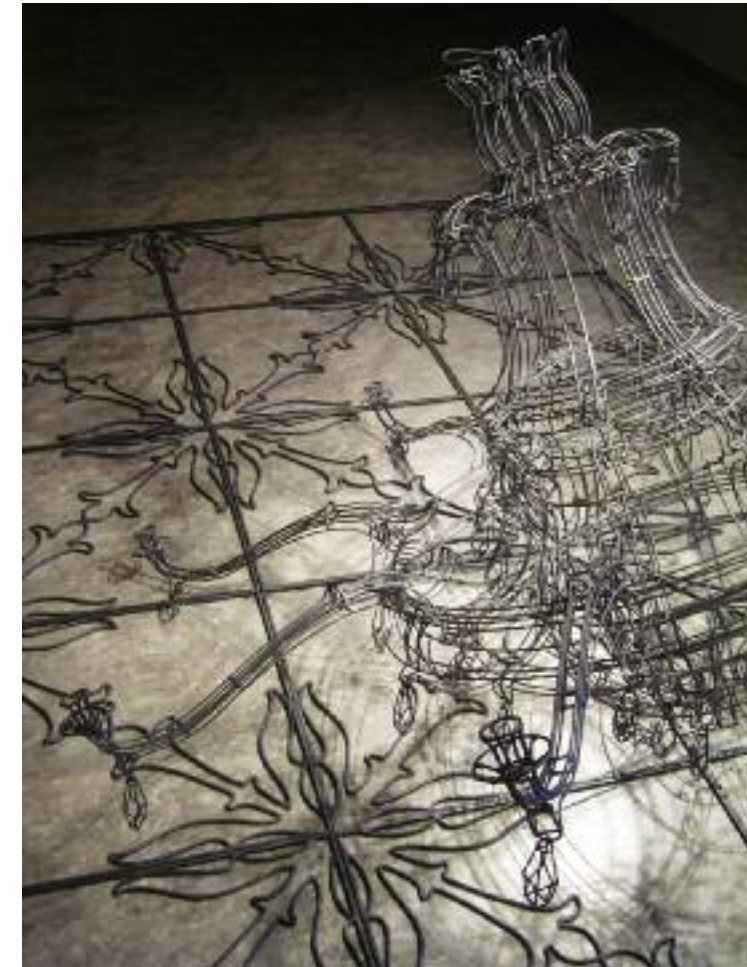
As is evident from the undercurrent of narrative in their work – as well as their more overt use of words, poetry and riddles – the Gerlovins draw on a background of words and writing. Yet they have never traded in straight narrative or storytelling. Rimma Gerlovina began her artistic career as a poet, and both artists were founding members of the Russian Samizdat Movement, which was involved in the production and covert distribution of one-of-a-kind self-published art books in the former Soviet Union. For those involved in Samizdat, the alternative use of texts was intended to both underscore and elude cultural censorship in the artistically homogeneous Soviet Union of the 1960's and '70's, and as Samizdat artists, the Gerlovins developed their own unique language of implication and metaphor. However, both members of the husband and wife team soon found that their creative expression called for a more diverse use of materials than texts or books, and their works evolved into sculptural and performance pieces. After moving to New York in the early '80's, the Gerlovins persisted in examining the dual and sometimes duplicitous nature of words and images in a series of avant-garde and underground installation and sculptural works, and their photographic work began not long after.



The Gerlovins' current work continues to make subversive use of familiar metaphors and materials. Along with words or narrative, an equally significant component of their photographs is the graphic gesture. While in some pieces the long history of body illustration is invoked and the human face or form is drawn, written or painted on, in others the Gerlovins' invert this tradition; the body is used as illustration, as in *On the Balloon* (1995) and *The Apple Tree* (1995), in which Rimma's hair extends from her body to delineate images that surround her physical form. Another kind of graphic subversion can be found in those works in which a layer of white points create an image or veil over the primary image. This "veiling" effect shows up the transitory nature of material interests and obsessions, particularly in more recent photographs such as *Entomology* (2002) and *Mini-Lab* (2003), in which the white overlay seems to denote the transparent distractions of science and technology.

Despite a sense of visual sophistication and seduction that is distinctly modern, it is gratifying to know that the Gerlovins' work is not digitally produced or manipulated. Their works are contemporary observations on a timeless notion, and they both subvert and innovate the use of traditional symbolism and stories. Rich distillations of human experience and intellect, each piece offers us a glimpse of a world that is both familiar and human, and at the same time mythical, profound and often quite stunning.

Crown, 1998, C-print, 24" x 20"
Oars, 2000, C-print, 24" x 20"



Kim Cridler
top: *there*, 2003, steel, 40" x 60" bottom: *providence*, 2003, steel and brass, 60" x 30" x 30"

REVERSE ANTHROPOLOGY

Enrique
Chagoya's work

reveals in its explicitly political subject matter. For over twenty years his paintings, prints and books have focused unequivocally and unwaveringly on power relationships between the United States, Central and South America, and the rest of the world. Chagoya, who was born in Mexico City, remarks that his artwork "is a conceptual fusion of opposite cultural realities that I have experienced in my lifetime."

Before pursuing a career as an artist, Chagoya received a degree in economics in Mexico City, oversaw rural development projects in Veracruz, and worked with farm laborers in Texas. Upon receiving his MFA from University of California at Berkeley, Chagoya directed San Francisco's Galeria de la Raza, which became known as a premiere venue for Chicano art. Chagoya's career exemplifies a persistent concern with the issues of cultural imperialism. However, a specific cultural or political agenda is not the scope of Chagoya's work — his paintings and works on paper are witty, visually intriguing and uncompromisingly intelligent.

Diverse pictorial traditions of European, North American and Latin American origins are central to Chagoya's work. A short list of the graphic forms he utilizes might include codex books (a graphic recording of history invented by the indigenous peoples of Central America), European painting and sculpture of the last three centuries, Mexican public art, currency, pornography, religious iconography and pop culture imagery.

While many of these graphic forms may be independently familiar to us, Chagoya layers them in ways that produce unexpected relationships and striking ironies. His work entices its viewers to reconsider the cultural contexts of each of the traditions he employs, and at the same time joins seemingly disparate influences to create work that is innovative and provocative in its own right. Whether juxtaposing pre-Columbian mythology,



Victorian propaganda and 19th century European painting, mixing Mickey Mouse with political portraiture, or presenting elements of abstract painting on ancient Aztec *Amate* paper, the artist's whip smart aesthetic insight enables his viewers to recognize the inherent connections that make this work so vivid and compelling.

The codex, a form that Chagoya has often appropriated, offers a worthwhile parallel with his own work. A small number of such books produced by indigenous artists and historians document life both before and after the arrival of the conquistadors in Central America. These codices, which can be read in any direction, are reminders of both an original culture and the process of its overthrow and transformation by colonial interests. If such documents reveal an indigenous civilization that was as complicated, culturally advanced and self-aware as that of the Hispanic colonizers, they also make obvious that any comparison between the two societies would be inaccurate. Following this nonlinear tradition, Chagoya's work introduces a diversity of historical accounts and aesthetic traditions without the value judgments and calculated omissions that typically accompany such portrayals.

Chagoya is concerned with the idea that history is written by those who win wars. To counter this, he proposes a "reverse anthropology," one that describes alternative cultural histories and relationships. Such a project is especially important at times when any opinion that diverges from an accepted paradigm is often openly demonized as dangerous or anarchistic (or worse, unpatriotic). Although his constant willingness to confront abuses of power has been essential to Chagoya's work for over twenty years, it is particularly incisive and vital at the present moment.



left and above: *The Adventures of the Noble Cannibals*, 2003, acrylic and waterbase oils on solvent transfers on amate, 8" x 110" (detail)

EXHIBITION SCHEDULE 04/05

2004

October 7 - 30
Opening October 7 - 7 to 9 pm

Einar & Jamex de la Torre
Amber Eagle

November 4 - 27
Opening November 4 - 7 to 9 pm

Rimma Gerlovina & Valeriy Gerlovin

December 2 - 31
Opening December 2 - 7 to 9 pm

Mayme Kratz
Marie Navarre

2005

January 6 - 29
Opening January 6 - 7 to 9 pm

Kim Cridler
Valerie Hammond

Saturday Talk by Kim Cridler
January 8th, 1:00 PM

February 3 - 26
Opening February 3 - 7 to 9 pm

Jessica Joslin
Rick Hards

Saturday Talk by Jessica Joslin
February 5th, 1:00 PM

March 3 - April 2
Opening March 3 - 7 to 9 pm

David Kroll
Jo Whaley

April 7 - 30
Opening April 7 - 7 to 9 pm

Enrique Chagoya
Ian Van Coller

Saturday Talk by Enrique Chagoya
April 9th, 1:00 PM

May 5 - 28
Opening May 5 - 7 to 9 pm

Brad Durham
Nissa Kubly

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Gallery Hours:
Tuesday - Friday 10 am to 5 pm
Thursday evening 7 to 9 pm
Saturday 12 to 5 pm

Closed Thanksgiving,
Christmas and
New Years Day
www.lisasettegallery.com