

Inhabiting the Inner Sanctum

Review of *Golden Shrine* by Bonnie Baker

In the highly theatrically installations of Cynthia Dinan-Mitchell, the elaborate ornamentation of interior design are the visual instruments that allow her to appropriate and transform space with print, textile and ceramics. For younger printmakers such as Dinan-Mitchell, print is simply one option among many strategies and materials; installations are an option for structure. *Golden Shrine* is characteristic of the recent movement towards print-based installation sometimes christened with the awkward moniker “printstallation”. Recent because it has only been around since the seventies and eighties but rooted in techniques of mechanical reproduction that date back to the late 14th century in Europe and as far back as the 7th century in China.

Trending large in North America the genre has quickly achieved critical recognition as evidenced by the long- listing of Quebec artist, [Dominique Petrin](#) by 2014 Sobey Arts Award and spawning multinational art expositions such as [Philagrafika](#) in 2010.

Upon entering *Golden Shrine*, viewers tread cautiously through a jumbled of plaster roses, bone fragments, mounds of luxurious cushions, and scatterings of incarnadine feathers. The ecclesiastical palette of red, black, gold and white links the multitude of separate artifacts, all worthy of inspection and handling. A central reliquary holds the beatified and battered image of the horned beast, glowing with internal light; the scene transfixes the viewer as either a benevolent trinket or an ominous relic. One is compelled to view the shrine as having been constructed by eccentric acolytes, all at once, solemn and playful.

When planning a new installation, Dinan-Mitchell reflects upon earlier works, borrowing elements as needed, hand crafting new to flesh out her concept. She feels “her work is like a collage. Only once it is in a gallery can I see everything together.” *Golden Shrine* grew out of a 2010 installation, Exploration Spatiale, at the Fine Arts Museum of Québec. The space given to Dinan-Mitchell was a jail cell which she transformed into a room for contemplation of the sacred and as she describes, the “weird.” This sense of push-pull duality, transforming something soft into something very ugly has become more evident as her themes have progressed from the domestic setting to the environment of public spaces. A good example of this twinning is serpentine knitted rope carried over from *Western Wasabi*, 2012 to the present installation. The rope represents a strong graphic element, tying together the individual elements, symbolically and physically. Its snake skin pattern repels many viewers but when the same pattern is repeated on the surrounding throw cushions, it is ceremonious decoration.

The merging of hands-on printmaking and installation structures started around the time [Nancy Spero](#) created her epic multipanel pieces in the late seventies and early eighties. Ever since then, the borders of printmaking have become fluid. What we now call ‘traditional’ print processes were once cutting edge technologies. Printmaking’s innovative history continues today with photography, video, digital printing and sculpture. “It should be no surprise that artists feel the need to investigate the reception and production of images in the physical world, to call our attention to the occupation of space by images. And to look at both how we got here and where we can go.” ([Charles Schultz](#), *A Matrix You Can Move In: Prints and Installation Art, Art In Print*, 2011).

Dinan-Mitchell's *Golden Shrine* in its staged absurdity gives us, the viewer, permission to cross the red carpet and inhabit the inner sanctum, to claim the sacrosanct as our own clubhouse to play in.

Golden Shrine is currently showing at ARTsPLACE Gallery, Annapolis Royal. The exhibition runs through July 27. Visit www.arcac.ca for more information and <http://cynthia-dinan-mitchell.com/en/index.php>

Bonnie Baker is a visual artist whose work has crossed between textile, drawing and printmaking reflecting a fascination with the representational element. Her current work examines family mythologies.

In 2014, she exhibited prints in St. John's, Ottawa and New York. She is a founding member of Elephant Grass Print Collective in Parker's Cove, NS. www.bonniebakerstudio.com

Hyperlinks to be included:

Dominique Petrin <http://www.dominiquepetrin.com>

Phiagrafika <http://www.philagrafika2010.org>

Nancy Spero www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/feb/26/nancy-spero-serpentine-rachel-withers

Charles

Schultz http://www.orithofshi.com/orithofshi/wpcontent/uploads/2013/09/Art_in_Print_vol_1_No_3.pdf