

# Réalité et féminisme avec les Femme Fantastiques

By Jesse Cordes Selbin

**John Lucas**

Performer Amelia Winger-Bearskin speaks to the audience on the opening night of the Femme Fantastique art show at the Volitant Gallery Sept. 28.

The realm of feminist surrealist fantasy is one infrequently explored in pop culture. Femme Fantastique, the current exhibit at contemporary art space the Volitant Gallery, attempts to do just that, presenting the work of 14 female artists whose work transcends borders and boldly mixes personal experience with fantasy, playing with the idea of multiple realities.

Xochi Solis, director of the Volitant, believes the show provides “an introduction to a new softer revolution incited by the female artists of today,” and offers an alternative to more traditionally patriarchal ways of telling stories and relating history. While differing interpretations of storytelling and personal history fluctuate by artist, the exhibit is simultaneously very cohesive.

“[The show] remarks upon the fluidity of the concept of femininity and just how this new direction is a renegotiation of the feminist movements of the past,” said Solis.

A focus on the melding of realities is particularly important in the work of Daphane Park, one of the show’s artists and creative visionaries. Starting a few years ago, Park began exchanging ideas with Solis and Betts Coup, a Ph.D. candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, on her now decade-old idea of a show which would “exhibit a bunch of women who make work about the fantastic or unseen, and their relation to the unseen.”

While the lineup of artists has shifted with time, their vision has remained intact, and the three cooperatively curated what evolved into Femme Fantastique.

Of her own artwork, Park says her inspiration is based on “storytelling, and how language and image are connected.” She is particularly interested in intersections and understandings of different realities, and her work speaks to a realm in which image and narrative can “co-exist.” Inspiration for her work in Femme Fantastique came partially from other cultures.

“Different, non-three-dimensional realities are allowed to offer counsel and perspective to the three-dimensional realities,” said Park. The use of traditional themes, myths and symbols to complicate such questions of reality dominate the show. Particularly engaging are Wendy Red-Star’s “Seasons” photographs, which use comically kitschy, clichéd settings and costumes to examine Native American cultural identity, provoking questions of how stereotypes can come to function as a form of common socio-cultural “reality.”

Such reliance on memory and folklore to present contemporary feminist interpretations offers a new way of looking at how history is told, albeit one that harkens back to much older cultural forms of oral and visual storytelling. While such forms of relating history have traditionally been subjugated to more typical written histories, Solis sees the artists of *Femme Fantastique* as bearers of the old way.

“{We are] bringing back to life the tradition of storytelling as a promotion of personal and shared history,” said Solis.

A further nod to atypical cultural history is presented in Joan Jonas’ video installation, “Upsidedown and Backwards.” The video, from 1980, is a pioneering look at feminist interpretations of femininity and fairy tale narratives, and features a face-painted, wildly-costumed Jonas reading haphazardly mixed lines from folk stories. Although the piece is older than its more contemporary peers in the show, Solis chose Jonas’ work specifically for the way it which it acts as a precursor to and “has a dialogue with” the other pieces.

To continue their exploration of issues of feminism and the fantastic, Volitant will be presenting the *Femme Fantastique* film festival, a movie screening taking place Tuesday nights at the gallery every week for the duration of the show. The films were chosen to represent a wide range of conceptions of femininity, and were all produced by or feature women as their main topic.

The films will encourage a continued dialogue on what it means to weave concepts of feminism, storytelling and multiple realities and histories. In keeping with the show’s theme, such a discussion can help, in Solis’ words, “bring to light the impact and importance of reaching into the fantastical worlds of our unconscious and creating something both familiar and bizarre that is meant to be explored and shared.”

The Where & The When

*Femme Fantastique*

Volitant Gallery

320 Congress Avenue

Through November 10