



MiNDY ROSE
SCHWARTZ

january 14th–february 26th, 2011
artist talk: february 10th, 2010 7pm
opening: january 14th 6–9pm
gallery hours: tues–sat, 11am–5pm

Vintage Tchotchkes of My Very Own Mindscape

by Lori Waxman

I suppose it would be theoretically possible to approach the art of Mindy Rose Schwartz from an objective, analytical position.

One could consider the deliberate outmodedness of her choice of technique, material and style: the deftly worked papier-mâché, the confounding crystals and holograms, the West German pottery mode “Fat Lava,” and the hippie leftovers of the 1970s generally. The extremes of her modus operandi—stringing all-consuming



photo by T.W. Li

macramé from double-height ceilings, building credenzas that sprawl and quite literally reach in every direction—edge close to the hysterical. And then there are the domestic origins of her sculptural creations, the reinvented end tables, wall hangings and small decorative objects based on furnishings with a handmade look and a mass-production

price tag. At threewalls, these even fill the three display spaces as in the rooms of a house, with Foyer, Living Room and Sunroom each taking over a gallery.

The crunch of second-wave feminism lurks in her elevation of women’s work and the home environment. Appreciation for the naïveté and weirdness of children’s art sparks an unexpectedly modernist note, of the Paul Klee variety. A wryly loving commentary emerges about the excessiveness of middle-class, suburban consumer culture, as well as the relentlessness of its cycles of fashion.

Trouble is, in order to perform such an analysis, you’d have to find a writer who recognized the stuff of Mindy Rose Schwartz’s installations—but only from having seen it in thrift stores or other people’s homes, or perhaps on display at a particularly open-minded design or craft museum. That’s not me. I know this stuff intimately.

I grew up with it in a shag carpet-filled ranch house in a suburb of Montreal, Quebec—just as the artist herself did in Skokie, Illinois. Walking into a gallery filled with Mindy Rose Schwartz’s strangely sleepy, creepy and ultimately familiar creations swirls me into a tailspin of recognition, a series of Proustian moments of involuntary memory in which the infamous madeleine has been laced with something far trippier than coconut or jam.

When I was small, my paternal grandmother gave me a jewelry box filled with costume necklaces, brooches and



photo by T.W. Li

watches that she no longer wore, either because they were broken beyond repair or simply out of date, some by just a few seasons. I played with Nana's hand-me-downs for years: spidery orange and green plastic clip-on earrings, a chunky mother-of-pearl bracelet with pieces gone astray, a shiny ladybug whose wings opened to reveal a timepiece. A brassy, stamped metal pin in the shape of a rose, complete with stem and leaves, haunts me more than her other trinkets.

But there it is, in the "Living Room" of Schwartz's exhibition, reworked into the cosmic pedestal of "Dream Sequence Ballerina Table with Yielding to Deep Despair Wall Hanging." And there it is again, undulating like so many externalized brain waves above the mystic's head in her "Chandelier." Nana would think these transmutations inexplicably ugly. To me, they release the weird potential I always somehow knew that flower contained.

My other grandmother, my mom's mom, did not give me a box of jewelry because hers was not costume. But she did have a giant mahogany cabinet full of Royal Doulton figurines that I visited every

time I was at her house. I cared only for the two balloon and flower sellers, a cheery old woman and a tired downtrodden man. They were bone china and about eight inches tall, working-class people hand-painted in bright colors to be both precious and adorable. I never exactly liked them but they fascinated me the way all miniatures do, and I found the prospect of them and their other ceramic cohorts being frozen and locked up in grandma's dining room to be an endless source of mystery and discomfort.

And there they are, in the "Sun Room" of Schwartz's exhibition, the female figurine having regained her youth, lost

the bottom part of her body, and expanded to the size of a fountain. Her rainbow balloons have floated off and only the flowers remain, serving to decorate her hair and bodice. She's surprisingly the worse for it—her face expresses alarmingly little through tiny eye and mouth slits and a wee bump of a nose. Tears stream out a spout in her head and rain down all around her, in the form of crystal pendants on thin golden chains. She wades in a pool of her own sadness.

The man has done better for himself, in a way. He's now "A Peaceful Man," and his gentle face endures. But gone too are his balloons and the body that sold them. In their place grows a lush ginger beard that splits in half and runs to the ground, forming a pair of spindly magical legs. From the tip of one blooms a single sweet blossom. Finally grandma's figurines have become creatures to whom I can relate.



photo by T.W. Li

Oh, there was macramé in my childhood home, and string art too. Plenty of plants depended on craftily knotted beaded rope to

hang from the ceiling just so, and plenty of boats and suns and abstract motifs relied on the hobbyist obsessiveness of our family's extended network of friends to come into existence and be gifted into ours. But somehow these mediums register less precisely and profoundly in my object memory than that brassy flower and those ceramic dolls. For other gallery-goers the unexpected flashes and eddies of recollection will be triggered by different sculptures, even if they too grew up with some of the same mass-produced furnishings and tchotchkes as me or Mindy Rose Schwartz.

Objects have unique effects on each of us, as we have unique effects on them in turn.



photo by T.W. Li

They may seem made of stable stuff—okay, a bit of dust here, some mold there, a little warping from the humidity, maybe—but that's just on the surface. What Mindy Rose Schwartz reveals, through creating from scratch sculptures that seem simultaneously deeply recognizable and deeply odd, is just how changeable they really are.

Lori Waxman has a PhD in art history that is all about walking in cities as an art form in the 20th century. She also writes criticism for the Chicago Tribune and Artforum.

Mindy Rose Schwartz extends thanks to:

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threewalls

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