

**SUSAN JAMISON:
ENCHANTMENT**

Ruth C. Horton Gallery
September 1–October 8, 2016

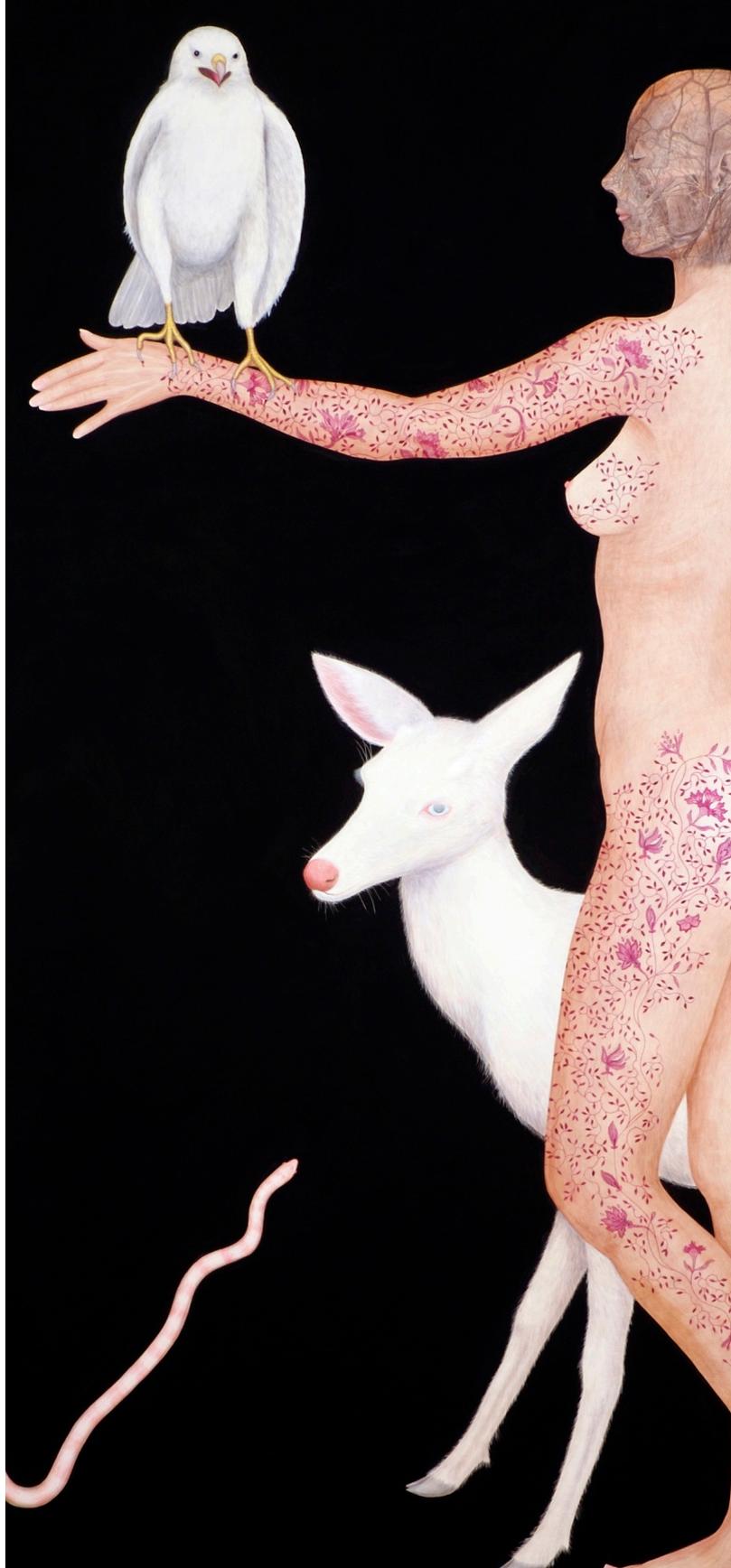
**MOSS
ARTS
CENTER**

Natural Woman

Susan Jamison, best known for her intricate egg tempera paintings, works as a painter and sculptor in Roanoke, Virginia. Her paintings, fabric sculptures, installations, and small drawings abound with femininity and fanciful images that present a spectrum of conceptions of womanhood, beauty, and power. On view in this exhibition is a selection of paintings from 2008-2016 that depict avatar-like female figures in imaginary interactions with animals and nature

Throughout history, Woman has been inextricably connected to nature—colloquially, spiritually, and physiologically. The appearance and functions of the female body, its primordial and alluring topography, its earthy fecundity, renders it to some as mysterious and wild as nature itself. To view Woman is to be reminded of nature, of life and death, nectar and blood, vulnerability and immense power, the wild and the tamed. The implications of that connection depend wholly on cultural context; whether Woman is to be feared, exalted, or dismissed outright. Among many fluctuating roles, Woman has been cast as moon goddess, witch, hysteric (note the etymology), and earth mother, alternately, sometimes even simultaneously a mythical being of worship, vile temptress, and scapegoat. She has been both revered as giver of life and condemned for original sin. This association with nature is both a cage and an ocean...or, in the case of the work of Susan Jamison, it is a forest. Within Jamison's forest, a lush dreamlike world, yet one not entirely removed from our own, Woman and nature are intertwined like honeysuckle vines. She is neither wholly venerated nor victimized. She is not quite captive, yet not the captor herself; She is both and neither. She simply is.

We Are Beautiful, 2008 (detail) ►
Egg tempera on panel
24 x 18 inches
Collection of Adriana MacGregor





◀ *Never More Tighter*, 2015 (detail)
Egg tempera on panel
36 x 36 inches
Collection of the artist

Jamison's dream-forest is an amalgam of experience, knowledge, and vision. It is rooted in childhood memories, brightened by Dutch floral paintings and Audubon illustrations, dappled with the darkness of the Brothers Grimm, and verdant with folk wisdom, divination, and allegory. Amid the forest archetypal female figures encounter flora and fauna, some menacing, most albino, all rich in symbolism and suggestion. The figures, for which Jamison herself is the prototype, often bear tattoo-like floral lace patterning on their bodies. Perhaps it is an ultra-feminine armor that protects them from the darkness in the forest, or war paint that marks them as heroines of the realm. Or perhaps it is an ancient spell embroidered into their skin, indelible, ancestral, and elemental. The scenes in which the figures are placed are rife with contrast in meaning and style. Rose-petal skin floats atop velvety black, spiders in their armor shine like leather against stark white; ethereal webs and fine thread pierce tender skin, a cold snake drapes across a warm breast. Even Jamison's studio is an embodiment of this juxtaposition, this interweaving. While airy and bright, the almost exclusively white space is punctuated with effigies of mortality— taxidermy, antlers, a miniature human skeleton. Filmy lace hangs next to fur, a craggy skull rests beside a delicate bird's nest. The myriad textures and finishes are awash in natural light, along

with paintings and drawings in various stages of life. In the space, as in the work, one is reminded of birth, death, and the many guises of beauty between and after.

In her studio, Susan Jamison paints almost exclusively in egg tempera, a medium harkening to medieval and early Renaissance art, and one that by its very nature restrains gestural, painterly marks. However, a background in printmaking, a process-oriented work style, and a visionary mind allow the artist to plan and beautifully execute her ideas within this restraint. Jamison's paintings begin as visions translated into "shorthand sketches" to be later developed into complete drawings. The drawing is then transferred to the prepared surface, artist-grade Masonite generally coated with black or zinc white. After this point, the artist's work is deliberate and meticulous rather than improvisational or expressive; layer upon layer of egg tempera is applied until her initial vision is realized in luminous detail.

While each work is rich and distinct, the archetypal, mannequin-like appearance of the figures in Jamison's paintings, like illustrations from an anatomy book, allow for the insertion of the "everywoman:" the viewer, even regardless of gender, is able to, in some way, connect with them through their subtle complexity. The women, and the mystical tableaux in which they reside, invite us to revisit our connection with nature, to celebrate it, rather than eschew it as a tired label, a reductive superstition. The images of Jamison's dream-forest beckon and repulse, liberate and ensnare, and paint Woman proudly in her many colors, her many roles. Within Woman, as within nature, both quiet, yet immense power and heartbreaking fragility exist simultaneously. There, the sweet floral scent of femininity mingles with warm notes of maternity, both tinged by the coppery scent of blood, and, underneath all, there is a dark musk of sensuality, fear, and ancient magic: *enchantment*.

Meggin A. Hicklin
Exhibition Program Manager, Moss Arts Center
Exhibition Curator, Susan Jamison: *Enchantment*



Fly Me, 2016 (detail); Egg tempera on panel; 36 x 36 inches; Collection of the artist ▲

About the Artist

Susan Jamison received a bachelor of fine arts from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia (1988), and a master of fine arts with a concentration in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island (1991). Jamison's works are held in the collections of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, The Eleanor D. Wilson Museum at Hollins University, POM International Corporation, and many highly regarded private collections. She has been featured in three volumes of *New American Paintings* and she was profiled in two national publications, *Garden & Gun* and *Local Quarterly* magazines. Jamison was awarded a fellowship from the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation for a residency at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. In 2013 she was given The Karen Shea Silverman Endowed Fellowship to return to the VCCA for another residency. In 2012 Jamison attended an international artist residency in the city of Opole, Poland and was an artist in residence at Santa Fe Art Institute in 2014. She was a recipient of the Lillian Orlowsky and William Freed Foundation Grant for painting in 2014. Jamison lives and works in Roanoke, Virginia.



◀ *Miss Carolina Lily*, 2016
Egg tempera on panel
24 x 24 inches
Collection of the artist

ON THE COVER
Good Luck Couture, 2008
Egg tempera on panel
24 x 18 inches
Collection of Eleanor D. Wilson Museum,
Hollins University

Works in the exhibition

All images courtesy of the artist

Weaving Ritual, 2016
Egg tempera on panel
24 x 24 inches
Collection of the artist

Miss Carolina Lily, 2016
Egg tempera on panel
24 x 24 inches
Collection of the artist

Love Inside and Out, 2016
Egg tempera on panel
72 x 44 inches
Collection of the artist

Fly Me, 2016
Egg tempera on panel
36 x 36 inches
Collection of the artist

Do You Think?, 2016
Egg tempera on panel
18 x 18 inches
Collection of the artist

Never More Tighter, 2015
Egg tempera on panel
36 x 36 inches
Collection of the artist

Needle Me, 2012
Egg tempera on panel
36 x 36 inches
Collection of Rick and
Suzanna Fields, Richmond, Virginia

Above the Pack, 2010
Egg tempera on panel
Diptych, 88 x 72 inches
Collection of the artist

Curious Walk, 2008
Egg tempera on panel
72 x 44 inches
Collection of the artist
Courtesy of J. Fergeson gallery, Farmville, Virginia

We Are Beautiful, 2008
Egg tempera on panel
24 x 18 inches
Collection of Adriana MacGregor

Good Luck Couture, 2008
Egg tempera on panel
24 x 18 inches
Collection of Eleanor D. Wilson Museum,
Hollins University



Weaving Ritual, 2016; Egg tempera on panel; 24 x 24 inches; Collection of the artist ▲

General Information

Admission to galleries and exhibition-related events is free.

Gallery Hours

Tuesday–Friday, 10 AM–5:30 PM

Saturday, 10 AM–4 PM

Fall 2016 Exhibitions

Four one-person but interrelated exhibitions deal inventively with the female persona.

Susan Jamison: *Enchantment*

September 1–October 9, 2016

Amy Cutler

September 15–December 11, 2016

Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle

September 8–November 28, 2016

Lynn Hershman Leeson

October 20–December 11, 2016



For more information about exhibitions and events:

www.artscenter.vt.edu



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