

Jessica Heikes

Jessica Heikes' work is a tender yet radical reflection on the emotional scars imposed on women as they maneuver the burdens of domesticity, specifically those imposed by society, or by personal expectations, or familial duty.

At first glance, the works remind one of the aftermaths of a natural disaster. A piece of clothing, a shirt, skirt, blouse or sweater is either soaked, dipped, or layered with plaster, then arranged in an open-faced mold, which in turn is filled with plaster. Heikes at one point tried to give rigidity to some of the material. Though she will still try to direct the final composition by careful placement of the garment, she allows the weight of the plaster to impose its will on the fabric.

"There is a force the material is subjected to and I don't know how that dress will move when I pour the plaster. There is a lot of satisfaction as I pour the plaster but it is also sad," she explained.

Sadness is a strong presence in the work and reflects her memories of childhood and the tenuous relationship with her mother. Though love was present, Heikes confesses there was an emotional distance her mother maintained. The work reflects her attempts to understand that distance, and how many women, who sublimate their own aspirations for the impositions of motherhood and domesticity, share that distance.

In *smoking at the table*, a blue dress with pink lapels, buttons and trim are encased and absorbed by plaster giving it the effect of a garment rended, fabric torn. The elegance of the dress dissolves as it melds with the plaster -- the garment as metaphor for a life lived and the plaster a stand in for societal constraints. The large buttons jump out of the frayed and fading colors, emphasizing their function. They will seal a body snug, provide cover, the trappings of a role defined, imposed on a free spirit, seated at a table wistfully smoking.

*Looking out the window* is an exquisite and bittersweet image. The oval shape gives it the feel of a curio, a prized possession restrained by the alabaster of the plaster. The delicate green paisley weave, saturated in places, faded in others, creates a sense of loss that is accentuated by the array of buttons, three of which are missing. One can feel the body that rests heavy on the windowsill looking at possibilities and what if's, wrapped in a cardigan that has seen better days but still comforts.

*Dissipated* is a round sculpture form with a shirt, the color and shape consumed by the plaster. Though Heikes gives up control to the plaster, allowing it to render the material, in this piece she has scraped away part of it to reveal a red button. It sticks out like a single tear, a drop of blood bright against the dissipated shirt. Just above it, in poignant contrast, the imprint of a

button speaks to the underlying sense of absence. The impression is memory sanctified; yet in contrast to the actual button, it is a memory that speaks of unresolved pain.

Jose Faus