

KELLY O'CONNOR: ARTIST STATEMENT

My work is derived from a combination of memory, fantasy and fiction, often drawing from Western folklore through the use of iconic characters. I am particularly interested in the duality of characters that represent American idealism, yet were often tragic figures in their actual lives. Much of my work is about exposing the reality behind these public façades.

Judy Garland is a recurring heroine in my collages. Her classic film, *The Wizard of Oz*, is full of magic and pure artificial joy; yet Garland's real life was quite tragic. For me she represents a loss of innocence. Garland and many of the female characters in my work have a look of bliss or artificial happiness, while many of the male characters represent the ominous "man behind the curtain" or the creators of the stories. These characters are mythological to me and make up much of my subconscious.

I strive to create scenes through which the viewer can experience the influence or spell that timeless narratives can cast over our lives. These stories contain enough archetypes and subliminal messages to provide an endless source of inspiration for me. Often, I combine several fairy tales to give an overall sense of the stories. I often stage familiar characters in menacing landscapes. I appropriate idealized American landscapes, such as Disneyland and Yellowstone National Park, and use them as a scene for a non-linear narrative. I intentionally leave the situation ambiguous in order for the viewer to relate their own experiences to the suggested scenarios.

Playing with color is central to my process. I create candy-colored surfaces that are so sweet it's sick, and incorporate colors sampled from vintage record covers. The contrast of sparkling rays and neon colors against weathered, dull tones acts as a metaphor for the duality within the characters, whether real or imagined. In order to create large-scale work, I enlarge images from their original source. The appropriated images are drawn from film and amusement memorabilia, primarily from the 1950's and 1960's. I like this time period because the line quality of the drawings is minimal and the subjects are rich with American idealism that. This mid-century modern aesthetic juxtaposed with my contemporary cultural views, results in a post-utopian interpretation.

"In collage, works on paper, and installation-based work, O'Connor's familiar subjects undergo surreal, psychedelic, hypnotic, and other unsettling transformations."

– Rene Barilleaux, Chief Curator McNay Art Museum