Drema Montgomery

Artist Statement

My work consists of paintings that combine toys, adornments, and fleshy forms to explore the precious and pernicious role that culture plays upon the development and maintaining of a social identity.

Colloquialisms, introspection, and religious morality all inform the slightly dark tone and compositional approach to the construction of these images. Titles within this body of work are derived from colloquial terms such as *keep sweet* and *honey child.*  These phrases often work as forms of endearment as well as directives of behavior. They are common in the piedmont regions of Alabama where Appalachian and Southern culture interweave. Vernaculars endearments and admonishments are the day-to-day manifestation of an underlying code of behavior and morality that is part of the shaping of identity and value-systems.

Both in my paintings and in the homes of my regional upbringing, decorative objects such doilies and pearls, overlap with the severity of religious imagery. I paint fleshy innards that are caught in the midst of religiously inspired compositions. A veil of sweetness and radiance obscures and soften this severity, and bring up further implications of the layered nature of cultural cultivation.

The space of the dolls is transitional both physically and psychologically. The internal cavities depicted in my paintings accommodate the presence of the baby dolls by attempting to integrate and consume them. As viscera interacts with plastic, tension is created between the breaking down of what is interior and what is exterior, what is protected and what is consumed, and what is desirable and what is repellant. The paintings show a journey of excavation through my body and identity. Through the labor of painting this history is made visible and present revealing the conflicts and catalysts in the formation of myself.

My process involves multiple steps where I approach the same forms again and again. Attempting to open the symbolic vessels, and investigate within. Through creating multiple physical manifestations of intangible subjects such as gender and culture, I am able to more clearly understand the points of complexity and conflict that arise within myself. Through building physical sets, photographing, and painting, I continue to readdress and investigate those conflicted positions. Within this exploration of the personal, empathetic experiences can arise within the work for the viewer.

The paintings map out a history of identity and work as a third space for reflection. They also explore the ambiguous and conflicting social expectations of femininity. Young girls project on to the dolls during play. The dolls are both the vessel of identity, as well as oppressive shapers of self. The tension created when something is both alluring and disturbing, cherished and feared is where I find the most fruitful catalyst for my work. This group of work is still being created and explored because it continues to offer up new revelations, and situations of unrest that like a pieces of sand in an oyster compel me to work over these ideas until I have fashioned them into something new and lustered.