



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: *FALLEN*, 2015, glazed Porcelain, gold lustre, feathers, wood, upholstery, paper, acrylic; *MIRROR MIRROR*, 2016, acrylic, porcelain, magnolia branch, lacquer; *MOUNTED CREAM*, 2014, glazed Porcelain, dyed fleece fibres; all at Project Gallery

LAURA HUDSPITH

TORONTO
at Project Gallery

Review by Alex Raponi

The whimsical porcelain sculptures in Laura Hudspith's *Lacunae* exhibition transport us back to another era - specifically to Victorian times, when taxidermy was first popularized as a part of interior design and decor, and bird and butterfly collecting alike were mainstream pursuits. In fact, observing Hudspith in her studio, fastidiously pinning row after row of delicate dead moths and butterflies, is reminiscent of middle-class Victorian drawing rooms, where polished wood chests encased drawer upon drawer of ethereal winged specimens. This very same sense of nostalgia permeates the entirety of Hudspith's debut solo show at Project Gallery (Toronto) in which she thoughtfully examines the varied ways that human beings collectively and, often times, subconsciously, satisfy sentimental yearnings and the 'lacunae' in their lives by way of amassing objects and 'things' over the course of them.



LACUNAE opening reception at Project Gallery

On the evening of *Lacunae's* opening reception, the gallery is abuzz with awakened energy and delighted chatter among the art-viewing crowd. Upon entering the long corridor of Project Gallery, one is immediately struck by the vibrant and fantastical forms that adorn and animate the otherwise white-washed space. There is an air of enchantment and childlike wonder. It's as though one serendipitously stumbled into a life-size cabinet of curiosities - a cabinet filled with contemporary reverie and fanciful flair. Hudspith's talent for transforming organic matter into otherworldly and phantasmagorical objects calls to mind the work of fellow Canadian ceramic artist, Kate MacDowell. Both Hudspith and MacDowell's meticulous porcelain sculptures draw our attention to the inherent conflict in our romantic notion of living in harmony with the natural world *vis-à-vis* current patterns of consumption.



TOP: Artist Laura Hudspith at *Lacunae* opening reception at Project Gallery
BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: *LACUNA BEACH*, 2016, porcelain, monopoly money; *ANOTHER PIECE OF THE FURNITURE*, 2015, glazed Porcelain, wood, toile de Jouy fabric, upholstery materials; all at Project Gallery

Baby sparrows teem in a nest of multicolored Monopoly money, next to the porcelain cast of a garish pig skull ornamenting haut monde Toile de Jouy upholstery, while brazen angel curios diabolically hover about. The outward geniality and playfulness of the artworks create an accessible point of departure from which their sophisticated conceptual underpinnings proliferate. A burst of vivacious laughter, that I happen to recognize as the artist's own, illuminates the room - and what suddenly becomes clear is just *how* interwoven Hudspith's own selfhood and her artworks actually are. Through *Lacunae*, we are given the opportunity to behold the artistic outcome of this emboldened and charismatically critical, reciprocal relationship.



FROM TOP LEFT TO BOTTOM RIGHT: *BONE AND FLORA*, 2015, unglazed porcelain, deer bones, LED circuitry, felt backing; *PLASTIC DREAM-A-DERMY*, 2014, glazed porcelain, commercial decals, gold lustre, plastic poodle figurine, dragonfly wings; *GOT YOU PEGGED (detail)*, 2016, porcelain, glaze, gold lustre; *MIRROR MIRROR (detail)*, 2016, acrylic, porcelain, magnolia branch, lacquer; all at Project Gallery

The coexistence of both frivolity and sentience across Hudspith's *Lacunae* series has further repercussions still. It induces viewers to tap into their personal value systems, not only in evaluating the theses that Hudspith proffers, but in order to reconsider the bases of their own rationales. As a reward for their receptiveness to interacting with the works in this way, viewers are gifted an augmented awareness as it relates to the myriad of possible meanings for each artwork and its constituent components. Much like the contemporary Swiss pop artist Sylvie Fleury, Hudspith has an affinity for semiotics, and not only with regard to how she alone interprets symbols - her enthusiasm encompasses how the world at large perceives them as well. Through their art, both Hudspith and Fleury re-contextualize symbols of social status and consumer culture to reveal a deeper irony. *Lacunae* achieves this through taxidermic tropes that highlight the paradox between recent taxidermy trends in consumerism (*i.e.*, *the proliferation of faux antler wall decor and forest deer/fawn halloween costumes*) and taxidermy's historical value as a way to preserve and appreciate the natural world.



TOP: *MIRROR MIRROR*, 2016, acrylic, porcelain, magnolia branch, lacquer; at Project Gallery
BOTTOM: *WINGED METAMORPHOSIS*, 2016, glazed porcelain, pink translucent soap, starling wings, Asian moths, LED circuit; at Project Gallery

Even the very materials from which the artworks are made are emblematic of the tensions among *Lacunae's* various themes. A kaleidoscope of feathery wings, that instinctively undulate in tune with the motion of passer-byes, congregate around a glowing, womb-like orb, and juxtapose the monochromatic opaqueness of porcelain shields that memorialize the gallery walls. In much the same way that 17th century Dutch still-life *vanitas* contained objects symbolic of death, transience, and the vanity of earthly pleasures, Hudspith's art objects are a modern and three-dimensional take on analogous themes. The taxidermy, flora, moths, butterflies, manufactured tchotchkes, bourgeois furnishings, effeminate objects, and even the rose-colored reflective facade of *Mirror Mirror* (2016), symbolize such contemporary socio-cultural struggles as organic vs mass-produced, ephemerality and transformation vs preservation, and entrenched, yet expired, gender-specific constructs. These assorted themes synergistically interact with one another throughout the exhibition, as do the sculptural works themselves, and breathe new meaning into their preexisting relationships with one another, with the individual, and with society at large.



HIS OASIS, 2016, cage, acrylic, concrete, porcelain, glaze, gold lustre, enamel, fabric, crystal, mirror, chain, wire, chandelier, butterflies, wood, pearl; at Project Gallery

***Lacunae*, Laura Hudspith's debut solo show, is now on display at Project Gallery (184 Munro Street, Toronto) and through Sunday, April 24th, 2016.**

<http://projectgallerytoronto.com/exhibitions/lacunae/>