



Pam Joseph in her studio.

Body Work

Nationally acclaimed artist Pam Joseph epitomizes Aspen's penchant for the avant-garde.

BY HILARY STUNDA

DOWN A LONG SERIES OF WOODEN STAIRS is the entrance to Pam Joseph's expansive art studio in Aspen. Skylights illuminate the space. Tiny cutouts of breasts, thighs, a rosy nipple, and other body parts from erotic comics and London tart cards are strewn across a center table. Rows of exhibition announcements and museum gift-shop postcards hang on clips. Tom Waits's plaintive growl pops on the soundtrack.

Joseph flips through a mountainous stack of oil and digital prints. "I was cutting out little body parts and one piece fell onto an exhibition announcement for Anton Henning," she says, adding, "It worked." The "Postcard Paintings" series was born and has been her focal point for the last three years. Joseph collages images of body parts onto the postcards and then manipulates them on the computer, "overlapping and receding the new information into the other artist's painting." From this interpretation she'll create a painting—oil on linen or paper with the original collaged elements. Finally, she'll photograph

the painting to be reproduced back to the size of a commercial postcard.

"All these permutations created a whole new world, an ability of range," she says. By superimposing the digitally scanned erotic collage snippets onto classic art—like Diebenkorn's *Girl on a Terrace*—Joseph makes mischief with such icons as Picasso, Rousseau, Dalí, Courbet, Guston, Manet, and Bacon. Here, Dada and soft-core porn mingle with and inform the artistic process. In *Rousseau Cinématique* the dot matrix degradation of the comics offsets the sheen of the classical oil technique. This incongruous marriage of visual contexts nails contemporary culture.

"At some point you have to learn what they were thinking about. How did they paint? And then, at some point, it becomes my painting," she explains.

In December 2007, Joseph was part of a group show at Francis Naumann Fine Arts. "Les Demoiselles Revisited" celebrated the 100th anniversary of Picasso's famous painting. Her collage rendition, *Resampling Les Demoiselles*,

includes tongues, breasts, hands holding buttocks, and a sliver of a black man's profile in coitus.

Calico Flower Parts, after O'Keefe, 2005/06, is a dead ringer for O'Keefe's sensual flower. At the center of the open white petals is a tangle of body parts painted in a fleshy hue softly caressing the stamen. With this work, Joseph was still painting the body parts. But then she "had the urge to print them out of the computer large-scale, cut them out, and collage them on the canvases."

Joseph has long explored questions of women and their roles in society. And while her works may attach to this theme, when it comes to experimentation she's fluid, moving from such disparate mediums as large sculpture, airbrush lacquer, and urethane on aluminum to wallpaper, monoprints, scarves, books, digital prints on gold-leaf paper, and oils. She also created the label design for Sombra, a mezcal by Betts & Scholl.

Other creations include the "Hundred Headless Women" project, a series of wood-burned cutting boards that toured as part of her "torture museum" for a traveling interactive installation called the "Sideshow of the Absurd," a carnivalesque trip through the collective image bank of curiosities and archetypes as seen in freak shows. "I started burning into the cutting boards images of women in perilous situations," says Joseph. "It's like the magician's assistant who gets cut in half. She's always smiling and she always survives."

"Sideshow" is currently on exhibit at Artspace in Shreveport, Louisiana, and has been shown at nine museums and galleries in the United States, including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver and the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. "It's about the power of women; the violence behind façades," she explains. "Fate and chance."

First published as a handmade artist edition in 2006, the "Hundred Headless Women" project was exhibited in China and eventually was bought by the New York Public Library and private collectors. It is now available in paperback.

Joseph has exhibited in Paris, Berlin, Copenhagen, and Beijing. This December she'll attend Art Basel Miami Beach with a Duchamp-inspired work of art. In October 2009 she will have her first one-woman show at the Francis Naumann Fine Art Gallery in New York City (*24 West 57th Street*) for her "Postcard" series. "This kind of thing never happens," she says. "You get a phone call out of the blue and are told you're being offered a solo show in New York. I've got goose bumps."

Insider Info

For information on Pam Joseph's works, call 970-920-4098 or visit manose.com.