

Susan Eley  
Fine Art

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***The Tall Tale:  
Folk, Fantasy & Fear in Art of the Fairy Tale***

A group exhibition featuring work by Audrey Bernstein, Elizabeth Bisbing, Laurel Garcia Colvin, Ayakoh Furukawa, Carolyn Monastra, Maria Passarotti, Deborah Scott, Barbara Strasen, Fumiko Toda and Chie Yoshii.

January 15-February 28, 2014

Opening Reception: Wednesday, January 15, 6-8 pm  
**Featuring a performance by Jester of the Peace Barbara Ann Michaels**

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We are delighted to present ***The Tall Tale: Folk, Fantasy & Fear in Art of the Fairy Tale***, an exhibition of 21 photographs, paintings and mixed media works by ten women. The rich, eclectic variety of art includes a range—from literal depictions of well-known tales and characters to abstract expressions of fairy tale narrative, imagery and plot. The exhibition features work by **AUDREY BERNSTEIN, ELIZABETH BISBING, LAUREL GARCIA COLVIN, AYAKOH FURUKAWA, CAROLYN MONASTRA, MARIA PASSAROTTI, DEBORAH SCOTT, BARBARA STRASEN, FUMIKO TODA** and **CHIE YOSHII**. The exhibition opens on **Wednesday, January 15, with a reception from 6-8 pm, and remains on view through February 28, 2014.**

**The OPENING RECEPTION, features a PERFORMANCE BY JESTER OF THE PEACE BARBARA ANN MICHAELS, who will "marry" you to your Happily Ever After. What Charms you in life? Is it a Prince or Princess Charming? The devotion of your friends, family, vocation, vacation, hobby or spiritual practice? Your Happily Ever After begins right now when you pledge your love with Jester of the Peace.**

*Barbara Ann Michaels, Jester of the Peace, and Ordained Interfaith Minister, makes a career of the interplay of love, art and comedy. She is an award-winning wedding officiant in NYC, specializing in highly personalized weddings, including costume and adventure ceremonies. Michaels specializes in audience-interactive and improvisational theater as a clown, dancer, actor, and writer. She has performed at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the New York Clown Theatre Festival, San Francisco Fringe Festival, Figment Festival, ImprovBoston, First Night Boston, on the Discovery Channel, and as a clown in Brazil and Germany. She is the subject of a documentary film, currently in production, entitled Jester of the Peace.*

Since the beginning of civilization, fairy tales have played an important role in the collective consciousness of children and adults. Fairy tales inspire, educate, frighten and delight. They are often our first experience with literature and storytelling. Fairy tales act as our early teachers, even before we begin school, demonstrating how to behave, who to trust, what to be wary of and how to get along in the world.

Born through the spoken word, fairy tales were first passed on orally and later through the written word. We can attribute the dissemination of regional tales in the western world to authors such as Charles Perrault in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the Brothers Grimm in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who collected tales directly from the storytellers, edited and recorded them.

Fairy tale plots are simple and easy to follow, imbued with moral lessons drawn decisively in black and white. Characters are two-dimensional; they are good or evil, beautiful or ugly, kind or selfish, with little ambiguity. Physical beauty connotes goodness in fairy tales, but also inspires hatred and jealousy (Snow White, Cinderella). Physical beauty also represents inner beauty, while physical ugliness represents evil. Every beautiful princess is good and every ugly hag is cruel.

Fairy tales often begin with a worst-case scenario: Once upon a time, a loving mother dies, leaving the only child with a somewhat loving, but weak father now dominated by an evil stepmother (Cinderella, Snow White). Abandonment and neglect by the surviving parent result in abject loneliness, poverty, hunger and despair. Fairy tales play to a child's worst fear—the fear of the loss of a parent.

The settings for fairy tales are as two dimensional and simplistic as the characters that inhabit them. Families often live on the edge of a dark, dank forest, where what lurks behind each tree is a mystery (Little Red Riding Hood, Goldilocks and the Three Bears). Home itself is often a place of terror, where food is scarce (Hansel and Gretel) and children are forced to labor (Cinderella). Then there is the other extreme: the wealthy, royal family who inhabit a castle on a hill. Here, a king and queen live with their perfectly beautiful prince or princess. In these tales, characters are bedecked in finery and enjoy a cornucopia of delectable food and wine.

While wildly entertaining and colorful, the role of fairy tales in children's lives is to instruct as much as to entertain and delight. The terrifying scenarios children find themselves in catapult them into action (Hansel and Gretel, Jack and the Bean Stalk) to make their way in the world. Survive, but play by the rules: don't talk to strangers (Little Red Riding Hood) and don't trespass (Goldilocks), for example. Basically, the world is a big, bad mean place, so take care! All you may have is yourself to rely on, and sometimes your good looks, if they don't work against you.

So, with all this death, hunger and loneliness, why do children love fairy tales? They identify with the heroes in the stories; they empathize with the pain of missing a parent, sibling rivalry or even lost love. If the characters can overcome the worst situations through ingenuity, grit and bravery (Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel), then the reader can too, with a bit of magic and fairy dust sprinkled in for good measure.

## THE TALL TALE ARTISTS

### AUDREY BERNSTEIN

Audrey Bernstein draws our attention to the key symbols of our beloved fairy tale heroes—the clock for Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood’s basket—through her mixed media creations of photography, paint and collage. These composite sketches enliven and remind us of the essence of each narrative—the fear, the vanity, the repose.

### ELIZABETH BISBING

At first glance Elizabeth Bisbing’s collages, made with gouache, gold leaf and foil, seem sweet, naïve, but on closer inspection a sense of foreboding emerges. “The Simurgh” features a girl with a pink sundress and hat looking up at a wild bird, known as a simurgh, a benevolent mythical flying creature with roots in Persian and Armenian cultures. The page features the quotation: “And the Birds Shall Eat the Flesh off Thee.” Both this work and “Out of the Dragon” refer to medieval manuscripts in their composition, gold lettering and diminutive size.

### LAUREL GARCIA COLVIN

Laurel Garcia Colvin’s paintings explore the worlds of reality and fantasy, childhood and aging and the angst of adolescence, themes prevalent in fairy tales. Her Enchantment series explore her interest in symbiotic narratives and the interaction of the natural and human realms, and the often hidden, evocative forms of flora and fauna. The works evoke the enigmatic nature of a dream, and imply emotional, psychological or spiritual states. Colvin is represented by Elisa Contemporary Art, Riverdale, NY.

### AYAKOH FURUKAWA

With an exceptionally refined technique, Ayakoh Furukawa recreates a traditional toile in pen and paint to set as the backdrop for her Little Red Riding Hood. Roles of aggressor and victim are swapped; Little Red Riding Hood steps on the Wolf’s tail in one painting, and sits cuddled up with the beast in the other. Yet, there is something sinister as the wolf has human hands, one brown and the other white, introducing gender and racial issues.

### CAROLYN MONASTRA

Carolyn Monastra has worked for many years on an ongoing series called “lovely, dark and deep,” the title excerpted from a line in a Robert Frost poem. In both of her photographs in The Tall Tale, the artist explores the natural wonders of the wilderness, with its hanging flora, and mist-like atmosphere, while at the same time introducing the possibility that nature can be terrifying, as well as awe-inspiring.

### MARIA PASSAROTTI

Photographer Maria Passarotti makes brilliant use of the proverbial woods as her backdrop for two stunning images showing her real daughter in the guise of a fairy tale heroine. Small and alone in the woods and bedecked in red in both photographs, Passarotti considers Hansel and Gretel (notice the red string stretched behind her, marking her trail), but broadly refers to the universal fairy tale theme of a child abandoned in the woods. Our fairy tale protagonist is young and vulnerable, but at the same time vital and brave, as so many fictional characters before her.

## FUMIKO TODA

Fumiko Toda paints mystifying, magical scenes with golden moons, rainbow speckled skies and flora, bursting with velvety petals of cobalt blue, crimson red and burnt orange. Toda gives us every child's fairy tale dream landscape, the antithesis of the bare, spooky woods. The child on a tight rope, visible in two of the Tall Tale paintings, bravely moves ahead. He may feel hopeful, courageous and, of course, scared, but he never loses his sense of wonder as he makes his way forward.

## DEBORAH SCOTT

Fairy tales have been told and retold for centuries all over the world, reflecting various cultures and regions. Each new telling is a customized interpretation for a new century. Artist Deborah Scott reinterprets traditional fairy tales with a wonderful sense of 21<sup>st</sup> century mirth and irony through her unique mix of collage, paint and photography. A smirking Rapunzel is shown in front of her tower, sporting dyed blonde, shorn hair and ripped jeans. Little Red Riding Hood carries a plastic Target bag and meanders through the woods in her red raingear and rolled denims.

## BARBARA STRASEN

Barbara Strasen gets to the essential spirit of the narratives "Hansel and Gretel" and "Anansi The Trickster" through her unique mixed media works. In "Hansel and Gretel", she contrasts the innocence of the children before their banishment with the bar-like prison space containing fierce, stylized, carnivorous witch faces. Strasen learned about the West African Anansi tales, from her aunt's Jamaican caregiver. Anansi is a creation deity, a shape-changer, skilled in wisdom and stories, who often takes the form of a spider. Strasen emphasizes the shape-changer and spider characteristics.

## CHIE YOSHII

Chie Yoshii, the classicist in the exhibition, revels in the sumptuousness of oil paint to create rich, saturated, jewel like colors for the red velvet dress, the red-gold tresses splayed against a golden pillow and the royal blue curtain pulled back to reveal Sleeping Beauty. We are voyeurs to this private moment; we watch the sleeping girl, too gorgeous to be anything but a fairy tale, with her budding sensuality and rosy complexion.

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In conjunction with *The Tall Tale*, we are pleased to present a brief reading from *Bite The Apple*, a play by Linda Manning



**February 13, 2014, 6:30-8 pm, at Susan Eley Fine Art**

*Bite The Apple* was developed by Linda Manning in the New Adaptations for the Stage Workshop at The Directors Company in NYC, fall 2010. In August 2012 it was produced as part of the New York International Fringe Festival.

### **Synopsis:**

*Bite The Apple* picks up with Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella and Snow White 20 years after their fairy tales have ended as they all navigate the modern world and approach middle age.

