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LYNNE ALLEN
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Nature Morte, Lynne Allen’s exhibition of recent photogravures, as well as neon sculpture and miniature glass objects, is not just about still life, but literally about dead objects, metaphors for lost ways of life. Allen’s Native American relatives became Westernized through three generations of white intermarriage and U.S. government policies. Allen terms the arranged objects in her photogravures “portraits of a way of life.”

Allen has been incorporating meaningful objects into her prints since graduate school at the University of New Mexico in 1986. In 1997–1998 in Colonial Colors (Figure 1), Allen depicted an outstretched glove, as if in welcome, but printed with a battle scene, alluding to the broken treaties between the U.S. government and Native Americans.

Allen employed a shoe symbol in My Winter Count (Figure 2) with a range of footwear from moccasins to high-heeled Western pumps, showing movement in footwear design from Native American to Western European or American, symbolizing the shift of culture over the generations. Similarly, she juxtaposed a Western-European shoe mold with a plastic toy Indian in her photogravure Horse and Rider (Plate 1), comparing cultures.

Allen’s print from 2003, My Grandmother Was an Indian—Can You Tell? (Figure 3) also featured a Western-European or American woman’s shoe. In this case, the shoe is a symbol for Allen herself. The contemporary shoe has Indian patterns on it, visually linking Allen to her heritage, since she herself does not look Native American. As Judith Brodsky so insightfully expressed,"
“Each revelation in understanding this Sioux portion of her heritage has enriched Allen’s efforts to illuminate the complexity of the psychological issues she finds within herself and ultimately within all humankind.”

Allen’s 2003 installation (Figure 4), combined screen projected images of cowboys and Indians with tiny plastic toy cowboys and Indians on the floor beneath the screen, like the small Indian figure mounted on the European American shoe mold in *Horse and Rider*. The toy figures in the installation were running free, unaware that their way of life was coming to an end. In both instances, scale reinforced the power of the conqueror. In the installation, the cowboy was large on the screen compared to the running toy figures below. In the recent photogravure, the plastic Indian is tiny compared to the large, Western-style shoe mold. Figuratively, the Indian is being kicked out of sight.

Another example from Allen’s past oeuvre that directly relates to the current exhibition is her print from 2009, *They Waited Silently*, depicting Allen’s great-grandmother Josephine Waggoner as a symbol for Native peoples. Ominous hooks scatter across the surface. The words “Gulf of Mexico,” “Mexico,” “Mississippi R.,” and “Florida” orient the viewer and identify the U.S. map. The hooks are pink, seemingly innocent or harmless, but they represent unseen danger, another instance of a misleading surface, like the beautiful feathered fishing flies in Allen’s photogravures (Plate 3). Allen said, “the work was about the ‘taming’ of the West and bringing to light the bloody history that has been so richly romanticized through TV Westerns and movies.” Allen’s print with drawing on it questions the romanticism of the Western. A final example linking Allen’s past work with her present is her mixed media quilted packing blanket with stenciled boat forms, lead sinkers, smashed bottle caps, and red yarn, a work that continues to evolve with hand stitching, like the hand-stitched mourning bag in Allen’s photogravure (Plate 2). The lead sinkers, like the fishing flies in the photogravures, look harmless, but have the functional purpose of weighing something down. The packing blanket alludes not only to Allen’s move in 2006 from Rutgers University in New Jersey to the School of Visual Arts at Boston University in Massachusetts, but also to the eviction of many Native Americans from their lands.

Lynne Allen selects objects for her still life photogravures that symbolize the domination of the conqueror over the conquered, whether Native American or some other victim. Although she often introduces humor into her work, such as the use of plastic toy soldiers or the flamingo, she is serious about alerting the viewer to invisible dangers presented in attractive wrappers not only in history but also in life today—hidden agendas. Allen’s photogravures recall the power struggles in the American West and project future such conflicts in the world today. Is anyone listening?

1 Lynne Allen, e-mail reply to author’s questions, October 1, 2009.
3 Lynne Allen, editorial comments on essay, October 4, 2009.
4 Lynne Allen, e-mail reply to author’s question, October 1, 2009.
Lynne Allen is a collector of things. Unique things. Sentimental things. Honorable things. Mournful things. As an artist and printmaker, Allen has always made objects. Ranging from richly layered prints and mixed media two-dimensional works to small-scale sculptural objects made out of paper, Allen moves easily between two and three dimensions. In her recent body of work, Nature Morte, Allen expands her formal repertoire to include exquisitely composed photogravures, a technique she recently learned, and multiples of fabricated miniature glass and resin objects. In Nature Morte, the object itself takes center stage. Allen literally “casts” various found and made objects, including fishing lures, beaded moccasins, riding spurs, antique shoe forms, souvenir paperweights, glass rattles, a miniature log cabin, and a toy “Indian” figurine, to name a few, as the subjects of inquiry into which she explores the inner life of things and their symbolic and imagined relation to an exterior world. In Allen’s handling, such objects veer away from static depiction but rather, despite the work’s somewhat minimal and ethereal aesthetic, embody complex layers of meaning that operate within the spaces of the personal/private and the public/collective.

Lost and Found
Nature morte connotes the “life” of the object as stillness, as contained or weighted within the boundary of the frame, suspended eternally between past and present. As “dead nature,” the still life evokes a sense of loss or a kind of longing for what has been or what will never be. Nature Mortes speaks to such longing. Formally related to the still life but also to the genre of nineteenth-century portrait photography and Victorian cartes de visite, Allen’s series of nine photogravures depict discreet objects and staged tableaux suspended against a lush, velvety blackness. Together, the objects assert themselves in a sensuous luminosity, shimmering like a bracelet of melancholic charms. Yet, like the genre of nature morte, Allen’s objects cease to exist as functional things, and consequently any tangible connection to origins or to lived experience is ultimately severed. These objects take on new “life,” but one that is put in the service of a continually recontextualized and reformulated past.

Mourning Bag (Plate 2), a composed tableau, situates a fabricated purse, which Allen made by sewing together two antique handkerchiefs that belonged to her paternal great-aunt, within a gilded $3.99 WILL BUY YOU A MEMORY: RE-COLLECTION IN THE WORK OF LYNN ALLEN

The environment of private objects and their possession—of which collections are an extreme manifestation—is a dimension of our life that is both essential and imaginary. As essential as dreams.

—Jean Baudrillard1

LYNNE ALLEN | NATURE MORTE

By Lynne Cooney | Exhibitions Director | Boston University College of Fine Arts | School of Visual Arts

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nineteenth-century frame. In the Victorian era, women who lost their husbands would customarily carry mourning purses, usu-
ally brown or black, sometimes for up to a three-year period as a solemn reminder of their widowed status. These purses held
symbols as well as practical function (after all, ladies required purses), indicating that one should not approach or speak with a
wilde in certain social circumstances until her mourning period
had ended. Thus the mourning bag was not just a signifier of
death but of mourful silence. In Mourning Bag, Allen stitched onto
the front of her constructed purse the phrase “No thought
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On Longing observes in her remarkable book
of formal relationships and juxtapositions, Allen recontextualizes
as an assembly of objects, Allen’s series of photogravures looks
re-collection
space of its own time.
The purse is framed, immortalized in its stillness. We experience
But not that which is solely related to death. It connotes other
women’s embroidered samplers, also evokes a sense of loss.
face of the antique handkerchief, which is also reminiscent of
Michelangelo. It seems an appropriate sentiment for such a
silent object. The trace of the hand through the stitching on the
of photogravure was invented in the 1830s) and historicizes the
objects/subjects within a particular moment in American history
where there existed escalating tensions between Native Ameri-
cans and whites. Metonymically, Nature Morté not only explores
issues of conflict relating to Native Americans but relates to the
history of all conflicts. Like Fishing Flies, Lure (Plate 4) also con-
tains a tension between the beauty of the object depicted and
its real function. Isolated against the expanse of black, the lure’s
host glistens as a warning or marker of treacherous beginnings
(or endings). These works remind us of those contested spaces
during occupation and struggle, strength and weakness,
wrongs committed and rights denied.

The formal arrangement of images such as Fishing Flies and
Lure evokes the aesthetic of the specimen or artifact and,
in this regard, addresses the collection through the principles of
classification and display found in the cultural history or ethno-
graphic museum. The history of acquisition and presentation of
non-Western objects by both European and American institutions
(sometimes under questionable circumstances) is now commonly
understood. Extracted from any context of origin—their
Historical, cultural, or geographical—these museum collection con-
structs illustrate of representation of the cultural Other through
the re-presentation of objects. Within the museum setting, sin-
gular objects or groups of objects act as surrogates or stand-ins
for cultural wholes as part of Sioux woman’s moxasins become
representative of all Sioux women, for example. As such, the
object’s original function—whether utilitarian, spiritual, etc.—is
reframed through its aesthetic presentation, and meaning is
conveyed through the employment of varied visual strategies
such as didactic text or the superficial non-relation to other

objects (a collection of various types of Native American pottery
becomes representative of all Native Americans despite their
unique tribal affiliations). The object then becomes a tool to be
“read” within the collection according to the language of display.
The collection’s inherent hierarchies of value are understood
through these systems of classification that are defined as much
by absence as by presence. James Clifford writes in his essay on
collecting art and culture that “collecting presupposes a
story.” Practices of inclusion and exclusion within the collection
construct not only narratives around the identity of the culture
“represented” but, simultaneously, the identity of the collector/
possessor. Much of the cultural authority of the West has been
built upon the acquisition, collection, and pilfering of objects
from other cultures. As James Clifford further observes, “In the
possessing…has long been a strategy for the deployment of a
possessive self, culture and authenticity.”

Allen’s objects tell untold stories. Unlike the silence often
imposed upon objects within the museum collection, Allen’s
objects do nothing to conceal or obscure narrative but rather
reveal to certain truths. Allen’s story is a tale of conquest and of

NATURE MORTE
LYNNE ALLEN | NATURE MORTE
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Figure 5
Fishing Flies, 2009, photogravure, 17 x 25 in.
unequal relations of power. Consider the paired images of *Moccasins* (Figure 6, Plate 6) and *Size 9D* (Figure 7, Plate 7). *Size 9D* depicts a pair of antique wooden shoe forms. Like a portrait, the shoe forms are centrally framed, serving as an inanimate substitute for the unnamed person to whom they once belonged. Through the perceived style and time period of the shoe forms, however, one can reason that the identity of the individual is not only masculine but also white. We then are able to imagine the type of shoes, the kind of man who wore them, the earth crossed and covered by his steps, and the land he has taken. *Size 9D*, in its stillness, tells the story of colonial expansionism and of surrender and occupation.

In contrast to the men’s shoe forms, *Moccasins* suggests the feminized space of the Other. The delicately beaded Native American moccasins, believed to be female, represent the Native American woman. Viewed as a double portrait, the paired images of the shoe forms and moccasins suggest multiple readings. On the one hand, a personal narrative is conveyed which is related to the racial split of Allen’s biography, specifically her matrilineal Native American heritage and the European ancestry of her father. Each portrait represents one half of the self. On the other hand, the images serve as opposing portraits, representing the colonizer and the colonized—the omnipresent white patriarchy and the invisible Native American. To complicate such a straightforward interpretation, Allen gives the portraits comparable aesthetic weight and scale in which Allen asserts a feminist perspective where the female Other is visually equal to that of her white, masculine counterpart. Here, history is rearranged or re-imagined as it should have been.

Similarly, *Spurs* (Plate 5) depicts a pair of men’s riding spurs which belonged to Allen’s father, and like the shoe forms and moccasins, are given immediacy and presence within the frame. Suspended, shimmering like jewelry or a pair of woman’s earrings, *Spurs* possesses a feminine delicacy. The image creates a tension within the object’s inherent masculinity as a signifier of brute aggression, as a symbol for the taming and control of nature. Spurs occupies a feminine space that carries through in much of Nature Morté. And so, Allen’s history is a feminist one, one that acknowledges the untold contributions of women—both Native American and European—in the early history of the United States. As many present-day Native American tribes have sought to reclaim lands once inhabited by their ancestors (through often complex legal processes), Allen seeks to correct falsehoods and reclaim truths. And in this way, she symbolically reclaims American history from a hegemonic patriarchy.

**Spurious Objects**

Whereas the photogravures speak to the layers of meaning embedded in the unique object and its relation to the collection, Allen’s arrangement of found and cast objects is situated within the realm of serialization and the mechanized reproduction of the souvenir. On a glass table, Allen assembles multiples of hand-blown glass rattles and cups, miniature cast-resin “Indians” on horseback, “Indian” figurines sitting in a canoe, and manipulated found-glass paperweights. Allen’s interest in revealing the true nature of things continues in this grouping of objects, and the translucent materiality of the glass and resin objects resonates visually with the photogravures. Unlike the collection, where a connection to the past is embedded within the immediacy of the objects represented, therefore lending value to the collection’s authenticity, the souvenir object has no direct value. Authenticity in the souvenir is tangential and exists only through its abstract association with the memory of experience. Stewart describes this as a distancing effect in which the memory of the body, or of the labor of its maker, is replaced by the memory associated with the discrete and reproducible object. The object then becomes a memory standing outside of itself and thus presents “a surplus and lack of significance.”

**Figure 6**

*Moccasins*, 2009, photogravure, 17 x 21 in.

**Figure 7**

*Size 9D*, 2009, photogravure, 17 x 21 in.

**Figure 8**

‘running horse,’ cast clear resin, approximate dimensions 4 x 2 x 1 inches.

**Figure 9**

‘canoe,’ cast clear resin, approximate dimensions 6 x 1.5 x 3 inches.
The mass-produced quality of the souvenir means that many people can acquire the same object, like these souvenir snow domes for sale in interstate gift shops. Only when the many people can acquire the same object, like those souvenir souvenirs of representation. The objects reinforce the stereotype of irony and subtle humor, these are not harmless trinkets, but value, only display value. Of course, in Allen's intentional use of playful preciousness. Souvenir purchased in high-end department stores, giving the object a reminiscent of both a child’s toy and the type of glass figurines that contains an image of the place or is some kind of small-scale replica, such as an ashtray depicting the Grand Canyon or a miniature model of Mount Rushmore. In a similar vein, Allen incorporates found souvenir glass paperweights of varying sizes within the multiples of glass and resin objects. Some of the paperweights contain their original images, whereas others have been replaced with images that Allen created or manipulated. The differences are not immediately discernible, which adds a level of ambiguity to these already uncertain objects. Compare two objects: One is a souvenir paperweight containing an image of Niagara Falls, the sublime beauty of the falls encased under its glass dome (Figure 11). The other paperweight contains an image of Allen’s great-grandmother circa 1860 (Figure 12), which Allen added. As souvenir objects, they both operate as a means for the recuperation of memory, one the experience of a place, the other, the experience of a person. Both objects are also souvenirs of a lost Native American history. Niagara Falls once occupied Iroquois territory and even as early as the 1800s had been a popular tourist destination. The image of Allen’s Sioux great-grandmother not only references the memory of the artist’s relative but also a lost way of life. Both are memento objects, presented like tombs, in which the past is frozen in an ever-unfolding present.

As a souvenir, Allen’s objects have no explicit functional value, only display value. Of course, in Allen’s intentional use of irony and subtle humor, these are not harmless trinkets, but souvenirs of representation. The objects reinforce the stereotype of the aggressive Native American in flowing headdress charging ahead in battle. These are images with which we, of a certain generation, were raised. I remember my brother playing with cowboy and “Indian” toy figures, re-enacting in miniature battle scenes out of history books or from television (both offering different types of fiction). Similarly, the Native American figurines in the canoe (Figure 9), which were cast from a souvenier set of salt- and–pepper shakers belonging to the artist, also reinforce old tropes. Dean MacCannell, in his writing on tourism, states that “Everywhere in the minutiae of material culture, we encounter reminders of the availability of authentic experiences at other times and in other places.”7 These are souveniers of persistent memory, fetish objects which speak to the image of the Native American that has not merely faded away. Allen reminds us that these images still exist, in multiple, such as Allen’s hand-blow glass rattles. Oversized and made of glass, they recall traditional Native American rattles; but according to Allen, Native Americans would never use glass, preferring natural and flexible materials. Thus, these objects are enact, conforming to our expectations of otherness and our desire for an authenticating image, however spurious. Souveniers purchased from tourist destinations offer minia- ture reproductions of the experience of place. This is why it is more meaningful to purchase a souvenir from the visited site that contains an image of the place or is some kind of small-scale replica, such as an ashtray depicting the Grand Canyon or a miniature model of Mount Rushmore. In a similar vein, Allen incorporates found souvenir glass paperweights of varying sizes within the multiples of glass and resin objects. Some of the paperweights contain their original images, whereas others have been replaced with images that Allen created or manipulated.

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Any souvenir shop is not complete without its sign, a fluores- cent beacon with which to attract passersby from the road. Allen displays her version of a roadside attraction in the form of neon letters that read “hook, line and sinker” (Plate 10). Manufactured according to Allen’s specifications, the neon sign is displayed against a wall, hovering like a harbinger of things to come or as a warning not to repeat the past. Written in all lowercase letters, Allen’s sign is not flashy or didactic and expresses a deliberate passivity. The neon sign is a kind of June, seducing the viewer under false or misleading pretenses: “hook, line and sinker” can be read, then, as the moral of Nature Morte’s story. In Allen’s conception, things are not always as they seem, and we are not to believe appearances, even in art.

3 Ibid, p. 152.
5 Ibid, p. 15.
6 Stewart, p. 133.
Horse and Rider | Photogravure | 17” x 21” | 2009 | Plate 1
Lure  |  Photogravure  |  17” x 21”  |  2009  |  Plate 4

Spurs  |  Photogravure  |  17” x 21”  |  2009  |  Plate 5
The neon sign is a kind of lure, seducing the viewer under false or misleading pretenses:
...things are not always as they seem, and we are not to believe appearances, even in art.
Selected Solo Exhibitions

2010
James Michener Museum of Art, Doylestown, PA. Nature Morte. Solo exhibition in conjunc-

2007
Martha Street Studio Gallery, Winnipeg, Canada. Shorthand to Xian.

2006
Society of Northern Alberta Print-Artists, Edmonton, Canada. Truth is like a Slippery Fish.

2003
Franningham Art Museum, Franningham State College, Franningham, MA.
The Plains Art Museum, Fargo, ND.

2001
The Frans Masereel Center, Kasterlee, Belgium.

2000
Interchurch Center, New York, NY.

1999
Hartford Museum of Art, Clinton, NJ. Knowing/Not Knowing.

1994
Susan Teller Gallery, New York, NY. Other People’s Diaries.

Selected Group Exhibitions

2010
Gallery of the College of Staten Island CUNY. Wording the Image: Pat Steir, Jaune Quick-to-

2009/10
Fuller Craft Museum, Brockton, MA.

2009
Museum of Fine Arts, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL.

2008
Nathan Cummings Foundation, New York, NY.

2007
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, MO.

2006
University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan.

2005
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, MA.

2004
University of Nebraska Art Gallery, Lincoln, NE.

2003

2002
Denver Museum of Art Modern and Contemporary Gallery, Denver, CO.

2001
University of Nebraska Art Gallery, Lincoln, NE.

2000

1999
Gray’s School of Art, Aberdeen, Scotland; traveling to Inverness Gallery, Inverness, Scotland; St. Ives Gallery, Weth, Scotland, and East Kilbride Arts Centre, Glasgow, Scotland.

1998
Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, Scotland.

1997
Washington, D.C. Fulbright Association 20th Anniversary Art Exhibit.

1996
Republic of Macedonia, Bitola 97, International Print Triennial.

1995
The Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR.

1994
Sleeth Gallery, West Virginia Wesleyan College, Buckhannon, WV.

1993
Ljubljana, Slovenia. 23rd Ljubljana Print Biennial.

Awards/Honors/Posts

2007
Marion and Jasper Whiting Fellowship.

2004–05
Fulbright Scholarship, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan.

2004
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts/Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation Grant.

2003
Junior Individual Artist’s Grant, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts/Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation Grant.

2002

2001
University of Nebraska Art Gallery, Lincoln, NE.

2000
Amici Dell’arte-Famiglia Artistica, Ciao Museum, Cremona, Italy.

1999
University of Nebraska Art Gallery, Lincoln, NE.

1998
University of Nebraska Art Gallery, Lincoln, NE.

1997
Washington, D.C. Fulbright Association 20th Anniversary Art Exhibit.

LIVES AND WORKS
Lynne Allen
Lives in Boston, Massachusetts

Museum of Modern Art for Wales, Machynlleth, Wales, UK.


Shanghai University College of Fine Art, and the China Academy of Fine Art, Hanzhou, China. China Sansui International Printmaking Exhibition.

2006
Nathan Cummings Foundation, New York, NY.

2003
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, MO.

2001
University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan.

2000
Tweed Museum of Art, Duluth, MN.

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Gray’s School of Art, Aberdeen, Scotland; traveling to Inverness Gallery, Inverness, Scotland; St. Ives Gallery, Weth, Scotland, and East Kilbride Arts Centre, Glasgow, Scotland.

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The Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR.

Sleeth Gallery, West Virginia Wesleyan College, Buckhannon, WV.

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Bitola, Republic of Macedonia, Bitola 97, International Print Triennial.

1991
Nawal Gallery, Chicago, IL.

1990
The Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR.

1989
The Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR.

### Fellowships and Residencies

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<th>Residency/Institute</th>
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### Permanent Collections — selected

- Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
- Museum of Modern Art Library, New York, NY
- The New York Public Library, New York, NY
- Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England
- Corcoran Museum of Art, Washington, D.C.
- Jordan & Johnson Corporate Collection
- The Noyes Museum, Oceanville, NJ
- The Newark Public Library, Newark, NJ
- Darner Museum of Art, Darner, CO
- Fraser Maureen Center, Kasterlee, Belgium
- Artemis Kunst Museum, Vasteros, Sweden
- Ukrainian Museum of Contemporary Art, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine
- Macedonian Culture Ministry, Republic of Macedonia
- University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque, NM
- University of Wisconsin—Parkside, Kenosha, WI

### Education

- Master of Fine Arts, University of New Mexico, NM, 1986.
- Painting/Printmaking with a minor in Art History.
- Master Printer Certification, Tamarind Institute, Albuquerque, NM, 1982.
- Master Printer Certification in the Fine Art of Lithography.
- Bachelor of Science in Art Education, Kutztown University, PA, 1970.

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