

EMILY FLEISHER

ASTRO-TURF



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

OCTOBER 2 - NOVEMBER 6, 2014

AUSTIN, TEXAS



Nearly Everything, silk screened matt board, stop motion animation with pastina (star-shaped) pasta, 6" x 2" x 5", 2014.

Cover Panel: Gallery View with *Earth Moving*, plywood, plaster, flock, metal, 46" x 31" x 62", 2014.

EMILY FLEISHER *ASTRO-TURF*

Emily Fleisher has hidden the universe inside a box of pasta, interstellar space slipped in like a surprise toy. Her bathroom floor ripples like water, and her toothpaste squeezes out a miniature pastoral landscape. Fleisher's sculptures are like glimmers of a fourth dimension, showing something beyond our vision or our capacity for knowing, but occurring nevertheless.

Nearly Everything (2014), a handmade replica of a Ronzoni pastina pasta box, contains a video loop playing in the box's small window. Tiny star-shaped pasta pieces cascade outwards to offer a glimpse of the universe, and then, after a quick peek at this galactic image, the pasta pieces spill back into place, obscuring the view once again. Their color, size and movement are like shifting grains of sand. Known as *pastina* (tiny dough), this type of pasta is served in Italy as a baby's first solid food.

A room filled with Fleisher's art feels like a bizarre sci-fi stage set, but Fleisher plays these tricks the old-fashioned way. Aside from the video, there is no computer animation or digital imagery behind the art's incongruous juxtapositions. Fleisher handcrafts her sculptures and the effect powers them like jolts of electricity. Their absurdity heightens the viewer's awareness, and gives a sense of mystery to the everyday surroundings that she incorporates into her work.

There's a sly cunning in the impossibility of these occurrences that Fleisher manages to render possible, like with dream logic. This magical realism enchants all of her sculpture. Fleisher offers encounters with the seemingly normal but replaces it with the sublime; yet she sets it in a quiet, domestic context, something to be found in the backyard or even the pantry.

Though it's not feasible for a hard surface to move like liquid, Fleisher obtains this effect

in *Of Tides* (2014). Fleisher recreates a 49" x 67" section of tile floor entirely by hand. Instead of buying and using the same kind of tile as her bathroom floor, she hand-cast each of the hexagonal 3/4" tiles in plaster, and then painted them. Through this tedious and time-consuming process, her energy becomes embodied in the sculpture.

Fleisher's inspiration for *Of Tides* is the sound of a plastic toy hitting the floor, tossed out by her son during bath time. The sculpture suggests the many actions in a day and the hours of life that slip away. Yet within this blankness, certain moments stay remembered even while large spaces of time become invisible. These indelible moments, though repetitive and seemingly meaningless, are not always the scheduled meetings documented in a calendar. They are the quiet, empty spaces between, often domestic, and they may be what one's mind gravitates to when reflecting on a day, year, or a life.

Timber!!! (2013), a wall piece made from MDF, cut paper, and inlaid spackle, maps the streets of Fleisher's suburban neighborhood. Viewed from above, the street lines curve and snake like an inescapable maze. Paper trees, made from a scrapbook puncher, eclipse space with their homogenous crowded order. The crafted paper trees are anonymous, generic symbols, voided of personal meaning. The same feeling comes from viewing a city from a plane. Bare roofs, green lawns, and geometrically portioned out lot sizes appear neat and organized from high above, but on the ground, each house masks the infinitely varied individual lives being lived inside each one. Fleisher's art suggests there are pockets of enchantment hidden within the concrete folds of the city.

In other sculptures, idyllic landscapes spill out of a wheelbarrow, a soap dispenser, and even a book. The bright green flocking material, velvety grass and Lilliputian bushes and trees create idealized, romantic

scenes, absent of people. This flawless, storybook quality stands in great contrast to the dull homogeneity of today's suburbia.

Fleisher's style recalls Robert Gober's handcrafted sculptural installations, in which commercially made objects are replicated by hand and skewed so that they have a psychological dimension. Because of the way he recreates and frames them, Gober's seemingly mundane objects, such as a sink or crib, evoke personal connections and emotion. Like Gober, Fleisher painstakingly recreates banal, everyday objects and through this process, transforms them into symbols. Fleisher demonstrates a specific personal twist on their eponymy. Creating her own version of the pasta box or bathroom floor is a way to carve meaning into the object with each gesture; to imbue the object with an aura of memory and association.

These everyday subjects are the legacy of pop art, but with personal references and alternative narratives. Andy Warhol explained about the Campbell's soup in his iconic images, "I used to drink it, I used to have the same lunch every day for 20 years or so, over and over again." Like Warhol, Fleisher also ate the food that is a recurring subject in her work; it is what her mother used to serve her as a child. Also like Warhol, Fleisher recreates a commercially made object, the pasta box. Yet, unlike Warhol's *Brillo Box*, which Warhol revered for its industrialized beauty, Fleisher's



Island, Floating, matt board, caulk, flock, 10" x 3" x 2", 2013.



Detail of *Trails Off Too Soon*, flocking, wood, model railroad materials, 71" x 36" x 20", 2012.

silkscreened box of pasta appears decidedly handcrafted. Fleisher plucks it from mass consumption, and instead of celebrating its industrial origin, she removes it. The pasta and its box become a prop in personal, psychological narrative.

The *pastina* reappear in *If You Want to Make Pasta from Scratch* (2013). Viewed from a distance, this piece borrows from Vija Celmin's drawings of galaxies, such as *Star Field III*. But up close, it shares nothing with Celmin's minutely detailed, careful renderings. Instead, it is a strange DIY version, in which Fleisher has scattered the *pastina* across a burlap canvas that has been covered with white caulk. She then spray painted black over the pieces to create a negative imprint of their tiny star shapes. The result bears an uncanny similarity to images of deep space, using pasta. According to Carl Sagan, this isn't such a leap, to which Fleisher's title alludes. Sagan's well-known quote, "If you wish to make apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe," reveals that we are all made from stardust, even the ingredients in pie or pasta.

In this work, Fleisher bridges childhood with adulthood. As with *Nearly Everything*, the incorporation of pasta, her childhood meal, captures the poignancy of youth, when

the boundaries of one's world are measured and intimate. With age, the boundaries become ever extending, out into infinity.

If You Want to Make Pasta from Scratch is on a piece of burlap that may be rolled up and transported. This plays on this signification of infinity and points to Neil Degrasse Tyson's concept of time and space as a four-dimensional fabric. In concept and material, the piece is a metaphorical representation of the complex theories of outer space, as well as a charting of development, how this understanding has grown from a naïve understanding of the concepts to a stronger, more technical realization of its existence.

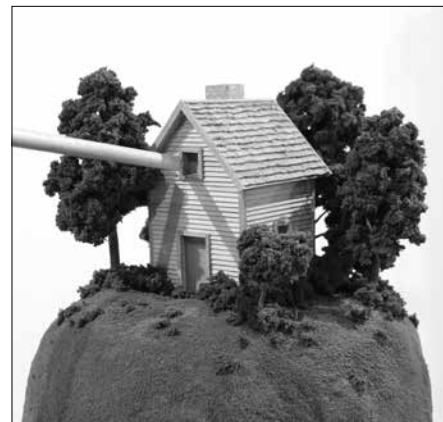
Contemplating the infinite cosmos throws off one's sense of scale. *Stellar-Scope* (2013) demonstrates this discombobulating sense. Fleisher props up her sculptures to evoke a stage set, and this renders their fabrication transparent, like seeing Oz behind the curtain. A tiny house sits on a vertiginous hilltop that is mounted on three white stool legs. An enormous silver telescope sits on two white sawhorses. The skinniest part of the telescope, that one looks through, is exaggerated to look like a needle that appears to be almost piercing the upper window of the house, like a giant syringe. In a reversal of scale, the telescope is far larger than the house. The lens is directed towards the wall where *If You Want to Make Pasta from Scratch* hangs. The telescope's lens is also covered with an image cosmos, a wrinkly surface, made again with the pasta. The matt black, imperfect surface forms a texture opposite of glass' reflective sheen. Also, the silver caulk along the seams of the telescope is drippy and gloppy, piped out like icing.

The mark of the artist's hand plays a decisive role in this and all of Fleisher's pieces. The evidence is visible in her use of caulk, which, with its malleable consistency, holds imprints; and in the shallow recesses of the plaster tile pieces, which form

intimate, subtle imperfections, the wavy matt surface a distinct contrast from the smooth gloss of a commercially fabricated glazed tile. Fleisher draws the viewer's attention to her use of material and her manipulation of it, in order to claim the object and cause the viewer to see it through a filter. The artist's hand is the signification that these objects, though symbolic, originate from the imagination and not the real world.

Fleisher explores how ways of knowing are layered upon one another with the passing of time. Like the process of scientific knowledge, this can be incremental and cyclical, not strictly linear. For example, in neuroscience, new research suggests that certain kinds of memories may be "malleable." As we replay memories in our minds and through conversations, this repetition can allow for their alteration. This research is suggestive of Fleisher's content and process. Fleisher fabricates revelations out of memory, time and observations. Ashes to ashes, dust to stardust, from the bottom of a box to the outer reaches of space—Fleisher's art stretches boundaries and widens the context.

Wendy Atwell received her M.A. in Art History and Criticism from The University of Texas at San Antonio.



Detail of *Stellar-scope*, wood, metal flashing, aluminum caulk, flock, model railroad materials, 93" x 30" x 70", 2013.

EMILY FLEISHER

EDUCATION

- 2006 MFA Sculpture, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI
Certificate in Collegiate Teaching, Brown University,
Providence, RI
Sheridan Center for Teaching
- 2002 The Johnson Atelier, Apprenticeship, Trenton, NJ
- 2001 BFA Sculpture, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 (TBA) Box13 Artspace, Houston, TX
- 2014 *Astro-Turf*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
- 2011 *Don't Touch the Legs*, Stella Haus, San Antonio, TX
- 2008 *Don't Look at the Back*, Spark Contemporary Art Space,
Syracuse, NY

SELECTED GROUP AND TWO-PERSON EXHIBITS

- 2014 *Arte Nuevo*, University of Texas at San Antonio,
San Antonio, TX
- 2013 *City Of Tiny Lights*, Salisbury University, Salisbury, MD
Terrestrial, Los Medanos College, Pittsburg, CA
- 2012 *Foot Long Show*, UTSA Satellite Space at Blue Star Art
Complex, San Antonio, TX
Northwest Vista Faculty Show, NVC Palmetto Building,
San Antonio, TX
- 2011 *Just a Little Bit Heavy (Encounters With Questionable Surfaces)*,
with Jason Willome, Joan Grona Gallery, San Antonio, TX
- 2009 *Vivid Wonders of a Startled Imagination*, MCLA Gallery 51,
Beacon, NY
Stone Canoe 3, Delevan Center, Syracuse, NY
- 2008 *2008 Everson Biennial*, Everson Museum of Art,
Syracuse, NY. Juror: Edward Winkleman
Made In NY 2008, Schweinfurth Memorial Art Center,
Auburn, NY. Jurors: John McQueen and Jen Pepper
12"x12" A Small Works Show, Todd Gallery, Middle
Tennessee State University. Juror: Dave Hickey
- 2007 *New Frontiers*, Art House, McAllen, TX. Juror: Linda Lewis
Small Works Show, Limestone Art Gallery, Fayetteville, NY
Faculty Show, Cazenovia College Art Gallery, Cazenovia, NY
Matrilineage Symposium, Spark Gallery, Syracuse, NY
Syracuse University Faculty Show, Lowe Art Gallery,
Syracuse, NY
- 2006 *Curiouser*, Stay Gold Gallery, Brooklyn, NY. Curator:
Julia Bryan-Wilson
8th Annual National Small Works Exhibition, Attleboro
Arts Museum, Attleboro, MA. Jurors: Katherine French
and Nancy Whipple Grinnell
MFA Thesis Exhibition, RISD Museum, Providence, RI
Curators: James Hall, Mark Moscone

Perfectly Frank, Peerless Lofts, Providence, RI

The Floor Show, Sol Koffler Gallery, Rhode Island
School of Design

2005 *Still/Moving*, Sol Koffler Gallery, Rhode Island
School of Design

2005 Young Sculptors Competition, Heistand Gallery,
Miami University, Oxford, OH. Juror: Dr. Judith
Kirshner, One of ten national semi-finalists

Mason Building Lobby, Rhode Island School of Design,
Providence, RI

PUBLICATIONS

- 2013 Ain, Deb. "Five Questions With Emily Fleisher." Agave
Magazine Blog. Web. 10 Nov. 2013
Agave Magazine Vol.1, Issue 1 (Summer/Fall 2013)
16, 23 Web. 1 Aug. 2013
- 2011 Artifacts. "First Friday Preview." San Antonio Current
2 Dec. 2011 Print.
Blogs San Antonio Current Web. 2 December 2011
Messer, Emily. "Gallery Stroll." San Antonio Express News
12 Dec. 2011 Print. Web. 12 December 2011
Said, Erika. "Escultura y diversion." El Manana (Laredo, TX
and Nuevo Laredo, & Mexico) 6 Dec. 2011: Culture 5. Print.
- 2009 Stone Canoe: A Journal of Arts and Ideas from Upstate
New York Volume 3, (2009): 90-91. Print
- 2008 Johnson, Melinda. "The Object and Beyond." The Post-
Standard (Syracuse, NY) 8 June 2008 Stars 4. Print
Dufort, Jon. "Empire Halls." Syracuse New Times
13 Aug. 2008 Pg.8. Print.
Mellor, Carl. "Made to Order." Syracuse New Times
13 Aug. 2008 Pg.9. Print
- 2007 "Spotlight on Education." Surface Design Journal
Volume 31, No 3 (2007): 62-63. Print.



Detail of *Stellar-scope*, wood, metal flashing, aluminum caulk,
flock, model railroad materials, 93" x 30" x 70", 2013.



Detail of *Of Tides*, cast plaster, joint compound, wood, 68" x 48" x 6", 2014.

Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 36th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,878 artists in 290 visual art exhibitions, 121 music, dance and theater events, 15 film festivals, 25 literary readings and 518 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, the New York Times, ArtForum and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from

the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 950 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



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