



"GIFT FOR XAVIER," 2010

Carlee Fernandez

TAXIDERMY COYOTE, REDWOOD, BRONZE

63" x 82" x 38"

PHOTO: ROBERT WEDEMEYER

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ACME

LOS ANGELES

Carlee Fernandez:

"World According to Xavier"

at ACME

To say that the new sculptures, videos and photo works by Carlee Fernandez on view at ACME 'shape' motherhood and mortality—phenomenologically, psychically and semiotically—is at once to go to the crux and to simplify egregiously. As in all work that endures, a reference to motherhood is necessarily a rhizome of rich ungoverned allusions to many related things: to biology, biography, family, identity and lineage—all the things that the bringing forth of new life drags along with it like seaweed caught in a tide. We're told that the artist's mother commemorated a first trip to the sea by making Carlee a mobile of sea things, and Fernandez returns to favor in "World According to Xavier." The suite of photos, sculptures and video were conceived as a 'gift' to her son, Xavier, but the pleasure is ours. The photographic and video pieces feature the artist and her infant son directly; other works reference parts of the memory matrix the two necessarily inhabit together, a weave that includes the tangle of interdependence, race and fluid selfhood positions like artist, caretaker, offspring, son, parent, man and woman.

In a wholly visceral way, Fernandez undertakes a sort of post-partum project that chronicles the unfolding of a conflated past, present, and

potential history shared and negotiated between mother and child generically and this mother and boy-child in particular. As such, all the works contain this sensual mix of life and loss of self that is inherent in the most intense religious and sexual experience, and appears as well in the Baroque tradition that is subtly honored and parodied here. Fernandez consciously or accidentally seems to channel allusions to tequitqui—a word used to describe post-colonial, pre-absorption art in Mexico that combined indigenous Mesoamerican confrontations with death and allusions to Christ. In *Hues from Brown to Pink*, she ties her son to her bare body, his back to us, and photographs both with their arms out crucified-style, for an effect that is tribal, pagan and ecclesiastic at once. All the taxidermied animals—swans, bobcats, wolves—feel like playful yet serious lessons to her infant son about her/his non-urban roots, about a contact with nature that we may soon know only as a remote and stuffed abstraction. Startlingly stunning is *Gift For Xavier*, featuring a stuffed coyote (dual reference to dangerous borders and to Beuys) caught in flight as it leaps onto/preys upon a fragile spider web made of metal.

—MARLENA DOKTORCZYK-DONOHUE