

## ACME.

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## ART AND CAKE

A Contemporary Art Magazine with a Focus on the Los Angeles Art Scene

### Jennifer Steinkamp at ACME.

By Lorraine Heitzman

Through January 7th



Jennifer Steinkamp, "Still Life", Photo Courtesy of ACME. Gallery

At the end of the eighteenth century, a British woman in her seventies named Mary Delany did something no one else had done before; she made a series of nearly one thousand collages created through the precise art of paper cutting. Delany cut and assembled dozens of individual pieces for each paper mosaic and layered them with tissue paper to achieve a remarkable depth of field and veracity. Her subjects were flowers and they were starkly set against black paper to showcase their beauty and detail. In their severity and isolation they suggest a modernist sensibility about to flourish.

At the new ACME gallery space in Frogtown, Jennifer Steinkamp has created a similar botanical tour de force. In a galaxy of her own making but reflective of our time, she makes fruits, berries, flowers and seeds that are moving samplers. They read as hyper-real in part because of our associations with botanical illustrations but in actuality they are idealized abstractions. Her large floor to ceiling projection is a little like children's toys where bits of flotsam and jetsam float in a viscous, sparkly fluid. Spinning through a dark space, but self-illuminated, her flora are computer-generated images, and like Delany's flowers, are perfectly unblemished and isolated. They rotate and bump up against their boundaries like bumper cars at an amusement park, travelling at different speeds until they stop and reverse course.



Jennifer Steinkamp, "Still Life", Photo Courtesy of ACME. Gallery

Steinkamp's *Still-Life* extends from floor to ceiling encompassing the entire wall at ACME via two projections that are seamlessly matched. Within her universe there is a shooting gallery of apples, oranges, plums, raspberries, blackberries, pears, blueberries, apple blossoms, orange blossoms, seeds and twigs. In this silent celestial space the viewer is hypnotized by the fluid movements and oversized platonic renderings. Nothing of dramatic significance happens and yet we are mesmerized. Somewhat akin to witnessing a fireworks display or standing before a Mark Rothko painting, this installation must be experienced in person to allow the projection to fill your field of vision and create maximum impact.

Steinkamp studied experimental animation at CalArts and earned both her undergraduate and graduate degrees from The Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. She is a professor at UCLA in the department of Design and Media Arts and has been teaching 3D modeling and motion there for many years. Her recent animation work has focused on botanical elements much like *Still-Life* and they are all stunning in different ways. In *Botanic 1* from 2015 and exhibited in Times Square the following year, the horizontal format showcases an encyclopedic array of flowering plants. The animation begins with all the flowers neatly lined up as if posing for a group portrait. Gradually they begin to disperse, some moving laterally and others diagonally; then things begin to happen. Scale changes, flowers wilt, petals fly off and disperse, all while moving towards the edges, collecting at the perimeter like autumn leaves blown by the wind until they settle against a fence.



Jennifer Steinkamp, "Botanic 1", Photo Courtesy of ACME. Gallery

While the arresting beauty of Mary Delany's work was partially based on her mastery of paper cutting skills, it is her aesthetic choices and her eye that are ultimately more important. Her decision to isolate flowers and set them against black focused attention on the exquisite images she created; and the subtlety of her methods created a new realism. Steinkamp's animations work similarly. She also places her botanicals against a stark background to showcase their forms and she too reveals a reverence for the natural world. As her title *Still-Life* implies, her animation brings still images to life. We may be dazzled by the way she choreographs her work, but using motion is also a way to heighten the reality of her subjects. Like the apocryphal story about the moviegoers who watched *The Great Train Robbery* and ran out of the theaters in fear for their lives, we still believe in the illusion of motion. Steinkamp knowingly employs that suspension of belief and harnesses it to make beautiful new realities.

Jennifer Steinkamp *Still-Life* is up through January 7, 2017  
ACME. Gallery 2939 Denby Avenue Los Angeles, CA 90039 Tel. 323 741 0330



Jennifer Steinkamp, "Still Life", Photo Courtesy of ACME. Gallery



Jennifer Steinkamp, "Botanic 1", Photo Courtesy of ACME. Gallery