

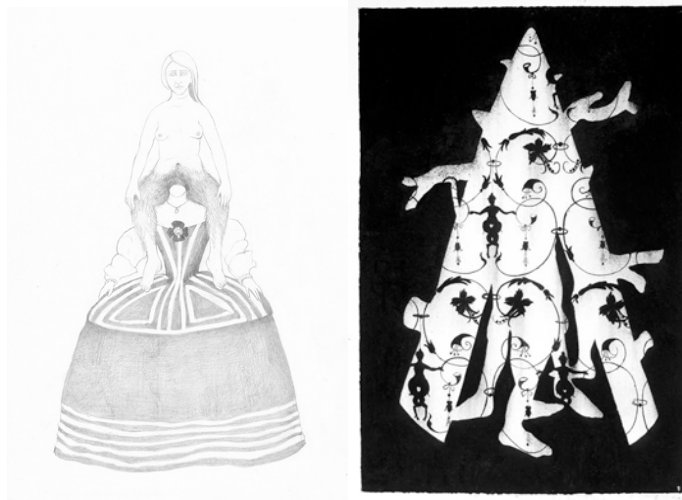
DAVID NOLAN **NEW YORK**

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Alice Maher
Hypnerotomachia:
Recent Drawings and Sculpture

February 13 – March 15, 2008

Opening reception: Wednesday, February 13, 6-8 pm

David Nolan Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new work by Irish artist Alice Maher. For her second show at the gallery, Maher will display drawings and sculpture from three series inspired by the quest of Poliphilo in the famous 15th century novel, *Hypnerotomachia Polophili: The Strife of Love in a Dream*, which explains that while all human dealings are essentially byproducts of erotic, phantasmagorical ponderings, some parts are worthy of knowledge and memory.

Part of a significant generation of Irish artists born in the mid 1950s, including Eilis O'Connell, Dorothy Cross and Kathy Prendergast, Maher entered the scene 10 years later, after having chartered a rigorous academic course. Her degree in European Studies, MA from the University of Ulster, and Fulbright Scholarship at the Art Institute of San Francisco speak for her work, which is distinctly informed and inspired by her research during those years. Ergo, each work is a part of a personally rich tapestry; sewn from the threads of a childhood steeped in rural folklore, and profoundly accented with the pictorial strategies from historical sources as varied as European medieval sculpture, gender, mythology, and the language of dreams.

In the *Bestiary* series, displayed in the front room, we encounter several larger than life charcoal silhouettes of mysterious creatures, extracted from the middle panel of Hieronymus Bosch's

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painting “The Garden of Earthly Delights.” Part man, woman, beast, landscape and architecture, the bulging metamorphoses represent the transitory unions that happen in the course of a quest. Here, man, beast and nature breathe through the same orgy. The obsessively applied layer upon layer of charcoal hints at Maher’s fascination with the elusive nature of the malleable blackish medium. The drawings seem to search for some sort of moral imperative, but then, their serious introspection is quelled by the decorative pattern that ordains their surface. Overlaid by flowery motifs from Pompeian panels, 18th century wallpapers and contemporary headscarves, the enigmas are superficially contained. The dynamic of these works is Maher’s trademark. She rejects a stoical approach to any one set of morals, and prefers to play with the complexity of human nature. This dynamic applies to the formal value of her work as well. The eggs, placed on pedestals of varying height around the room, also derive from Bosch’s painting. As two-dimensional etchings translated into the third dimension by their placement on a rounded surface, the organic orbs inhabit a space that is curiously indefinable. They muddle a neat classification of art as existing in only one of two playing fields.

In the second room, we pass from biblical references to folklore, where we meet a series of floating images in soft pencil from Maher’s *Night Garden* series. The drawings have received significant critical success since their debut in the fall of 2007 at The Royal Hibernian Academy. While on display, they charmed the famous Irish poet, Eilis Ni Dhuibhne’s, who responded by writing an inspired collection of free verses in a collection she calls *Mark My Words*. Though more detailed, the forms are not recognizable as being from this world. They seem to inhabit a space just beyond our memory, as if trying to recall a nursery rhyme from childhood. And like all fables, we try to piece together the moral of their story.

Maher was honored with her first major museum retrospective, *Natural Artifice*, at the Brighton and Hove Museums, U.K. in 2007. Since 1994, when chosen to represent Ireland at the 22nd Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil, Maher has seen a constant stream of success inside and out of Europe. Her recent solo exhibitions include: *The Night Garden* at The Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin (2007); *Orsola* at the Oratorio de San Ludovico (2006); Jim Schmidt Contemporary, St. Louis (2006); Galleria di Nuova Icona, Venice (2006); *Garden* at the Purdy Hicks Gallery, London (2006) and *Portraits* at Mestni Muzej, Ljubljana, Slovenia (2006).