

# Lorini goes beyond Dr. Doolittle

By R.B. STRAUSS

Though postmodernism has a lot to answer for, one of the pluses in its favor is the egalitarian atmosphere permeating the art world over the last few decades.

Work that was once looked at askance has been welcomed into the fold with open arms. The current exhibition at Salon des Amis Gallery, 2321 Yellow Springs Road in Malvern, is a fine case in point. "Sticks and Bones (Words *can* Hurt)," by Markels Lorini, boasts ceramics and jewelry. In the past, both were considered as merely "crafts," though now are fully accepted as art:

To further the cachet of this exhibit, the ceramic pieces are combined to create an example of an art form that continues to gain aesthetic momentum, the installation. An installation is a work that takes into account the space it occupies and so transforms a gallery into a new environment.

The installation here is broken into separate sections, with a large central portion resting on a table in the center of the gallery while the rest orbit it like planets around a sun. This centerpiece features a large pile of ceramic sticks, stones and bones, plus all the letters of the alphabet. Ringing this pile is a quintet of animals: a rabbit, raccoon, gray cat, Siamese cat and a dog. All hold dishes filled with various objects but for the gray cat, which holds a stick.

One of the tenets of postmodernism is how kitsch is elevated to the status of high art. A perfect example is that Elvis-on-velvet paintings are no longer the low mark of our culture, while Graceland itself is the grandest example of trailer trash chic mutated into lasting installation art and a comment on American culture at large (for better or worse). Another tenet of postmodernism is the contrast between text and context. Lorini tackles both with devastating

aplomb, and layers it with a patina that subverts the intrinsic irony of postmodernism.

If one took the animals, which are some of the text of the installation, and isolated them from the installation as a whole, which is the context, they could be seen as kitsch garden ornaments with no intrinsic worth below their surface. Yet when placed within the context of the installation, they are imbued with meaning. Also, as they are one of a kind, unlike garden ornaments that are mass-produced like clones, these animals are pure sculpture:

The patina here rests on the fact that these animals bring to the installation a spiritual depth, an animistic solidarity with what they literally bring to the table. In the context of the installation's theme, which is the power of language, from high oration and melodic prayer to low punditry and hate speech, Lorini has taken the old adage, "Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can never hurt you," and grafted it onto the age old mystic rapport that humanity across every culture shares with animals. And postmodernism is at heart cynical, secular and dismissive of all things spiritual.

There are more components to this fascinating and important work of art than I have room here to explore further, with one being an interactive element dealing directly with language. Do go and experience this art in its original form before it ends up in a museum that can only approximate the site specificity of Salon des Amis Gallery. Oh, and don't forget, there are loads of beautiful jewelry here, too. For directions to the gallery and further info, call 610-647-6010.



A ceramic rabbit sitting beside a pile of sticks, stones and bones by Markels Lorini is featured at Salon des Amis Gallery, 2321 Yellow Springs Road in Malvern.