



Grotesque Menagerie

The beasts of **Jessica Joslin**'s menagerie are equally haunting and compelling. These sometimes wild, sometimes domestic creatures can be found perched on ornate platforms, carnivalesque balls, or carriages. Luxurious materials such as velvet and leather contrast with stark bone and metal, while the creatures' anthropomorphic poses highlight unique personifications of character.

Joslin, 37, says creating them is like solving a riddle; a new technique or part may function as a clue.

Having worked on this type of sculpture for 16 years, the Chicago artist has refined her techniques by building architectural models, prototypes, and custom props. "That training brought a level of expertise in machining, casting, and precision fabrication," she says. "My sculptures are constructed using a wide range of techniques, each appropriate for the specific qualities of that material."

It's difficult to ignore or reconcile the irony inherent in the mechanistic look of these recognizably biological creatures. Joslin explains, "They are at once grotesque and playful. Certain characteristics

of the animal assert themselves and are augmented by decorative conventions; some are constrained. Each piece is a distillation of forms from the internal and external structures of the animal, reinterpreted through the materials that I find beautiful."

It would be careless to reduce the varied signifiers in these works to a single, consistent message; you're as likely to find a detail from a couture gown as a bondage harness. The meanings are layered, encompassing a broad range of Joslin's interests.

"Those layers are there to be excavated, but are not strictly necessary for appreciation of my work. In other words, I'm not pursuing a didactic agenda. I make my beasts because they are what I dreamed of discovering, but they didn't exist anywhere, so I had to make them myself."

Joslin's recently released book, *Strange Nature*, is available from the Lisa Sette Gallery at lisasettegallery.com.

—Thomas Walker Wilson

✂ Joslin's creatures: jessicajoslin.com

✂ Interview: craftzine.com/09/handmade_joslin