



**MARY CATHERINE NEWCOMB  
BREAD AND BONES**

**July 15 - August 12**  
**Opening Sunday, July 15, 2-4pm**



Image: *Miss Real Silver*, scrounged cow bones, watercolor, fixative.

## BREAD AND BONES

Essay by Sandy Saad, Curator of Exhibitions and Education, Visual Arts Centre of Clarington

Mary Catherine Newcomb's artistic practice is deeply engaged with the exploration of death, myth, rebirth, nature, and time. Her sculptures often occupy paradoxical intersections of attraction and repulsion, myth and reality, and life and death. In *Bread and Bones*, Newcomb's contemplation of life and death informs a series of sculptures featuring plants growing out of carcasses, bread baked into the bone structures of animals, and hanging animal skeletons assembled and ornamented to create fantastical creatures. Her work is layered with complexity; her sculptures are often foreign and familiar, and straddle the line between dead and alive. Newcomb's seductive art invites you into a distinct reality.



Image: *Miss Real Silver* (detail), scrounged cow bones, watercolor, fixative.





Image: *Miss Real Silver* (detail), scrounged cow bones, watercolor, fixative.

The exhibition begins with the introduction of two surreal creatures; *Miss Real Silver*, and *Pushmi Pulyu*. Their skeletal forms suggest dissolution, but their physical presence has a very jarring and disarming impact. Outstretched to occupy the space, *Miss Real Silver* is inspired by the real Miss Real Silver, a cow owned by Newcomb's great-grandfather. After living in Mexico, he purchased a ranch in Arizona on which the mammal lived. Newcomb came across a photo of her great-grandfather with the cow in her grandmother's collection of memorabilia, along with Talavera pottery purchased by her great-grandfather during his time in Mexico. *Miss Real Silver's* body is assembled in a Frankensteinian fashion using a series of bones from multiple cows. Each is intricately painted in cobalt blue motifs mimicking the patterns of Talavera pottery.



Images: (Left) *Pushmi Pulyu*, animal bones, urethane. (Right) *Untitled (Venus and Cupid, Bronzino's "Allegory")*, beeswax.

She is accompanied by *Pushmi Pulyu*, a Siamese creature built of natural bone and artificial bone casts, with a head on each end of its shared torso. Its double-ended nature hinders its ability to move, requiring one side to submit to the other. The sculpture is juxtaposed with *The Kiss*, a miniature wall sculpture inspired by Bronzino's *An Allegory of Venus and Cupid* c.1545. The erotic painting has two main characters – Venus and her son Cupid, who engage in an erotic kiss. Newcomb magnifies the kiss on the lips, focusing on the attraction and repulsion conveyed in their incestuous moment.



Image: Installation shot of small gallery artworks.

Drawing parallels between mythology and agriculture, photographs of a 2012 installation, *Osiris' 10,000 Soldiers*, show 38 square meters of wheat transplanted into the pews of St. Anne's Anglican Church in Toronto. Osiris, the Egyptian god of the afterlife, is said to have fostered all life, including sprouting vegetation and the fertile flooding of the Nile River. Images of the installation accompany documentation of the wheat collection process and bread sculptures, some baked into carcasses, others taking the form of dismembered human parts. The "bodies" are accompanied by large pots of grain from which the wheat was taken for Newcomb's installation. Wheat and bread are reoccurring themes in Newcomb's work. Wheat is a symbol of resurrection, the cycle of seasons, abundance of life and fertility. The wheat occupies the pews of a church, a symbol of the spiritual change. In the Eucharist, the bread and wine represent the body, and in Roman Catholicism, bread becomes the actual Body of Christ through Transubstantiation. It is transformation, life after death.



Image: *Crabbit*, animal bones and bread.



Image: *Untitled (deer)*, steel, hd styrofoam, hydrocal, vermiculite.

The third portion of the exhibition infuses life into what is dead. Mushrooms grow out of the architectural pillars of the gallery, a life-sized deer appears to pause in action as it looks back, about to step forward, and the corpse of a rabbit holds life as grass grows out of its body. Mary Catherine Newcomb disrupts the cycle of nature in her interventional approach to what is lifeless. Science takes on a larger role in this space as petri dishes and sterile metal tabletops hold animals. She plays with our perceptions as life-like creatures are created from synthetic material, taken out of their context and installed in the gallery.

Mary Catherine Newcomb's sculptures combine elements of mortality and immortality; bones, signifying death and decay are combined with bread, symbolizing life and sustenance. We see sculptures taking on a life of their own as grass and various plants grow out of the animal corpses that hold their roots, shifting and evolving over time. We see science play a role in preservation, and the grotesque beautified into seductive and disarming forms. Deeper than this, we play a major role in this surreal world, as we are confronted with our own perception of what is foreign and familiar. Our seduction, repulsion, discomfort, and enjoyment become a reflection of our own response to the fantastical world Mary Catherine Newcomb invites us into.



Image: *Fordwich Hare*, animal bones and dried remains, earth, vermiculite, seeds, burlap, embroidery, floss (table: wood, stainless steel).



# BIOGRAPHY

Mary Catherine Newcomb is a sculptor who works in a variety of media while exploring notions of nature, magic myth, science, and time. Newcomb attended the University of Toronto where she received a B.Sc. She later enrolled in the Fine Arts program at the University of Waterloo, and in 1991 she received an M.F.A. from York University. Newcomb's work has been exhibited in national and international institutions including CAFKA at Cambridge Sculpture Gardens, the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, and Loop Gallery in Toronto. She has completed several public commissions and has received many grants and awards including the K.M. Hunter prize for visual art.






Image: *American Bulldog*, animal bones, bread.



The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington,  
P.O. Box 52, 143 Simpson Avenue,  
Bowmanville, Ontario L1C 3K8

Ph: (905)-623-5831  
E: [communications@vac.ca](mailto:communications@vac.ca)  
Visit: [www.vac.ca](http://www.vac.ca)

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## EVENTS PROGRAM

Artist conversation with Curator:  
Saturday, July 28, 2 - 4pm.  
This is a free event.

## GALLERY HOURS

Monday, Tuesday: 9am - 5pm  
Wednesday: 9am - 9pm  
Thursday, Friday: 9am - 5pm  
Saturday, Sunday: 10am - 4pm

Executive Director: Dionne Powlenzuk  
Curator of Exhibitions & Education: Sandy Saad  
Marketing Coordinator: Aine Belton  
Development Coordinator: Vivienne Song

Cover image: *Alchemy*, animal bones and dried remains, moss, needle, eyedropper, petri dish, (plinth: wood and stainless steel) a few mushrooms here and there.

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