

Great Goddesses: Sculptures and Photo Tableaux by Jane Gilmor,
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By: Paul Brenner. *Real Art Ways*, Hartford, CT.

These sculptural assemblages and photo tableaux by Jane Gilmor present such a startling collision of kitsch with myth that one may not know whether to chuckle or recite incantations upon approaching them. When Erma confronts the Great Goddess, one can't help but wonder what each must be thinking about the other. The wealth of images in relief on the "shrines" blend a whimsical surrealism with an iconographic, hieroglyphic authenticity; a masterful mélange of the modern and the 'ancient.' Gilmor's motivations lie in the "construction and deconstruction of myth;" her Great Goddesses enact 'sacred' rites in the ruins of temples, counterparts to the rituals that must have once taken place there to honor mythological deities. The feline-headed personae, reminiscent of vestal virgins or a kitty chorus for a Greek tragedy, appear on the shrines engaging in their enigmatic sacraments, in miniature, in relief, in photos, and on video. As associations with gender that we have come to adopt at face value in contemporary society. These works question all that we associate with modern religious pomp and circumstance, the solemnity of which seems a far cry from the performances staged by Jane Gilmor, which blend a ceremonious melodrama with a healthy dose of satire.

The "shrines" are influenced by Gilmor's frequent visits to Mediterranean countries, the roads of which are dotted with memorials to the dead, which often exhibit a photograph of the deceased, and other images related to the person's life on earth. The votive medals placed on religious shrines, which represent a body part or possession in need of divine intervention, motivate the use of pressed metal on the assemblages; Gilmor has amassed a large collection of these iconic medals in her travels. A wooden frame acts as support for the metal repousse (a relief pressed out from the inside), which is replete with images of the human body, often in fragments, architectural details, and other iconic forms. This richness of figurative elements which cover the "shrines" may lead one to search for narratives, especially given the titles, which suggest modern tales of mythic consequence. *Do You Live Alone?*, *Mrs. Maberry's Shrine*, *Do You Mind If I Sit Here?*, and *Issues of Origin* are titles which have personal significance for the artist, while the way the elements of the shrines relate to these titles is a puzzle for the viewer.

Photos of the performances Gilmor has staged in ancient temples are incorporated into the shrines, as are found objects and figurines. The artist explains, "Both the content and the use of materials are intended to create a ritualistic ambience not unlike that of some bizarre roadside shrines. For me, these shrines embody the peculiar, ridiculous, and meaningful (less) qualities of almost everything human." For us, they provide humorous and thought-provoking objects, which lend themselves to a close scrutiny in the search for, and recognition of, familiar and fantastic images; our personal associations with these images may lead us to see our life experiences as approaching mythological importance. Modest as one may be,

egocentrism is an inborn tendency; Gilmor's shrines encourage and legitimize this indulgence.

Over the years, Jane Gilmor has returned to the ruins of ancient religions in Greece, Italy, Egypt, and Japan, where she has staged performance/rituals involving her Great Goddesses. These cat-headed women in loose, flowing garb present "the female psyche as a strong creative force", while taking a tongue-in-cheek look at the way contemporary society associates animal images with gender characteristics. By incorporating satire and melodramatic gesture, the viewer is challenged into recognition of these stereotypes, and a subsequent questioning of their validity. Recent tableaux present Erma, the typical 'modern' woman as tourist and woman-of-the-world- bowling in white gloves, etc. -who is shadowed by a Great Goddess. In performance photos from Erma's Deconstructs Time, Religion, Liberty," a Great Goddess in the guise of the iconic Statue stands monumentally beside the screen, which presents a changing chronicle of Erma's experiences. All the while, Erma herself enacts ritualistic movements and a clock operates as a referent for Erma's life. Gilmor conceives myths as "being created throughout our lives by day-to-day experiences and by the culture in which we live." Our routine behavior can be seen as ritualistic; material objects in our culture have developed into the status of shrines; significant others are 'worshipped'; we create, in a sense, a unique religion of which we alone comprise the congregation. It is the realization of this mythic quality of our lives that Gilmor strives for in her work.

Jane Gilmor was born in Ames, IA and attended Iowa State University (B.S., Textiles), the University of Iowa (M.A.T., M.A., M.F.A.), and the School of Art Institute of Chicago. Her fascination with the feline image was brought to the forefront in the mid-70's when she entered her cat in an All American Glamour Kitty contest and ended up in the finals by dressing her pet in crazy costumes. In the late 70's, she first visited the Temple of Athena Pronae in Delphi, Greece and the Temple of Karnak in Luxor, Egypt, where she staged her Great Goddesses performances. She has since returned to these sights and others in Crete, Turkey, Japan (where she produced booda-Doo-Da), and New York City (Terrorist Kitty at the Manhattan Bridge), in addition to indoor performances in Iowa where many of the Erma tableaux were conceived. Her work has been exhibited widely in group and solo exhibitions in the U.S. and Europe, including recent exhibitions at the Nelson-Atkins Museum (Kansas City, MO), the Minnesota Museum of Art (St. Paul), and the A.I.R. Gallery (NYC). She lectures frequently on her work and on women in contemporary art. Gilmor is currently a Professor of Art at Mount Mercy College, Cedar Rapids, IA and an adjunct professor at the University of Iowa's School of Art.