

October 8 - 31, 2009

Opening Reception: Thursday, October 8, 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm

Marilee Salvator

Mary Had A Little Lamb

Marilee Salvator received her BFA (honours) in printmaking from Illinois State University, Normal, IL, in 2000 and her MFA in printmaking from University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, in 2004. She currently resides in Bloomsburg, PA, where she is Assistant Professor of Printmaking and Two-Dimensional Design at Bloomsburg University.

Salvator's artwork ranges from traditional 2-d prints to mixed print media/installation. Her work tends to flux back and forth between issues of autobiography, feminist ideals and abstraction.

In the past five years, Marilee Salvator's work has been exhibited in over 30 exhibitions throughout North America and abroad. Recent solo exhibitions include *Circles*, Fairbanks Gallery, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR, and *Ring Around The Rosie*, SNAP Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta.

Recent group exhibitions include *The Stream of International Prints*, Anyang, S.Korea; *2009 China Sanbao International Printmaking Exhibition*, Jingdezhen, China; *5th International Biennial of Miniature Art*, Warszawa, Poland; *2008 Pacific States Biennial*, Hilo, HI; and *Stampa D' Arte*, Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice.

Bridget Indelicato operates editorB.com, a writing and copy editing service for the visual arts sector. She is currently living in Peterborough, Ontario, with her husband and imaginary dog.

Open Studio, Canada's leading printmaking centre, is dedicated to the production, preservation and promotion of contemporary fine art prints.

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EDITING Sara Kelly
TYPESETTING Sara Kelly
DESIGN Kathe Gray/electric pear



Moo Goes The Cow (detail), screenprint, watercolour, fabric, thread and cross stitch hoop, installation size 6' x 14', 2008

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Tuesday to Saturday, noon to 5 pm

Marilee Salvator: *Mary Had A Little Lamb*

by Bridget Indelicato

When I first began researching Pennsylvania-based artist Marilee Salvator for this essay, I felt like I'd stumbled upon her diary tucked in the back of her underwear drawer. I read about her middleclass upbringing in a small town in Illinois in the early seventies through to the early nineties, her vocational and educational explorations, and her inspiring journey to becoming a practicing artist and fine art printmaking professor at Bloomsburg University. I began to feel an affinity towards her; I too was born into a middleclass family in a small town in Illinois in the early seventies and paved a path into the visual arts in my twenties and thirties. As I flipped through her imaginary diary I came to an arresting development in her story – she experienced childhood sexual molestation. She spent years painfully trying to erase her memory of this violation of her innocence and her feelings of deep shame, but today she pushes her abuse into the light to process it, expose her scars and heal herself with courage and grace.¹

Marilee Salvator brings together a number of recent and new series under the title *Mary Had A Little Lamb* for her solo exhibition at Open Studio. As the title implies, Salvator is borrowing and appropriating this popular children's rhyme to subtly mask and quietly unfold her own narrative. In these personal works, driven by exhaustive process and layering, she also reaches outside of her autobiography to point to the broader historical reference of women and domestic work, namely embroidery and family portraiture.

The large installation *Moo Goes The Cow* is comprised of over one hundred mixed-media works on found and reproduced patterned fabric stretched onto embroidery hoops exhibited six feet high along a fourteen-foot wide span of wall space. The overall first impression is a colourful smattering of playful bubbles of varying hoop sizes (some no bigger than the palm of your hand), each with layers of screenprinted and watercolour painted imagery that invites you to step closer. They appear like kaleidoscopes of children's book illustrations – a grazing cow, a little girl blowing bubbles, a fire truck – on surfaces sporting children's bed sheet-like patterns of ribbons, flowers, and toy boats and planes. But the crafty sweetness is quickly marred by the murky stains, produced with tea and watercolour, and overlaid anatomical drawings of male and female genitalia, including instructional steps of how to put on a condom. This visual disruption drops like a clue on the unsuspecting viewer drawn to the bright, playful pattern. As a viewer, you start to question and examine each piece, bending down to see the ones grazing your kneecaps and stretching on your tiptoes to make out the ones overhead. Salvator describes this juxtaposition of innocent children's imagery and sex education illustrations as a way to "illuminate the deep-seated confusion and scarring that sexual molestation can create."² The inappropriateness of this adult content imposed on the storybook characters is meant to crawl under your skin and create discomfort and awkwardness.

Scrapbook is another hefty installation, both in volume and subject matter, which Salvator began in 2004 and continues to expand, currently containing



over one hundred pieces. These mixed-media works housed in secondhand, cheaply ornate frames, reminiscent of family portraits clustered on the living room wall in its final presentation, follow the recipe of the scrapbook: memories pressed onto pages in a collage of imagery. But again Salvator disrupts association by formatting painful childhood experiences into keepsakes. The individual works are layered collages similar in content to the previous series and made of found materials, photocopies, tape, crayon markings, fluids and digital reproduction with screenprinted imagery. In these works, and even more so than in the previous series, the surface appears stained and watermarked as though left too long in a damp, leaky basement. She uses multiple sources of staining including her own menstrual blood, a deeply personal impression of herself which can also be read as a right of passage and loss of innocence. Salvator describes this permanent staining – which is also extended onto the gallery wall in dramatic tea drippings – as the manifestation of feeling unclean after abuse, a feeling that never fully disappears.³

While these works deal with pain and confusion, they bring the subject of childhood sexual abuse out of the darkness. Marilee Salvator's "obsessive handiwork,"⁴ as she calls it, is offered to us in playful and alarming installations, safely bringing us to a place of hope and empowerment.

¹ Discussions of the artist's background and artistic practice and imagery can be found on her website <http://www.marileesalvator.com>.

² Marilee Salvator, *Mary Had A Little Lamb* Artist Statement, September 12, 2008.

³ Email correspondence from Marilee Salvator, August 4, 2009.

⁴ Marilee Salvator, *Ring Around The Rosie* Artist Statement, July 1, 2007.