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SWEET AND STRANGE CREATURES OCCUPY  
SURREAL WORLD IN ELISSA ARMSTRONG'S CERAMIC WORKS



*white fantastic*, 2004; earthenware, glaze, polymer clay, 10 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 7 inches; Courtesy of the artist

*Elissa Armstrong:*  
*Objects of Innocence and Experience*  
on view July 7–October 1, 2006  
at Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art

KANSAS CITY, MO—Ranging from highly prized Wedgwood vases and porcelain figurines to Hummel collectibles and kitschy souvenirs, the history of the decorative ceramic object is varied and complex, and includes both fine arts and hobby craft. In her latest body of work, Elissa Armstrong,

an artist based in Lawrence, Kansas, comments on this complicated history by creating forms that occupy an aesthetic limbo, where traditional practices and conventional ideals in ceramics are both celebrated and subverted, and recognizable figures are transformed into hybrid, mysterious beings.

The public is invited to contemplate Armstrong's creative manipulations of the decorative object at the artist's first solo museum exhibition, *Elissa Armstrong: Objects of Innocence and Experience*, on view July 7–October 1, 2006 at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art. The exhibition opens with a free, public reception 5:30–7:30 p.m., Friday, July 7, with an artist discussion 6:30–7:00 p.m. Museum admission and parking are free, and seating is first come, first served. Armstrong is a visiting artist at the Kemper Museum.

Like the prose in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, a collection of poetry by

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William Blake, the exhibition *Objects of Innocence and Experience* includes nearly a dozen works that exist in a state of duality reflecting childhood simplicity as well as adult experience. Using commercial hobby molds and found objects—sources that clash with the hand-cast individuality and authenticity of traditional ceramic works— Armstrong creates seemingly innocent animal figures reminiscent of Beatrix Potter. She then purposefully overwhelms and caricatures these figures with layers of thick, garish, colorful glazes, hand-molded appendages and an array of materials not associated with conventional ceramics, such as felt, glitter, and decals—decorations that give the figures a Baroque-like excessiveness and a grotesque glamour. The result is a collection of creatures who have morphed from their cute, kitschy idealizations into surreal beings that have escaped the prescribed conventions of the ceramic object to live in a modern world of perpetual transition. Looking at them evokes questions about their evolution: Are they becoming or unbecoming?

Armstrong's more abstract sculptural forms also address this endless state of transition. Lacking recognizable forms and features, these non-traditional objects speak to the humble beginnings of one of her more defined, mythical creatures, or perhaps their final, mature end after being stripped of frivolous and unnecessary accessories over time.

"Occupying a place where reality and fantasy coexist, Armstrong's works display a postmodern awareness of the past and a contemporary irreverence toward what are deemed to be the appropriate materials, techniques, and subjects for ceramic art," Elizabeth Dunbar, curator at the Kemper Museum, writes in an accompanying essay. "The free-form abstraction of plaster, the gaudiness of glitter, and the sentimentality of childhood figurines all combine to push the boundaries of ceramics to their limits, and ultimately, transcend them."

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## FREE EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

**Friday, July 7**

*Elissa Armstrong: Objects of Innocence and Experience*

**Opening Reception, 5:30–7:30 p.m.**

**Artist talk, 6:30–7:00 p.m.**

Start your weekend off at the opening of *Elissa Armstrong: Objects of Innocence and Experience*. Armstrong's ceramic works combine figurative and abstract forms with garnish glazes and finishes. This is Elissa Armstrong's first solo museum exhibition. The Lawrence, Kansas-based artist will present a short slide talk about her work at 6:30 p.m. Get there early. Seating is first come, first served. This event is free and open to the public.

**Tuesday–Wednesday, July 25–26**

**Visiting artist workshops**

In conjunction with her exhibition, Armstrong works with summer school student and adult senior groups in hands-on workshops. Contact Kristy Peterson at 816-457-6134 or [kristy@kemperart.org](mailto:kristy@kemperart.org) for more information.

**Saturday, August 12, 2:00 p.m.**

**Tour: Meet Me at the Museum, *Elissa Armstrong: Objects of Innocence and Experience***

Join a Kemper Museum docent for a free, guided tour of the exhibition. Gather at the visitor services desk a few minutes before 2:00 p.m. No reservation is required, but space is limited.

## Thank You

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The Kemper Museum acknowledges the generous support of Bank of America for the 2006 Visiting Artists Program. Financial assistance has been provided by the Arvin Gottlieb Charitable Foundation, UMB Bank, n.a., Trustee; the Hallmark Corporate Foundation; the Muriel McBrien Kauffman Foundation; the David Woods Kemper Memorial Foundation; and Missouri Arts Council, a state agency. Generous in-kind support is provided by *The Kansas City Star* and Midwest Airlines.

## About the Kemper Museum

Kansas City's acclaimed, free contemporary art museum, the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art opened in 1994 and draws more than 130,000 visitors each year. The Museum boasts a rapidly growing permanent collection of modern and contemporary works of artists from around the world. The Museum hosts temporary exhibitions, installations, performance work, film and video series, lectures, concerts, children's workshops, and other creative programs designed to both entertain and challenge. For more information, visit [www.kemperart.org](http://www.kemperart.org).

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The Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art is open 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m., Tuesday–Thursday; 10:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m., Friday–Saturday; and 11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Sunday. The galleries at Kemper East (200 E. 44th Street) are open 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m., Tuesday–Friday. The Museum's popular Café Sebastienne serves lunch 11:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m., Tuesday–Saturday; dinner 5:30–9:30 p.m., Friday–Saturday; and brunch 11:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m., Sunday. The Museum and Café are closed on Mondays.

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