

## A critic's note

Katheryn Holt's figurative art occupies a place between the private realm of memory, and the public realms of social and cultural history. Reading her paintings and drawings, we undertake something like a cultural anthropologist's investigation, translating and interpreting the significance of costumes, roles and ritual objects within a deeper structure to uncover their meanings. Many of Holt's pieces include collaged elements from her past—magazine ads from vintage women's magazines, typed pages of the television scripts her screenwriter father wrote when Holt was a girl, doll clothes from her mother's childhood and clothing from her own youth. Although these resonant signifiers are personal, they're also reminders of a collective past, with associations and connections to experiences held in common by baby-boomers, most particularly by the generation of women who initiated the feminist revolution.

Clothing--and its relationship to identity--is a recurring theme in Holt's paintings, as is the transformation of girls to women, with all the complexity that transformation implies. She uses a cast of archetypal characters—starlets, bathing beauties, socialites in plumage-bright cocktail dresses, fathers, mothers, daughters, and couples--to compose her cinematic narratives. Images of women displaying their bodies, and truncated compositions presenting girl's faces juxtaposed with women's clothes, seem to question the process of indoctrination into conventional social roles. Whether they are players in oblique cautionary tales, Holt's girlhood memories of herself in relation to her mother, or characters from her father's fictional stories, Holt's painted women are not merely dressed, but rather costumed as codified personae. When she uses bits of advertising to address social and gender roles, Holt reflects the icons and values of the larger cultural arena that shaped her own family, the stage where their lives unfolded. Holt uses devices like compartmentalizing images, or partially obscuring them with silkscreen and colored glazes, to evoke the elusive, layered nature of memory; each piece is a palimpsest where remembered moments and keepsakes, triggered by associations, rise to the surface before re-submerging into the ether of consciousness.

What is personal as memory, in aggregate becomes collective history.

While these canvases may tell the private stories of Holt's own family, they also stand as a universal story of changing roles and identities within the larger culture. In the end, her story is our story as well.

-- Jamie Brunson