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## Skins and Shells - Milton Fletcher



Alexandra Rutsch, Part Of The Miracle, Photographs and permission Alexandra Rutsch.

*Alexandra Rutsch is a compelling New York visual artist who takes personal risks by exploring her and her family's existence in stark, revealing, even biological detail. Recently, Alexandra and I had a candid Q&A about this overlap between her art and life.*

**Milton Fletcher: What are the current pieces you are working on?**

AR: I've been working on small-scale gouache drawings on paper. I like the texture, the scale and the uneven edges. They are frail and unique like our bodies. In addition, I've been working on prints of the bodies of my son, my husband and myself. The work is concerned with the links between us, the "skin" and how it is our "shell." Finally, there are also larger acrylic and encaustic works exploring "cellular landscapes" and fertility issues.

**MF: Your piece Part of the Miracle is striking because of its colors, patterns and circular shape. How did this piece come about?**

AR: I had bought these wonderful Indian papers a few years ago, and they've been in my studio ever since. The circle shapes overwhelmed me, and I didn't know how to use them. However, after the experiences of the last few years, they seemed to be the perfect surface for these "cellular landscapes" that I was working on. The circle lent itself so well to these "worlds" I wanted to create. After my husband's second bout with Lymphoma, he had to undergo a stem-cell transplant. Because this treatment would leave him sterile, we banked sperm. A year after the treatment, I underwent six tries of artificial insemination. Unfortunately, they were unsuccessful. During this time we were contemplating in vitro fertilization that would include taking hormones, egg retrieval and embryo implantation. We eventually decided against it.

During this experience, I was painting this series. I was imagining my ovaries making multiple eggs through the hormones, and the retrieval process of the needle sucking up the eggs. Reproductive images are visible, and the thin black invading line of the needle. The colors are surreal to me, just like I imagined the whole experience.

**MF: Life and art...**

AR: Yes. This piece, Intend to Live Again is the second of a series of approximately 40 small-scale gouaches that I began early this year. I had started painting again, after almost 2 years working on primarily printmaking. I was dealing with all the craziness and uncertainty of my husband's illness. I started working on these intimately-sized pieces in my kitchen by the window overlooking my backyard. It was winter, and everything outside was dead and covered in snow. I started with interwoven lines and was drawn into the small inner shapes that the negative spaces created. The paper is originally a dull red color, so you can see where it shows. I created a web of spheres and then became wrapped up in painting the small shapes in between. It put me into a trance, just painting and filling, not actively thinking of composition or structure. The meditative state of creating this one, inspired me to go on and create the rest of the series.

**MF: I've always been struck by your body print work. What can you say about Self Portrait—Night?**

AR: I started Self Portrait—Night in 2004; I was working with soft ground etching and had created plates of the torsos of my family. After these, I was inspired to do a full body print, but really had no access or space to create it all on one plate, or on one piece of paper. I still would like to! So, I cut up 11 plates and sectioned my "self" off. I first did it in a skin tone on buff paper, and then did this dark black/blue one on white paper. Next, I would like to take all the pieces and sew them together into one large piece and paint over it, portraying a topographical map of life experience. Basically, Milton, I'm exploring how my life is being "run" by things I can't see or control—I am imagining these inner worlds.

**MF: Well then, keep going on your fantastic voyage.**

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