

Wall Text/Catalog Essay

“MAs Select MFAs”

Hunter College, Times Square Gallery, Fall 2005

The brightly colored paintings of Julia Whitney Barnes evoke the fantastical, but their subject matter is rooted in science. Images of bats—or rather, bat/orchid hybrids—emerge from backgrounds of dense foliage. This series is inspired by the evolutionary ability of organisms to adapt to their environment. According to the artist, “The idea originated based on actual physical properties of how bats can start to resemble the plants around them as a camouflage technique and how orchids can become more visually similar to the animals that eat their nectar in order to seduce them into pollinating.”

Whitney Barnes's work serves as a breeding ground for her own experiments with nature. Her specimens are magnified and confront the viewer on a human, and at times, threatening, scale. By fusing images of bats and orchids into one beautiful yet unsettling entity, she subverts the attributes and connotations of both. This tension between danger and sensuality is heightened by Whitney Barnes's compositional balance and color value relationships. These factors infuse her work with a dynamic energy on both formal and psychological levels.

Julia Whitney Barnes was born in Newbury, Vermont. She received a BFA in Fine Arts Painting from Parsons School of Design in 2001.

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