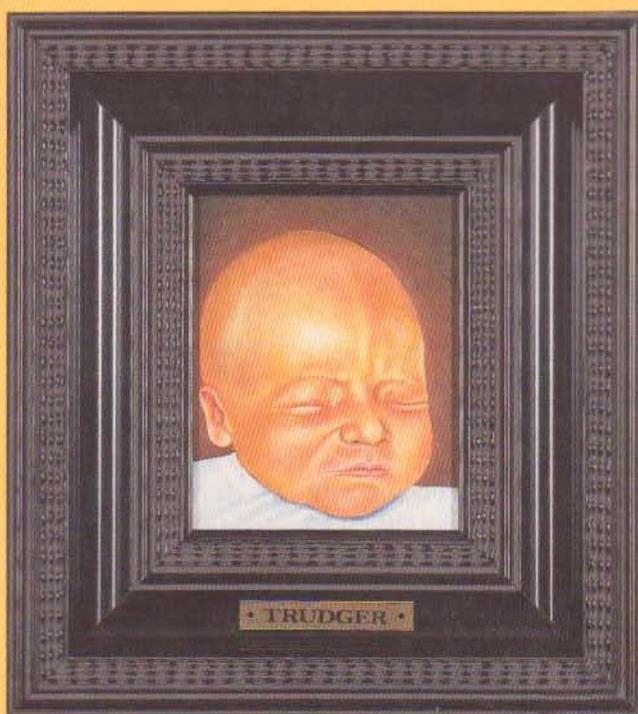
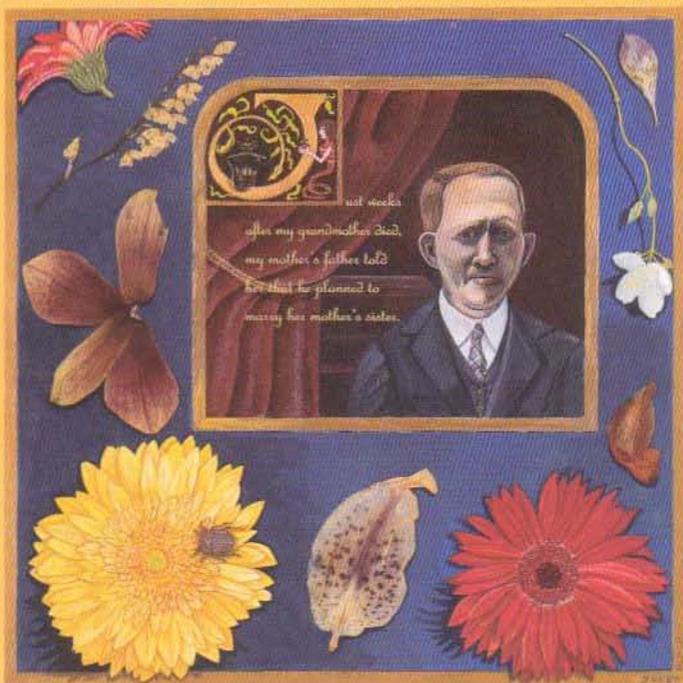


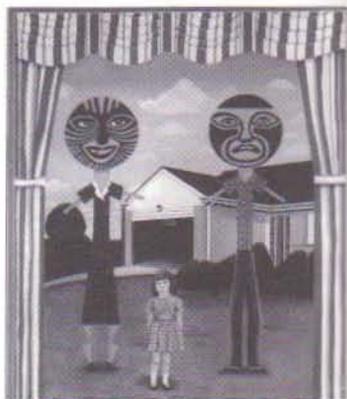
*Janet Bloch and Rose Divita*  
*Small Format Paintings*



*May 22 - June 26, 1998*  
*Community Gallery of Art*  
*College of Lake County*

# Janet Bloch Rose Divita

The works of Janet Bloch and Rose Divita are brought together in this exhibition for the first time. While there are strong distinctions between their manners of working, there are also areas of common ground. These two Chicago painters, working on small formats, combine representational imagery with text. In both cases the written text is an indispensable part of the image and idea. Bloch incorporates carefully crafted calligraphy in an anecdotal fashion. Divita's frames, with their one word brass labels, become an essential part of her work. Humor and an affinity for the absurd are also shared ingredients of their works.



Janet Bloch, *Me Three*

Leo Tolstoy opened his novel *Anna Karenina* with the statement: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." It is the uniqueness of the latter which makes Janet Bloch's work so compelling. Bloch's work is like an intimate look into her family scrapbook. Her gouache paintings with collaged elements explore the artist's difficult personal history in relationship to family and specific events in its history. Bloch states, "This series focuses on my search for a fuller understanding of my identity and the world that formed me."

Many of Bloch's works have images of herself or family members surrounded by decoratively painted flowers, birds, and butterflies. The elaborately rendered text connects the border with the figurative elements both visually and in an anecdotal fashion. All of these devices make the work reminiscent of a book of fairy tales. Joseph Campbell has stated that, "It is the business . . . of the fairy tale to reveal the specific dangers and techniques of the dark interior way from tragedy to comedy."<sup>1</sup> The fairy tale's protagonist triumphs over adversities which represent psychological forces, not physical events. Bloch's satirical look at her life is her "dark interior way from tragedy to comedy."



Rose Divita, *Alone*

Bloch's troubled figures and events are often surrounded by life affirming images of flora and fauna. *Skeleton Girl*, for example, depicts the artist as a child literally starved for her mother's love. Bloch's mother doesn't notice her deplorable condition because she is in too much of a hurry to meet her husband. This scene is framed by an exotic bird, leaves and seeds which represent Mother Nature's abundance and harmony. These natural elements stand in sharp contrast against the absurdity of the situation depicted.

Framed by garish window curtains, *Me Three* is like a prying look at the neighbors. Set in 1950's suburbia the artist is depicted as a young girl flanked by totemic parent figures. These two figures are adorned with masks that are a primitive version of the Greek symbols of tragedy and comedy. The parent figures seem to play their given societal roles of that decade as a happy homemaker and a stern bread winner. The girl, whose serious face appears more mature than her small size indicates, is caught between these influences.

# Small Format Painting

Included in the exhibition are a couple of examples of Bloch's larger social concerns. One such work, *Our Lady of Sorrows*, depicts the brutal rape and senseless murder of an Ohio environmentalist. The image with its accompanying text is a powerful indictment of the inhumanity of vested interest. In this regard it is reminiscent of Paul Cadmus's 1940 *Herrin Massacre* where striking miners butchered their replacement workers. Bloch's composition is painted in a religious folk art manner with a remorseful angel hovering over the martyred victim. As the factory pumps more pollution into the dying river in the background, one of the attackers pours its polluted water onto the victims wounds. While the media would matter-of-factly report such an incident, Bloch screams out her outrage in every brush stroke.

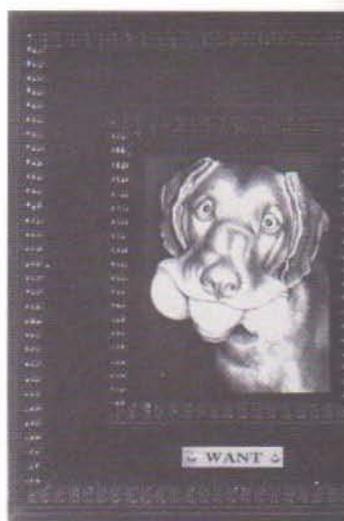
Bloch examines the challenging incidents which have shaped her life, her family and her notion of self. Through wry humor and exaggeration Bloch shows the comedic element that is often inherent in personal tragedy.



Divita also draws upon her own experiences for source material. However, Divita's work, although personal in nature, is open ended, so that the viewers may draw their own conclusions. Divita has employed text in her work for about a decade. In her present series, Divita has restricted herself to a single solitary word set against usually one visual element such as a dog, a horse, or a figure. The combination of these two components creates a matrix of meaning. In some cases the word is descriptive of the visual element, while in other examples it sets the emotional tone of the work. Sometimes the word seems deliberately ambiguous to make the viewer dig for its meaning.

The diminutive scale and beautifully rendered realism of Divita's works connects them to fifteenth century Flemish painting. Some of the portraiture of that period by artists such as Hans Memling and Dieric Bouts comes to mind. These artists, like Divita, would closely crop the upper torso to the edges of the picture plane. Their smaller-than-life-size portraits would often include text in the negative space which, like Divita's one word labels, further defines the image. Her frequent use of idyllic landscape in the background is also found in the Northern tradition.

Divita feels that her framing is an integral part of the piece; that it references the work to a specific aesthetic and historical concern. Her subtly ornate black and gold leaf frames evoke the seventeenth century treatment of the "little Dutch masters." Rose Divita paints on an extremely intimate scale. The image itself is often only four by three-and-one-half inches. She forces the viewer to come nose to nose with her subjects which are painted in minute detail. Under such close scrutiny the weave of canvas would be too apparent; therefore, Divita paints with oil on board to achieve an absolutely smooth surface. Her use of color is both strong and subtle; bold passages of



Rose Divita, *Want*

complimentary colors are filled with delicate nuances of tones and temperatures.

One of Divita's paintings is of a large dog with yearning eyes and three tennis balls crammed into its mouth. Its title plate on the frame states *Want*. Here the visual and textual elements conjure up the idea of excessiveness. The absurdity of the image demonstrates that desire (want) must be kept in check or it will run amuck. Another Northern Renaissance artist, Hieronymus Bosch, painted *The Table of Wisdom (The Seven Deadly Sins)* which has scenes depicting the degradation brought on by each of the sins. The dog seems to be an apt metaphor for the sin of gluttony, especially if one considers a dog's penchant to eat. It may be stretching a point, but a couple of Divita's other works fit into this context. *Attack* portrays a ferocious wolf which could be seen as an allusion to the sin of anger. A horse with an up turned nose is labeled *Appear*. The sin of pride, which includes vanity, is suggested in the horse's haughty nature, and also that one of the definitions of "appear" is "to come into public view."

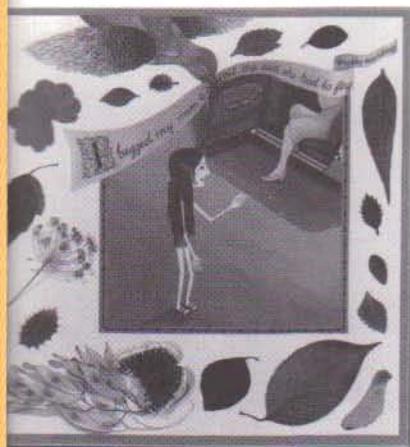
*Alone* is a good example of the word on the label setting the emotional tone of the work. Here an infant is seen from above while laying on the grass. The baby's closed eyes and contorted face clearly communicate discomfort and the sounds of crying are almost audible. Having so recently parted from the comfort of the womb, the child must feel very "alone" at this moment of emotional distress. The universal response to the cries of an infant is to hold and comfort the child.

Following the Northern tradition, Divita employs a concentrated realism. The interaction of the visual and the textual elements create a personal poetry which is open to interpretation.

While a few years apart, Rose Divita and Janet Bloch were graduates of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Both artists were recipients of the 1996 Arts Midwest/NEA Regional Visual Artist Fellowship. Although their aesthetic concerns differ, these two artists use text as an indispensable part of their works. Divita's spare use of a single

word and figure contrasts with her profusely rendered realism. Bloch employs written passages and elaborate compositions to expand her understanding of her identity. When viewed together the works of both artists can be seen as exploring different ends of the same spectrum.

Steven Jones, Curator  
College of Lake County



Janet Bloch, *Skeleton Girl*

# Biographies

## Janet Bloch

Education: MFA, 1980 & BFA, 1978, School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Exhibited Solo: Sioux City Arts Center, Sioux City, IA, 1997. Lyons Weir Gallery, Chicago, IL, 1996. Exhibited: *Self Objects* (2 person show), South Bend Regional Museum of Art, South Bend, IN, 1996. *Indianapolis Regional*, Indianapolis Art Center, Indianapolis, IN, 1995. *Phoenix Gallery's National Juried Exhibition*, New York, NY, 1995. Awards: 1997, Grant-Illinois Arts Council, Visual Artists Fellowship. 1996, Grant-Arts Midwest/NEA Regional, Visual Artists Fellowship. 1995, Purchase Award, Sioux City Art Center. Positions: Gallery Director, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL. Instructor, Columbia College, Chicago, IL.

### Exhibition Checklist

- Retablo*, 1992, gouache and mixed media, 24" x 18", \$1200  
*Our Lady of Sorrows*, 1992, gouache and mixed media, 16" x 13", \$800  
*Till Death Do Us Part*, 1994, gouache and mixed media, 20" x 23", \$1600  
*First Marriage*, 1995, gouache and mixed media, 32" x 28", \$1600  
*Me Three*, 1996, gouache and mixed media, 32" x 28", \$1000  
*Mourner*, 1996, gouache and mixed media, 20" x 20", \$1000  
*Skeleton Girl*, 1996, gouache and mixed media, 21" x 21", \$1000  
*Care Giver*, 1996, gouache and mixed media, 20" x 20", \$1000  
*My Living Doll*, 1996, gouache and mixed media, 21" x 21", \$1200  
*British Invasion*, 1996, gouache and mixed media, 20" x 19", NFS  
*Winter Suicide Fantasy*, 1996, gouache and mixed media, 23" x 21", \$900  
*Anxiety*, 1997, gouache and mixed media, 20" x 20", \$1600  
*Fish Woman Gets a Lesson*, 1997, gouache and mixed media, 18" x 14", \$600  
*Fish Boob*, 1997, gouache and mixed media, 19" x 16", \$500  
*That Fish Girl*, 1997, gouache and mixed media, \$200  
*You're Gonna Make It After All*, 1997, gouache and mixed media, \$200

## Rose Divita

Education: MFA, 1977 & BFA, 1974, School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Exhibited Solo: *Rose Divita*, Noyes Cultural Center, Evanston, IL, 1995. Exhibited: *Chicago Four*, University of Nebraska at Omaha Art Gallery, 1997. *Meticulous* (three person exhibit), Aron Packer Gallery, Chicago, IL, 1997. *Animal Invitational*, Lyons Weir, Ginsberg Gallery, Chicago, IL, 1996. *The Chicago Show*, The Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL, 1990. Awards: Arts Midwest NEA Regional Visual Arts Fellowship Award 1996/1997. Alliance of the Indianapolis Museum of Art Award, 1981. Reviews: Chicago Reader, 6/20/97 and 5/26/95. Taught: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, First Year Program, 1994-95. Asst. Prof., Herron School of Art Indiana University and Purdue University at Indianapolis, 1977-1983.

### Exhibition Checklist

- Want*, 1995, oil on board, 10" x 8 3/4", \$900  
*Skipper*, 1995, oil on board, 10" x 8 3/4", \$700  
*Trudger*, 1995, oil on board, 10" x 8 3/4", NFS  
*Drama*, 1995, oil on board, 8 3/4" x 10", \$900  
*Loss*, 1995, oil on board, 8 3/4" x 10", \$900  
*Alone*, 1997, oil on board, 8 1/4" x 8 3/4", \$900  
*Allure*, 1997, oil on board, 8 1/4" x 8 3/4", \$900  
*Affect*, 1997, oil on board, 8 1/4" x 8 3/4", \$900  
*Appear*, 1997, oil on board, 8 1/4" x 8 3/4", NFS  
*Amuse*, 1997, oil on board, 8 1/4" x 8 3/4", \$900  
*Affront*, 1997, oil on board, 8 1/4" x 8 3/4", \$900  
*Alas*, 1997, oil on board, 8 1/4" x 8 3/4", \$900

**Gallery summer hours:**  
May 22-June 5  
Mon-Fri 8:00 am-4:30 pm  
June 8-26  
Mon-Thur 8:00 am-10:00 pm  
Fri 8:00 am-4:30 pm



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Front, top: Janet Bloch, *Mourner*, 1996, gouache and mixed media  
Front, bottom: Rose Divita, *Trudger*, 1995, oil on board

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