

## Fairy tales come to life in ‘Dread & Delight’ exhibit



MK Guth's "Ties of Protection and Safekeeping."

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The tales that have been woven in the stories we read and movies we watch give us unique insights and perspectives, and also help shape many parts of our individual outlooks on the world. Classic fairy tales like those collected by the Brothers Grimm in the 19th century are full of disturbing imagery, adult situations and violence that rival many of our contemporary horror stories.

“Dread & Delight: Fairy Tales in an Anxious World,” on view at the Akron Art Museum through Sept. 22, features 21 artists who have reinterpreted many of the classic fairy tales. Each of these artists use recognizable elements of one of seven stories — Little Red Riding Hood, Hansel and Gretel, Rapunzel, Cinderella, All

Fur, Fitcher's Bird and Snow White — to address the complexity of life today. They often use the darker elements of each of these stories to explore gender, social roles, sexuality and other parts of daily life.

Making use of multiple galleries in the museum, this exhibit provides what is an often novel, humorous and consistently interesting look into how an artist researches ideas, imagery and meaning while using something as familiar as fairy tales to enhance their own message. It's an extremely entertaining exhibit and while it may have some familiar parts, it is also educational and full of surprises.

“Ties of Protection and Safekeeping” is a large installation made with synthetic hair, flannel ribbon and ink made by the artist MK Guth. For the piece, Guth asked people to write an answer to the question, “What is worth protecting?” on to a piece of red flannel. The artists then wove the answers into a giant long Rapunzel-like braid.

In Akron, the installation takes over one of the larger galleries included in the exhibit and hangs from the ceiling. Walking through and around the piece you can read answers to the question that range from mundane things like a special keepsake to deeper thoughts about how a parent would never allow their child's heart to be broken. The braided hair and the red fabric twist and move visually all over the space and this adds a rhythm and sense of movement that helps engage your eyes and body as you walk around the work.

Another dramatic work included in the exhibit is “Mother-Load,” created by the artist Timothy Horn. The sculpture is a child-sized, Cinderella-like carriage that was created using a variety of materials, but most notably it is coated in a layer of rock sugar and shellac.

The piece was created originally for a show at the de Young Museum in San Francisco. It was inspired by the “rags-to-riches story” of Alma Spreckels, the collector whose sugar fortune was used to found what is now part of the museum. She came from modest beginnings and rose to great wealth. She was never fully accepted by San Francisco society and had distant relationships with all of her children. This piece is Horn's take on a gilded 18th-century Neapolitan sedan chair that Spreckels used as a phone booth in her home. Spreckels had a less-than-perfect life though she achieved great wealth. Horn's sculpture explores and highlights the temporary nature of our existence while at the same time calling into question the values in a society that helped to shape the life of a person like Alma Spreckels.

Some of the more clearly identifiable and directly interpretable works in the exhibit are a series of photographs by Xaviera Simmons titled “If We Believe In Theory,” in which the artist has dressed young people in a red cloak and

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photographed them play-acting like little red riding hood in front of a wooded area. In these images, the artist is capitalizing on the realistic and dramatic nature that can be part of a photograph's power while at the same time creating work that could even be interpreted as autobiographical. They are printed at a rather large size, 40-by-50 inches, and this scale helps to set a stage that invites you in and creates a moment for your own interpretation and memories to take hold.

A piece that was included just for the Akron portion of the exhibit's national tour is "Blue Beard," a cut vinyl work by Romanian-born artist Andrea Dezsö. "Blue Beard" is the French version of the German tale "Fitcher's Bird," in which a wealthy violent man has the habit of murdering his wives. The piece is quite large, reaching from the floor to ceiling. The graphic nature of the artist's mark is highlighted by the black vinyl contrasting with the white wall of the museum.

"Dread & Delight: Fairy Tales in an Anxious World" is the type of exhibit that through its familiar subject matter gives you an opportunity to climb inside the artists' minds and gain a better understanding of the ideas and emotions being related. It's an extremely well-curated show.