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Judy Onofrio

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Just Pretending, 1995

mixed media

86 in. x 50 in. x 32 in. (218.44 cm x 127 cm x 81.28 cm)

The Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection: Gift of the Roy and Christine Sturgis Charitable and Educational Trust, Katie Speer and Barry B. Findley, Trustees, 1996. 96.24

Judy Onofrio

Onofrio's work is filled with fantasy and exuberance. She draws her inspiration from "folk art," often called "outsider art," acknowledging artists who feel compelled to express themselves with no formal art training in their backgrounds. The best manage to find a remarkable variety of imaginative statements, often utilizing a similarly remarkable variety of unconventional materials. Onofrio also credits her great aunt, Trude, who she remembers from childhood as a wonderfully eccentric free spirit.

Though the artist would describe her work as essentially narrative in character, there is rarely a single story or simple meaning behind the plethora of forms. Male and female relationships are often explored, but the artist admits there are subplots as well. In *Just Pretending*, for example, we might wonder if the mermaid is real, imaginary or just a costumed figure. Other images carry the weight of symbolic intent, like the serpent, which here is an icon for good, a male protector. The fruits and flowers are intended to be sexual, with a quiet, seductive intent. There are personal references as well, in the artist's love of swimming.

Most of the material that embellishes the form comes from the artist's frequent excursions to flea markets. They serve to provoke memory and nostalgia in the viewer's mind. In a sense the objects have had a history but are now being put to a new use; a bottle cap for a specific brand of beer, now becomes fish scale on the mermaid.

Judy Onofrio was born in New London, Connecticut in 1939 and was educated at Sullins College, Bristol, Virginia. She originally began her artist career as a ceramist. She now lives in Madison, Wisconsin. Her backyard is known as Judyland.

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