

GRAND GESTURES

Rachel Feinstein, photographed among the large-scale works in progress in her New York studio. L'Wren Scott coat. Gloria Vanderbilt jeans. Her own Fendi shoes. In this story: hair, Renato Campora for Frédéric Fekkai at the Wall Group; makeup, Alice Lane for NARS Cosmetics at Jed Root, Inc. Details, see In This Issue. Sitings Editor: Phyllis Posnick.



HER OWN CREATION

Well-known as an art and fashion muse, Rachel Feinstein puts the spotlight on her work with a fantastical sculpture exhibition in New York. By Dodie Kazanjian. Photographed by Tina Barney.

a succession of vividly dramatic anecdotes. She remembers watching her beloved dachshund froth at the mouth and die after eating a poisonous toad, and many nights spent at the Miami disco Club Nu, where the traveling acts once featured a South American freak show with a 20-inch man sitting on the shoulder of a giant blonde woman. "All this stuff makes you who you are," she says.

Feinstein's Lever House exhibition was ignited by a Hans Christian Andersen story called "The Snow Queen." (It's not the first time she's used a fairy tale; for her New York artistic debut in 1994, at Exit Art, she built a live-in "Hansel and Gretel" gingerbread house and was sleeping in it when John first saw her.) Two years ago, she read "The Snow Queen" to her two boys, Francis, now seven, and Hollis, five, and afterward she couldn't get it out of her head. "It's a very long, very strange story," she tells me, "and in my mind it's about the idea of when and why some children become jaded and go to the dark side. Something just changes in them. They're the people who become drug addicts. They've lost that happy gene they used to have. This is really deep, heavy, scary shit, and that's what this story means to me."

The tale also features plenty of elements that fit right into Feinstein's aesthetic—a palace, a chariot on fire, a goblin with a magic mirror, a boy under an evil spell, and a girl who seeks to save him from the Snow Queen, his captor. The multipart installation will fill the ground-floor lobby of Lever House and spill out into the garden, where her gold-leaf chariot will occupy the site that Damien Hirst's gigantic, pregnant "visible woman" sculpture occupied a few years ago. Inside, the hinged-together troop of oversize, brightly painted wooden soldiers (a nutcracker, a Beefeater, a Napoleonic hussar, and four others) marches across the room. "John thinks it's one of the best things I've ever made," she says. "He feels it's about my fears of what's happening in the world, of war, and children, and the strange combination of the two." She's also building two rooms: a white wooden Carpenter's Gothic chamber where three large Feinstein sculptures will perch in niches, and another (the Snow Queen's lair) whose mirrored walls are covered



SNOW QUEEN L'Wren Scott feather cape and jeans. Gap T-shirt. Christian Louboutin platform heels.

with painted vines. "I'm ripping off Renzo Mongiardino," she says, referring to the legendary Italian interior designer, who was also famous for his dramatic film and stage sets. "In his book *Roomscapes*, he has a mirrored bathroom with trompe l'oeil vines growing over the mirrors." Both Rachel and John are enamored with Mongiardino's lush interiors, and they are currently arguing over whether to use one of his disciples for the interiors of the town house they recently bought near Gramercy Park. "I've been telling John, let's just do the fabulous, insane palace when we're older and we don't have so many needs. But he wants to make the insane palace right now, and screw the coat closets and where we're going to put the bicycles." (Thanks to the prices of Currin's paintings in his recent show at Gagosian, they can afford to do either.)

Rachel and John are both art stars, and this complicates their already over-loaded schedule. Marc Jacobs used her as the "muse" for his 2004 ad campaign, and Tom Ford recently enlisted her to model for the first women's line under his own label. (She lost fifteen pounds to do it: "I made myself stop eating the two helpings of dessert after dinner.") Being a fashion icon doesn't get in the way of Rachel's ambitions as a serious artist. It's all part of an unabashed embrace of her world in its infinite variety.

Everyone wants Rachel and John to appear at their openings and parties, and the three children all demand, and get, a lot of daily attention. "I can't help myself," she says. "I want to make sculpture, big sculpture, but I'm in a funny conflict all the time. My conflict is that I'm a sculptor, and I'm a woman, and I'm a mother. As a mother, you're supposed to be 100 percent there for your children, and you're never supposed to be selfish. But if you're an artist, it's all about being selfish. It's what I want to see and who I am. All very complicated. I don't think you can be a great mother and a great artist and run a great house and be a great woman at parties and be great to your friends and great to your family."

Spend five minutes with Rachel, though, and you'll come away thinking she can. It's clear that she's in love with her life, her husband, her children, and her work. "What I long for the most is not my youth," she says. "It's simplicity." □

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