

RISD MUSEUM

Raid the Icebox Now with Beth Katleman: Games of Chance, November 8, 2019-July 4, 2021

The world is still deceived with ornament.
–William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

How can we reconcile a wealthy art patron’s personal wrongdoings with the merits of his or her collection? In 1904, Charles Pendleton donated his prized collection of decorative arts to the RISD Museum, specifying that the museum build a replica of his house in which to display it. Although Pendleton has invited us into his “home,” his personal life remains a mystery. What little we know is scandalous: he was expelled from Yale for an “indiscretion with a female” and later became an avid gambler. Yet by donating his collection to the museum, he honed his image as a gentleman for posterity.

In this intervention, I shine a light on Pendleton’s inner life, embellishing liberally. In the corridor leading into the domestic sphere of Pendleton House, I’ve created a lavish porcelain room made from cast toys, figurines, corporate mascots, and other pop icons. The muse for *Games of Chance* is Fortuna, the Roman goddess of luck. A blindfolded Marilyn Monroe represents the goddess, who, with a spin of her wheel, conjures a shipwreck on one side of the room and paradise on the other.

As Andy Warhol did, I use pop icons such as Marilyn Monroe to highlight contrasts between public and private personas. I am intrigued by the contradictions between the polite veneer of Pendleton House and Charles Pendleton’s disreputable behavior. What if, rather than burnishing a patron’s reputation, a museum space illuminated his or her indiscretions?

As I created this work, my imagination morphed actual events from Pendleton’s life into surreal fairy tales. I invite you to enter this strange world and fill in the details for yourself.

Beth Katleman is an American sculptor based in Brooklyn, New York. She is best known for creating extravagantly detailed rococo installations laced with dark humor and literary references. Katleman casts found objects such as vintage dolls and other flea-market trinkets in white porcelain and arranges them into ornate tableaus. Her work fuses elements of high and low art and creates allegories that draw from pop culture, fairy tales, and classic literature.

Raid the Icebox Now is made possible by a lead grant from the National Endowment for the Arts with additional support from the RISD Museum Associates, Judy and Robert Mann, Taylor Box Company, and a generous in-kind gift from Meyer Sound Laboratories.

RISD Museum is supported by a grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, through an appropriation by the Rhode Island General Assembly and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and with the generous partnership of the Rhode Island School of Design, its Board of Trustees, and Museum Governors.

RISD MUSEUM

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Beth Katleman, American, b. 1959

Games of Chance, 2019

Porcelain installation

Courtesy of Beth Katleman TL151.2019

