

The Bungalow that Art Built

Artist Karin Broker takes us into her bungalow compound where life intersects with art.

Artist Karin Broker's life falls neatly into two categories: life before she married real estate developer Mark Witte and life after. Once she tied the knot, she found the themes of her creative expression changed as much as the creature comforts of her surrounds. Inside the couple's 1920s bungalow and the artist's adjoining studio, one can understand exactly the effects on her new works: glorious, often enormous, Conté drawings on Formica-covered panels, sculptures that range from life-size iron silhouettes to her latest series of fanciful boxes and dolls adorned with beautiful vintage paste jewels.



It's a Beautiful Life

Karin Broker, abuzz with energy, laughs easily. You'll often find her running from Rice University, where she serves as chair of the Department of Visual Arts, to her house/studio compound. Or she might be on her way to the horse farm in Magnolia that she shares with her husband, a 17-acre weekend retreat where she rides dressage and works for hours at her easel. "Before my marriage, my work was filled with angst — dark, a lot of boxes, the relationship thing was on my mind," Broker says. "When I

got married, I was on sabbatical from Rice, and I realized that I loved beautiful things ... that was a really terrible place seemingly to go, from angst to admitting I like silver and crystal and the trappings of domesticity."

Sketching on massive panels of Formica, she renders pretty cabbage roses, peonies and sprays of lush, delicate blooms in vivid black-and-white detail, softened with a water wash, yet usually devoid of even the slightest blush of color. "I started working on flowers before I met Mark, but they were connected to loss, to melancholy,"

she says. "After Mark, it wasn't that way at all."

Raised east of Pittsburgh in a quaint town called Penn, Broker became entranced with the crystal manufactured nearby. Reflective of its delicacy and luminance, her latest work, to be featured this fall at McClain Gallery, is indicative of her newly discovered love of beautiful objects. Using vintage rhinestone jewelry, much of it found at flea markets, she deconstructs old tin boxes and antique porcelain doll heads and fashions decorative busts encrusted with glittering stones and charms.

Left: On her "religious wall" in the dining room, a 1501 engraving by Albrecht Dürer, an etching by William Blake and a photogravure by Rice University professor Geoff Winningham. Broker teaches printmaking and drawing at Rice and is drawn to historical and contemporary prints.