

Suzanne Sbarga
COLLAGE PAINTINGS



Serenade, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 16 x 12 inches

Night Bird Through Opera Glasses

By Mary Anne Redding

Once upon a time, when women were birds, there was the simple understanding that to sing at dawn and to sing at dusk was to heal the world through joy. The birds still remember what we have forgotten, that the world is meant to be celebrated.

—*When Women Were Birds* by Terry Tempest Williams

The artist leaves the arts administrator's world of rational organized thought, retiring to her sacred nest where she spends the evening spinning secrets—strange surrealistic worlds inhabited by isolated dreams of Hieronymus Bosch conflated with the words of her grandfather and great grandfather, both scribal rabbis who passed down their love of mysticism to the cherished inheritor of their ageless knowledge.

Plant life, butterfly wings, iridescent pearls, sea creatures, land animals, and beautifully strange birds become the habitat for metaphors of fertility, regeneration, and both spiritual and sexual freedom. Suzanne Sbarge's fascination with birds is inspired by the paradox between: "their freedom of flight and the stability of their domesticity." The artist, through her acts of creation, undergoes a metamorphosis through divine agency, experiencing an awakening, an obsession, the hint of a tease, an ancient myth, an interrogation, a celebration of a life of hope in the midst of the chaos of the mediated world of nature—a world under increasing siege so poignantly revealed in *Flood Song* (p. 3) and *Island* (p. 7).

Suzanne's painted collages open doorways into the ambiguous space of the night: dreams brim with narrative probability yet remain resistant to literal interpretation. There are libraries of potential in a single image—the lyricism of worlds breaking apart to be restructured into new impossible possibilities, the lost physicality of paint and paper in our sterile digital age—memories and the songs of the birds. Music is important, a quiet reference to the self: the artist plays the accordion (a secret revealed) and married into musical royalty. The song continues.



I live with several of Suzanne's collaged paintings; they haunt my nights and enrich my days like Margo Timmon's lyrics, reminding me of connections that lie beneath the waves as rock becomes my anchor and bird becomes my dream, offering me endless skies to search for buried memories of art, experience, a shared passion for the desert and its ancient wisdom that draws us together through space and across time: I succumb to an alchemical longing.

Scientists have recently discovered a surprising super-massive black hole that estimates with great accuracy when starlight first filled our universe. On earth, we have always looked to the stars to find out where we are. Suzanne's paintings speak to this searching. In *Constellation II* (p. 4), starlight cyclones through the tiny house and tunnels into the earth, providing a map for knowing where we are. Similarly, the figures in *Clay Pigeon* (p. 7) and *Leopard II* (p. 6) are bound to the map beneath their feet but look to the sky for a different kind of knowledge. Suzanne's art reminds us indeed, that our world in all its mysteries is meant to be celebrated.



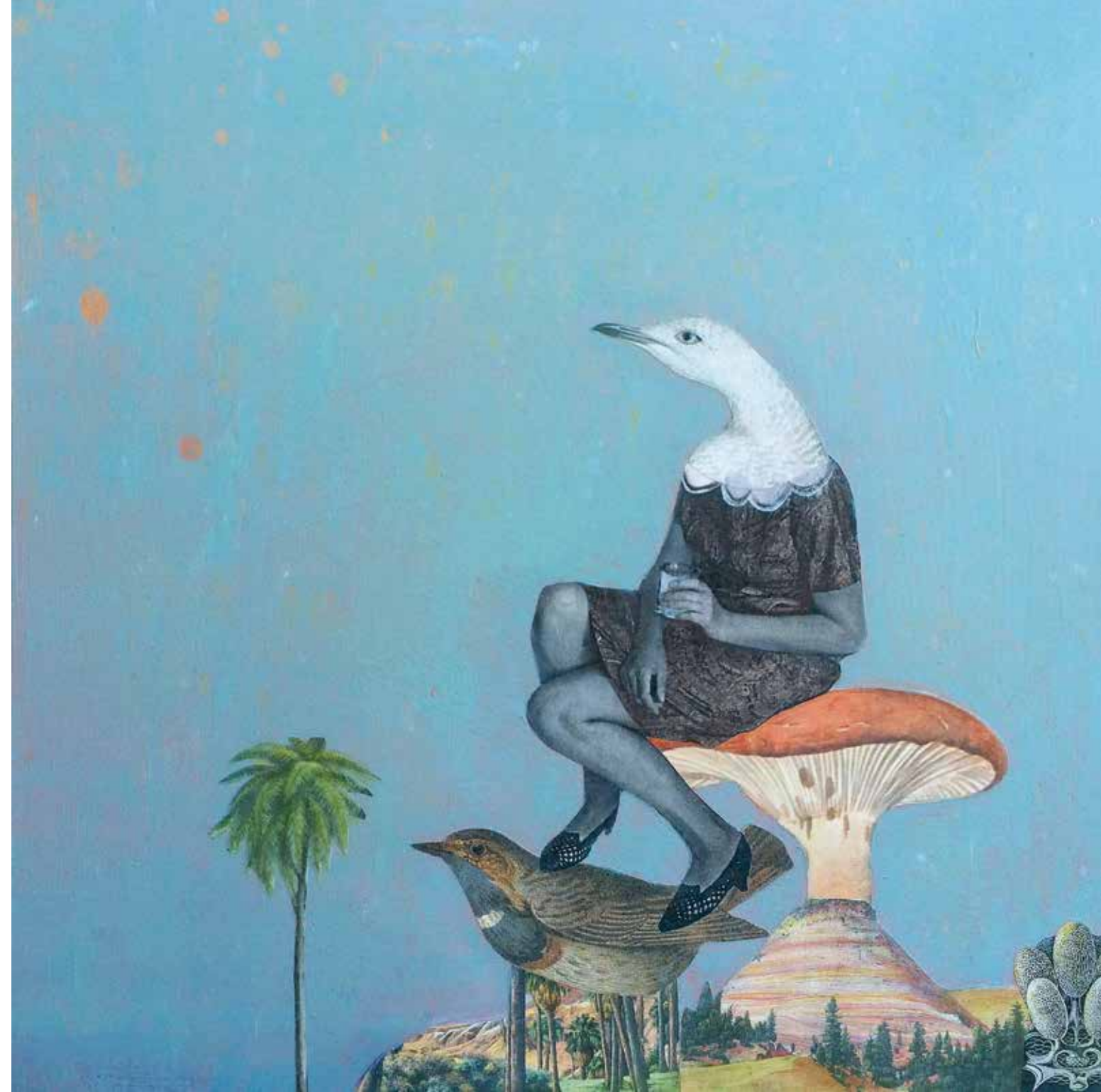
Clay Pigeon, 2007, oil & collage on panel, 16 x 16 inches



Constellation II, 2005, oil & collage on panel, 6 x 6 inches



Leopard II, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 8 x 8 inches



Island, 2015, oil & collage on panel, 16 x 16 inches



WINGED VICTORIES: Mystical Images by Suzanne Sbarge

By Jennifer Levin

Pasatiempo Magazine, December 1, 2017

If looking at *Parrot Couple* [p. 13], a collage by Albuquerque artist Suzanne Sbarge, inspires you to listen to the 1969 Leonard Cohen song “Bird on a Wire,” Sbarge would take that information in stride with a smile. You could excitedly tell her all the reasons the image made you think of the lyrics to a song you haven’t heard in years, and she would be thrilled that you made a personal association with the piece, in which a parrot with the head of a woman sits next to a regular parrot on a tree limb. Farther down the limb, another parrot woman looks on, her expression one of passive jealousy — while the other such creature appears judgmental and a little self-satisfied. Sbarge would then explain, with some delight, that she didn’t weave any such narrative into the collage.

“The pieces really look like they tell a story, and I like that narrative quality, but I also like that it’s open-ended and doesn’t resolve,” she said. “When I’m working, if a situation becomes too obvious, then I don’t pursue it, or I change it, because I’m always looking for that place where you can’t figure it out. You’re drawn in but left wondering.”

As in *Parrot Couple* (p. 13), the other works in her show *Meta/Morph* at Turner Carroll Gallery combine and juxtapose humans, animals, and plant life in a timeless, dreamlike environment that is sometimes reminiscent of paintings by Max Ernst. They range in size from just four inches square to the 42-by-36-inch *Out on a Limb* (p. 12), a collage of two bird women who are potentially in competition for the affections of a regular bird. In the way of dreams, the scenario is both strikingly surreal and completely normal. One bird woman wears a crown of pink flowers while the other looks like she might be on break from her job at a department-store makeup counter. The regular bird has greenish feathers and bedroom eyes.

Head Dress, 2017, oil & collage on photograph, 14 x 10 inches

Sbargo grew up in Connecticut and moved to Albuquerque in 1989 to attend graduate school at the University of New Mexico. “They had a great program that doesn’t exist anymore — a master’s in art therapy from a post-Jungian archetypal perspective. We studied a lot of dreams and mythology. We worked with imagery more than clinical practice, which I really loved as an artist. But when it came to working in the field, the jobs were really in psych hospitals, which I didn’t want to do.” She bought a house in the South Valley neighborhood, where she still lives today. A guesthouse functions as her art studio and as a residence for visiting artists that come to 516 ARTS, a contemporary art space in downtown Albuquerque, which she founded in 2006 on behalf of the McCune Charitable Foundation; she is now its executive director.

As a young artist, Sbargo worked in photography and transitioned to collage over time, first painting with oils on top of her pictures and eventually cutting up photographs to reinvent the images they contained. She has refined her practice throughout the years; today she paints surfaces with brightly colored acrylics and collages images she gets from old books over that layer, seals the collage surface with gel medium, and then paints on top of that with oils. She favors birds, wild cats, and women and animals with big, serious eyes. Her compositions, informed by a background in graphic design, bring together various disparate elements to be in constant conversation with each other within a vintage-inspired but thoroughly modern tonal sensibility.

Meta/Morph includes *Seated Cat* (p. 15), an image of a house cat with Shirley MacLaine’s head, as well as one of a kangaroo with a human head in its pouch, and another of a mischievous-looking monkey sitting on the lap of a man wearing an acorn for a hat. In *Coyote* (p. 14), a small child in a lacy Victorian-era christening dress gazes at the viewer with a slightly dour expression on its dog face. A rabbit, a deer, a squirrel, and a raccoon perch nearby, hiding in plain sight in a manner reminiscent of an illuminated manuscript or post-apocalyptic bestiary. This visual language extends from piece to piece, with repeating imagery that shows up in surprisingly different contexts, lending Sbargo’s work the feeling of being one continuous series.

“I’m always thinking about how the parts can come together in a way that creates some kind of balance, but also some kind of dissonance that opens up my mind and the viewer’s mind. There are certain faces, hands, birds, and natural plants and things that I use over and over in different situations. A plant might be half of a face in one piece and part of a house in a different piece. So, the bits of collage I use become — I don’t want to call them symbols — but they have qualities that are sort of fluid.”

Her preoccupation with animal-human hybrids and an otherworldly use of flora stems from concern about global warming and animals that have gone extinct — or are in danger of doing so. “It’s about the connectivity among all creatures. On a planetary level and a soul level, we’re interconnected not only through biology and the environment, but also spiritually — though not in a religious way,” she said. “We’re really connected to other beings, and that’s kind of what I think about as I’m working. Animals are part of human consciousness. As we lose animals, we are losing parts of our own consciousness.”

This holistic and deeply empathetic view of humanity may stem from Sbargo’s creative childhood. Recently, looking through old photographs, she found picture after picture of herself as a little kid immersed in concentration, drawing and cutting things up, crafting and knitting. Her father came from a family of Russian Jewish refugees, and her mother, who is in her late eighties now, is a Holocaust survivor. “She and her parents escaped Paris in 1941 and got on a boat that they thought was going to America. It went to Martinique, in the Caribbean, and they ended up in a very unusual location for a concentration camp. But they got out. My grandfather, who I was very close to and who lived to be 101, was an amazing artist. He was a rabbi and a calligrapher, and he spoke many languages. He had a mystical quality and was kind of psychic. He was a scientist, too, in addition to all these other things. I feel like I definitely have his spirit in me.”

Sbargo’s work has never been about her family’s traumas or daring escape stories, and yet there is a sense of risk in her collages, and of the dead being conjured. The pieces convey a consciousness that is suspended between sleeping and waking, and a profound humor bubbling up from beneath a font of sadness — or vice versa. In *Gull* (p. 16), a woman with the head of a seagull, wearing an old-fashioned white bathing suit, feeds smaller gulls that swoop down at her along a waterfront. In one hand, she holds a fish she might be saving for her own dinner. The sky behind her is neither cloudy nor sunny, the weather somehow calm and ominous at once. The image should be terrifying, but the gull woman doesn’t seem afraid at all.

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Suzanne Sbargo: Meta/Morph

December, 2017 • Turner Carroll Gallery, 725 Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico



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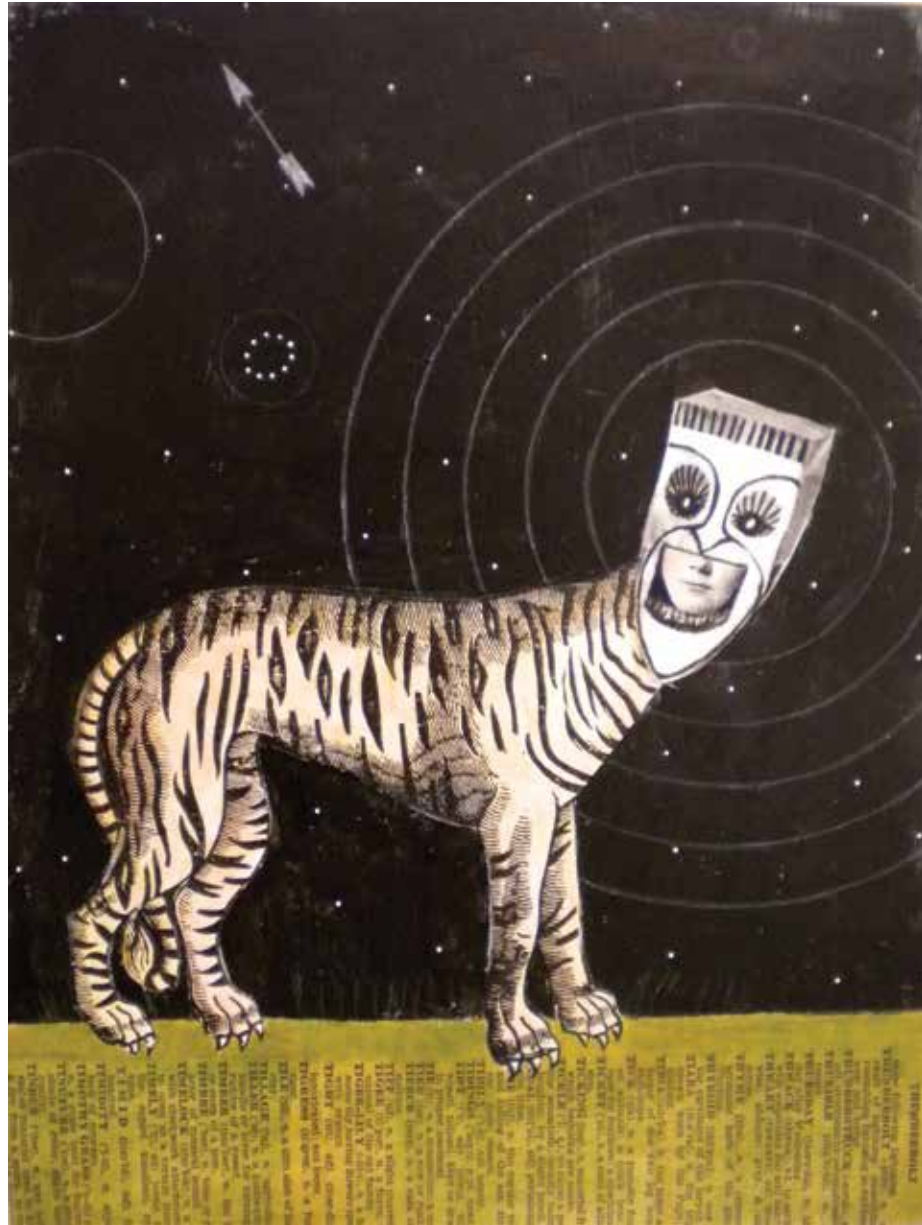
Parrot Couple, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 16 x 16 inches
Out on a Limb, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 42 x 36 inches



Seated Cat, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 7 x 5 inches
Coyote, 2017, oil & collage on photograph, 14 x 10 inches

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Tiger, 2011, oil & collage on panel, 11 x 8 inches



Thrush, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 8 x 10 inches

Horned Moth, 2015, oil & collage on photograph, 11 x 8.25 inches

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Puff, 2016, oil & collage on panel, 5 x 5 inches
Radiate, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 20 x 16 inches

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Fish, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 4 x 4 inches



Beak, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 4 x 4 inches



Foliage, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 6 x 6 inches



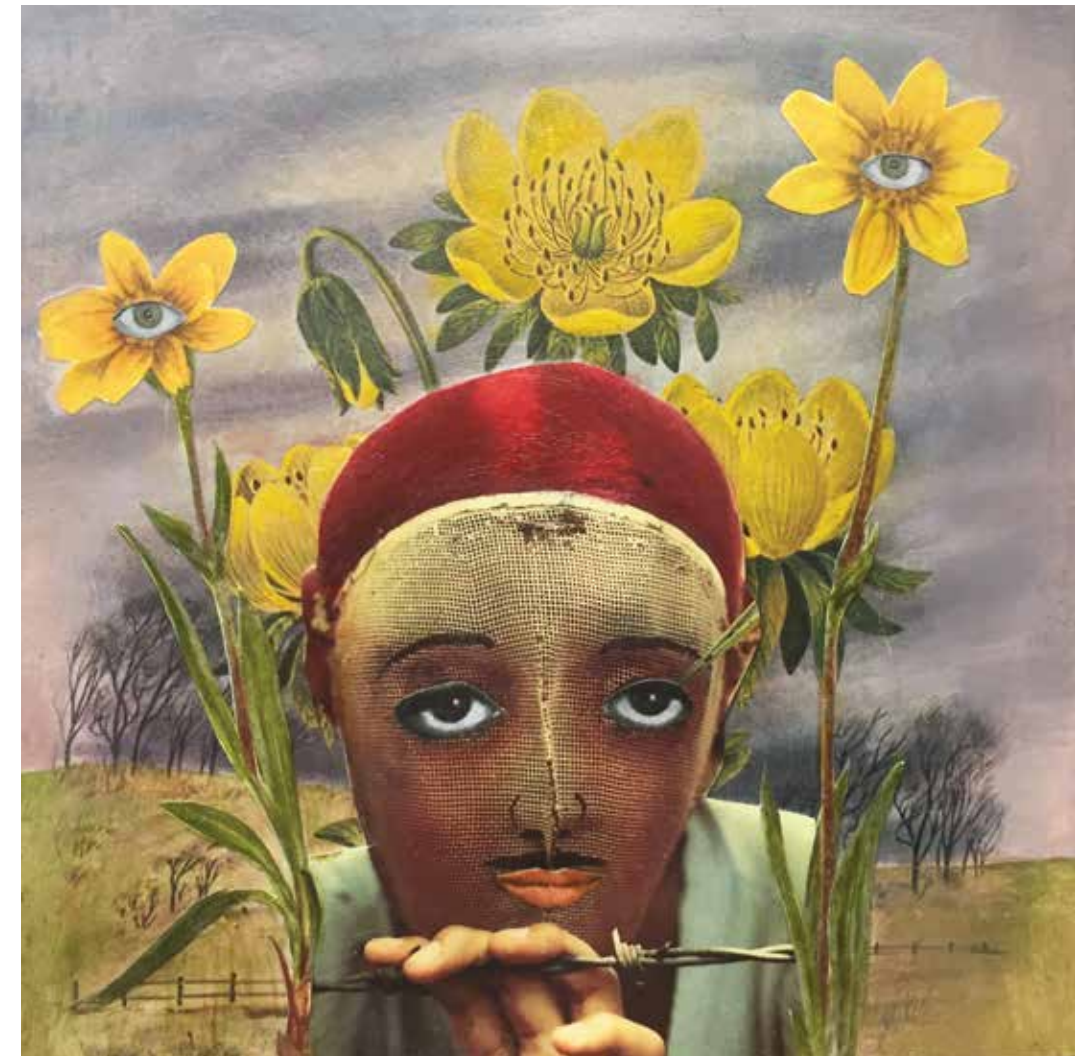
Ostrich, 2015, oil & collage on panel, 8 x 8 inches



Bikini, 2006, oil & collage on panel, 16 x 16 inches



Gull, 2017, oil & collage on paper, 5 x 3,5 inches



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Yellow Flora, 2016, oil & collage on panel, 8 x 8 inches

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Violets, 2016, oil & collage on panel, 12 x 9 inches



Owl 2015, oil & collage on panel, 4 x 4 inches



Wild Turkey, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 21 x 18 inches



Cape, 2017, oil & collage on photograph, 17 x 10 inches



Hat, 2017, oil & collage on photograph, 17 x 10 inches



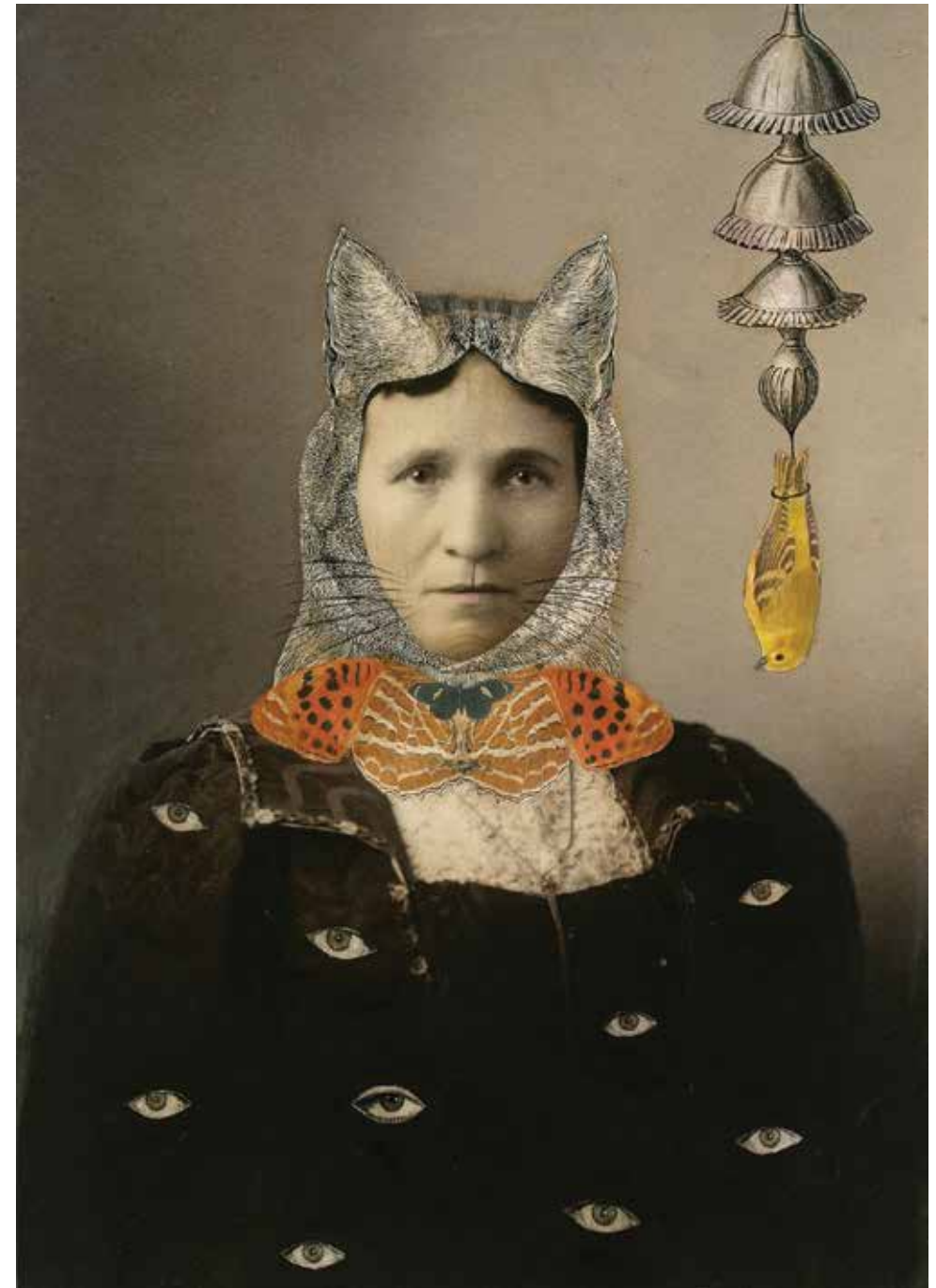
Fish Head, 2017, collage on photograph, 6 x 4 inches



Ferret, 2017, collage on photograph, 6 x 4.5 inches



Seabird II, 2017, collage on photograph, 7 x 4 inches



Woman with Yellow Bird, 2010, oil & collage on photograph, 14 x 10 inches



Couch Bird, 2007, oil & collage on panel, 8 x 8 inches



Mondrian Dress, 2015, oil & collage on panel, 16 x 7.75 inches



Kangaroo, 2016, oil & collage on panel, 8 x 8 inches



Tornado, 2011, oil & collage on panel, 12 x 12 inches



Mushrooms, 2015, oil & collage on photograph, 14 x 9.5 inches



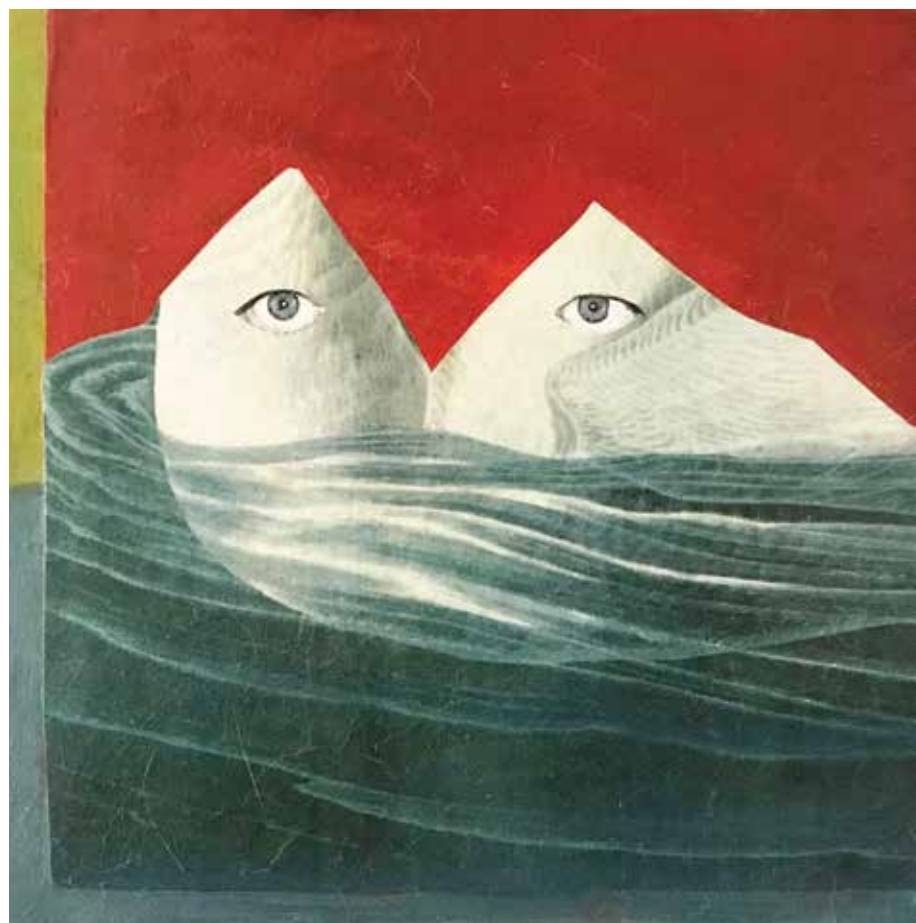
Potatoes, 2015, oil & collage on photograph, 14 x 10 inches



Russian, 2017, oil & collage on panel, 4 x 4 inches



Hula Cat, 2018, oil & collage on paper, 5 x 3.5 inches



Icebergs, 2014, oil & collage on panel, 8 x 8 inches
Accordion II, 2016, oil & collage on panel, 10.5 x 6.5 inches

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Blue Jay, 2016, oil & collage on panel, 11 x 9 inches
Observatories, 2005, oil & collage on panel, 34 x 30 inches

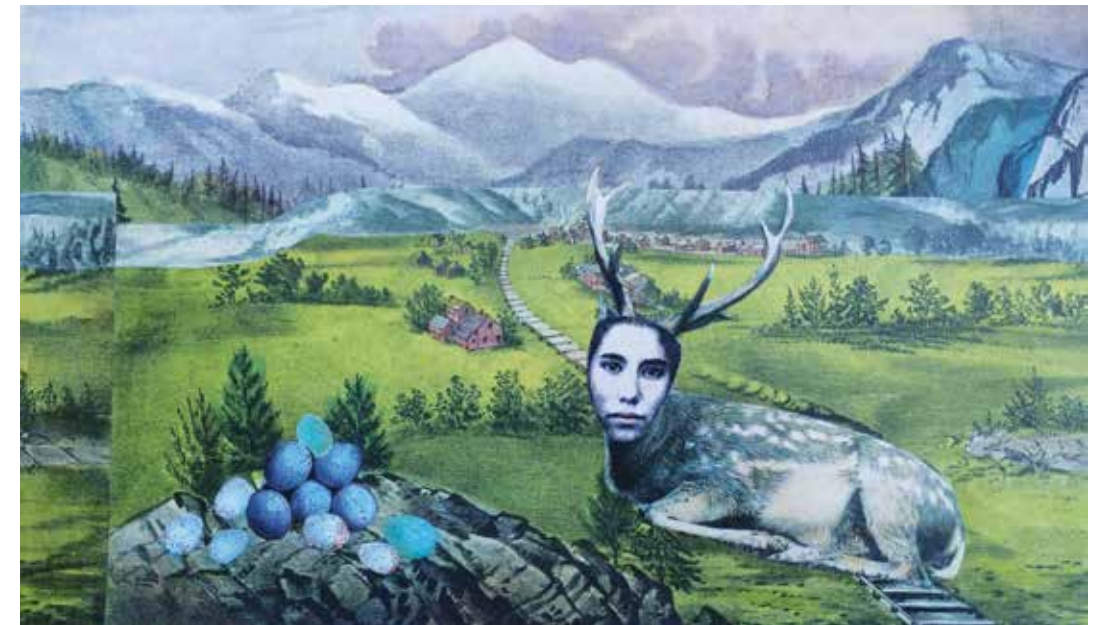
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Outing, 2009, oil & collage on panel, 16 x 16 inches



Deer II, 2015, oil & collage on panel, 7.75 x 13 inches

Suzanne Sbarge

b. 1965, Hartford, Connecticut

EDUCATION

M.A. Degree: University of New Mexico, Art Education, 1991.

B.A. Degree: Barnard College, New York City: Art History & Studio Arts, 1987.

Non-degree work:

Vermont Studio Center, 12/02, 12/04, 12/05, 8/07, 8/09.

Penland School of Crafts, North Carolina, 2000, 1998.

Anderson Ranch, Colorado, 1997.

University of Massachusetts, 1988 - 1989.

University of Connecticut, 1987 - 1988.

Syracuse University Art Program, Florence, Italy, 1985.

Art Student's League, New York City, 1984 - 1986.

L'Ecole des Beaux Arts, Toulouse, France, winter 1982 - 1983.

Rhode Island School of Design, summer, 1982.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2017: *Meta/Morph*, Turner Carroll Gallery, Santa Fe, NM.

2015: *A Wing and a Prayer*, Mariposa Gallery, Albuquerque, NM.

2010: *New Work*, Harwood Art Center, Albuquerque, NM.

2007: *Breathing Space*, Mariposa Gallery, Albuquerque, NM.

2006: *Inside Out*, Nüart Gallery, Santa Fe, NM.

2005: *Earth to Honey*, PaperGami, Albuquerque, NM.

2004: Solo exhibition, Volakis Gallery, Yountville, CA.

2003: *Bird's-eye View*, solo exhibition, Harwood Art Center, Albuquerque, NM.

2001: *Hybrids*, solo exhibition, Guadalupe Fine Art, Santa Fe, NM.

2000: *Apogee*, Orbit Gallery, St. Paul, MN.

Polarities, Guadalupe Fine Art, Santa Fe, NM.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2015: *Public Selects*, Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, NM.

Encompass, Harwood Art Center, Albuquerque, NM.

2014: *Real and Surreal*, Sandra Lee Gallery, San Francisco, CA.

Axle Indoors, Peters Projects, Santa Fe, NM.

Poetics of Light: Pinhole Photography, New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe, NM.

2009: *Albuquerque Now*, Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, NM.

2008: *Miniatures 2008*, Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, NM.

Inception, SCA Contemporary Art, Albuquerque, NM.

Site Unseen, SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM.

Alice and Wonderland, Wally Workman Gallery, Austin, TX.

2007: *Echoes of Surrealism*, Volakis Gallery, Yountville, CA.

Summer Show, g2 Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ.

Spirit Room, Fargo, ND

Cut & Paste: The Collage Show, curated by James Kaufman, TAG Gallery, Nashville, TN.

2006: *Intimate Works*, Bachelier Cardonsky Gallery, Kent, CT.

Against the Grain, Galleri Urbane, Marfa, TX.

2005: *Wild & Sweet*, Orpheum Art Center, Albuquerque, NM.

Mythical Tales, Melanee Cooper Gallery, Chicago, IL.

2003: *Faces & Figures*, Galleri Urbane, Silver City, NM.

Fresh, Galleri Urbane, Silver City, NM.

2002: *3 Corners*, Eye Lounge, Phoenix, AZ.

Now, Fort 105, Albuquerque, NM.

2001: *Superstition*, Fort 105, Albuquerque, NM.

1999: *Cleavage: An Exhibition on the Breast*, Jonson Gallery, Albuquerque, NM.

1998: *Photographers, Or Maybe Not...*, The Harwood Art Center, Albuquerque, NM.

House Show, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL.

The Manipulated Photographic Image, FACET, Taos, NM.

1997: *No Edition*, Lucy Gallery, Albuquerque, NM.

Dreamworks by Contemporary Women Artists, Guadalupe Fine Art, Santa Fe, NM.

Extending the Photograph, The Harwood Art Center, Albuquerque, NM.

1994: *Art of the Spirit*, University of Arkansas Fine Art Gallery

Thirty Under Thirty, Ralph Greene Gallery, Albuquerque, NM.

1993: *Power to Feminism*, Centennial Gallery, Albuquerque, NM.

1992: *The Universal Link*, University of Texas Health & Science Center, San Antonio, TX.

1991: *A Sense of Place*, Raw Space Gallery, Albuquerque, NM.

SELECTED ARTICLES

Winged Victories: Mystical Images by Suzanne Sbarge, Jennifer Levin, cover story, Pasatiempo, 12/1/17.

Playful and Liberating, Megan Bennett, The Journal North, 12/1/17.

Animals in the Human Imagination, Emily Van Cleve, Santa Fe Art Journal, 11/27/17.

Review: *New Work*, THE Magazine, 6/10.

Suzanne Sbarge, Mixed Media Collage Artist, Spring Griffin, Albuquerque THE Magazine, 7/07.

Breathing Space, Kevin Hopper, Local IQ, 2/22/07.

Review: *Suzanne Sbarge: Inside Out*, Jon Carver, THE Magazine, 6/06.

Cut & Paste: Artist combines collage & oils, Dan Mayfield, Albuquerque Journal, 4/16/06.

Maps and Legends: Suzanne Sbarge, Real and Virtual, Steven Robert Allen, The Weekly Alibi, 7/15/05.

Sbarge's Surreal World Takes Wing, Wesley Pulkka, Albuquerque Journal, 3/16/03.

Four Corners, Joshua Rose, Shade Magazine, Phoenix, AZ, meaty issue, 2002.

Review: *Hybrids*, Laura Addison, THE Magazine, 12/01.

Suzanne Sbarge's Surreal Scenes, Lynn Cline, Pasatiempo, The Santa Fe New Mexican, 11/01.

Review: *Polarities*, Jon Carver, THE Magazine, 10/00.

GALLERY REPRESENTATION

Turner Carroll Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Mariposa Gallery, Albuquerque, New Mexico



Above:

Cardinal, 2011, oil & collage on panel, 9.5 x 24 inches

Front Cover:

Horned Moth, 2015, oil & collage on panel, 11 x 8.25 inches

Acknowledgements

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suzannesbarge.com

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