



Shannon Cartier Lucy

*Silver Bells and Cockle Shells*

March 7th - April 20th 2024

I've been present on at least three occasions where Shannon Cartier Lucy is compared to Annie Hall. It's never reductive — she is such a character, such a naif — but always an attempt to get at something unknowable about her way of thinking. How does she integrate so much depth with such levity? Even among her friends, she is fascinating.

The realism in Lucy's paintings makes them seem immediately knowable, but their strangeness makes that knowledge impossible. Even calling the paintings "strange" puts too fine a box around them. They are off-kilter, but only slightly. A girl's head being cradled a little too tightly; a well-dressed party guest reaching for a snack from underneath the table. These are the scenes in a film right before the camera tilts its angle, before the dolly swings out and exposes the broken scenery that had been just out of frame.

Look for the cinema in Lucy's paintings. The Hitchcock lighting and the Polanski tension. How she swings her unique perspective around and pulls up memories you'd forgotten, smashes them with daydreams you thought were yours alone. Dylan and the Lamb might remind you of a story you half-remember from Sunday School mixed with a childhood obsession with Bianca Jagger's white silk wedding tuxedo.

The nursery rhymes Lucy borrows ideas from in some of these paintings travel along a similar trajectory. The fragments you hold in your head from childhood are part of a larger story that isn't always clear until many years later. But that original thought, with its skewed perspective and child's logic, often contains truths that are deeper than the well-considered, big-picture version. Lucy understands that intuitively.

Their words may change meaning over time, but those original intentions carry over, like a secret code we've all memorized without understanding. After all, the idea of childhood is a relatively recent phenomenon, and only in the past few hundred years have children been seen as separate from adults. For that reason, the adult themes in nursery rhymes are sometimes blatant — a baby falling, "cradle and all," from a tree top, or a man falling off a wall and splitting into pieces — but we've heard them so many times that we've grown accustomed to them, and might even associate them with sweet melodies and storybook illustrations.

Other times those adult themes are more coded, as in the rhyme "Mary Mary Quite Contrary," which Lucy references in the title of this exhibition — there are claims that both silver bells and cockle shells are specific types of torture devices used by "Bloody" Queen Mary I of England. Even the "pretty maids all in a row" may have referred to the mythical iron maiden. Whether or not those claims are true is secondary — it makes a great story.

Imagine a time-lapse video from the perspective of the nursery rhyme this exhibition takes its name from. Its early creation, the many times it was sung by all children who grew up and out of childhood, their lives full of loss and worry and love, who then sang their own children the same songs they remember, but maybe the edges are softened. It's a generational game of telephone that picks up the residue of tragedy and reinterprets it as something that is both familiar and strange, until it becomes something like an aristocratic widow balancing seashells in each hand as though she's a belly dancer holding finger cymbals. It's not the truth that matters, but the story.

Lucy is here to tell us the stories we would have otherwise forgotten.

—Laura Hutson Hunter