

Celia Eberle

By Catherine D. Ansporn

If you crossed surrealism with archeology, then added antique porcelain and needlework plus vintage plush toy animals, you might approach Celia Eberle's mindset. But beware— all is not as it seems in this strange universe. Those 13th-century porcelains are fake. The crewel embroidery has been wildly altered by the addition of felt applique. And those toys are more disturbing than endearing, with weird limbs and eyes sprouting in unnatural places.

Eberle has achieved startling effects in a 20-plus-year career that has encompassed painting, drawing, sculpture, performance, and installation. Her media read like an odd, if ingenious, shopping list: mouton, fake fur, alabaster, found toys, bone, plaster, gesso, papier-mâché, Styrofoam. "I grew up in the Big Thicket, or pine curtain," she says about her semi-rural upbringing in Longview, Texas. Her father, a union president, and later nightclub owner, taught her to "look at discrepancies and read between lines."

Eberle graduated with a BFA from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, in 1974. After living in Longview for years, she moved in 2002 in Ennis, where she resides with her husband, Frank (who builds and restores cars), in a contemporary metal building on a remote patch of land with cattle as neighbors—an existence worlds removed from the glitz and glamour of Dallas, even though it's just a 45-minute drive away. Eberle is closely connected with Dallas, however, having exhibited there since 1987. In fact, a 2002 Dallas Museum of Art travel grant sent her to investigate the porcelain centers of Europe, which resulted in her "faux porcelain" series.

Among Eberle's most memorable projects to date are the ambitious "Body of God" installed at Gray Matters (Dallas, 1998), which included a two-story maze representing the *Bowels of God* and a giant wasps' nest, complete with realistic wasps, representing the *Mind of God* (re-created small-scale in alabaster, 2006); *Paw*, in which a human donned a giant faux-fur paw at a

neighborhood intersection for a solo at Mulchahy Modern (Dallas, 2001); and “Sweat,” again for Mulchahy (2004), which re-created a bedroom decked out in quilts, faux-porcelain lamps, and framed embroideries.

Recent works, crafted in her farm-shed studio, incorporate “Artifacts” formed from bone, coral, stone, and jet. These creations suggest “a culture that assumes there is no difference between past, present, and future,” Eberle says. “This opens the door to the pursuit of meaning on many levels and allows for a collision of materials and methods.”