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# All She Can Cluster

*Illogic and randomness dictate the singular collages of Patricia Nix*

Written by JOHN THOMASON

After conquering the art market in her native Texas and spending 35 years in the hallowed art capital of New York City, Patricia Nix moved to Palm Beach because she wanted a quiet life. After three and a half years living and working in a sprawling second-story flat on Worth Avenue, she admits that “it hasn’t worked out that way.”

In fact, she may be busier than ever. Nix has been creating art since age 11 and has exhibited around the world, selling paintings for six figures in a career that has spanned six decades. But thanks to “American Baroque,” a rapturously received retrospective at the Boca Raton Museum of Art last year, Nix has been discovered by new audiences.

The show’s opening brought more than 600 attendees to the museum, more than any summer unveiling in recent history. And Nix, in her trips down to Boca to interact with museumgoers, encountered many repeat visitors drawn to her singular style, which combines the collage aesthetics of Joseph Cornell with her own thematic motifs. In addition to her multi-canvas paintings, Nix sculpts boxes and totems from personal mementos and flea market ephemera, from doll parts to broken instruments to animal horns.

Though she’s lived in cosmopolitan epicenters, Nix is a Palm Beach anomaly whose outsider art is far removed from the gilded antiques and blinding Pop art found elsewhere on the island. She also eschews the pretensions artists

assume when discussing their process. She calls people “darlin’,” and when she feels she’s wading too deep into art theory, she asks, “Am I making sense to you?” in the kind of thick Texas drawl you just want to bottle and sell.

“I make the first stroke with no preconception at all,” she says. “But the first stroke tells me where to go for the second. I am not smart enough to preconceive those complex things; [if I did], they would be just like everybody’s arrangements of junk.”

“I like for everything in my paintings to look accidental—preferably to be accidental,” she adds. “But to make that many accidents that work takes years. And if anything looks intentional, I can’t

stand it. How obscure is that? I have to create more and more and more accidents.”

And creation can take its toll. Nix is in her eighties, and completing the four brand-new commissioned works that “American Baroque” required led to insomnia, loss of appetite and three hospitalizations. She had a sciatica attack, from overwork, shortly after the show opened.

But Nix is already planning her next exhibition, once she finds a museum that will host it: a series of paintings inspired by the tarot, which has been a decades-long inspiration. “I have all the major arcana almost finished,” she says.

We’ll keep waiting for the accidents to happen.

“I like for everything in my paintings to look accidental—preferably to be accidental!”

The artist with her monumental work “Circus Maximus”



