

## Maggie Taylor Surrealistic Dreamscapes

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*Burden of Dreams*

Maggie Taylor's photomontages, an amalgam of the old and the new, are comprised of 19<sup>th</sup> century daguerreotypes, old illustrations, contemporary photographs, as well as various objects and artifacts; all layered together through digital image editing. The resulting artworks are surrealistic dreamscapes—that demand time and attention from the viewer to fully comprehend.

Taylor's *Burden of Dreams*, a visual duet of a woman and a man, features old photographic portraits found at antique fairs, combined with objects, photos and illustrations, all representing the numerous thoughts exploding out the couple's heads. To create these artworks, Taylor scans the images and objects into her computer; then using Photoshop, she manipulates the faces, adding retro-color

schemes. She finally engages in the laborious task of layering the scanned objects—including flowers, plants, animals, snakes, insects, books and musical instruments—to convey the couple's private thoughts. She says that *Burden of Dreams* is semi-autobiographical, adding that she often loses herself in the creative process while building these complex artworks.



*Burden of Dreams*, exemplifying Taylor's three-decade body of work, also flows naturally from her childhood pursuits of reading and listening to stories, as well as building and creating things. "I was a very introverted child who loved a good story, whether it was by Ray Bradbury or in a Mary Tyler Moore episode," she says. "Building houses with blocks made me feel like an architect, while my dollhouses became design projects or stage sets." In high school, Taylor's driving passion to know more about life helped her excel at her studies. She was admitted to Yale University in the early 1980's, choosing philosophy as a major in order to gain broad knowledge of worldwide ideas and beliefs. She also took many photography classes, soon realizing that with this discipline, she could combine her love of art with her desire for philosophical expression. She

attended graduate school in photography at the University of Florida—a place where students were merging film photography with painting, sculpture and performance, and often collaborating on larger installations. Taylor reveled in that multidisciplinary environment. Adapting this broad artistic approach to her own work, she began combining seemingly unrelated objects, including “old toys, dead birds, caterpillars, various junk and debris,” in individual photographs. Looking back, these surreal still-life images became the precursors of her current multilayered works. She received an MFA at the U. of Florida in 1987.

Taylor lives near a small swamp in Gainesville, Florida, with three large dogs and her husband, Jerry Uelsmann, who is a pioneer in the photomontage darkroom technique. “Jerry is totally committed to making photographs as a way of life,” she says. “It is inspiring to see the magical things he comes up with in the darkroom.” From her home studio Taylor talks about living a life of artistic bliss. “Having a creative job is essential to me. If I did not make these images, I might be writing or working as a designer of some sort. I like anything hands-on that involves imagination.” When asked about other recent images, she lovingly describes them as though they were offspring. Discussing *But Who Has Won*, part of her “Alice in Wonderland” series, she points to a Victorian girl scanned from an 1850 daguerreotype, while the surrounding birds are from 18<sup>th</sup> century botanical illustrations. For *The Nest*, she used a 19<sup>th</sup> century photograph of a girl, added goggles, and then scanned a hornet’s nest that, today, is proudly displayed in her home. For the bees swarming out of the nest, she scanned dead bees and old bee drawings. In *Moving On*, her homage to last year’s Olympics, she scanned an image of an athletic young man, had him pull a cloud with a face on it, while a similar cloud is on his shirt. The surrounding landscapes in her works are derived from various sources, including photographs from her own travels. When asked about the symbolism in these artworks, she says that the ideas simply flow out from her, that she has difficulty putting their origins into words.

Taylor, who has won several awards for her images, who is widely exhibited in the U.S. and Europe and is in gallery and museum collections, talks poignantly about her future. While she plans to continue building artworks within her computer, she is equally enamored with the resulting old-fashioned looking prints comprised of ink on paper. “I will always want to create finished pieces that can be hung on the wall or go into books.”

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*Liz Goldner*