

If it is true that the ability to be puzzled is the beginning of wisdom, then this truth is a sad commentary on the wisdom of modern man. Whatever the merits of our high degree of literary and universal education, we have lost the gift for being puzzled. Everything is supposed to be known ... to be puzzled is embarrassing, a sign of intellectual inferiority.<sup>1</sup>

Inspired by mass media, U.S. military survival manuals, nature books, fairy tales, Japanese woodblock prints, Persian miniatures, and her own personal experiences, Amy Cutler creates exquisitely detailed, enigmatic paintings that obsessively illustrate scenes of women, animals, and hybrid beings engaged in dream-like activities. Her works, which include drawing, gouache on paper, and paint on wood panels, have been described as “snippets of Laura Ingalls Wilder, Hieronymus Bosch, and Masterpiece Theatre plotlines.”<sup>2</sup>

Since graduating from The Cooper Union School of Art in 1997, this Brooklyn-based artist has experienced a rapid, steady rise to critical acclaim. Her work has been featured in major surveys of contemporary art, including the 2004 Whitney Biennial in New York, as well as exhibitions at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, among others. Her paintings have been reviewed favorably in art journals, newspapers, and even fashion magazines, ranging from *Artforum* and *The New York Times* to *Elle*.

Cutler’s pictures, which incorporate elements of fairy tales and dreams, offer viewers the chance to reclaim the “gift for being puzzled,” to revel in a delightful world of ambiguity tied to our everyday lives and fantasies. While the existing writing about Cutler’s work generally acknowledges its imaginative, fantastical nature and locates it squarely, if superficially, within the traditions of fairy tales, dreams, and Surrealism, the same writing has not considered these