

# Love Gas & Invisible Objects

by Kathleen Whitney

During the past 20 years, the notion of “imagination” has been given short shrift. With very few notable exceptions, a fast scan through the art magazines of the past two decades leaves the impression of rigid categories of work produced by legions of practitioners any one of whom could be substituted for the other without a marked change in outcome. Risk-taking and the imagination are bound within learned patterns and conventions; these characteristics of the creative process have been increasingly repressed by the art world’s proprieties and rules of presentation. Artists have come to be viewed as agents without true instrumentality, vehicles through which the culture practices its logic and performs its prohibitions.

Heide Fasnacht has never subscribed to this kind of passivity; she belongs instead to the rather small ranks of artists whose work represents a triumph of individual imagination over the repressions of style and fashion. Fasnacht’s work is an amalgam of intelligence, humor, and craft representing nothing less than a grand attempt to give poetic form to knowledge. Her work is always handsome, elegant even; yet it seems remote from its own appearance. This is work more engaged with itself than with the viewer; its appearance seems more a side effect of its subject matter than a strategic attempt to attract.

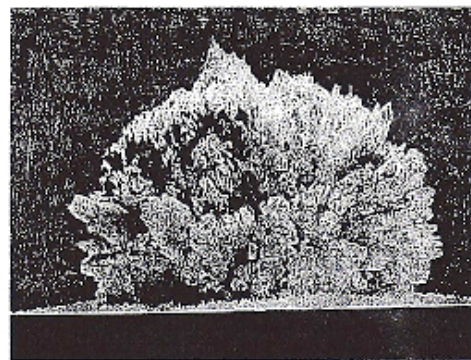
Fasnacht’s interest in a range of phenomena has led her to read widely from an eclectic mix of interrelated scientific literature. Rorschach testing,

R.L. Solso’s cognitive research on rapid eye movement, and astronomer Sir William Herschel’s incorrect 19th-century charts of the Milky Way—these sources provide a foundation for Fasnacht’s interest in creating metaphorical guides to the familiar and arcane territories of the universe and human psychology. Her work is neither duplication nor critique of impersonal scientific technique but a quirky, humorous attempt to make allegory from information. Like Jorge Luis Borges’s obsessed mapmaker, Fasnacht carves out patterns of order from phenomena too large and complex to understand on any level other than the metaphorical.

While black and white photographs and maps of stars, eye-scans, and continents have provided a visual format for much of Fasnacht’s imagery, her aesthetic is derived from the art of the ’70s. Artists of this period engaged in a phenomenological examination of experience and of the notion of objectivity. The act of perception itself was emphasized and distinguished from the subject of observation. Focus was centered on the process of observation rather than merely the observed thing. Similarly, Fasnacht attempts detachment from the “idea” of sculpture while at the same time trying to be receptive to the phenomena that have attracted her.

These interests and approaches represent a highly conflicted relationship with abstraction. Fasnacht’s work appears “realistic”; its imagery is drawn from “factual,” “scientific” sources such as maps and photographs,

all supposed representations of reality. Her current use of ready-made images is a major change within a body of work that was overtly abstract in the past. Yet for all its roots in fact, her imagery has more of a cartoony than a realistic flavor—a form that invites fantasy and the slippage of meanings. While the work is formally true to its roots in observed phenomena, it performs a clever reversal in the way it

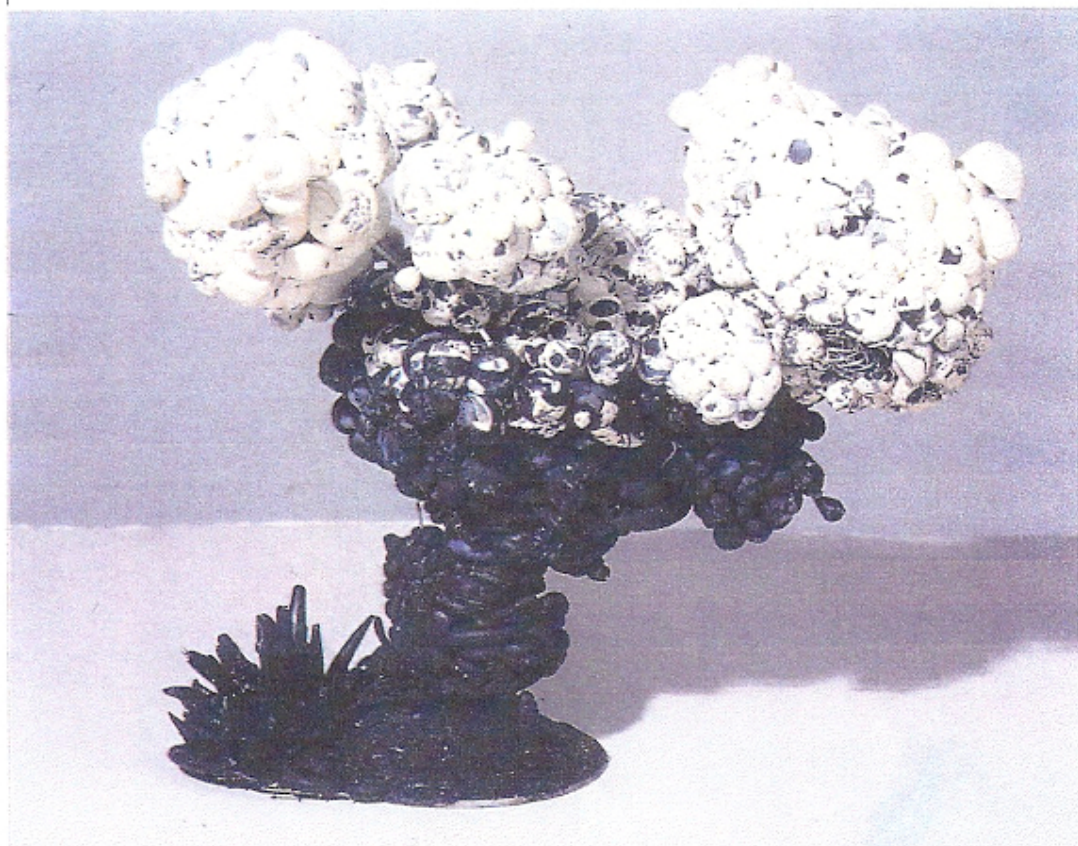


Opposite: *Eruption*, 1998. Polymer clay and metal, 17.25 x 9 x 6 in. Above: *Bomb*, 1997. Graphite on paper, 22 x 30 in.

reveals and emphasizes the abstraction concealed in a realistic image. Her art achieves its effect by calling attention to the split experience fundamental to modern life—the separation between the retinal and the conceptual, the immediately perceived and the slowly understood, the instinctual and the learned. The viewer experiences her work as a contradiction because of the tension between the coolly distanced, analytical sources of the images and



Top: *Pearl Harbor*,  
1998. Polymer clay  
and metal, 8.5 x 12  
x 10.75 in. Bottom:  
*Explosion at Sea*,  
1998. Polymer clay  
and metal, 13 x  
14.5 x 13 in.



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