

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sarah Blackwelder
Innocence Awry

May 30 – June 24, 2006

Opening reception: Thursday, June 1, 6-8pm



A.I.R. Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of recent paintings by Sarah Blackwelder, May 30 – June 24, 2006, with a public reception for the artist Thursday, June 1, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm. The solo exhibition *Innocence Awry* is the main component of the artist's 2005-2006 Fellowship at A.I.R.

In this series, Sarah Blackwelder paints individual and group portraits – each laden with narrative suggestion – of a humorous and poignant array of stuffed and mechanical toys. Most of the toys are vintage playthings showing the wear of years of loving use. On first glance, they are adorable, nostalgic references to bygone eras – both a naïve, sentimental era in popular culture and the more personal era of childhood. On closer viewing they become documentaries of the complicated range of the darker side of human emotions and relationships. Using a rich, dark palette, an extremely articulate rendering of the figure, and a strong, horizontal light source, Blackwelder paints intensely psychological images where the shadow of the “sitter” is personified to the extent that it becomes a stronger, more human alter-ego. In paintings that depict groupings of toys, the same sureness and enriched palette carry forward the suggestion of a recent event, sinister perhaps, naughty for sure, and its unfolding aftermath.

Blackwelder explains: More than to a single narrative or formalistic element, I depend on emotion to convey the substantive content of my painting. I am intrigued by stuffed animals in that they are inanimate objects specifically designed to evoke a caring, protective emotion. . . . I use my art to transform that perfectly calculated cuteness to show other sides: fear, loneliness, apprehension, anger. I find it fascinating to find my viewers startled at what they see; their first reaction to coo over a ‘cute’ object suddenly cut short by the presence of something ominous. The ultimate feeling is one of betrayal, with the painting serving as a subtle reminder that even the most benevolent of life's offerings can be full of unpleasant surprises.”

Blackwelder received her MFA from the New York Academy of Art in 2003 and has exhibited in several galleries in and around New York City, including the Society of Illustrators Guild Hall, Space Station and Micro Museum. *Innocence Awry* is her first solo show.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 11am to 6pm. For further information, please contact 212. 255. 6651 or visit www.airnyc.org.