



# The Collection Sarah Roche



# Work- ing

as part of the Philadelphia Museum of Art's gallery maintenance crew is a job somewhere between janitor and conservator, with tasks varying from mopping exhibition platforms and cleaning glass cases to in-painting Imperial Chinese columns. And Gallery Maintenance is a public affair. Pushing our supply cart through the crowded galleries, we gingerly tuck it aside to let visitors view the Clodion sculptures or Jackson Pollock paintings undisturbed. Though we try to be invisible, our appearance in a gallery almost always becomes the main attraction. Most asked visitor question: "Do you do windows?" Most frequent (and maddening) comment: "Will you come to my house?"

Sarah Roche's years working on and managing this crew provide the foundation for her latest body of work, entitled *The Collection*. *The Collection* turns the museum visitor experience on its head; this is art about art, or more specifically, about the process of viewing art. These works reflect an ease and familiarity gained through the artist's regular interaction with these collections. In Roche's world, ordinary glass display cases and windows adopt a magical quality, capable of reflecting multiple works of art at once and sometimes even including the viewer in the image. In these works, we see ourselves reflected, the image amorphous and filled with potential. We are reminded that visiting a museum is not a solitary adventure; we rarely look at one work without seeing others in our peripheral vision, and we are seldom alone in our viewing.



# In the sepia- bathed

*Ghost in PA German*, Roche reinterprets one of the museum's period room installations as a contemporary memento mori. Inspired by the vision of a coworker cleaning in this space, this painting shows a male figure, his back turned toward the viewer. In contrast to the insistent mass of the furniture surrounding him, the figure is not solid in his corporeality. The apparature looks at the clock, referring to the passage of time and ultimately reminding us of the ephemeral nature of life. This atmospheric work underscores the enduring nature of these objects, the tangible result of the creative process that will live on beyond the life of the artist or craftsman.



In *The Red Room*, various swords and pieces of armor are presented, sanitized of their original purpose. Artfully mounted and arranged, they appear to float in the case and become more object than instrument of death. That is, until one notices the artist's reflection, the appearance of the human form, the vulnerable flesh that these pieces once sought to protect or destroy.

# Toget- her

with representations of Renaissance majolica and Sèvres porcelain, the artist pays homage to the common gallery maintenance cleaning cart, presenting it in a larger-than-life version and placing it in the center of the gallery. Roche points out, "my sense of hierarchy of the high and low of specific objects or mediums fluctuates and is often lost". The cart is elevated to the status of art—and not for the first time. I recall an incident when the real cart was carelessly parked quite close to Duchamp's infamous Fountain. I observed a museum visitor, hands clasped behind his back, brow furrowed, regarding our cart quite studiously.



# Through the works

In *The Collection*, Roche teases apart the many layers of the experience of viewing art in a museum setting, inviting us to see the museum as intimately as she herself sees it. She reminds us that the human element is inherent in the process of creation and, more importantly, of viewing. The artist makes the work and the curator establishes the framework, but it is the viewer who genuinely creates the experience.

— Lynn Smith  
Philadelphia, 2006

**Lynn Smith Klein is an art historian and a former member of the gallery maintenance crew at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She is currently the museum registrar at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.**

## Artworks

Cover: Detail, *Art Cleaning Cart with Spray Bottle, Puffer & Brush* 2004–2006 painted MDF, porcelain, wool 51"x 45"x 27"

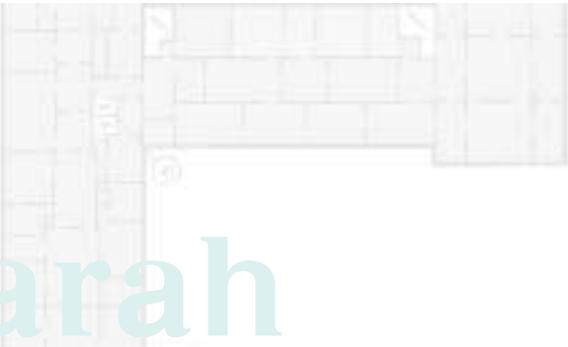
Interior: *Sweetbriar Volcano*

*Ghost In PA German*

*The Red Room*

*Renaissance Aura*

Back Cover: *Self Portrait In Armor*



# Sarah Roche

was born in New York City in 1971. She currently lives in Philadelphia, PA. She has an M.F.A. from the University of Pennsylvania and a B.F.A. from Moore College of Art and Design. Her work has been exhibited recently in Philadelphia at Cerulean Arts, The Center for Emerging Visual Artists, Gallery 817 at The University of the Arts, The Ice Box, Project Room and Spector Gallery and at The PA College of Art & Design in Lancaster. She has worked at the Philadelphia Museum of Art as a conservation technician since 1997 and as a label technician since 2005. The artist can be contacted at: [saraheroche@yahoo.com](mailto:saraheroche@yahoo.com) or via phone at: 215.983.5644.

