

Alan Magee

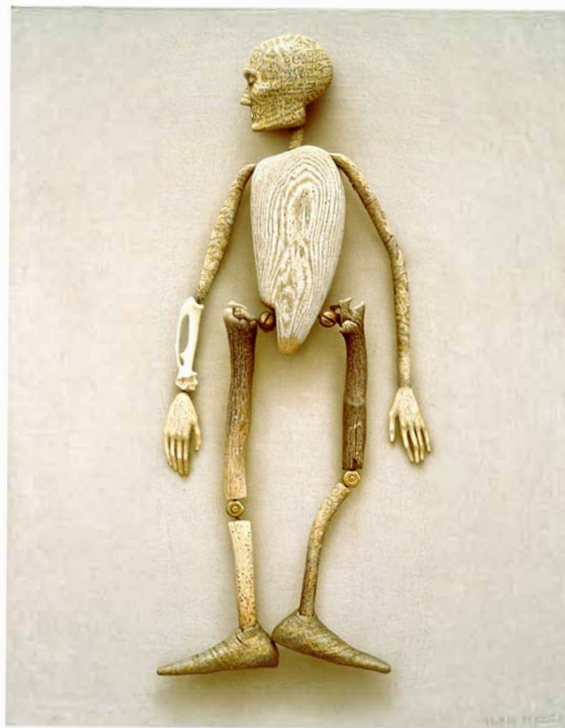
Forum

One might easily add Alan Magee's still lifes to Mark Twain's oft-quoted list of "lies, damned lies, and statistics." Magee uses oil and acrylic on panel to produce good lies—thoroughly convincing trompe l'oeil images. He strives to create a seamless counterfeit whereby the viewer is cast in the role of detective, searching for the telltale clue that reveals the painting is, after all, a painting and not the thing it represents.

Although there is nothing modest about Magee's adroit illusionism, there is a humility in the subjects he represents. Solitary brushes and old tools—their scarred and pockmarked surfaces reflecting decades of use—are set against timeworn, muted backgrounds. Other motifs are more exotic: pale, delicate skeletal puppets intermingle hand-carved bones with hardware and found objects. The bleached white bones of birds in *Still Life* (2001) and a dozen desiccated ochre poppies in *Field* (2006) are arranged like lines on a tally sheet. Some images juxtapose the ordinary with the extraordinary: a pair of pruning shears placed atop a page of carefully rendered dinosaur bones resembles a metal-skinned creature caught midstride.

The pleasures of mimesis are both simple and complex. Magee's counterfeits are so scrupulously precise that we never doubt that in each and every detail they mirror their original models. At the same time, the artist's obsessive, exquisitely focused care takes his real-world subjects into a realm of heightened clarity, far from ordinary life and very near the vivid world of dreams.

—Gerard Haggerty



**Alan Magee, *An Exact Anatomy II*, 2006,
acrylic on panel, 14" x 11". Forum.**