

## Carlee Fernandez

### "World According to Xavier"

ACME., Los Angeles  
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By Kit Warchol  
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British artist Damien Hirst once told *The New Yorker's* art critic, Calvin Tomkins, that "Death is an unacceptable idea so the only way to deal with it is to be detached or amused." We are meant to feel disconnected from his preserved tiger sharks and chainsawed calves, and to engage with his art by feeling disturbingly disengaged from its subject matter. One might consider Los Angeles-based artist, Carlee Fernandez' "World According to Xavier," a counter to Hirst's oeuvre. Her taxidermy sculptures are intricate tributes to mortality — not through detachment but through interaction. They explore how death and life interweave in nature and humanity.



The show is distinctly feminine, reinterpreting nature's verdure and the human form according to the experience of motherhood (the titular namesake, Xavier, is Fernandez' son and the pieces, according to ACME's press release are "gifts" to him). In "To Xavier, I Love You," 2010, Fernandez delicately knits together taxidermy birds (a swan, peacock, and domestic goose), producing a surreally beautiful affair that resembles an avian mating dance. "Derek's Plant," 2010, is a sculpture of two bobcats that appear to have grown together, a plant sprouting out of their pelts, simulating a Phoenix-like rebirth: life from death, growth from decay.

Where Hirst disavows mortality by implementing the technologically inhuman (read: preservation through formaldehyde, glass, and steel), Fernandez flouts death through the suggestion of reproduction, illustrating the infinite cycle of mother and child. Death may be unacceptable to both artists, but Fernandez presents us with an alternate philosophy — one free from detachment, and full of devotion to life.