



Karen Rich Beall

*plaster, dry pigments, and oil paint
10x12x1/2*

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, flowing letters that appear to read 'KRB'.

**House & Garden
Twists on Domesticity**

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Terrarium

- 1: a vivarium for terrestrial animals
- 2: a fully enclosed wholly or predominantly glass container for the indoor cultivation of moisture-loving plants
- 3: a planting in such a container: **GLASS GARDEN**

At a moment when planet earth's ecology is best characterized by the term 'greenhouse effect,' it seems relevant to review the definition of terrarium. The natural environment has been altered and managed by man to such an extent that one might conceive the planet as a terrarium. Our global garden has become a terrestrial house.

In the work of **Karen Rich Beall**, nature is understood to be a construct, offering an already manipulated point of departure. Her work deceptively recreates nature in order to introduce personal and human narratives into the environmental sphere. A recent work, "You're Living All Over Me," presents varied fungal forms that sprout with the random, ominous abandon of a spreading disease. Here, the artist envisions nature as a symptom, a sign of ill health. The meticulously constructed mushrooms, each fabricated from plaster and pigmented with oil paint, eerily consume the white all.

As is typical of Beall's work, a seemingly benign natural phenomenon triggers metaphorical connotations. "Ladies in Waiting," which initially strikes the viewer as an elaborate and beautiful flower arrangement, yields a darker subtext. Each plant is a reproduction of an Indonesian floral predator that hungers after insects for vital sustenance. In Beall's natural order, beauty is deceptive. Her work – ranging across diverse media to include embroidery, sculpture and installation – structures nature as a series of processes that mirror our own bodily metabolism.

David Moos
Curator of Painting and Sculpture
Birmingham Museum of Art