



Marilla Palmer juxtaposes the artificial and the organic in works like *Falls Village Rose* (left) and *Debauchee of Dew*, both 2007.

In Marilla Palmer's drawings and sculptures, organic materials are tempered with high-tech flashes: mushroom spores mingle with bits of holographic paper, tree fungus dangles from steel wire, and feathers flutter beside phosphorescent beads. In the collage *Falls Village Rose* (2007), for instance, imprints from the underside of mushroom caps top watercolor stems in a delicate composition punctuated by a single leaf made from reflective vinyl. Similarly, *Debauchee of Dew* (2007), which takes its name from a line in the Emily Dickinson poem "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed," is a quilt made from rich green fabric stitched together with pink thread. It recalls a verdant forest—except one square is made from Astroturf. By mixing natural and artificial elements, Palmer explores how technology can enhance—and compete with—nature.

After briefly attending Alfred University in western New York and spending a year studying art on the Greek island of Paros, Palmer earned a B.F.A. from the College of Art and Design (today the University of the Arts) in Philadelphia in 1977. But her decision to focus on painting was fraught. Palmer's mother and stepgrandmother were also artists, and "painting came with a lot of baggage—personal and historical," she says. Painting was the "history of men's accomplishments. I wanted to integrate other traditions."

After graduation Palmer returned to her native New York City and took a job as a textile designer. One day she brought home a swatch of high-tech polyester fabric and decided to paint on it. That experiment resulted in a dramatic shift in her work. She was soon beading and embroidering fabrics and using these "ultrafeminine" techniques, she says, to embellish three-dimensional steel objects like mobiles. One such work, *Silver Lining* (2005), is made from sparkling threads anchored by phosphorescent beads and tree fungus; a steel-and-bead tree hangs in the center. Palmer illuminates these mobiles, which were shown at Pierogi Gallery in Brooklyn in 2005, with rainbow LED lights so that they seem to be moving through a seasonal or life cycle. Fungus is a particularly apt symbol of death and rebirth, she explains; it is often a sign that a tree is dying.



Palmer, 52, lives in Brooklyn with her husband, Peter Zaremba of the rock band the Fleshtones, and their son, Sergei. She splits her time working there and at their home in Connecticut, where she collects materials for her art. A show of Palmer's new works opens at Fringe Exhibitions in Los Angeles on the 19th of this month; prices range from \$2,800 for collages to \$10,000 for assemblages. The works on view will include drawings of fragments of nature, like bark or branches, to which she has applied her magpie assortment of ornaments. "I try to transform the bits and pieces into fabricated plants that are beautiful and grotesque," says Palmer. Like the rest of her works, each is a humorous take on humankind's drive to, as she puts it, "replace the real with the fake." —Rachel Somerstein

Rachel Somerstein is a writer who lives in New York.