

Rebecca Rants on Toddlers and Tiaras

Rebecca Brodney, Staff Writer



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Unless we reside under a rock or in Siberia, we've all seen and heard of TLC's controversial show *Toddlers and Tiaras*. On the surface, it appears to be just a bunch of little girls prancing around onstage in pursuit of a crown. Beneath the fake hair, fake teeth, fake nails, fake tans, and fake smiles, however, the show is much more disturbing than what meets the eye. TLC films the preparations for the pageants, the unruly children, and the sociopathic parents.

My first gripe with the show is that these little girls genuinely don't seem to want to do this. If anything, the children appear to be acting as puppets for their stage parents, hoping that they can gain love and approval. In one episode, Carley, a young pageant queen (4 years old), and her mother, Melissa, were constantly at war. Carley strongly disliked having highlights (she clearly didn't feel that blondes have more fun), and while the bleach was sinking into her scalp, Melissa made efforts to distract her daughter whom she called her "mini me" by asking, "Are you excited to see your friends at the pageant?" to which the little girl sadly replied, "I don't have any friends."

Parents also dress up these children in inappropriate and revealing clothing. One girl was dressed up as Dolly Parton, complete with padding in the bust to mimic Dolly's voluptuous appearance. Another was dancing to *Pretty Woman* and dressed like Julia Roberts, who happened to play a prostitute

in the film. Many contestants in these child pageants are also dressed up as Vegas showgirls, complete with their midriffs, legs, arms, and chests almost entirely exposed. Truth be told, I think my dog's scarves provide more coverage. Wendy Dickey, the mother of Paisley, the girl who wore the *Pretty Woman* costume, explains in the September 9 *US Weekly* article, *Toddlers and Tiaras Tot Wears Pretty Woman Prostitute Costume* that she herself made this dress for her three year old daughter. She further justifies her wardrobe choice by saying, "I'm raising my child just as well as any mother does.... I take my kid to church every week." Okay, Mom, as long as you take your three-year-old daughter to church, I guess it's okay to dress her like a prostitute.

Admittedly, I watch the Miss America scholarship pageant on television each year. Unlike what are known as "Kiddie Pageants," Miss America and similar scholarship programs that cater to grown women focus strongly on community service, fitness, confidence, and talent. Shows such as *Toddlers and Tiaras* demonstrate how young girls are indoctrinated into a system in which they are trained from a young age that only their external beauty matters. I believe the lessons these toddlers are learning from these pageants will affect their ability to become happy, successful, and confident adults in ten to fifteen years. Parents: please put your little girls in a sport where they are valued for skill over how they look in a \$2000 dress.

Rhymes in Time Review

Molly Ashline, Staff Writer

The current art exhibit in the Frankie G. Weems Art Gallery, *Rhymes in Time*, is a critical examination of the ulterior – and largely malevolent – meanings of common nursery rhymes. The exhibit is the work of artist Emily Cash, who was aided in the installation by others, including Catherine Thornton, Kelly Smith-Campbell, and Emily Soldin Howard.

Rhymes in Time includes pieces on commonplace tales as *Mary, Mary Quite Contrary*, *Peter-Pumpkin Eater*, and *The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*, which include mixed media artwork as well as the entire nursery rhyme text and a short description of the actual meaning. This information was intriguing as it seemed completely removed from the nursery rhymes' apparent meanings.

Aside from the stories behind the stories, the art work itself was interesting and dynamic. Many types of media were used by Cash, which kept the exhibit from becoming stagnant; there was always another level in which an observer could view the work. The pieces displayed the artist's concept fairly well.

The whole exhibit had a somewhat whimsical ambience corresponding well with the original nursery rhymes and serving to enhance the contrast between the innocent meaning and the hidden alternate meaning. This stark difference caused an emotional response in some viewers. As a Meredith College art student of the class of 2015, Emily Edwards, put it, "I was a bit in shock because I didn't know the real meaning behind the nursery rhymes." For example, *Mary, Mary Quite Contrary* is actually about Mary, Queen of Scots and her hatred of Protestants, which led to mass beheadings. I wonder if any Protestant mothers today read that nursery rhyme about the persecution of people who could be their ancestors before tucking their children into bed.

Though the overall effect of the exhibit infused familiar tales with a new interest, there were some aspects which detracted from the main idea of the art work. Multiple piles of books were strewn about the gallery, possibly to emphasize that fairy tales and nursery rhymes (as well as their double meanings) are everywhere, but I felt the need to read every title on the books, which made me look less at the art work. There also seemed to be a slight break in continuity of the exhibit; I never really knew which piece I should look at next, but that may have been because all the pieces were so enticing, appealing, and complex. Every time I looked at the work again, I would notice a different aspect, especially in the pen and ink *The Woman Who Ate a Fly*, which included everything she swallowed somewhere in the anatomy of the horse. Meredith student Emily Edwards stated the detail was her favorite part of each piece because it drew the eye in to explore the works.

The *Rhymes in Time* exhibit is a well-developed collection of art work with an interesting concept of the skewed portrayal of women in nursery rhymes that disregards their actual, disreputable ways. The exhibit was well worth the trek to the gallery; I had a great time examining the artwork and walked away having learned something to boot.

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