

*Once Upon a Time* is a series of small-scale mechanical sculptures based on popular folk tales. Collectively, they examine the underlying moral messages of fairy tales and their effect on child's psyche. Each sculpture is a wind-up toy comprised of a painted wooden box with moving figures, as well as music clockwork that plays a custom-composed melody particular to each scene. The miniature size encourages up-close viewing, and visitors are allowed to pick up the toy in order to operate the wind-up mechanism. The purpose of using familiar mechanical toys as illustration of fairy tales is to unlock hidden and repressed childhood memories. Small paintings featuring the protagonists are shown alongside the music boxes, providing a closer look into each character.

In their modern version familiar to every child, Western fairy tales tend to sugar coat their original import. Yet even watered down, they speak of older men and women terrorizing young children, fathers leaving their children in the woods to die, and stepmothers feeding their husbands' biological children poisoned apples. The more graphic tales often contain an undercurrent of violence, incest, and sexual abuse, and even the milder ones teach children to be subordinate, to never question authority, to blame themselves for their misfortune, and accept their fate.

Now, as a grown woman, re-reading these once beloved fairy tales to my daughters, I am appalled at the messages they carry, implicitly or not. With these music boxes, I aim to confront the dirty and uncomfortable truth behind the cute characters and seemingly innocuous stories.

Mass-produced mechanical toys for children are ubiquitous – think crib mobiles that play Brahms' lullaby. These quaint devices have been bringing much joy and enchantment to children since antiquity and possess a timeless quality. Yet we never think of them as vehicles for artistic expression and rarely value the craftsmanship and precision required to create the metal cylinder and the mechanism that coordinates music with motion. The rocking figures are usually naïve and kitschy; the music – soothing and innocent. However, there is an incomparable intimacy to the viewing experience – starting it up, watching a scene unfold, and sensing the vibrations of the plucked metal pins as they form a melody. I want to use the immediacy of that experience to show suggestive scenes accompanied by sweet and unfamiliar melodies.