



KISS OF DEATH

EXHIBITION HORATIA HARROD MEETS AN ARTIST WHO TELLS GRISLY FAIRY STORIES

A ragged, stuffed red squirrel clasps its paws together in prayer in the chaotic white-walled Dalston studio of the artist Tessa Farmer. It has good reason to be fearful. For the past nine years, Farmer has overseen the evolution of a sinister breed of tiny skeletal fairies. When she started making them they were mischievous 3-in high sprites crudely crafted from small twigs stuck together with a glue gun. As her technique became more skilful, the fairies got smaller and more devilish, enslaving insects, then dismembering and eating them. Now, at the Natural History Museum, they have set upon a fox, reaching new levels of micro-sadism.

It would be hard to imagine a weirder portrait of the artist at work: days spent collecting dead wasps from the streets, burying carcasses of hedgehogs, pigeons and blackbirds in her mother's back garden, opening the post to discover frogs and beetles sent by friends and family, surreptitiously slipping a rat flattened by months of sun and rain into her handbag. In her studio, or at home in her bedroom, Farmer spends hours putting together her fairies from tiny pieces of root and soil, using tweezers, embroidery scissors and superglue under an ultra-bright light.

Farmer, who uses the word fairy as a matter of fact ('Sometimes, I explain the work to someone, talk about fairies, and I suddenly realise they have no idea what I'm talking about'), sees her work as 'a sort of story. I like to talk about them as a species as opposed to art, because I don't see them like that at all. They're so familiar to me.'

Tessa Farmer: Little Savages, Natural History Museum until 28 January; 020 7942 5000; www.nhm.ac.uk