
OH I LOVE BARBIE, BUT I THINK SHE HAS GOTTEN REALLY BAD... SHE'S SO SUBURBAN NOW

LUDOVICA ANVERSA, DARJA BAJAGIC, DORA BUDOR, AMBRA CASTAGNETTI, SALOMÉ CHATRIOT, NAN GOLDIN, GREER LANKTON, LUCILE LITTOT, PAUL MONROE, JAMES ROMBERGER, SERGEI ROSTROPOVICH, MARION SCEMAMA, EMMA STERN, MANON WERTENBROEK

The exhibition is both an extension and an update of the previous exhibition at the New Galerie *Take a Walk on the Wild Side* which brought together primarily photographic works by Lower East Side artists from the 1980s. It presents works by contemporary artists covering a wide range of mediums. If the counter-cultural strategies of construction of the self by Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz, Marion Scemama... resorted to the use of photography in connivance, the contemporary self is immediately socially solicited to build a digital and public persona. This changes the picture.

The exhibition opens with a large montage of photographs by Nan Goldin entitled *Greer Lankton, 1958 - 1996*. As is often the case in Goldin's work, the focus is on a personality, a way of life, and relationships that the America of the time refused to see: Greer Lankton and her exploration of gender. But in addition to the candid images, the polyptych also presents works: dolls by Greer Lankton. The irruption of another source of portraiture offers a reservoir of possible identities and breaks the dialectic of the viewer and the viewed.

Greer Lankton's dolls offer a model of polyphonic construction of personality. Whether they are drag queens, counterculture idols, fragile metropolitan deans, hermaphrodites, and even herself, these dolls constitute an alternative family, a set of personalities constructed from tights, wire, and plaster, real hair, and glass eyes from the taxidermist's shop. A photograph of one of them, Princess Pamela, opens the last room of the exhibition. Massive, purple, in panties, Greer Lankton sometimes put it on like a costume to perform. One can wonder if she is in it, hidden, in front of us in this picture.

These dolls prefigure the contemporary methods used by the artists in the exhibition: shifting from one avatar to another, successive misused incarnations, atemporal presentation of ancient archetypes, concealment and revelation through the play of obfuscations and transparencies, fusion in the digital medium itself... The term "emerging artist" is omnipresent today, postulating a kind of primordial chaos from which one should extract oneself; the artists of the exhibition question on the contrary where they "emerge" from.

Toxic Venus (Salomé Chatriot), *Venus As A Boy* (Ambra Castagnetti): if the techniques of the two artists seem opposed - printing a digital file on Plexiglas for Salomé Chatriot and ceramic placed on painted steel for Ambra Castagnetti - they both summon the ancient figure of Venus. The tight curls of Castagnetti's Venus hairstyle recall the statuary of late Roman emperors. *Balajka* is a Medusa, with long snake-like hair, as if pacified by a petrification that one suspects she may have inflicted on herself, in a personal epiphany reminiscent of selfies. The figures of Salomé Chatriot are also hyper-sexualized busts, with truncated heads. If the fragmentation of the female body is a "classic" of the fetishization, Salomé Chatriot produces figures from some mother files. The viewer never has access to the code. In an inversion of the male control over technology, Salomé Chatriot makes the male gaze get lost in a labyrinth of which only she has the asymmetrical keys.

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"And then, you know, it turns out everyone wants to play as a girl if her boobs are big enough. I think there's a lot of overlap between who you want to be and who you want to have sex with."

Emma Stern in an interview with Travis Diehl, Artforum, 2022.

Heavily inspired by the nebula of manga and video games, Emma Stern's female figures are set in a persistent world of paintings, drawings, sculptures and files. The New Galerie hosts *Amber*. If the cold pop strategy of taking up "glossy" images seems to be the order of the day, Emma Stern doubles this gameplay with a targeted interrogation. From Tom Raider's heroine Lara Croft to the vocaloid Hatsune Miku, the possible takeover of feminized characters by a fanbase whose "gamer" relationship to gender should perhaps be estimated at the first degree. In Greer Lankton's artistic chronicle, her parents' ban on playing with dolls is foundational. Since 1996 (the first iteration of Tom Raider) a primarily teenage male audience has been playing with a Barbie equipped with twin guns with infinite bullets and a small brown backpack.

There is an undercurrent of homoeroticism, literally, that runs through the exhibition; a relationship of fascination with oneself that, in a broken mirror effect, diffracts and melts identity. *Salty Shoulders*, by Manon Wertenbroek, presents a colorful skin suit, emptied of the body that may have inhabited it, like a last vestige of Harlequin. The artist's other work in the exhibition - *By Then She Had Become a Palpable Absence* - seems to show muscles with an improbable geometry (abdominal?) and as if half flayed, although covered with fragments of clothing. The schyzophrenic notions of bodies without organs are bypassed by a phantasmal parthenogenesis, whose engine is optical: the artist's focus.

The pictorial process of Ludovica Anversa also reveals this use of depth of field. Organic figures, which we suspect to be bodies, are as if buried under a moving layer that lets them show through, in an archaeological back and forth. In the painting *The Paradox of the Phasmid*, superimposed on this "background", a recurring figure in the artist's work is delicately painted: a thin twisted branch. One does not know if it signifies camouflage, concealment, the artist's artifice - or if it is not rather a pointer to a panvital strategy, of cyclical circulation not only of organic substances, but also of their appearance, even of their identity.

Greer Langton's work seems to prefigure these deployments of a playful, pop, deceptive identity, but in a properly visceral way. Lucile Littot's small ceramics come from a solo exhibition where they were "framed" by a narrative. They were as many (consenting?) victims of a Countess of Bathory played by the artist and reincarnated as a plastic surgeon in California. The strident colors, the grotesque treatment of the small petrified beings question the (symbolic) effectiveness of this blood remedy.

The subtitle of Sergei Rostropovich's two photographs - *Through a Glass Darkly* - is taken from the *First Epistle to the Corinthians* and traditionally signifies the lifting of the veil that hangs over mortal eyes in what is properly announced as an apocalypse, a revelation. In Sergei Rostropovich's work, as in all the artists in the exhibition, there is a constant tension between the desire to display, to lay bare an identity, and the warning of the moral tale of a Narcissus. He, once he has clearly seen his reflection in the water, can never detach himself from it. He will watch for it even in the waters of the Styx. The parable runs through cultures: in Philip K. Dick's *A Scanner Darkly*, undercover cop Bob Arctor falls into paranoia the day he is asked to watch Fred, his cover. Sergei Rostropovich's blurred photographs, whose aesthetics evoke a video clip that would never stop, revolve around this moment when everything stops, everything becomes clear, but which one can also worry that it is also a brutal descent.

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Behind the games of representation, the euphoria of the affirmation as an artist combined with the risk of this self-analysis, with a certain dread of oneself runs through the exhibition. Marion Scemama's 4 photographs document a 1984 performance by Mike Bidlo and present some players from the Lower East Side scene (Luis Frangella or David Wojnarowicz) disguised as characters from the Factory - the previous generation of New York artists. One experiences the playful and rather paroxystic pleasure of embodying and hijacking figures that have become blue chip. But the destiny of this 80's generation, mowed down by AIDS, has often been not to survive its predecessors. If we feel all the creative irony of this group, it is striking to see them frozen in the disguise of a history that they will not have.

Battle Angels, by artist and comic book writer James Romberger, so influenced by the 80-90s independent comic book scene to which he contributed so much, points to the way everyone re-enacts narrative archetypes, classic or pop, Ovid or superhero. We see a super-masculine devil being attacked, successfully it seems, by numerous small, resolutely feminine angels. There is a wink, an echo of an era and a scene that continues to be important, where the hallucinatory naturalism of a comic book recounting Wojanowicz's junkie trials and tribulations in New York City is followed by an ironic take on DC comics.