Desire and Domination
-
Imagining the Psyche

Davida Kidd
Diana Thorneycroft

The Martyrdom of Saint Agatha
Diana Thorneycroft

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NANAIMO ART GALLERY
When viewing the photo work of Davida Kidd and Diana Thorneycroft we are immediately aware of the fact that there is play afoot. The dichotomy and strangeness of this art play is that both fun and fear exist in the work simultaneously. What kind of play is represented and who controls the game? Who are these characters and why do they exist in this surreal ground? Thorneycroft and Kidd give us a complex and curious game plan, in which the rules are ambiguous, but the penalty for failure is grimly suggested.

Kidd and Thorneycroft both work with imagery that runs the ground between dream and nightmare and is both intimate and theatrical. Their works are beautiful and complex, painful and frightening. Both artists often set their work on elaborate stages. Some of Thorneycroft’s have the theatrical stages of great paintings of art history, while Kidd’s sets are elaborate drawn or manipulated spaces. These spaces set us up to question where the sets are sited and how the characters came to exist in them. From here, it is a short step to imagine a dream/menace world.

And that is the fun of this game; the characters are given new roles and strategies, in unexpected and in some cases completely horrible situations. In Kidd’s work we soon realize that her characters are part doll and part animate woman; this realization creates an unsettling experience for the viewer. In Thorneycroft’s work the characters are being dragged, beheaded, crucified, gouged and bloodied. Within this world we wonder who is in control and what the artists are asking their characters to do. However, even as we wonder, we have a strong sense that this work will simply not be questioned; it is what it is and we choose either to engage the rules or leave the play ground.
Both artists use complex strategies to displace some of the tension of the work. One such strategy is a glorious rich seam of black humor. As in Shakespeare's plays, the characters that represent cultural stereotypes, "norms", or ideologies are placed within the artists' dramas as a means for comical critique. An example is Kidd's mean girl who is being shoved around the playground by her victims; we just can't stop watching to see what they do to her, so long as we are outside of the possibility of physical harm. Similarly, in Kidd's "Hollowcast: the Waiting Room" we find ourselves back on the playground being stared down by the top girl in the school pecking order. What does this girl desire us to do? Whatever she asks, we know that she is in charge and we will do it, for fear of punishment and ridicule.

As long as distance remains between us and the action, we are more than content to see all sorts of things happening to the characters. In Thorneycroft's "Saint Agatha" we see the saint parade before us with her severed breasts on a platter. This is Thorneycroft's game but she is allowing us as viewers to play, too. Although we can't be part of the game space, the very act of viewing it and questioning the nature of the game allows us into the fold. Thorneycroft's martyrs are accompanied by a collection of forensic material that alludes to acts of torture. Without the forensic material, these martyrs remain within the world of illusion. However, the forensic material closes the ground between illusion and reality with its museum-like presence. We can now see the evidence of crimes committed, and this forensic/archeological "proof", alluding to historical documentation, suggests the authenticity of each work's internal narrative.
Inspired by a book entitled *Torment in Art* chronicling paintings of martyrdoms, Thornycroft's martyrs are set in the rich textured ethereal backgrounds of the original paintings. Like animated stage plays the sets function in a curious way. They are stripped of their original inhabitants and oddly costumed dolls take the characters' places. Initially funny, these surrogates then sink to a level of melancholy. These crude plastic renditions of people and animals seem like the isolated end product of historical narratives. Frozen in place, they are able to endlessly continue the savagery they are performing because Thornycroft has halted her game at this position for our amusement and dismay. And, we still get to laugh at their pain. A glorious game.

Kidd's "Core Dump" is a series of photographs documenting a three-dimensional installation. In these works Kidd pushes the intensity of her digital nightmare/dreamscapes into representations of a three-dimensional stage. In this stage-set there is evidence of mischievous play and learning in the remains of children's toys, fables and drawings left on the installation's wall. Elements of the Western nuclear family are deconstructed and are placed on display. Who were the children who played, learnt and left? Why are the objects that stimulate our sentimental memories of our own tumultuous childhoods placed in such an ominous atmosphere for our re-examination? What kind of people are these children growing up to become?
Because “Core dump” documents an actual installation, we become intrinsically involved with these scenarios, forced to step onto the stage. Whereas once we could distance ourselves as viewers from digital photographs, here we must individually assume the role of performer within the space that Kidd has constructed. Because Kidd’s images reflect our own childhood dreams and anxieties, we at once step into an established narrative that speaks to us and seems to present our own internal subjective histories. The effect is a culmination of narcissistic delight, dismay at the disintegration of former “golden” times, and an anxiety about the future. It just may be that, while we are being presented with fragments of our collective cultural history, we are also being presented with pieces of our individual youth. Were we once those children, now grown up and integrated into the Real World of adults?

Go Girl
Davida Kidd
Bios:

Diana Thorneycroft has exhibited various bodies of work across Canada, the United States, Edinburgh, Moscow, Tokyo and Sydney. Her work has been the subject of national radio documentaries and a CBC national documentary for television. Thorneycroft’s photo-based exhibition, The Body, its lesson and camouflage was on an eight city tour from 2000 to 2002. A book by the same name was published. Her work has been included in the 2002 released Phaidon Press publication Blink, which presents the work of 100 rising stars in photography. They have been selected by 10 world-class curators, each proposing 10 photographers who they consider to have emerged and broken new ground in the last five years. Diana lives and works in Winnipeg.

Davida Kidd was awarded the prestigious Grand Prix (for traditional and non-traditional printmaking) at the International Print Triennial in Krakow, Poland on September 19th, 2003. She has exhibited across Canada, the United States as well as Farnce, Ireland, Cuba, China, and Spain.

“The content of my art practice, for years, has addressed themes of domination: the psyche by the dream or ideal, the conscience by guilt, the personality by passion. Individuals often appear to be trapped or misguided by their own choices.

Working in the general realm of manipulated photography, I like to blend the line between illusion and reality, cultivating the ambiguous line at which my subjects become invented creatures. We are, after all, human projectors. How we perceive what we see in front of us can change before our eyes.

As much as the intrinsic documentary quality and “truth” factor of the photograph has been challenged, it still lends a kind of rational surface, which I enjoy manipulating in order to pull the viewer into my ambiguous narratives.”

NANAIMO ART GALLERY
www.nanaimoartgallery.com

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