

first floor

1, 2, 3, september 1994

jacinta schreuder

the dwarf

Standing, my body is dwarfed by the larger than life. No longer in a position to look, rather it is i who am seen, by the scene.

Mermaids peering down from above. A chair beckoning from a distant corner. Floating, twisting, bizarrely abstracted, barbie's hair searches menacingly for its trademark body. My position within this space is involved, implicated. The room itself becomes a site of signification and rather unwittingly, i seem to be standing within it.

Two-dimensional, traced, the bodies of the mermaids are suspended uncomfortably. Looming and contorted, their power arises from a shift in focus, from the fetishist to the fetishized. Positioned in a state of internal dialogue, these forms speak across the space of viewer, seeking to reclaim the self-empowering gesture of objectification. In this way, they are uncontainable, occupying rather the space of the container itself.

Effecting a sense of estrangement, exaggeration denies the comfort of familiarity. Fairy tale figures are wrenched from their position of childhood innocence to return as the repressed, haunting the scene of an originary imagery. Suddenly, my body is trapped on the page of the story book. It is isolated, silenced, constrained. *I sure hope Ken turns up soon!*

tessa dwyer

If jacinta drew when she was young, she may well have drawn mermaids. These paintings make me think firstly not so much of the 'objects' depicted (mermaids, barbie doll hair and room), but of the culture of 'popular' imagery from which they are taken. In particular, advertising, magazines, soap operas, and romance novels which construct images of women, for each woman to either identify with or reject, as a message about who (and how) we are/are not.

Both the barbie doll and the mermaid are images created to represent certain attributes as essential to femininity; particularly: beauty, physical attractiveness, passivity. Barbies offer the opportunity to also purchase an amazing array of clothes (my cousin had every item available at the time, i'm sure) illustrating how important clothes and appearance are also for a woman. Mermaids are either good and beautiful creatures who help sailors, or temptresses who lure them to a watery grave. They are the embodiment of a defenceless female figure who must rely on her beauty and charm.

Directly, mermaids and barbie dolls have little to do with us. One can see the same important characteristics, however, in many of the "types" around us in popular adult culture. T.V. shows such as melrose place, beverly hills 90210, or models inc., all show the ever increasing importance placed on beauty; characters both male and female in these shows are not only "beautiful" but often are easily



labelled as good or bad in the simple manner of children's fairytales.

Painting the images, enlarged, directly on the walls, takes them further from their original source and links them with advertising and billboards; questioning our relationship to such familiar imagery when its context and depiction are so altered. Recognising the individual imagery or source in some ways is not even necessary in jacinta's work; if you do not have an answer to the question of "what is that?", then you recognise the strangeness, instead, of images taken from the most "everyday" sources. Jacinta actively employs the potential such imagery has to seem strange even bizarre, when taken out of context and focused on our attention.

This work reminds me, also, that when i was young and *did* play with barbie dolls, whenever i drew i used to draw images of women. Perhaps making these images for myself i was joining in the process of defining myself through relating to or discarding certain images.

maria griffin

The strictness of generic forms, the stability and regularity of the patterning of textual and visual figures ensures their conveyability in the produced/ producing culture within which they operate.

The highly formulaic style of cartoon drawing renders it, in some sense a

language, and as such is "more or less thick" further, it is one of those languages that are, "the most social, the most mythical(which) present an unshakable homogeneity...woven with habits and repetitions, with stereotypes"(barthes.image-music-text). The smooth and polished surface of the cartoon, the cartoon body, shaved of superfluities, of excess detail, the distracting and extraneous, presents itself as a body for easy consumption. Obscured behind the veneer of innocent simplification, the purification of form, is a multitude of cultural, historical, semantic, sexual significances.

The ideal woman containable in discourses a conglomeration of parts, female bits, big hair, small waist, good interior decoration, is transmitted in cartoon form, naturalised by the ubiquity of the representation, the ostensible motivation of that particular (arbitrary) rendering.

Rendered here only as a trace, the figures of the little mermaid and barbie are disturbingly familiar, the images are laid bare, the viewer confronted by the inevitability of this recognition. It is the inscription of this cartoon ideal on the psyche of the viewer that is necessary for the drawing together of the signifier and the signified into sign. It is this recognition of recognition that intervenes in the chain of coherence, what is read now is the process of reading.

This playful mimetic strategy, the

replication and shifting of the monolithic standards of genre is "for a woman to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it..." (irigaray. this sex which is not one 1980.p.76)

nicole tomlinson