



Getting drawn in

Julie Nord's drawings are striking in their beauty and strangeness. The combination of intricate draftsmanship and children's-storybook-bright watercolour painting first attracts the eye; it is only when one looks more closely that sinister elements begin to appear. *By Jo Caird.*

The little girl in the polka-dot dress in Paperdoll's House may appear sweet at first glance, but then one notices the black and white spaces to her left and right. They are cut-outs in the shape of the girl, complete with the tags one would use to fold a paper doll's dress onto its wearer. The white cut-out space is a dazzling blank against the brilliant watercolour background; the black cut-out is terrifying, punctuated with staring eyes and gaping mouths. It is then that we see the pair of scissors in the girl's hands and the dead expression in her larger-than-life eyes. It is clearly the girl herself who has made these cut-outs.

Suddenly we are made to question our initial reaction to the child and the storybook world she inhabits, to look beneath our nostalgia and consider all the facets of memory. As with the little girl and her black and white alter egos, it turns out that just one layer of meaning does not reveal all.

This idea is central to 'Xenoglossy', Nord's latest solo show, which is taking place at the Aros Aarhus Kunstmuseum in Aarhus in the artist's native Denmark. For the first time, Nord's drawings will be shown as part of an installation: she is transforming the museum's West Gallery into a cinematic sound stage, complete with a back stage area that aims to reveal the true illusory nature of the rest of the show. "You can see it's all an illusion", she says, delighted to be able to present her work in this way. "Even my drawings are an illusion. You can't take anything for granted."

The exhibition is a physical embodiment of one of the most important concepts informing Nord's work: that the 'reality' we experience is not all it seems and we can't necessarily trust our instinctive responses. "I try to question our normal habitual thinking by using as many contradictions as possible", Nord explains, "so it ends up in some kind of war, where you sit back in the loss of meaning. I think this loss of meaning can give a platform for different aspects of consciousness. It gives space for different ways of viewing the world."

Describing Nord's drawings in this way, however accurate in terms of the conceptual process behind them, actually does them a disservice as it makes the works sound difficult and inaccessible, and this couldn't be further from the truth. Both visually intriguing and a pleasure to look at owing to Nord's technical brilliance, 'Xenoglossy' is not the kind of exhibition that only art buffs can appreciate.

"I think you can enter my work from almost any level you want to", says Nord. "You can say 'wow, she's good at drawing, that's fantastic' or you can have a laugh – I think they're quite open. But you can also hopefully go deeper and find deeper layers and more philosophical things behind them."

This multi-layeredness is a result, partly, of Nord's formal practice. While in the past she was concerned largely with how to put across certain concepts or philosophical ideas with her work, Nord believes that now there is far greater balance between the conceptual



02

and the formal in her drawings.

She favours drawing as a medium because it allows her to bring an enormous range of aesthetic elements to her work. She cites “fragments of old etchings”, “tattoos”, “cartoons”, “children’s drawings”, “outsider art” and “illustration”, among the material she draws upon and says that this gives her a “huge freedom” in the way that she works.

Nord began her studies – at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts – as a painter, not a draftsman, but soon turned to drawing when she found herself overwhelmed by the almost limitless options of other media. In this exhibition, of course, Nord is using not just her familiar felt tip pens and watercolours, but also all the materials required to build the ‘sound stage’ that forms the backdrop to her drawings. Describing her creative practice and the evolution of her work, Nord says, “I just don’t want to get stuck in my own habits. So it’s important to get to – maybe the same thing – but through different angles”.

‘Xenoglossy’ is Nord’s first solo show in Denmark since the highly acclaimed ‘Elsewhere’ in 2006 and she is excited to be back. ‘Xenoglossy’, the result of over 18 months of dedicated work, will be well worth the wait. ■

Julie Nord – Xenoglossy runs from 14 August to 21 November at the Aros Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, Denmark. www.aros.dk

- 01 Julie Nord’s ‘Paperdoll’s House’
- 02 Julie Nord’s ‘Seance’
- 03 (Overleaf) Julie Nord’s ‘The Smoke in the Chimney’



RACHEL WHITEREAD: DRAWINGS

Whiteread’s large-scale sculptures, which often take the form of casts of ‘negative space’ – the interiors of buildings or rooms, or the area beneath items of furniture – are known across the world. Works such as *House* (1993), a cast of a derelict Victorian terraced house in the East End of London, shot Whiteread to prominence as one of the Young British Artists, a group that includes Damien Hirst and Tracy Emin. This exhibition is the first museum retrospective of her works on paper; it offers a fascinating insight into Whiteread’s creative and intellectual practice and a more intimate route into her large-scale pieces, luckily it runs for over four months, meaning there is no excuse to miss it.



Rachel Whiteread: Drawings runs from 8 September to 16 January 2011 at Tate Britain, London, UK. www.tate.org.uk



TRISHA BROWN

Brown is best known as a choreographer and dancer. She has been making experimental and postmodern dance performance work since the early 1960s, her company, the Trisha Brown Dance Company, having performed on some of the world’s top stages. This exhibition however focuses on Brown’s visual art, three decades of videos and mainly abstract drawings that have contributed to her choreographic process over the years. The pieces stand alone but have a fluid quality that ties them to Brown’s work as a dancer, particularly considering the fact- she often uses her whole body to draw with.

Trisha Brown runs from 11 September to 2 January 2011 at the Musée d’Art Contemporain, Lyon, France. www.mac-lyon.com