

“Sugar & Spice” 2009.

Statement - Barbara Ash

Barbara Ash’s recent body of work looks at issues surrounding the impact of global forces on the individual. It attempts to comment on certain pervasive, manufactured ideas of “perfection” & tries, in response, to provide a perspective which calls into question the somewhat ludicrous desire for uniformity.

The installation “Colours” comments on the sensitive yet pervasive hierarchy of skin-colour in post-colonial India & abroad. Hierarchies are a central theme in the work & the burgeoning fairness industry in India (having the largest sales of skin-lightening cream in Asia) & the absence of darker skin in the media/public life was striking to an artist coming from abroad. The installation also addresses parallel issues of “westernization” & conformity with particular emphasis on the female experience. It comments on the huge industry & market that aims to instill in women feelings of dissatisfaction & unhappiness with their own sexual “value” thereby rendering them compliant ever-ready consumers. The work explores ideas of femininity, often using dolls as an icon to look at issues of commodification & female representation & also touching on ideas of sexuality, innocence & beauty.

These standards are also explored in the “Personal care” series, a triptych looking at pressures provoked by the beauty industry. With the 2d works there is a focus on the acceptance of artificiality & how it works in tandem with the new increasingly, affordable technologies & their promotion by omniscient media & advertising forces. The work highlights the pressures of unwieldy beauty standards, one piece “Hair” focuses on the commercial abundance of false hair extensions & products, another “Body” deals with body-shape directives with surgical implants & Western anorexic models & lastly “Skin” explores the universal fascination with fairness. Other works also look at the normalization of plastic surgery into the mainstream.

With Barbara Ash’s work there is an ongoing involvement in juxtaposing traditional craft-based methods with “modern” methodologies/motifs. This is the case, from stone-carved sculptural objects sitting alongside synthetic fun-fur fabric in her earlier work, to the recent drawings using watercolour painting & paper-cutting alongside digital imagery taken from plastic surgery internet adverts & contemporary celebrity photos. There is a playfulness in the incorporation of different modes of working & expectations & in attempting to fuse, supposedly, adverse approaches. In this vein there is also an endeavour to combine “realistic” images, with more photo-based work, alongside “expressive/imagined” modes of representation.

Barbara Ash’s current work explores the situation of the individual & individuality in a technological, globalized, consumerist, environment & attempts to question, and often lampoon, the insidious dictums of a prevailing orthodoxy.

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