

Pascale Mira & Michael Husmann Tschaeni

The works of Pascale Mira and Michael Husmann Tschaeni present the different imageries of two individuals meeting and communicating, both with each other and the audience. As is common within the work of artists who also practice on the street, their imageries include a set of characters which repeat and are placed into created situations. In the Until Never show of the Tschaeni's work the dominant characters are children and a set of hallucinatory 'monsters'. These characters appear before a series of brightly coloured but often precisely detailed backdrops, which carry a loose sense of spatial organisation. The working method of the artists allows these worlds to reach out towards the viewer, entrancing them into the stories presented.

The Tschaeni's in fact work backwards, painting in layers on the reverse of Perspex screens to build up a combination of precisely defined areas with colourful smears and scribbles. The figures of the children are exact representational drawings, presented in active situations of play. This suggests that they are in fact the subjects of these worlds in the sense that our attention and response to the work is focused upon them. However they appear within worlds of fantasy, populated by child-like images of tendril spouting creatures, realised in broad patches of colour and surrounded by bright abstract objects.

These backdrops bring about a brilliant sense of the childlike Imaginary, both playful and sincere, but also containing their own internal logic. Having just spent Christmas with several of my young cousins, I felt like I recognised an extreme form of the worlds that kids create for themselves. The effect left on the adult viewer is like that of a wordless daydream, and indeed it also seemed like the titles of the work became irrelevant in conjunction with the removal of language from the experience of play. However, moving through the show, some of works begin to suggest a sinister undertone that these worlds are displacing the assumed independence of the children within them. Although the creation of these worlds bears a strong link to the children, there is a sense that their control over them is beginning to falter, and that the imaginary creatures of play are in fact becoming sinister figures of an unconscious fear.

In almost all of the works the faces of the children are turned away from the viewer, or obscured by one of the many Australian animals which also inhabit the pictorial space of the works in the Until Never gallery. Incidentally one of the notable pleasures of the show was the curious one of seeing Australian animals used so strikingly by contemporary artists. However in an ironic twist, the freshness of seeing animals such as wombats, rosellas and cockatoos used in painting, is disturbed by the interaction that they have with the

children. Surely everyone can remember a time or an incident as a young child when animals were a dangerous and foreign subject of curiosity. In several of the Tschani's works, the kids seem to have suffered for this innocence – in one work a child's prostrate body is covered (though not quite 'attacked') by a flock of flapping rosellas. In the watercolour drawing on the show's opening wall, we are presented with a rendition of a wombat facing us as it climbs over the kneeling form of a young boy in nappies.

Although these interactions contribute to the sense of wondrous danger faced by the children, there is a lack of malice in the way the children are treated, which in fact makes the images all the more unsettling. In one work which seems to conclusively summarise the situations I am describing a young boy occupies one corner of a brown/orange picture field, covering his eyes with his hands. Dominating the rest of the (small) picture area however, is a large tendriled monster, unrecognisable in human form or intention. Although there is no direct or determined act being played out between the two figures, the effect of this playful world on the child seems to be unmistakable, perhaps best expressed as a sense of dread.

That this unease running through the images is balanced against the simultaneous creativity and lightness of the Imaginary situations is testament to the intelligence of these paintings. The contrast between the confidently patterned and filled drawings, and the looser and more evocative colouration perfectly captures the elegance of the collaborative method employed by Pascale Mira and Michael Husmann Tschaeni. The viewer leaves the Until Never gallery with the rare experience of carrying accepted sensations, rather than being overwhelmed with didactic statements. Subtle and compelling, this show further demonstrates the commitment of Until Never in putting on high quality exhibitions of emerging contemporary artists.

Mickey Skelton, Melbourne 21.02.2007