

Pinafore girls or pre-pubescence rock-chicks: What did tomorrow bring us?

A mother snoops on her children, separated from them, leering at them (potentially) from behind the half-opened door. Two little girls huddle together, one with a deformed hand, possibly a pigskin glove, carrying a cane, her head smothered in a top hat. The other, with sad eyes peering from under a large purple bonnet, her nose reddened, her cheeks bruised, waits motionless. The viewer is left to speculate on their fate. Are they going to be presented as circus oddities or is a more heinous misadventure about to befall them? Will they be given away to a "rich uncle" or sold into service?

A little girl, wearing a summer dress and sandals, sits cross-legged on the floor. A boy in a checked shirt and trousers puts something (potentially phallic) in her mouth while another girl in a dour grey dress, her face covered by her straggling hair looks on (and does nothing to stop it). Behind them on the wall hangs a colourful poster of children of a similar age. They are wearing (respectively) red pussy-style bloomers, blue and red bunny-style dungarees and a pink doggy-style pinafore dress. The little boy is offering the sedentary girl a carrot and she is evidently enjoying it!

The first image is *Mutter mit spielenden Kinder (Der kleine Gernegross), Mother With Children Playing (The Little Ones Enjoy Dressing-up)* painted by Peter Fendi in 1839. It was on view at the Albertina Museum in Vienna earlier this year in an exhibition entitled *Peter Fendi und sein Kreis* (March 22 – June 7 2007). Contextualised in a mainstream museum show and embedded with paintings of a similar genre and era, it aroused no critical comment whatsoever. 19th century audiences were less forgiving – Fendi had already been criticised for a lithography series portraying group sex produced in 1834.

The second work is by Dejan Kaludjerovic. A video installation, produced in 2004, entitled *Bite a carrot, Bunny! Keine Angst vor kleinen Tieren, (Don't be Afraid of Small Animals)* from the cycle *The Future Belongs to Us III*, this piece caused a strong reaction from critics as inappropriate, exploitative

of young children and potentially paedophilic. A similar reaction was provoked by *The Electric Girl* series from, *The Future Belongs to Us II*. This portrays a prepubescent girl (Kaludjerovi's eight year old niece) in various alluring poses in the bedroom with a woman, presumably her mother, as participant or voyeur - the unconscious references to the 19th work are striking. Kaludjerovi contends;

In this work I am taking to the logical extreme existing images of little divas that adults/industry transforms children into. The present market is interested in the selling of the product, and for product to attract attention in order to be sold, any commercial trick, device, transformation is allowed. I depict what I question, one has to see what is being discussed. Today children are encouraged to buy or to have a need to buy as much as the adults. Often very extreme measures of transforming children into sexual beings are being executed.

In exploring consumerism (*Bite a carrot, Bunny!* taking its inspiration from a women's magazine, *Burda* 1980, advertising children's clothes) mixed with perverted sexual references, Kaludjerovi creates a microscopic view of society as a whole. Although many of his works explore children and the misuse of children, his interest is symbolic rather than literal. He uses generic titles, such as *Chlorine Girls, Snake Kids* or *Rose Devil* (taken from the cycle, *The Future Belongs to Us I*, 2005).

Can I Change my Career for a Little Fun? from *The Future Belong To Us I*, 2006 (on-going) uses images taken from contemporary fashion magazines, such as *Vogue Bambini*, and visuals from the violent internet-based cartoon, *Happy Tree Friends*. The work unravels an ambiguity in which the expectations of the adults (society) confront a violent fantasy world which is increasingly the terrain occupied by children's TV and media games. The child's right to be child-like (impulsive, unpredictable, free, playful), is taken away

and this unnatural, prematurely adult child is then inserted into the landscape of the cartoon, witness *Dior Girl* and *Cowboy*. Kaludjerovic develops this theme further in the video animation *Are you ready for a ride?* In the first version, the cartoon character is killed by a shower of meteorites, and in the second (Beckett version), there is a build up of expectation and tension to the sound of twittering bird-song - but nothing happens. In *Love and Rockets* (which references the alternative rock band and Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez' comic-style magazine of the 1980s and 1990s), children with attitude gaze arrogantly at the viewers.



× *Europoly Installation*

proslava dana Evropske unije, Milano/
celebration of *The Day of EU*, Milan, 2006
izgled postavke/installation view
ljubaznošću umetnika/courtesy of the artists



× *Europoly Portable Game Version (prototyp)*
 Galerija A+A — Slovenski center za vizuelnu umetnost,
 Venecija/Gallery A+A — Slovene Central for Visual Art, Venice, 2006
 izgled postavke/installation view
 ljubaznošću umetnika/courtesy of the artists

In Dejan's work we are made aware of the structure of artworks as dialectic sites. In *Recuperating Political Radicality in Contemporary Art*, Peter Osborne argues that artworks constitute dialectic sites of autonomy and dependence.¹ He explores Adorno's notion of "art's double character", namely "autonomy and social fact". Autonomy's political meaning is freedom, the radicalism of its imaginary, whereas dependence's political meaning is the external dimension or context. The relationship between the autonomous and dependent elements are genuinely dialectic and depending on context, produce different effects. Osborne contends artworks also constitute dialectic sites of individuality and collectivity. The declining significance of universals has been replaced by "progressive particularisation"; where each work has to create the conditions of its own intelligibility and its aesthetics are derived from a multitude of subjective interpretations. In this flight from the generality of genres, series have become privileged modes of construction – a combination of structural libertarianism (its form) and imaginary radicalism (its content).

This notion of the series is played out in *Europoly* (2004 ongoing), a hybrid construction that challenges the nature of the artwork by functioning as a board game (the portable version) or an installation constructed in an institutional space, where it operates as a platform for social interaction (in the manner relational aesthetics). The tacit meaning behind the work is somewhat sinister: the EU is

empowered to define identity, (the rules of the game, so to speak). In this neo-liberal supra-national society, everything, including identity, is for sale. The game identifies a number of professions of varying value and prestige and is equipped with profession cards, chance cards and social cards, as well as providing accompanying symbols, such as refugee and designer bags. The work explores issues of identity, power, the process of integration, and questions the rigid, categorical, rule-based system that operates through the application statistics, reducing individuals to a series of value-relations. The throw of the dice, or "luck" largely determines the success or failure of the players in their application to become part of the new European identity.

Europoly builds on issues of identity and displacement in evidence in earlier works. As the malfunctioning children in *The Future Belongs To Us* morph into the professionals in the *Europoly* game, questions are raised about the role of chance in our lives: will, for example, *Electric Girl* become a prostitute or a manager? In the photo-sound installation, *What Did Tomorrow Bring Us*, 2001, Kaludjerovi depicted his parents on the brink of adulthood in an Arcadian scene with the future full of apparent promise. Underlying this beguilingly innocent work is the question of what remained after the demise of the "socialist utopia"?

July 22, 2007

Victoria Preston is an independent curator and critic working in the UK and Switzerland.

1 Kuzma, M. & Osbourne, P. (eds), 2006. *Recuperating Political Radicality in Contemporary Art. (1) Constructing the Political in Contemporary Art*. Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway.