

EYEMAZING



Julianne Rose's imagery deals with identity, and specifically with the unsettling intersection between natural and manufactured identities. Her series titled *Plastic and Flesh* explores the commoditisation of children in the service of adult-driven advertising, or conversely, the imposition onto children of adult-devised commodities, in the form of dolls. The work consists of diptychs that juxtapose an image of a real child with that of a nearly identical doll. What makes these pairings singularly unnerving is that in certain instances, it takes rather close examination to determine which is the child and which is its facsimile. It is this necessity of careful observation that forces one to contemplate issues that go far beyond the page.

The series "looks closely at the identity of children, the projection made by adults through infants, and the sometimes very disturbing confusion between this personal projection and reality," says Rose. "Children can become little dolls while dolls at times seem to possess more life than the children from whom they are modelled." Looking at a photo of a young Asian girl with outsized Geisha-style red lips painted over her mouth brings many questions to mind—what happens to children when they are exposed to toys that are formulated with adult interpretations of what is marketable? And when these interpretations often play into caricatures, stereotypes, and even sexually charged figures, how are the child's development and self-image affected? The photographer acts as provocateur, posing the questions rather than answering them, and opening the doorway to myriad channels of investigation. As the photographer herself states, "I see artists as channels through whom pass certain energies opening doors in each of us, doors that we can't always access alone."

Her project entitled *Singing Autoportrait – The World Survival Tour* is a comment on her experience as the winner of Australia's "Face of the Year" beauty pageant in 1985. In this piece, the Aussie artist—who is now based in Paris—takes an ironic look at the beauty industry, and again creates a comparison between human and manufactured doll. The work is configured as a life-sized triptych made up of photography, light, and sound, and takes the form of a musician's fly case sitting on a tripod. The artist's head is superimposed onto the body of a plastic, lifeless Barbie, a universal symbol of the simultaneous sexualisation and dehumanisation of young women. Rose wears a robot-like expression and her face is painted with doll-style makeup—pink blush, garish blue eye shadow, and the kind of overdone red lips that a child would apply with her mother's lipstick. The result is something out of a Tim Burton film—the beauty queen who is not quite alive, yet not quite dead. She appears soulless and cold. In the place of a heart is a plastic speaker, and one nipple has been transformed into a mechanical button that, when pressed, sets off a karaoke version of *I Will Survive* through the speaker and flashing disco lights from both of the flanking portraits, while the crown in the central portrait sparkles.

Revisiting the *Plastic and Flesh* photographs even a second, third, and forth time, the uncanny resemblance between child and doll continues to unnerve and provoke, the glassy eyes of both humans and toys staring eerily ahead and demanding attention. The confusion between inanimate object and person, between child and adult, and between object and objectified, blurring into an at once attractive and disturbing kaleidoscope of reflected identities. "My work is as much about ethics as aesthetics, and constantly explores and questions corporal representation in our society," muses Rose, "the dangerous confusion between human and objective values."



Julianne Rose, *Flesh & Plastic #1*, 2006, 80 x 120 cm (80 x 60 cm each), Digital print mounted on aluminium, Diasec, edition of 8 + 1 artist proof, courtesy Galerie 13Sévigne, © Julianne Rose

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"I am generally interested in psycho-sociologic subjects and exploration of human identity," says the artist. "Identity is an extremely intricate and fascinating phenomenon, and who we become as adults is so much a consequence of our experiences from childhood, the outcome of an extensive accumulation of influence from our individual physical and psychological environments." In the case of *Plastic and Flesh*, Rose explains, her interest lies in the paradoxical relationship of the child as both a "consumer of objects" and, simultaneously, a "child-object." She elaborates, "The initial awareness of beauty and perfection, accompanied by a deeper disturbing vision, questions the confusing boundaries related to one's own perception of identity. In our consumer society, the child's image (or that which the adult world projects on him/her) is used to sell anything from milk, fashion, cars, food or furniture, to holidays in paradise. Are children themselves becoming products of our consumer world?"

dolls is achieved in camera without digital manipulation, solely through the use of makeup and lighting. In terms of using film versus digital, the artist claims no preferences, and while working mostly in digital at the moment, says that she changes formats and techniques on a regular basis, in response to the requirements of her current project. "Cameras, films, computers, printing are all only tools and I use each according to the result I want for a particular project or image," she explains. "The powerful essence of a photo doesn't stem from a tool." Nevertheless, it is at least in part a tribute to Rose's seamless technique that the process completely disappears, allowing her message to advance so forcefully to the foreground. Revisiting the *Plastic and Flesh* photographs even a second, third, and forth time, the uncanny resemblance between child and doll continues to unnerve and provoke, the glassy eyes of both humans and toys staring eerily ahead and demanding attention. The confusion between inanimate object and person, between child and adult, and between object and objectified, blurring into an at once attractive and disturbing kaleidoscope of reflected identities. "My work is as much about ethics as aesthetics, and constantly explores and questions corporal representation

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