

Monsters and Oddities

Visual art has always been populated by fantastic creatures and monsters -- beings that present, depending on different cases, abnormalities, deformities or hybridism. Since the origins of civilisation, humans have felt the need to create these bizarre forms of life that take on diverse nuances according to the different historical epochs and geographical locations.

During primitive ages, the border between man and monster was shaded and fluid. In the course of history, the more the individual started to be conscious about his uniqueness and dissimilarity to the animal kingdom, the more the contraposition man-monster started to become clearer, and assume negative connotations. This distancing allowed man to consider his own negative qualities from the position of an outsider, while nonetheless never forgetting that the monster is a mirror that reflects unconscious truths about himself. In modern times, visual art and film, as well as new biological and genetic knowledge, blur the boarder between monstrousness and normality, man and beast, often turning points of view upside down (one example of this is the popular science fiction novel *Sentinel* by Frederic Brown).

Around the end of the nineteenth century some trends -- Symbolism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Metaphysics -- focused their analysis on common, everyday objects and the their ability to evoke feelings of strangeness and unfamiliarity through juxtaposition and subtle manipulations. It is not strictly necessary to use a monstrous creature to provoke a sense of strangeness, attraction or repulsion; it is enough to employ common elements -- apparently familiar -- to build dreadfully unknown worlds.

This concept of de-familiarisation is associated with thinkers like Russian theorist Viktor Shklovsky who asserts that this sensation of estrangement -- the revelation of common objects as strange and unusual -- is the essence and aim of the arts, and Bertold Brecht with his theatrical concept of the estrangement between actor and public, which has the purpose of activating the audience by awakening their critically consciousness.

Each work in the exhibition elaborates, even from completely different points of view, these concepts of monstrousness and de-familiarity. All the works propose common elements and situations that have been reinterpreted and exaggerated. Near the childish monsters by Sigga Björg Sigurðardóttir there are the unexpectedly alive creatures created by Lorraine Sue-Fern Yeung, the hybrid by Katinka Simonse (a.k.a. TINKEBELL), the disturbing yet ridiculous portrait of a beauty queen by Erica Eyres and, last but not least, the absurd and poetic love relationship described by Shelly Nadashi.

The public's reaction to these works may be one of disorientation; after this initial confusion, the spectator is perceptively and emotionally alert, immersed in a parallel dimension that connects to and reveals truths about reality. Familiar but simultaneously -- surprisingly -- strange.

Elena Damiano

Curator

Sources

- Brecht, B. (1990) *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. London, Methuen Drama.
- Shklovsky V. (1965) *Art as Technique in Russian Formalist Criticism: Four*

Essays. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press.