

NY

ARTS

Minimalia

Demisani Mabaso

Robert C. Morgan

Mike Bidlo

SENSATION 1999

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Janieta Eyre at Cristenrose Gallery
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Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.
final stanza
of Sylvia Plath's poem "Lady Lazarus"

Canadian artist Janieta Eyre is fascinated by death and the occult. In her first series of photographs done in the early 90s entitled *Rehearsals*, Eyre repeatedly staged her own death as a way, she claims, to psychically stave off becoming the victim of a violent death. Referencing Sylvia Plath's arresting suicide fantasy, Eyre's new series *Lady Lazarus* once again creates fantastic worlds that might be said to embody a state between life and death presented through her particular knack for simultaneously presenting outrageous fictions and unnerving truths. Eyre began her artistic career as a fiction writer and is absorbed by the capacity to blur distinctions between fantasy and reality. Unlike her last series entitled *Incarnations* in which her now signature use of duplicate self-portraits inhabited cramped feeling domestic interiors, the figures here primarily exist in abstracted black backgrounds, focusing the viewer's attention even more on the gothic figures she portrays.

Choosing the medium of photography because of its distinct ability to lend a sense of realism to a scene, Eyre then balances this sense of documentation with surreal imagery and an embrace of bizarre costumes and props. The majority of the works in the *Lady Lazarus* series are black and white photos of Eyre as singleton, twin, or triplet dressed in various costumes that defy simple historical categorization. Eyre successfully undermines a linear depiction of time by melding the old with the new. Her chosen costumes

and props, for example, incorporate antique-looking crinoline and old-style nurses' hats with boldly graphic checkerboards and polka dots and nearly psychedelic flower patterns. Time is also complicated by her creation of scenarios that seem to float languorously so that although the viewer recognizes the narrative present in the work, there is no intention on the artist's part to illuminate a particular reading or locate us chronologically in the elusive story.

An interest in medicine pops up repeatedly with reference to nurses, hospitals, and surgery. Indeed, in this series, Eyre takes her use of the duplicate explicitly beyond a psychological dimension by including a work entitled *Clones*. Here, two identical images of the artist in the nude stand side-by-side. The figures are bald and their eyes are glazed over, giving them an other-worldly appearance. Their hands cover their genitals in an unexpected display of modesty thereby suggesting that clones are both human and alien, or natural and artificial. This interplay between elements we assume to be opposites is what captures the viewer's imagination in these fascinating photographs.

Anne Ellegood

529 West 20th Street
New York NY 10011

Tel 212 206-0297
Fax 212 206-8494

E-Mail: CRgallery@aol.com