

**LAUGHING MY ARTS OFF: THE
ORIGINS OF HUMOUR IN MY ART**

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ABSTRACT

LAUGHING MY ARTS OFF: THE ORIGINS OF HUMOUR IN MY ART

Diane Collet

This thesis is an inquiry into the origins of visual humour in my art. Examples of six women's comic strip and fine art are analyzed as well as my own work in order to reveal patterns and applications for Art Education.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated
to my grandmother

Léonie Dubois

and to my mother

Simone Piché.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my precious friends Claudine Ascher and Stewart Fletcher, and the members of my examining committee, Paul Langdon, Lorrie Blair, and David Pariser, for their insightful comments and continuous support.

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LAUGHING MY ARTS OFF: THE ORIGINS OF HUMOUR IN MY ART

INTRODUCTION

For the past twenty years, I have been making humorous art that scrutinizes society, relationships and gender issues. Vibrant colour and choppy brushstrokes reflect my affinity for expressionism. My work is rooted within my emotions and I use humour as a vehicle to explore the darker side of humanity. It acts as a buffer and creates an objective distance from what I perceive as life's absurdities. My passion for humour is such that I have decided to undertake this qualitative research concerning its presence in my art.

Why and how do I use humour in my art and what are the implications for art education?

As an undergraduate student in the B.F.A. program, many professors encouraged my use of flamboyant colour but discouraged my forays into the realm of humour. The latter seemed to engender panic, more so than the use of blatant sexuality by some of my peers. Perhaps they felt I wasn't taking art or myself seriously. I find it unfortunate that these educators were not sensitive to the expressive possibilities of humour in art. There is a rebellious power in laughter that makes the status quo uncomfortable. Therein lies its value as an impetus for reflection and change.

Upon my graduation, humour naturally began creeping back into my work. I wanted to examine issues that were important to me and I made a conscious choice

to tackle them without artifice. I often viewed life as absurd and in my opinion nothing brought this out better than humour.

Today I still confront difficult topics in an instinctive and non-traditional way. Vivid colours and humour interact to initially lure the viewer to my work whereas the subject matter eventually leads to the contemplation of deeper meanings. I want people to question their fundamental beliefs when they look at my images.

Humour presents an interesting dilemma. What is funny to one person is not necessarily funny to another. Comic perception depends a great deal on cultural sensibilities and whether one is in a receptive state of mind. To appreciate humour, one must be free of anxiety (Holland, 1982, p.69). Humour is never constant and rarely funny all of the time. It represents treacherous territory, is occasionally offensive, and consequently involves a great level of risk-taking.

It also offers another dimension to art, one that is frequently overlooked by educators. Humour offers more than the obvious. It yields nuances, often involves narrative components and like art, is a precious characteristic common only to humankind.

Personal history:

I am a baby boomer, raised during the fifties and sixties. My parents were the first on my block to buy a television set. I grew up watching shows such as Father Knows Best where men were in control and women were basically in their service and in that of their children. These women were virtuous and self-effacing. Only entertainers and prostitutes could get away with overt expressions of sexuality.

Marilyn Munroe was an individual who particularly enthralled me. She wielded incredible power and manipulated men with her beauty and seductive ways.

The sixties brought forth tremendous change with the hippie and women's movement. Suddenly women could be as sexually active as men and were fighting for equal pay and opportunity in the workplace. Coping with this sociological about-face involved great adaptability and I found it particularly difficult to shed years of subliminal conditioning. On the one hand I wanted to become a perfect, docile, fifties wife and mother but I also fantasized being a sexually liberated and educated career woman. I totally embraced feminist ideology during this period however I don't think I ever managed to emotionally reconcile my upbringing with these radically opposing views. To this day, I remain aware of my early conditioning and find it difficult to surmount psychological barriers I have built within myself.

I often wonder why I have such an acutely developed sense of humour. I have a feeling that it evolved because my mother was diagnosed with severe clinical depression when I was very young. Antidepressant medication was not available in those days and she constantly went through the revolving doors of medical institutions, undergoing a number of experimental treatments for her condition. For years a cloud of gloom hung over my home and I coped by perceiving life as some kind of circus. I spent a great deal of time alone and became an avid fan of irreverent Mad Magazine. I believe this contributed to the development of my overactive imagination and love of jocularly.

Humour does not exist in a vacuum. It requires a social context and is therefore an important communication tool. I obviously don't make humorous artwork only for myself.

Humour is also culture bound. The feminist movement took place in the Western world. Our shrinking planet brings us into contact with people from all corners of the globe and in some societies women are still viewed as chattels. Conflicting value systems and personal battles continue to haunt me and feed the frequently black humour in my work.

Relevant literature:

Theories about humour originate from every possible perspective however no one definitive theory exists. Part of the problem is that humour involves emotion but is also a type of behaviour. Not everyone has a highly developed sense of humour. Serious people tend to be practical and view incongruities as uncomfortable disturbances in life's patterns while humorous individuals look at similar situations from a distance, in a playful way, and are not generally governed by them (Morreall, 1983, p.122). I intend to review literature from various standpoints in order to summarize what humour is generally understood to be. My sources include among others: Laughing: A Psychology of Humor by Norman N. Holland (1982), Laughter and Liberation by Harvey Mindess (1971), Argument of Laughter by D.H. Monro (1963), Taking Laughter Seriously by John Morreall (1983), and Humor and Society: Explorations in the Sociology of Humor by Marvin R. Koller (1988).

In this research, I will also refer to feminist literature concerning visual humour. Women comic strip artists for instance, express similar viewpoints and concerns as mine. Sources include Gloria Kaufman and Mary Kay Blakely (1980) in Pulling Our Own Strings and Nancy Walker ((1998) in David E.E. Sloane (Ed.) in

New Directions in American Humor. Humorous work produced by six women artists will be examined. I have chosen these artists not because men have not created great comic art in the past, but because there has been neglect in documenting work by women. The selected works are comparable to mine in that they deal with similar issues. Most were completed within the last seventy years as women's visual humour tends to be a relatively recently phenomenon.

I will be referring to Nicholas Rourke's (1997) Humor in Art: A Celebration of Visual Wit for data concerning humour-triggering mechanisms and applications in art education as well as Sheri R. Klein's (1999) article in the NAEA Advisory entitled Invitations into Art Through Visual Humour. Klein believes that embracing visual humour in curriculum is equivalent to embracing multiculturalism because humour is found throughout world cultures.

Research process:

I discovered that when my two children were very young, I didn't work the same way as I did when they became older. Early on, I didn't have time to plan or undertake preliminary sketches before I settled in the studio. I had to work fast, used collage and drawing techniques extensively, and rather than work from sketches, resolved issues and problems from painting to painting.

The chosen themes are not representative of my entire body of work. An overabundance of generally naughty and playful ideas over the years made the selection extremely difficult. Those included have either generated a great deal of interest on the part of viewers, spawned ample visual or written documentation on my part, or have special meaning for me. I have recounted personal narratives,

described my process in developing ideas and symbolic visual language, and reflected on the feelings associated with the making of each work. My aim is to describe the poetic, dream-like, lateral thinking process that in my view is akin to the workings of my mind. Unconscious and conscious thought mechanisms stimulate my use of visual wit. Through qualitative reflection I have uncovered connections and patterns that reveal how humour is a meaningful and important component of my production. It is my hope that this exploration will motivate artists and educators to use humour and whimsy in art and art education.

Chapter 1

HUMOUR THEORIES

Notwithstanding an incredible number of theories concerning humour and laughter, amazingly, an all-encompassing humour theory is still elusive because the phenomenon is incredibly complex. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine all of these theories in any detail. Consequently, I have chosen to review the following three, superiority, incongruity and relief/restraint.

The SUPERIORITY and/or DEGRADATION THEORY:

Considered an *emotional* theory, superiority and degradation originate with Plato and Aristotle. Plato believed that by degrading others, people elevate their own status and conquer all opposition (Koller, 1988, p.9). What makes a person laughable is their self-ignorance (Morreall, 1983, p.4).

Aristotle agreed with Plato and viewed laughter as a form of derision and wit as educated insolence (Morreall, 1983, p.5). He thought that laughing served the purpose of social corrective by keeping wrongdoers in line. Aristotle stated that one should only laugh at someone else's *minor* misfortunes, because it was morally inappropriate to laugh at serious ones (Morreall, 1983, p.110). Both men believed it preferable to avoid humour because it was harmful to a person's character (Morreall, 1983, p.6).

The superiority theory remained virtually unchanged until the 1800's when Thomas Hobbes added a modern twist. He surmised that as individual members of the human race, we constantly struggle with one another. When we win, we attain a

superior advantage and our laughter is self-congratulatory. He referred to it as a state of "sudden glory" in which we find ourselves better off in the struggle than we were before (Morreall, 1983, p. 5-6).

Another theorist named Anthony Ludovici (1932) applied an evolutionary approach to the superiority theory, speculating that people laugh when they feel they have adapted to a particular situation or environment; which he labels "superior adaptation" (Morreall, 1983, p.6). When people bare their teeth as they do when laughing, a primitive vestige of challenge or threat behaviour is evoked. In his view, our emotional lives are always dominated by basic feelings of insecurity and as a consequence, cowardice and laziness hides in our laughter. Like Aristotle, he was convinced that humour was the main cause of human decadence (Monro, 1963, p.100) because it weakened the character and confused the mind (Morreall, 1983, p.102).

The INCONGRUITY THEORY:

Incongruity is *intellectual* humour. Pleasure derives from finding unexpected connections between ideas. A contrast is created between the way a thing is presented and the way it really is. An orderly world yields patterns however incongruity reveals something that doesn't quite fit into patterns (Morreall, 1983, p.15).

While best known for his views on "superiority", Aristotle also flirted with incongruity. In his Rhetoric, he stated that one way for a speaker to get a laugh was to set up a certain expectation for his listeners and then to hit them with something they did not expect. There is speculation that Aristotle never really developed the

incongruity theory because it didn't fit into his ideas about superiority (Morreall, 1983, p.16).

Immanuel Kant (1792) considered the originator of the incongruity theory, describes the absurd as being essential for a lively, convulsive laugh (Morreall, 1983, p.16). Incongruity becomes "an affection arising from sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing" (Monro, 1963, p.147). Emphasis is on surprise.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1794) offers a variation on Kant stating that an unexpected conclusion to a situation is what initiates laughter and not necessarily the idea of *nothing*. Rather, what is laughable is "a mismatch between conceptual understanding and perception" (Morreall, 1983, p. 17-18). For Schopenhauer, the sources of the ludicrous are always paradoxical. "They trace connections where none exist, emotions are often involved, and the reversal of values is wholly in fun" (Monro, 1963, p.56).

Incongruity means that we look at things objectively. An incongruous, humorous attitude is philosophical, one that allows for a sudden collision of ideas normally kept in different compartments of the mind (Monro, 1963, p.157).

The RELIEF/RESTRAINT THEORY:

Long before the advent of psychology, both Plato and Aristotle hint at the relief/restraint theory of humour. Plato describes humour as liberating in the face of political constraints and social mores (Morreall, 1983, p.102), while Aristotle brings up catharsis but never expounds a precise definition (Holland, 1982, p.88). In his view, comedy acts out a revolt against control, offers an escape from conformity and this allows us to transcend our inferiorities (Holland, 1982, p.90). We experience a

spiritual bath, a necessary cleansing. Arthur Schopenhauer (*incongruity*) also refers to humour as a relief from Dame Reason (Morreall, 1983, p.21) and a portion of Immanuel Kant's hypothesis also involves the notion of emotional release (Morreall, 1983, p.16).

The father of the relief/restraint theory is considered to be Sigmund Freud. He describes relief as a release from restraints, restrictions or controls that are physiological, psychological, or social in nature (Koller, 1988, p.8). Sex and hostility are the repressed drives that generally lead to laughter but any taboo will do (Morreall, 1983, p.22). The main function of jokes is to allow us to express "morally unacceptable desires" (Morreall, 1983, p.103). Freud saw humour as a release of psychic energy while another theorist Herbert Spencer viewed laughter as a safety valve that releases energy built up in the nervous system (Morreall, 1983, p.29).

The relief/restraint theory often includes mention of a Gods-eye view wherein nothing is sacred (Mindess, 1971, p.30). The humorist sees the world objectively from a detached perspective and "penetrates the petty pretences of human behaviour" (Munro, 1963, p.59). Humour is incompatible with hero-worship (Monro, 1963, p.61) and a Gods-eye view offers momentary relief from striving, serving as a brief "holiday" (Monro, 1963, p.207). Morreall (1983) draws a parallel with philosophy: "... the humorous attitude is like the philosophical: the person who can appreciate the humour in his own situation is liberated from the dominance of his emotions, and so he has a more objective view of himself" (p.106). I believe a Gods-eye view also hints at the superiority theory. If humorists have the capacity to distance themselves from everyday events, they probably entertain the illusion of

being untouched by life's insanity and consequently feel above it all or temporarily superior.

Harvey Mindess's (1971) presents an interesting contemporary twist to the relief theory by encompassing ideas about superiority and incongruity within it. He sees humour as a type of liberation indispensable to our welfare (p.15), which has therapeutic power (p.21) and enables us to survive failure and success. The list below summarizes his views on humour and liberation:

- Reason: Nonsense becomes an escape from the intellect (Mindess, 1971, p.77).
- Language: Punning is a creative escape from a restrictive mode of expression (p.86).
- Naïveté: Satire is a periodic release from single-minded views (p.106).
- Morality: Humour allows a shift from an attempt to be good to an attempt to be natural (p.59).
- Redundancy: Laughter creates an escape from robotic behaviour (p.107).
- Seriousness: Humour reduces people to a childish state of mind; instead of pacing we skip, instead of shouting we sing. We express a joyful heart (p.121).
- Egotism: Nothing is sacred (p.137).
- Conformity: From birth to death we are programmed to nullify our uniqueness. We are stifled, conversely humour offers a relief from conventions (p.35).

All theories overlap and interweave so naturally that not one of them seems to adequately explain the nuances of humour. Murray Davis (1993) in "What's So

Funny?" believes the three theories reflect the times in which they were written and that each tries explain or cover too much. He feels rather, that they complement one another by dealing with different aspects of the same basic but complex process, which he describes in the following way:

1. "Individuals who perceive humour through an *"incongruity"* in the outer world,
2. express through laughter the *"release or relief"* of being subjectively unaffected by this objective contradiction,
3. and consequently feel their laughingly sustained subjective integration manifests their *"superiority"* to the humorously disintegrated object" (p.7).

Rather than dissect my artwork from the vantage point of each incomplete humour theory, I will assume that aspects of each mesh together as described by Davis above.

Chapter 2

WOMEN'S VISUAL HUMOUR – THE COMIC STRIP AND FINE ART

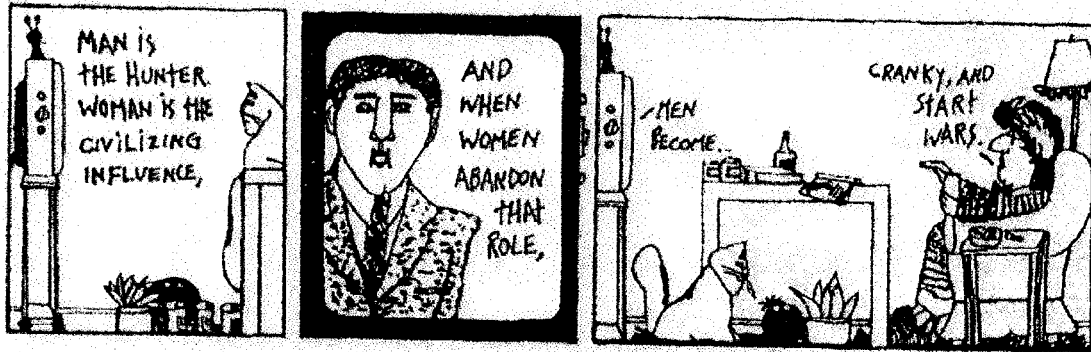
Nicholas Rourke (1997) identifies eleven psychological, humour-triggering mechanisms that are used by humorists to create unexpected and amusing conclusions (p.12). These include association, transposition, transformation, contradiction, exaggeration, parody, punning, disguise, satire, narration and appropriation (Rourke, 1997, p.14-16). Detailed descriptions of these appear in Appendix 1. I will refer to these mechanisms in the following examples of women's visual humour in order to identify how a humorous conclusion is attained.

Comic Strips:

The most widespread examples of women's visual humour are seen in comic strips. Various motivations compel women cartoonists to create. Artist Nicole Hollander feels a sense of outrage at all the things that bombard her from the media (Walker, 1998, p.104); Cathy Guisewite says she creates "a personal response to the culture" while Lynn Johnston's produces work that is autobiographical. Comic strips point out what is wrong with in the world and suggest *by inversion*, ideal and more humane scenarios. Women's comic art tends to be overtly or subversively political (Walker, 1988, p.105) in that it responds to the culture by talking back

"...to those forces that seek to manipulate women's lives...force readers to see beyond the humour to realities of sexism, racism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination. In this regard, all are to some degree political in intent. Equally important is their use of autobiographical elements – as reflections of what their

creators have experienced – which they use to make the comic strip a conversation in which we may mutually explore contemporary women’s lives” (Walker, 1988, p.116).



Reprinted by permission of Nicole Hollander, November 7, 2002.

Humour triggering mechanisms: Contradiction, exaggeration, satire, and narration.

In this strip by Hollander, a television commentator alludes to a stereotypical female role. The primary character, Sylvia, refuses to be manipulated by the source of this “truth”, in this case, an authority figure on television. She challenges readers to examine their robotic assumptions, emphasizing the elemental importance of questioning what is seen and heard via the media. Hollander’s character does not accept the notion that her purpose in life is to serve as the civilizing influence of men. She returns the responsibility where it belongs, back to the culture and to men themselves. This kind of humour definitely presents a political position and attempts to dispel a stereotypical myth. Hollander sets up the viewer for an unexpected conclusion. The comic strip uses a narrative format consisting in a series of graphic representations to tell a story. Contradiction is at play when she tosses her response back to the television set. She pokes fun at the culture (satire),

aims to trigger awareness concerning stereotypical beliefs, and attempts to discourage blind faith in the media.

In the following strip by Cathy Guisewite, Andy Warhol's infamous "fifteen minutes of fame" quote is revived and cleverly turned upside down into "fifteen minutes of anonymity." In so doing, Guisewite reminds us that privacy in our present-day world is merely an illusion. She spoofs our enslavement to the Internet when she refers to 9427 e-mails, another time-consuming by-product of technology and a source of additional stress in our already uncontrollable lives.

Guisewite appropriates a phrase, twists it around, creates a contradiction, and an unexpected conclusion to her narrative. She uses exaggeration (9427 e-mails) to parody human behaviour.



Comic Strip by Cathy Guisewite – Universal Press Syndicate

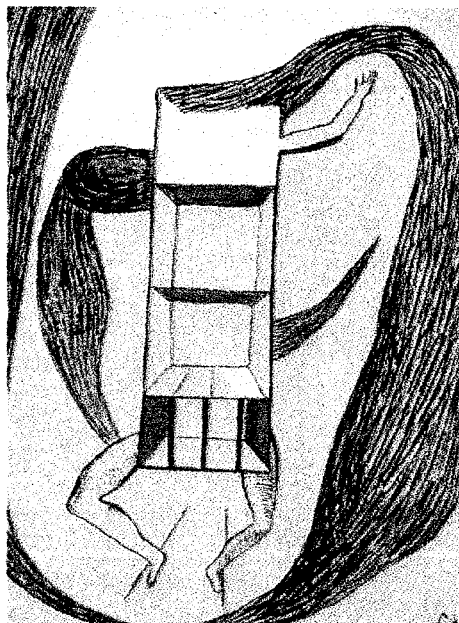
Humour triggering mechanisms: Contradiction, exaggeration, parody, appropriation and narration.

Women's humour ridicules persons or systems from both non-accepting and accepting "that's life" perspectives (Kaufman, 1980, p.13). It tends to be revolutionary and rebellious, a metaphor for transformation that stimulates thought about cultural change. Viewers must want, at least briefly, to emancipate themselves from normal representation. In order to laugh, people have to recognize that they share the same repressions. Women's laughter is a "communal response" which is not "gender-exclusive" (Isaak, 1996, p.5).

Fine Art:

The following examples of humorous art created by women visual artists reveal the use of similar devices as in comic strip art.

Louise Bourgeois

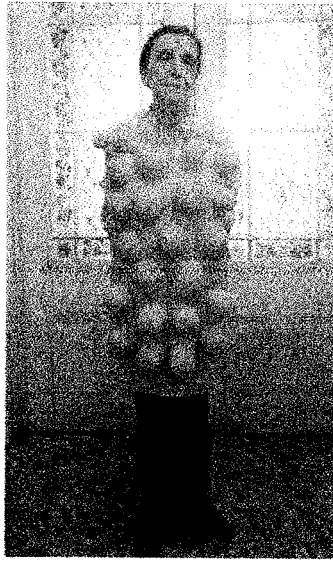


Femme Maison (1945-47)

Humour triggering mechanisms: Association, transposition, transformation, exaggeration, and satire.

Louise Bourgeois often referred to the word "privilege." She felt it was a privilege to have children, to be an artist, to be part of a "right" marriage and that perhaps it was wrong for her to have so many privileges. She said, "You deny yourself, deny your sex, deny yourself tools to save money for the family" (Gardner, 1994, p.47)

Her frustration and confusion are evident in the Femmes Maison series. In French, the word femme has several meanings. It can refer to a woman, a wife or an unfaithful spouse. Bourgeois most certainly overheard North American women refer to themselves as housewives, while in France, a woman would rather admit to being someone's mistress than a housewife. In this work, the woman's face is no longer an identity but a house. The word "maison" represents a sustaining structure, a smothering place, and a refuge (Gardner, 1994, p. 49-50). Bourgeois' painting responds to North American culture with an immigrant's voice. The work stimulates thought and forces viewers to see beyond stereotypical female roles. Bourgeois uses association when she takes an expression, "housewife", and envisions it literally, transposing the image of an actual house in lieu of a woman's face and body. She nullifies her existence as a human being, transforms her into an object, and creates an incongruity as a result. By using visual exaggeration and interpretation to make a point, Bourgeois mocks a sacred cow. This work is virulent in its satire. Bourgeois' revolutionary work was completed in the late 1940's. The women's movement was still 20 years away.



The Confrontation Exhibit – a banquet/ fashion show of body parts

(1978)

Humour triggering mechanisms: Appropriation, transposition, transformation, exaggeration, disguise, narration and satire.

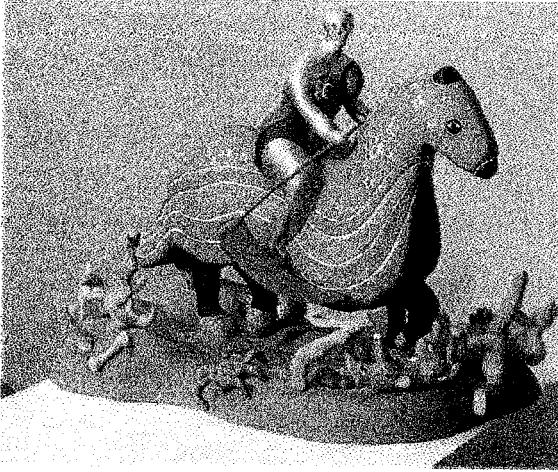
Apart from this garment of body parts, Bourgeois orchestrated a banquet table heaped with latex organs and carcasses alluding to a debauch of consumption and copulation that leads to a confrontation with death. This event, conceived as a joke by Bourgeois, was a comment on the sexes "because they are so mixed today" (Gardner, 1994, p.93). The punk movement with its threatening stance fascinated her. She viewed the clothing and hairstyles as parodies of the bland fifties. Art historian Gert Schiff and punk models paraded in her outrageous body parts performing a nervy hour of satiric fancy where they shouted verbal abuse at one another. Spectators sat or stood in wooden boxes unaware that they were meant to

be coffins. These were a reminder of how short life is. Bourgeois said, "The humour is black...despair is always black" (Gardner, 1994, p. 92-94).

This performance is an excellent example of artwork that responds to cultural phenomena. Humorous satire of this kind points to the absence of self-awareness within the culture. Bourgeois is politically sensitive to the hopelessness and anger inherent in the punk movement, which seeks relief from conformity and yet by its very nature of group adherence, creates another type of conventionality. She forces viewers to confront this dichotomy and seeks to stimulate multiple levels of consciousness. Bourgeois' garment is the epitome of the absurd, an incongruous comment about humanity's preoccupation with body image and sex.

She appropriates and transposes breasts usually hidden from view behind clothing to a full frontal "in your face" confrontational garment. She exaggerates; displays a multitude of breasts (not your run of the mill two), and other body parts. Bourgeois takes things to a ridiculous extreme. She uses the disguise when she has people stand unknowingly in coffin-like boxes. The performance implies a type of narration, a sequence of events. Her remarks concerning the brevity of life reveal her preoccupations. The work brutally reminds viewers to treasure each moment of their ephemeral lives.

Niki de Saint Phalle



Death (1985)

Humour triggering mechanisms: Exaggeration, transposition, transformation, contradiction, parody, disguise, narration and appropriation.

This structure is from Niki de Saint Phalle's Tarot Garden in Garavicchio, Italy. The garden is based on Tarot cards, reminiscent of her childhood. De Saint Phalle reveals:

"Les tarots me rappellent les contes de fée tant aimés de mon enfance. Chaque carte représente à la fois une épreuve, un trésor, et une question" (Mazzanti, 1998, p.42).

Translation:

"The tarot cards remind me of fairytales that I loved so much in my youth. Each card represents a test, a treasure and question, all rolled into one."

De Saint Phalle's life was plagued with hardship. Memories of a violent father, a neglectful mother, the experience of emotional breakdown, and persistent asthma and arthritis all contributed to her outlook in life. Art freed her from fixations that would have gotten her locked up in a mental hospital (Mazzanti, 1998, p.28-29). Her interior world, nourished by childhood stories, transposed itself into the exterior world.

The maquettes are reminiscent of children's toys, and recreated on a gargantuan scale. De Saint Phalle wanted to demonstrate that women could produce monumental artwork (Mazzanti, 1998, p.36). Visitors have access to the inner workings of her mind as they become miniature visitors in a fantasy world.

Using the mechanism of exaggeration, she augments the scale of her work to colossal proportions. An appropriated two-dimensional element, the Tarot card, is transformed into a three-dimensional sculpture, and transposed into a natural setting. These mechanisms yield a joyful contradiction, that of playful death. In the Western world, mortality is historically associated with the colour black, symbol of darkness, loss and sorrow, and often represented as a masculine entity in the guise of the Grim Reaper. De Saint Phalle converts this entity into a female goddess-figure wearing a brilliantly coloured swimsuit and carrying the proverbial scythe while riding a toy-like blue horse. She parodies western customs as she disguises the situation with bright, primary colours, evoking narration as she fashions a new myth from an old one. A historical tradition is turned on its head by an unexpected and incongruous depiction of the grim "reaperette." De Saint Phalle invites viewers to reconsider their views on mortality and stimulates a re-examination of occidental

beliefs. In so doing, she expresses revolutionary concepts as well as imaginative alternatives with respect to the cycle of life and death.

Meret Oppenheim



Stone Woman (1936)

Humour triggering mechanisms: Association, transposition, transformation, contradiction, punning, and satire.

Meret Oppenheim received a great deal of recognition after she created "Déjeuner en fourrure", a large cup and saucer covered with the fur of a Chinese gazelle. North Americans were not familiar with the name Meret and assumed she was a male artist, which may have contributed to her international renown. Following her acclaim, she began to lose faith in herself and pronounced that she

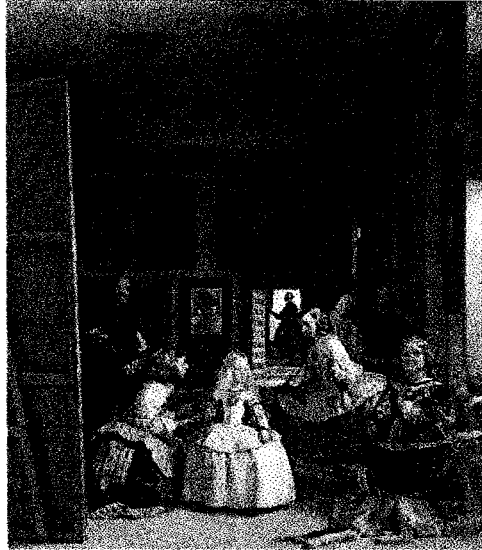
felt as if millennia of discrimination against women were resting on her shoulders, embodied in her feelings of inferiority (Curiger, 1989, p. 38-43).

Oppenheim had an incredibly *elastic* mind and her creations were frequently incongruous. She designed clothing to earn extra money. These were unusual if not commercially successful pieces such as gloves with light blue piping and red painted veins (Curiger, 1989, p.31). She made the interior of humanity visible by turning it inside out.

The incongruous "Stone Woman" reflects her disposition at the time when she created this work. Her autobiographical references, visions of her inner world, talk back to the culture and satirize the fate of women at a universal level.

Oppenheim associates her mood with the heaviness of stones, their shapes reminiscent of women's curves. She transposes and transforms them into a female body, creates a contradiction or incongruity. There is evident word/image play, a double-entendre that reinforces the weight of the image.

Louise Stanley



**Las Meninas
by Velasquez**



**Functional Family Triptych
(Dad's Version) (1993)**

Humour triggering mechanisms: Association, transposition, transformation, contradiction, punning, narration, appropriation and satire.

This work is an homage to Velasquez's Las Meninas, and depicts the Court of Philip IV. It refers to the human condition, in particular family and social issues. Stanley appropriates Velasquez's setting and costumes, includes actual portraits of royalty, (Rourke, 1997, p.5) and situates them in the present day creating an unusual incongruity.

This time warp is a very creative and multi-layered way to deal with contemporary issues. The wife/mother figure, probably Queen Marianna, (Rourke, 1997, p.5) is seen wearing a rather blank, zombie-like expression while washing dishes. Meanwhile while her "king" of a husband fixates on the television set, beer and snacks in hand. The woman performs routine, mundane tasks, while

simultaneously supervising her children doing their homework. The father is mesmerized by technology and seems oblivious to the emotional atmosphere of his surroundings.

This impossible, absurd situation is a scathing comment on stereotypical roles and presents a good example of “that’s life” humour. To achieve this end, Stanley uses association to connect the royal court to everyday living. She transposes the characters into contemporary times and transforms them to create a contradiction. She uses punning in the title alluding to a “Functional Family Dad’s Version” and creates a new myth, a form of narration. Her appropriation is transformed into biting satire about the nuclear family.

These powerful examples of women’s visual humour talk back to the culture, depict situations with political intent, force viewers to see beyond discrimination, and frequently refer to autobiographical sources. They also tend to be equity based and request a communal, gender-inclusive response. Unlike political cartoons, humorous visual satire contrived by women artists is generally aimed at society rather than at individuals and by inversion, suggests a better world for everyone. In the following six chapters, I will investigate examples of my humorous vision and identify similar motivation and mechanisms.

Chapter 3

THE ARTIST, WIFE AND MOTHER

Humour triggering mechanisms: Association, exaggeration, transformation, contradiction, parody, satire, and narration.

My studio is a small room in the basement, next to the laundry chute and washer and dryer. I have a regular ritual that I perform as an artist, wife and mother of a small child. I open the door of the chute, sort the clothing into piles on the floor, put a load in the washer, turn it on, and open the door to my studio. While the first load is washing, I calculate out how much time I have to produce art that day. Usually I don't have much to spare, interruptions abound, so I have to be efficient. The cycle is such that when the washer stops, I leave my drawing or painting, put that load in the dryer, another in the washer and return to my artwork.

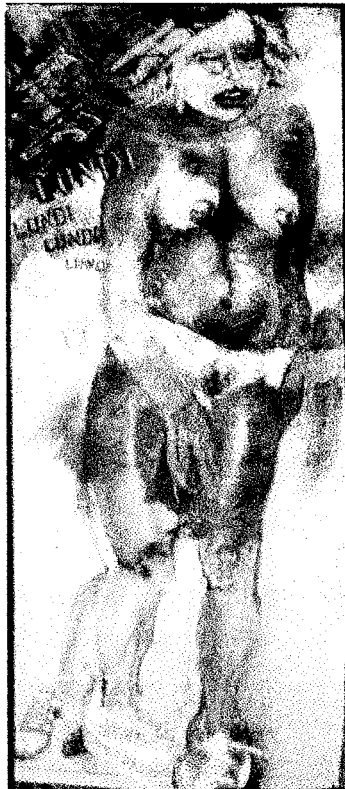
One day as I begin my ritual once again, I entertain the germ of an idea. I decide to paint a week of laundry. I hunt down scraps of canvas that I have stored away and cut them into oversize shapes of clothing. I sew bits and pieces together and in some cases add other types of fabric such as lace. In order to provide links from one painting to the other, I repeat visual elements in each garment, my turquoise running shoes and clothespins.

A couple of years prior to this project, I had produced a self-portrait of myself with a clothespin attached to the collar of my shirt. It was lying around so I fastened it there temporarily, planning to drop it into the appropriate container when I happened upon it. I forgot it was there until I set myself up for the self-portrait. I included the clothespin in my drawing because it was a perfect metaphor

for myself at that time, an artist who did lots of laundry. The symbol remained etched in my mind to be recycled in "A Week of Laundry."



© Une partie de moi-même - 1981



© Lundi - 1982



© Mardi - 1982

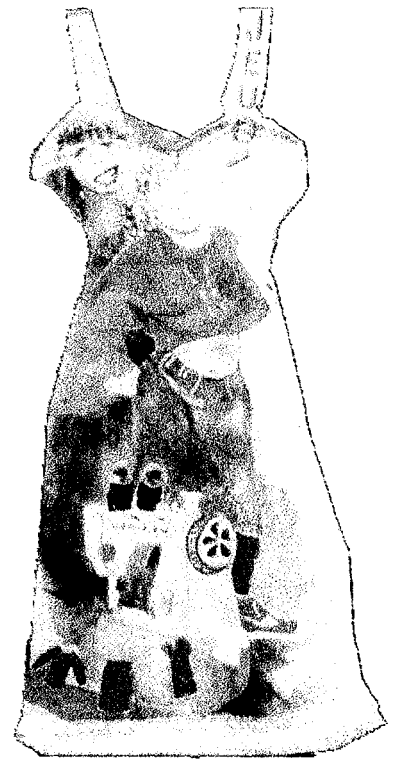
I begin with Monday. There are always tons of clothes in the laundry chute on Mondays. I am not a morning person; I usually feel groggy until 10:00. I paint myself as I feel on Mondays, like a zombie.

When Monday is done, I begin Tuesday. I paint my son and myself seated within the confines of a pair of pants. I create this facsimile by sewing pieces of canvas together. This allows me to save money because like many artists, I don't have much.

When the time comes to paint Wednesday, I decide to interpret myself washing the floor. My son is behind me sitting on his little Fisher Price car. I don't know why I bother to wash the floor. There will be tire tracks on it soon.



© Mercredi – 1982



© Jeudi – 1982

Thursday is about my relationship with my sewing machine. I am a lousy seamstress but I do my best with clothing repairs. I paint two little children sitting on the machine. My son always has friends over to play so I often have two or more children to supervise.

Friday deals with my attempts at jogging. I am always miserable when I exercise. It's not my favourite activity and difficult to fit into my life.



© Vendredi – 1982



© Samedi – 1982

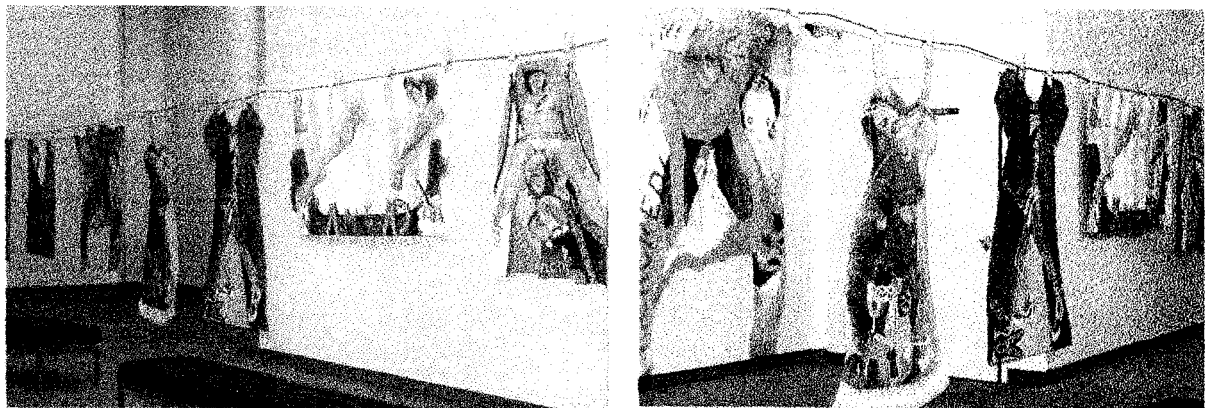
Saturday depicts the bath I deserve before I crash into my bed at night. I am exhausted. Now what is that pink teddy bear doing there?

Sunday is my day of rest. Little one is nestled between my legs. Everyday is Mummy Day.



© Dimanche – 1982

Giant clothespins and forty feet of cable are required to make the installation appear realistic. I never get to see the piece in its entirety until it is hung in a public gallery.



© La semaine de lavage - 1982 - Approximate dimensions 35' X 7'

When people hang out their laundry to dry, they expose part of their personal lives. I associate the notion of an art exhibition with that of routine,

commonplace, and intimate exposure. The scale of the clothing and clothespins are exaggerated to create a violation of an expectation; the familiar becomes strange.

Guy Robert in his book Art Actuel au Québec discusses expressionism's propensity to alter the human body and links it to my installation:

"...il devient évident que le corps humain a retrouvé toute sa puissance musculaire, même s'il semble parfois s'écorcher ou s'engouffrer dans un combat qui le dépasse : car peut-être est-ce dans ce dépassement du corps, dans cette transgression de ses limites apprivoisées ou de ses performances répertoriées que le sentiment de familiarité et de possession chavire, pour qu'émerge quelque profil neuf ou visible, du rapport au monde du corps?"

Semblable transgression peut aussi bien s'accomplir sur la trame la plus triviale, celle par exemple de la petite et routinière « semaine de lavage » que Diane Collet...étale sans pudeur comme sans compromis, dans une imagerie mordante, abrasive, décapante. Sous son pinceau ou son crayon, la femme se charge d'une extrême tension...." (Robert, 1983, p. 103)

Translation:

"...it becomes evident that the human body has found all its muscular power even when it seems at times to scrape or engulf itself in a battle that is beyond it: it is perhaps when the body oversteps its boundaries, transgressing its domesticated limits or routine performances, that sentiments of familiarity and possession capsize, to eventually emerge with a new and visible profile that relates to the collective human body?"

This type of transgression can be accomplished via an absurdly trivial format, such as the inconspicuous and routine week of laundry that Diane Collet...displays

unabashedly without compromise, using imagery that is biting, abrasive, and caustic. Her brush or pencil electrifies women with extreme tension....”

My use of colour is bright, cheerful but disguises and mildly satirizes the habitual, boring aspects of a homebound mother’s life. The work is similar in inspiration to Louise Bourgeois’ *Femme Maison* series. A subliminal contradiction exists within “this work of art” when it makes no reference to the fact that this person/artist actually finds time to make art. The main character is typical, expected, ordinary, and the title bears out this metaphor of routine existence.

The paintings are sequentially presented in a narrative format, resembling an enlarged comic strip. By examining my internal world, I create a piece that many women can relate to. In this instance, I work from the inside out, using my personal life to generalize about the external world. The work is riddled with incongruities, lampoons the mundane and responds to a culture that valorizes a conventional, stereotypical outlook on life.

Reactions to the installation, exhibited it in my hometown, were very positive. This type of work was not what the population was used to seeing at the time and many were initially shocked, then amused, and finally provoked into rethinking their ideas about art. The message was not lost on many of the viewers although I did have to explain why I conceived the work. I don’t believe many understood the link I made between the clothesline and the art exhibit.

Chapter 4

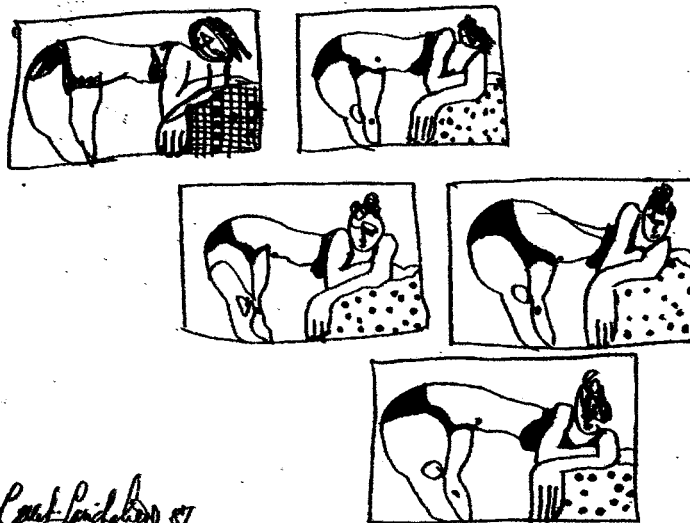
REVERSE ANTHROPOMORPHISM*

(*Anthropomorphism usually means giving human attributes to things not human, in my case, I reverse this meaning and give animal attributes to humans.)

Humour triggering mechanisms: Association, transposition, transformation, contradiction, exaggeration, parody, punning, and satire.

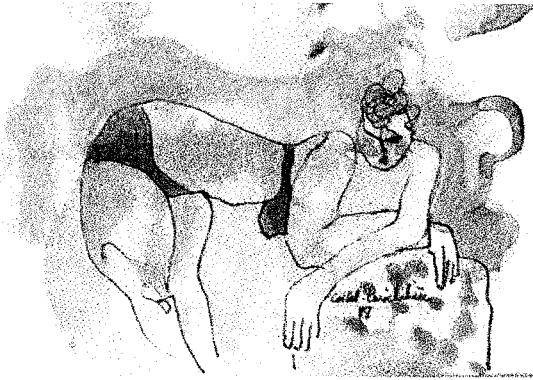
I am often at the neighbourhood pool where my son takes regular swimming lessons. I bring a blanket, lay it on the grass and sit as I wait for him to finish. I always observe what is going on around me however on one particular occasion, my perceptions alter.

Mothers and their children are everywhere. They are well equipped with coolers full of drinks and snacks, and bags filled with towels, sunscreen, and other sundry items. The women resemble animals, their backs arching as they retrieve items from the containers. The scene reminds me of a zoo or barnyard. I apply reverse anthropomorphism as I begin to doodle animal-like woman figures. This fleeting moment of observation spawns a series of sketches and paintings that depict women on all fours.



D. C. Lindley 87

© Reverse anthropomorphism doodles

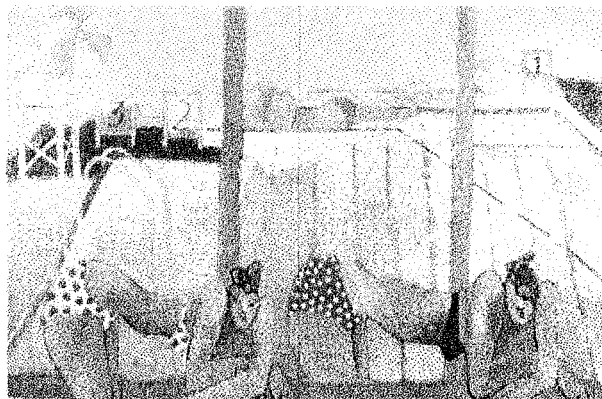


© Sketch for 1...2...3



© 1...2...3, 30" X 40" – 1987

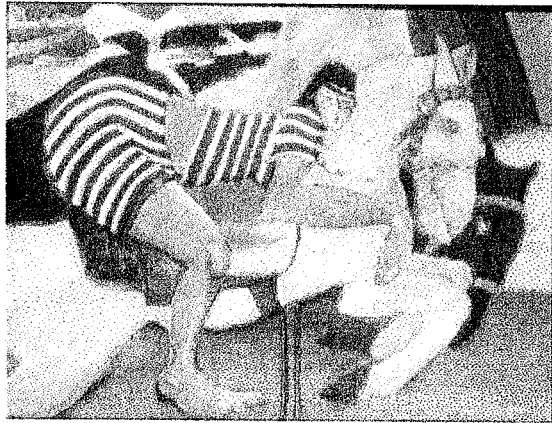
The orange/pink shadow behind the woman in the sketch on the left reveals an analogous thought process, the presence of another animal, most probably a horse. The analogy is now imbedding in my thinking and a phrase replays in my head like a broken record: we are supposed to be more than animals.



© La piscine (diptych), 40" X 60" – 1987

I produce a number of works using this imagery: my she-animal rides a carousel horse in "Mary-go-riding", becomes a half woman/half zebra hybrid in

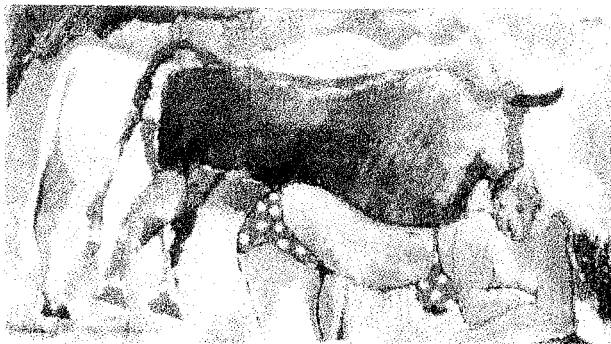
"Zerebral", evokes a prehistoric cave painting in "Up Against Some Heavy Bull", and becomes one with the oxen in "The Transformation of Lily White."



© Mary-go-riding, 30" X 40" – 1988



© Zerebral, 22" X 28" – 1990



© Up against some heavy bull,
23½" X 43" – 1989



© The Transformation of Lily White,
22" X 28" – 1989

In the three-year period during which I explore this theme, I create an image called "Out to Pasture" that engenders a range of reactions greater than all these paintings combined. The female characters retain their metaphoric animal stance, which I emphasize with zebra and leopard prints on their garments. In a Regina Leader-Post article entitled "Two views of female Identity", the author Greg Beatty describes the animal patterned clothing as "emphasizing the predatory

nature of male female relations" (Nov. 8, 1990). The women resemble nightclub entertainers or hookers, and are incongruously situated in a field where a horse nonchalantly grazes.



© Out to pasture, 40" X 60" - 1988

The idea of women grazing alongside a horse, confined by a barnyard fence in an unlikely setting of a pasture is incongruous. These disparate connections put the viewer off guard and provoke contemplation. The characters are seductive but the title (word/image play) suggests that they have been discarded, put aside, either because of their age or because they have lived out their usefulness. The title plays a very important role in situating the imagery within a context and leads viewers to reconsider repressive stereotypes. In Gallerie, Women's Art, (1988), I articulate my feelings during this period: "My work is often humorous, and I try to make my female characters strong and in control, but to me, something in their expression, posture, or situation betrays physical weakness. Their apparent

strength is that of the exaggerated caricature...I am continuously aware of my own physical inferiority in relation to men. I realize that statistically I'll most probably live longer, but I'll never have that muscular power. There will always be the possibility of becoming a victim" (Collet..., p.46).

This piece was shown in a duo exhibition with Mimi Matte entitled "On the Lighter Side" at the Rosemont Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan in 1990. In the exhibition brochure, Karen Schoonover, curator describes "Out to Pasture": "The brightly colored image is at once hilarious in its absurdity and cutting in its reference to society's attitude towards women and aging...through the work...we are invited to re-examine the commonplace and rethink accepted reality".

An experience from my external world, combined with personal preoccupations about confinement, aging and ensuing invisibility, resulted in a piece that provoked a wide range of reactions, divided by gender. When confronted with the work, male viewers generally reacted with puzzlement or were enticed by the overt sexual references. They tended to imbue the painting with their own sexual fantasies while female viewers responded with smiles and laughter.

When an artist decides to produce a humorous piece; there is always a risk that some people will not 'get the joke.' Humour is rarely funny to everyone and because it is fundamentally rebellious, it may offend. What appears comical to one person may enrage another, as was the case with this work. On one occasion during the exhibition, I provoked a particularly angry and aggressive reaction from a woman. She felt that I was perpetuating societal degradation of women. I explained to this viewer that the painting was conceived as a metaphor about the

status quo and that by inversion, viewers were meant to reflect on a more ideal scenario.

Greg Beatty evokes the relief theory when he describes the Lighter Side exhibition as offering: "...paintings that are gently humorous vignettes with a deft comic touch – subtle visual puns and surreal combinations of images that appeal to our sense of the absurd – that reflect the vital role humour plays in helping us cope with life's frustrations."

Association is the initial humour triggering mechanism at play in this work. The women's bent over posture recalls our animal nature, which I exaggerate and emphasize by elongating the back. This is done to parody and satirize societies' views about women. I then transpose the characters into different scenarios to create a contradiction or absurd conclusion. Word/image play is used to highlight the intended message.

Chapter 5

SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

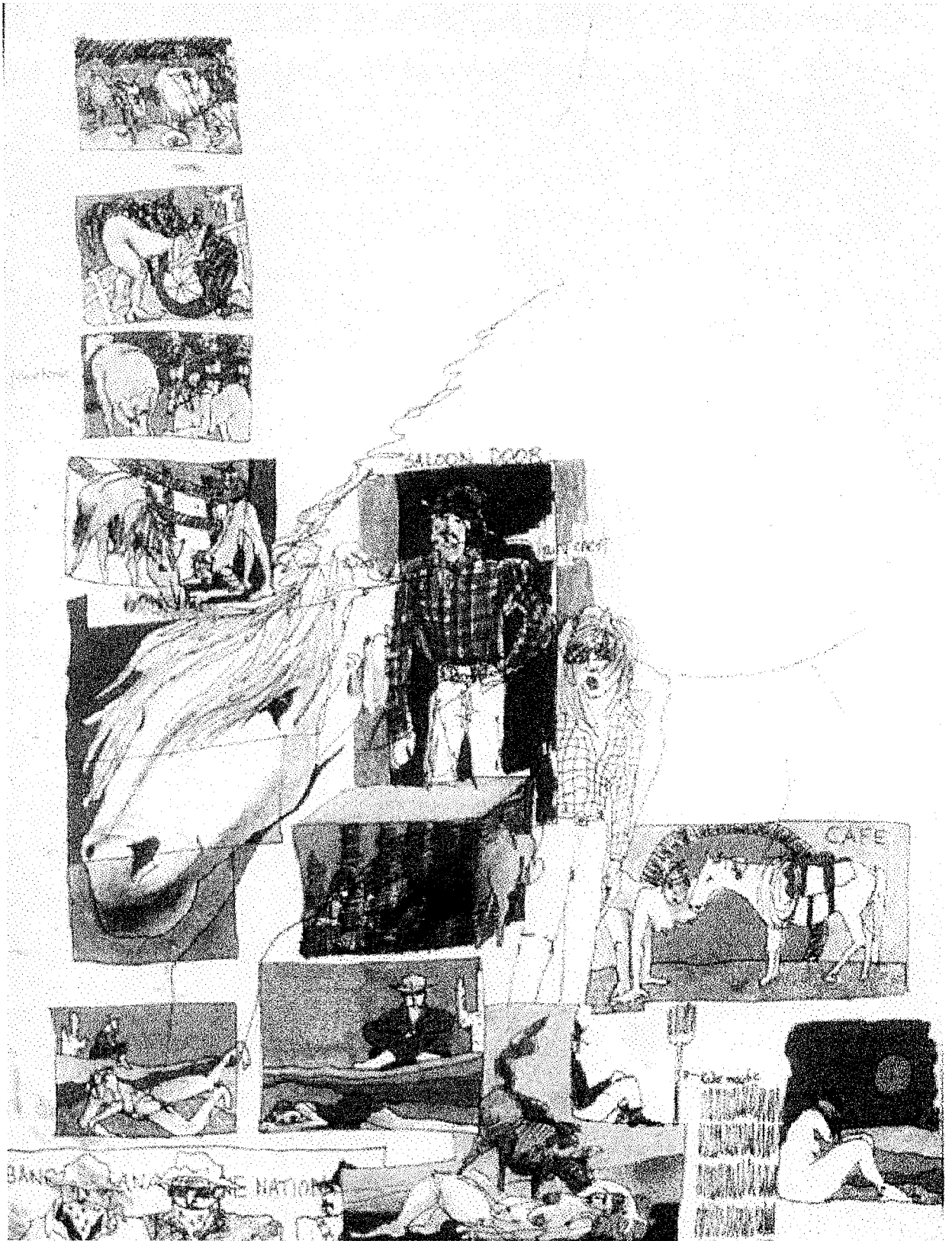
Humour triggering mechanisms: Association, contradiction, punning, disguise, and satire.

Along with reverse anthropomorphism, in the early nineties I also began interweaving images of bulls, a personal motif symbolic of lies, deceit and facades inherent in sexual relationships. Picasso was enamoured of this creature having been raised on a diet of bullfights in Spain, and used it repeatedly in his work. Although I loved the bull imagery and Minotaurs, I envied Picasso's uncensored spirit and his ability to freely express ideas concerning sexuality. I was often disturbed however, by his allusions to rape. The bull image generated a multitude of associations, which I used subliminally as a response to Pablo, art history, and the art world in general.

I moved to the country in 1988 where I frequently saw lots of bovines and other livestock. Nearly everyone in my equestrian neighbourhood had horses in their backyard paddocks. While most rode English style, I occasionally saw individuals on Western saddles sporting cowboy hats. I began using the image of the North American cowboy as a symbol of male machismo in various works.



© Vers St-Tite, 30" X 40", 1988



© Cowboy and reverse anthropomorphism doodles

One day as I pondered my frustrations as a poverty stricken artist, I drew a little cartoon inspired from a previous sketch (page 40, lower left). Art loving "cowboy/bandidos" break into a fictitious "Art Banque du Québec" and identify an unknown artist's paintings as *good enough* to steal. Two of the bandidos in this cartoon later appear in a painting entitled "Christina y los bandidos."

An unlikely cast of characters find themselves in a bedroom, a scenario that is at once amusing yet disturbing. The colours in the painting are bright and cheerful but further observation reveals two masked bandidos while a third displays aggressive posturing. They all look away from the female figure. The situation is ambiguous and leaves itself open to interpretation. Are the male figures viewing themselves in a mirror or has someone entered the room? Is the woman a victim, or the head honcho? Sexual innuendo permeates this work, a foretelling of what is to come.



© "This unknown artist is worth stealing"



© Christina y los bandidos, 40" X 60", 1988

A cross-fertilization of cowboy, bandido, and bull imagery led to a later painting entitled "Christine's Anonymous Lover", a powerful commentary on contemporary relationships. As with Christina y los Bandidos, the work began with sketches of a model that I drew on a regular basis. On one occasion, she agreed to pose with her male partner. Drawing two models at one time was a rare occurrence and a very stimulating experience. The interpersonal dynamics led to mordant associations in my mind.

According to Rourke, "Visual satire is a kind of oxymoron: It makes you laugh but it isn't funny (p. 83). It is a way of getting at the truth and serves as a public awakener, and ranges from a gentle wake-up call to an acrimonious whack" (p.85). This painting falls into the "whack" category because it rarely leaves people indifferent or unperturbed.



© Christine's Anonymous Lover, 40" X 60" - 1990
Alternative title: I think I have a headache

The image alludes to the subtle dialogue that occurs between men and women in matters of sexuality and evokes multiple interpretations. People can be entirely familiar with one another's bodies yet never have access to their partner's true feelings. Intimacy is not necessarily conducive to the penetration of emotional facades; some relationships are better when words are never spoken. The painting is a comment about robotic relationships; those that occur when people routinely have sex with their partner after love and passion have vanished. It also refers to a culture in which people know one another intimately before ever bothering to find out each other's names. The colourful scarf tied around the man's face, part of the cowboy/bandit disguise, puts the viewer off guard, emphasizes the male character's anonymity and suggests possible danger. Troubling ambiguity surfaces as the viewer considers whether this masked man is the woman's husband (a sexual game), a boyfriend, a one night stand, a saviour, bandit or rapist. The expression on the woman's face is not one of fear but one of boredom, dissatisfaction or irritation. There is little rapport between the two characters. The man approaches her from behind and slides his hand into her underpants. The scarf hiding the man's face reinforces the barrier between them. The bull, symbol of deceit and machismo, subtly appears in the background as a *work of art*.

The process used to achieve this painting is an excellent example of free association as it connects disparate elements. A number of personal symbols, the partially masked cowboy, female figure and bull, fuse to generate a surprising conclusion. The colourful, patterned bandana disguising the man's face is an unexpected element that hints at criminality. Equally puzzling is the expression on the woman's face vis-à-vis her veiled male counterpart.

The title of this work offers word/image play and situates the couple within a plausible sexual scenario that emphasizes the man's anonymity. This is a satirical work, one that triggers awareness of human folly and apathy. The imagery derives from both my internal and external world, each feeding on the other.

Reactions to this painting have been mixed and divided by gender. Women usually perceive humour and laugh out loud whereas men often react with confusion and defensiveness. Familiarity with local context, the North American lifestyle, is of primary importance in understanding the metaphoric experience at work in this painting.

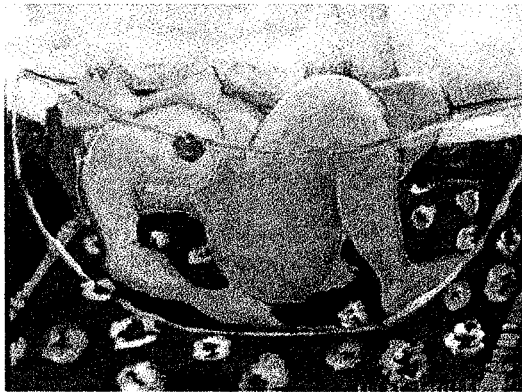
Chapter 6

WOMEN CONFINED OR CONTAINED

Humour triggering mechanisms: Association, transposition, contradiction, parody, punning, and satire.

The theme of a "women contained" often appears in my work. "Out to Pasture" reveals women fenced within a paddock; in "La soupe du jour", a woman lies ready for consumption within a soup bowl; while in "La baignoire", a female figure hangs onto a large fish within the restrictive confines of a Victorian bathtub. Movement and freedom are unlikely under the circumstances.

These visual metaphors apply an indirect approach to satire in that they couch ideas in double-entendres and layered meanings (Rourke, 1997, p.92). The intended messages become somewhat like puzzles or riddles, open to interpretation (Rourke, 1997, p.94). This approach allows viewers to complement existing narratives with their own and in so doing, tends to make the layers of meaning increasingly archetypal.



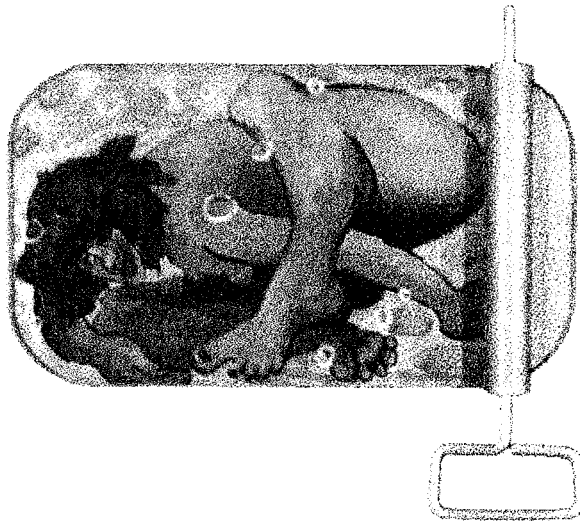
© La soupe du jour, 18" X 24", 1993



© La baignoire, 32" X 39", 1993

In "En conserve", the container is a sardine can. I am fascinated by these exotic treasure boxes filled with tiny, dead bodies in neatly packed rows. The attached key suggests that only a select few have access to its contents. Those malodorous fish lying in oil remind me of miniature, decapitated people. Prying them apart seems almost sacrilegious.

If I'm not careful when I open a can, I sometimes get oil on my hands, which makes them reek of fish and salty water. I try to wash off the scent but it lingers; I suspect this oil has magic properties.



© En conserve, 17" X 30" (approximate), 1996

These whimsical imaginings nourish my interpretation of the sardine can. I construct a three-dimensional, plywood container. The cover is a rolled back piece of painted silver canvas, while the key is of forged metal. I insert (paint) a woman within the can who is not chopped up nor cropped in any way. She floats in oil as her body contorts to fit within the can, an edible woman confined and available on demand to the owner of the key. Whether we find her in a soup bowl, bathtub or

sardine can, she remains stuck within predefined parameters, unable to escape. None of the characters in these works appear particularly upset about their captivity, which suggests that it may be partly voluntary, a product of conditioning.

These works present a violation of an expectation. Human beings are not found in food containers, nor are they usually seen swimming with large fish in their bathtubs. The strange pops up in a familiar setting, an absurd situation that generates cognitive incongruity. The titles of the three works offer word/image play. In the first, the title "La soupe du jour" implies that a woman appears on the menu as the pick of the day. In the second, she holds onto a fish as she swims in a bathtub of "Victorian" design, an era of great sexual repression and in the third, the female character is canned, which in French refers to being pickled, preserved, and possibly shelved.

These ideas originate in my internal world but also relate to the external world. Women are conditioned to marry, have families, and are expected to be on constant availability to fulfill the needs of loved ones. They choose this confinement willingly because they are programmed by society. The satire in these works nudges the viewer into re-evaluating societal expectations of gender roles, and by inversion, suggest a different view.

Chapter 7

MYTHS – OLD AND NEW

Humour triggering mechanisms: Association, transposition, transformation, contradiction, parody, disguise, and narration.

My father died in 1991. Following a cryptic phone call from the hospital informing me that he wasn't well, I headed out with my sister to see him one last time. We crossed the threshold into his room and found him lying dead on the bed in his Johnny shirt. My first thought was to find a blanket to cover him. I assumed he must be cold. Then a strange sensation enveloped me and I thought to myself, "this is not my father, this is the shell that used to house my father." His personality, the fire in his eyes had vanished.

I internalized this momentary insight deep within my unconscious. I was incapable of painting until I felt ready to honour my father in my work, by which time I inadvertently integrated the casing idea within an image of a knight in disintegrating armour.

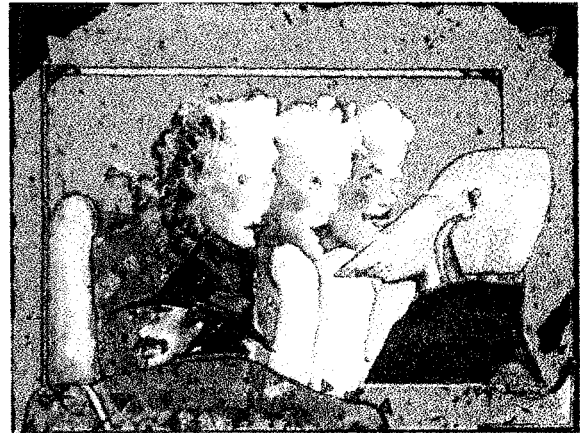
I am not a religious person in the traditional sense and as a result, found myself referring to pagan myths to make some sense of his demise. Barbara Walker's (1988) Women's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects provided much solace. I became particularly enthralled with Shakespeare's Wyrd (Word or Weird) Sisters also known as the Three Fates (Walker, 1988, p.43), representing the cycle of life in guise of the virgin, mother and crone, and by the crescent moon, symbolizing a boat that carries souls to heaven (Walker, 1988, p.121).

Emblematic of chivalry and honour, the first knight appeared in a painting entitled "Leopold I", my father's name. I continued to paint the knights and

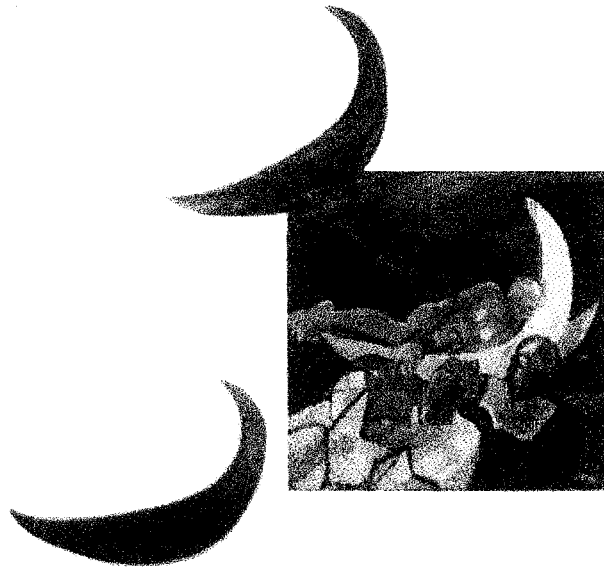
goddess figures separately and together, but after some time, the knight symbol began to transform and interweave with the macho, cowboy/bandidos. Together they represented the masculine principle, which I then juxtaposed with female goddesses, in essence, conceiving my version of ying and yang.



© Leopold I, 36" X 48" – 1991

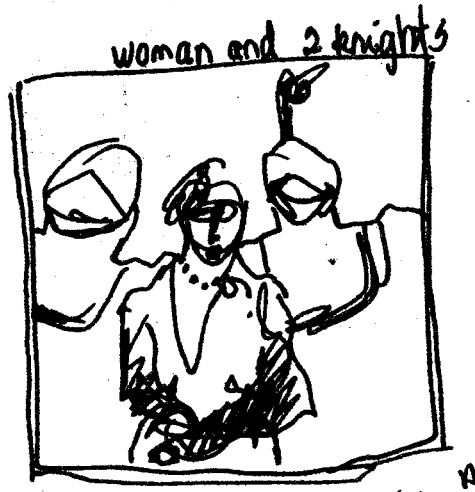


© La photo de groupe, 20" X 26" – 1992



© Moon Goddess

These new visual narratives led to further exploration. My ideas and associations are vividly documented in visual journals during this period. Small sketches led to works such as Edinburgh Castle wherein I imagined a tipsy queen supported by strong anonymous knights.

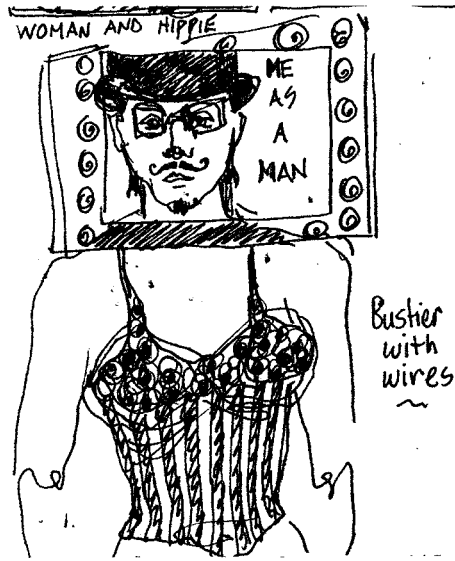


© Woman and 2 knights doodle

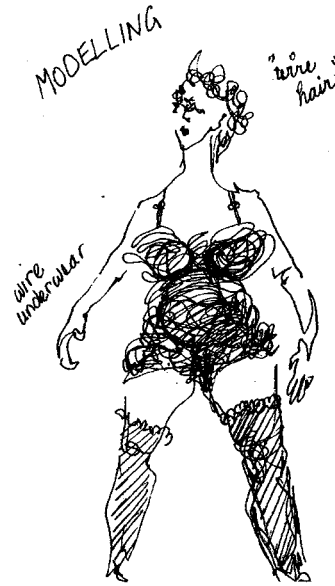


© Edinburgh Castle, 30" X 40" – 1992

I began to make connections between armour and women's underwire brassieres, both being uncomfortable devices to wear. I spontaneously forced ideas together and this cross-fertilization led to images of women's breasts being supported by wires or clothing hangers. My sense of humour is evident in these little sketches as well as in the final works. I poke fun at what women must endure to have beautiful, attractive breasts.

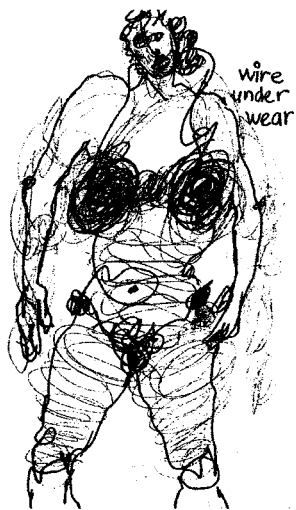


© Me as a man

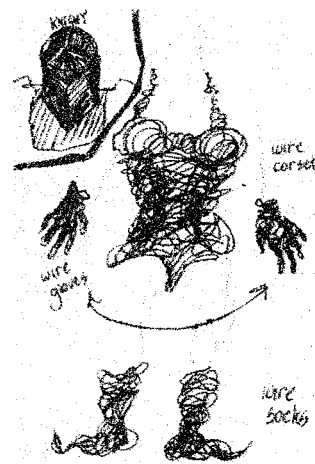


© Modelling wire underwear

In the sketch on the left, I visualize myself as a man and make the first connection between male armour and women's underwire brassieres, a good example of transposition. In other sketches, the wire becomes analogous to the drawing line as they mesh into one.



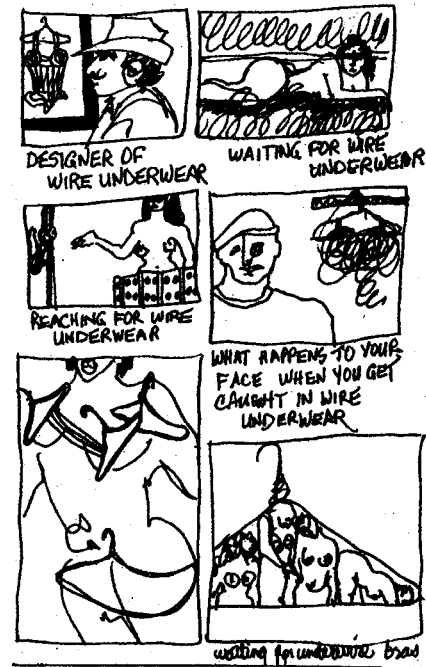
© Wire underwear



© Wire corset, wire gloves, wire socks

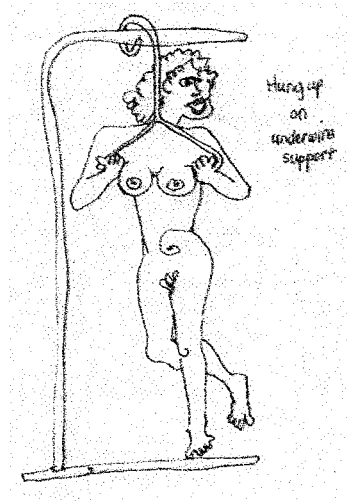


© More wire underwear



© Underwire brassiere doodles

In the tiny sketches above right, I envision the inventor of underwire brassieres as a man, for what woman in her right mind would create a contraption of such discomfort? The common denominator between the clothes hanger and the underwire brassiere is that they are both *suspension* devices. My mind takes another leap as I transpose clothes hangers in lieu of the underwire. My view of undergarments is forever transformed.



© Hung up on underwire support



© La discussion, 30" X 40" – 1992

In "La Discussion", a woman debates the merits of armour with a knight. His metal covering is readily observable and protects his body from harm however it also functions as an effective metaphor for emotional distance. The armour presents the illusion of strength and impenetrability, while in reality it serves to shield human sensitivity and vulnerability.

The women's armour on the other hand, is usually hidden, camouflaged, and designed to enhance or improve appearances. It perpetuates a fantasy of sexual attractiveness, a battle in which the forces of gravity and aging inevitably win. Both types of armour are deceptive.

The work uses contradiction and displaced logic to create a new incongruous narrative. Exaggerated caricatures of women, their breasts supported by clothes hangers incongruously contrast a knight in full armour. This encrypted message brings forth questions, implies multiple meanings and fuels fodder for thought.

A very tragic event, the death of my father, provided me with solemn imagery that slowly evolved and metamorphosized into humorous metaphors about emotional barriers and contemporary life.

Chapter 8

WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

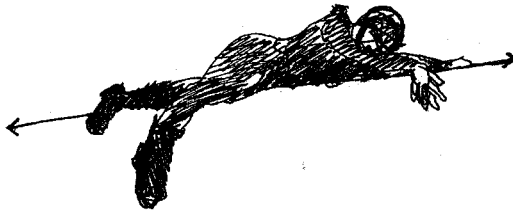
Humour triggering mechanisms: Association, transposition, transformation, contradiction, exaggeration, parody, satire, disguise, and narration.

In 1991, the City of Montreal had a call for entry based on the theme "Le Nouveau Monde" (The New World). Following a jury selection, I was among those chosen and invited to create a work based on this theme. Interpretations could either concentrate on an historical or futuristic perspective. I chose to contemplate on what might lay ahead.

The media bombarded us with bad news that year. Israel was threatened with chemical warfare and pictures of people wearing gas masks were commonplace. These alarming images became engraved in my psyche as I doodled ideas in my sketchbook.

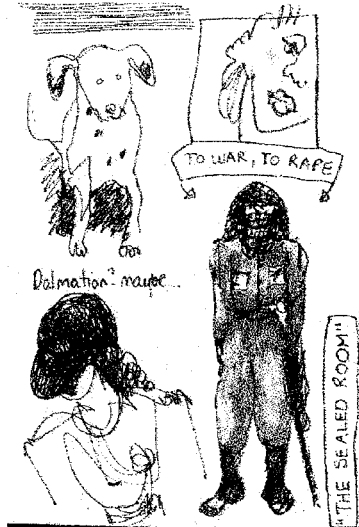
Jan. 15, 1991
is the deadline

The dead line



12/01/91

© The deadline

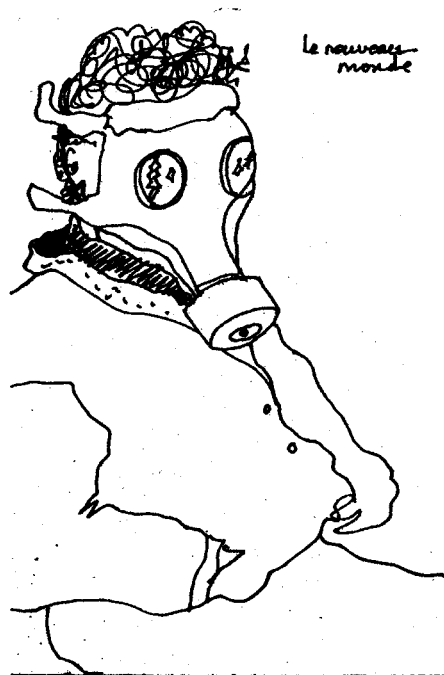


© To war, to rape

I wanted to create a piece for this exhibition that dealt with the feelings these images evoked. As I drew the people I saw on television I made connections between armour and gas masks, both serving to camouflage and protect the person within.

I reflected on air quality following chemical warfare. I began to ask myself questions. What if our air remained polluted indefinitely? Would humankind survive? If we did survive, what would our lives be like?

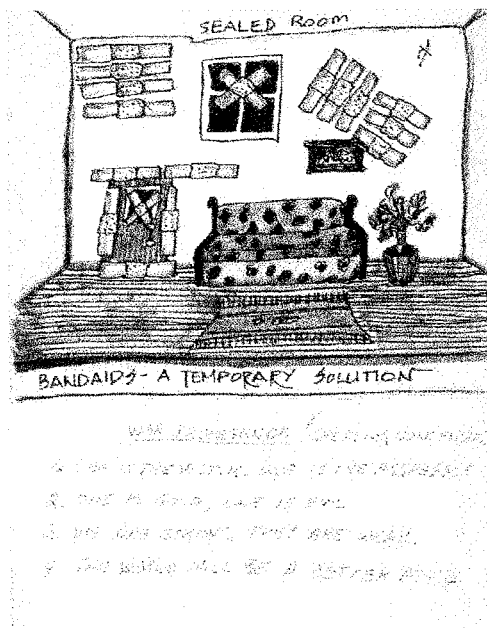
I envisioned a world where people would thrive despite a lack of breathable air. Their barely discernible appearance might serve to eradicate racial differences and eliminate conflict. Incapable of resorting to facial expressions, body language would become the most significant vehicle for articulation and communication.



© Le nouveau monde

Given that I wanted to focus on humanity's positive qualities rather than on the evil attributes of a powerful few, I conjectured that even if the air were contaminated, humanity would find a way to flourish. Our adaptability and flexibility in the face of adversity plus a persistent will to survive have been well documented over the centuries.

In my sketches, I envisioned rooms sealed with Band-aids (an absurdity), which served to protect humankind from the putrid air. People within these walls had to wear colour-coordinated gas masks in order to filter the planet's atmosphere. These fashion accessories matched whatever outfit a person wore.

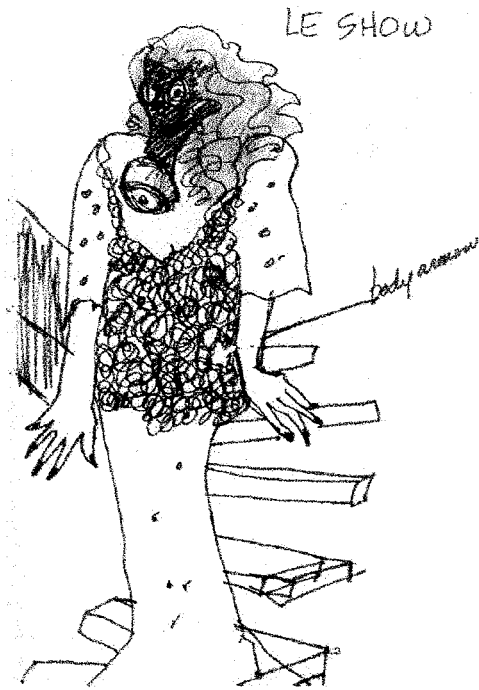


© Band-aids – a temporary solution

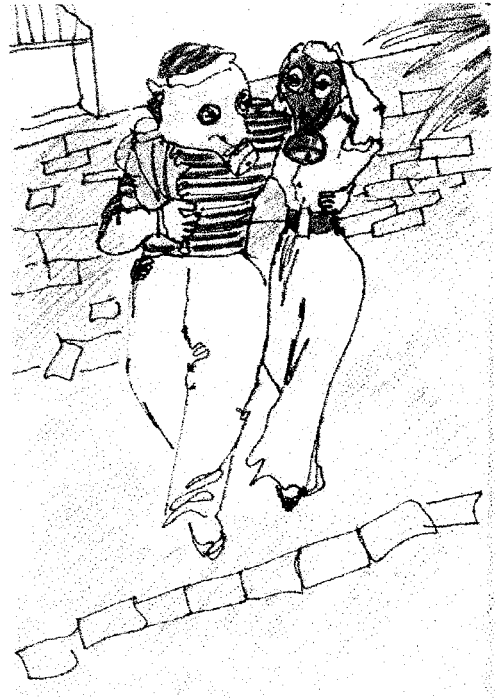


© Contemporary fashion

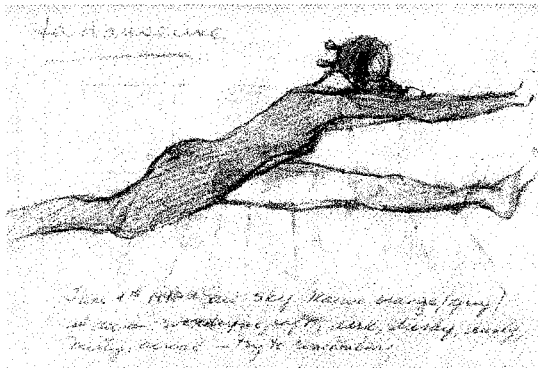
As a measure of a their success and fame, entertainers would display the most beautiful of masks as status symbols.



© Le Show



© Couple with gas masks

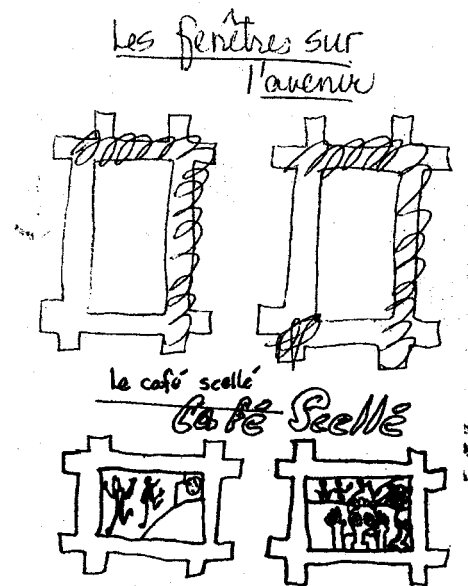


© La danseuse



© La famille

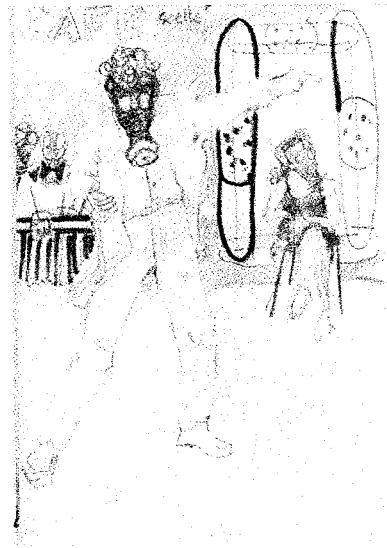
Gas masks would have to be worn all the time and by everyone in order to ensure survival of the species. I imagined domestic scenes with families nonchalantly relating to one another, the wearing of protective gear now part of everyday life.



© Les fenêtres sur l'avenir

The piece began to take shape in my mind. I dug out two old colonial frames someone had given me years before. Outside in mid-winter, I scorched and blackened them with a blowtorch to create the illusion of damage caused by war. I then wrapped wire around two or three sides to contrive a patched or hastily repaired appearance and to evoke the barbed wire of prison camps. These frames became time machine windows, glimpses into the future.

The frames were attached to ungressoed plywood panels as support material. I wanted the acrylic paint to be partly absorbed by the wood to achieve a rough, hastily done, naive and aged effect. I imagined our descendants finding these windows in an eventual archaeological dig, a testament to decipher.

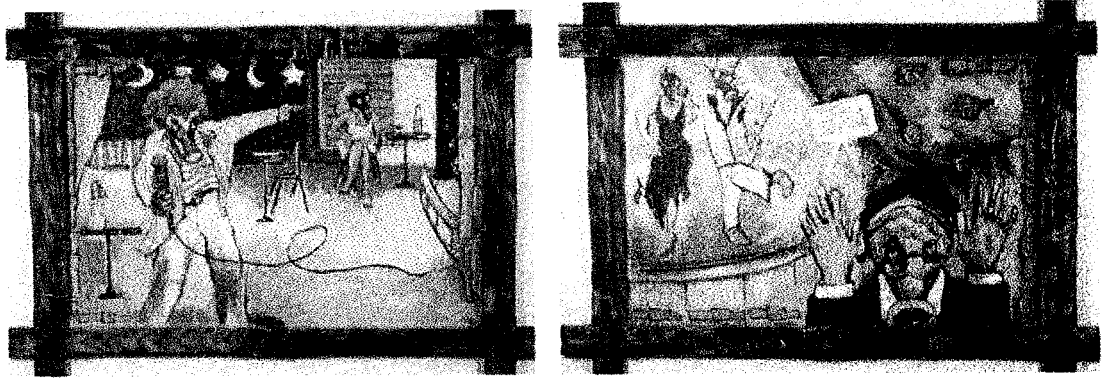


© Café scellé



© Couple dancing in gas masks

I selected to paint a nightclub scene, a place where people choose to enjoy themselves rather than dwell on the hardship in their lives. In the preliminary sketches above, entertainers get "on with the show" despite their gas masks. These devices impart an animal-like quality to the characters, hinting at mutations. People no longer smile, only their eyes divulge the soul within. Together with the performers appears a lone, decidedly more angst-ridden creature peering out the right window. His is the only face that betrays the after effects of chemical warfare. He is trapped within the confines of the Sealed Club to be perpetually entertained.



© Les fenêtres du Club Scellé (The Sealed Club Windows), 30" X 80"- 1992

I submitted the following text for the exhibition sheets:

L'Utopie versus la réalité

De l'air pur. / Je respire avec un masque à gaz.
 De l'eau claire. / Je bois de l'eau embouteillée.
 Une nourriture saine. / Je suce une pilule.
 Un gouvernement planétaire sans aucune frontière. / Mon passeport est tatoué sur mon pied.
 Une langue universelle. / Je mime.
 Une religion inspirée de la nature, sans règlement sauf celui de la non-violence. / Je porte un gilet anti-balles.
 La fusion raciale. / Avec les masques à gaz, on se ressemble, on se rassemble.

Translation :

Utopia versus Reality

Pure air. / I breathe with a gas mask.
 Clear water. / I drink bottled water.
 Healthy food. / I suck on a pill.
 A planetary government without borders. / My passport is tattooed on my foot.
 A universal language. / I mime.
 A religion inspired from nature, without rules with the exception of non-violence. / I wear a bullet-proof vest.
 Racial fusion. / With gas masks we look alike and unite.

This work evolved from an imposed theme however the mechanisms used to achieve a humorous conclusion were identical to those in my other works.

I associated what was happening at that time in Israel with "The New World." This represents a shift from one domain to another, a type of cross-fertilization. I transposed current events into the future, where hypothetical consequences of our actions could be revealed. I transformed, caricatured and exaggerated a horrific blast of information from the media into a routine cross-section of everyday life.

The gas masks are symbols of disguise and adaptability. They are reminiscent of my earlier preoccupation with armour and reverse anthropomorphism. The human body outfitted with a gas mask takes on animal qualities. An aberration has taken place, humanity is no longer what it was.

Reactions to this work were varied. Artists and art lovers seemed to grasp the metaphor quite easily and generally reacted with laughter. Inexperienced viewers were left perplexed, and often oblivious to the intended humour.

In my efforts to satirize the folly of chemical warfare, I used a narrative format, two panels evocative of the comic strip. This absurd scenario violates an expectation; getting on with life while having to wear gas masks is improbable.

Troubling images from the media coupled with personal anxieties provided the subject matter for this work. The external world impacted on my life and led to serious personal reflection concerning humanity, my own mortality, and the adaptability of our species. My internal world served as motivation to create a work that dealt with archetypal fears, a return to the external world. In making the

strange familiar and conversely the familiar strange, I produced a vision that was devoid of resolution.

Chapter 9

THE HAREM

Humour triggering mechanisms: Association, transposition, contradiction, punning, and appropriation.

A book called Harem, The World Behind the Veil by Alev Lytle Croutier (1989), leads to the creation of two other works. On its cover is a seductive and haunting painting by Ingres called La Grande Odalisque. Also lavishly illustrated on the inside, a dedication reads, "To all who danced the seven veils, my mother, grandmothers and aunts." Exotic prose parleys of odalisques, polygamy, and slave markets. Women are property, protected by eunuchs, castrated male guards. Stories of sultans and other royalty, opium, and baths, serve to stimulate my imagination. I begin to envisage a scenario.

The elaborate, colourful, patterned costumes in the book fascinate me. As I turn the pages, I am reminded of superheroes, the World Wrestling Federation, the circus, these in themselves all interesting metaphors for life.

I begin a "what if" game in my mind...what if things were different and roles were reversed? What if men were the objects of desire, sex slaves; their sole purpose in life to fulfill a sultana's whims? What would these men wear? What would they do? How would they behave?



© Dance of the seven males, 50" X 60", 1996

I hunt through my drawings of male models to find action poses. I want to paint the Dance of the Seven Males.

This work originates with its title, a phrase that stimulates my imagination. Punning or word/image play; a reference to the Dance of the Seven Veils, is of primordial importance to its understanding. While it is possible to appreciate the painting on its own, laughter generally ensues once the title is read. When I first contemplated this phrase, I thought of Matisse's painting entitled "Dance". I wanted a similar circular motif, one that would sustain the eye of the viewer within the tableau.

The painting was not worked out with sketches but rather resolved directly on the canvas without excessive preconception in order to maintain a level of freshness.

Looking through the pages of the harem book, I was particularly struck by the footwear everyone wore. The toes always oddly curled up. I decided to concentrate on colour and movement. Some of the dance poses in the painting are contemporary and not necessarily evocative of an Arabian past. The costumes recall present-day circuses, superheroes and wrestlers. The characters are linked within the implied loop, a not particularly seductive bunch since they offer no eye contact with the viewer. In fact, the main figure in the foreground is seen only from behind. He is a large, black, faceless entity with claw-like hands that seems a trifle sinister, the only dark mass contrasting the joyously bright surrounding colour. These men are still in control despite the role reversal. I speculate whether women have equivalent control as they dance away their seven veils.

In applying the mechanisms of association, transposition and contradiction, I create a work that suggests an opposing viewpoint, which by inversion parodies a stereotypical given and sets into motion thoughts about present-day life. Personal fantasies, my internal world, generate thoughts about the external world. Punning is of primordial importance for the initiation of a humorous response.

The harem surfaces once again in a work that deals with a contemporary phenomenon, that of the Internet chatroom. In these rooms, people create personas, secretly becoming whomever or whatever they choose. As in real life, hierarchies develop and group dynamics come into play, however in virtual-land, friendships evolve within an exciting fantasy world that contrasts mundane everyday existence.

When I first navigated the Internet; I was enthralled at the possibility of talking to people anywhere in the world. As a teenager, I had up to 20 pen pals at

a time. I wanted to learn about other cultures, meet new and interesting individuals unlike those who lived in my small, suffocating hometown. The World Wide Web offered the possibility of adventure, discovery and communication. I ended up in a colourful Australian chatroom where a slew of characters paraded through on a regular basis. I visualized what this place might look like and eventually decided to paint it.



An illustration to Quatrain XI of The Rubaiyat of Omar Kháyyám by Edmund Dulac appears in the Harem book (Lytle Croutier, 1989, p.23), which I find mesmerizing. A sultan, surrounded by his harem girls or slaves, is looking quite bored with life. Not unlike Louise Stanley's "Functional Triptych Dad's Version", I appropriate a scenario and apply it to an Internet chatroom.



© The Chatroom, 50" X 60", 1997

Within *my* palace walls, a very animated and grinning Sultan, the dominant male in the room, appears right of centre. His nickname Taipan represents the third most dangerous snake in Australia. He is obviously enjoying himself as he points to a flying goddess sporting an opossum on her head. As the operator, she is in charge of the room, hence a deity. Small calves running across the canvas symbolize a woman who lives on a farm in Nova Scotia, while frogs hopping across the tiled floor are my persona. Two koala/women fan the sultan. They represent one person who refers to herself in Sybil-like fashion as "Me Two." A large fly rests against the upper left wall, the character chosen by a young teenager who for the most part, merely listens in on adult conversations. This unlikely amalgam of characters is the product of a modern-day invention, which in my view is well worth documenting.

The title once again situates the viewer within a latter-day experience. Very few people in the Western world are not computer savvy and most have heard of chatrooms. The enjoyment of humour is to some degree contextual. If the viewer is unfamiliar with local context, the joke will not be understood.

Chapter 10

MEMORIES

Humour triggering mechanisms: Exaggeration, parody, disguise, and narration.

My mother has been telling me stories about her mother for as long as I can remember. I have the impression that she recounts these narratives in order to fashion a parent she barely remembers. The tale goes something like this: My grandfather first sees my grandmother as a young girl of fifteen. She is dirty, barefoot and singing blissfully to a group of pigs in the sty. He wants to marry her but her father insists that she is too young. She is allowed to marry my grandfather, a man eleven years her senior, a year later at sixteen.

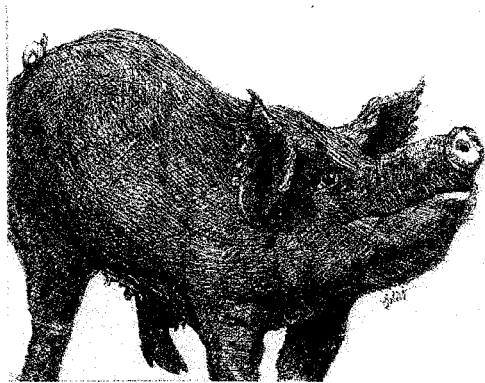
The rest of the account is a tragic one. From the age of eighteen on, she becomes pregnant sixteen times; endures two miscarriages, fourteen births, and of these, only five of her children survive to adulthood. Babies covered with sheets and little white coffins often grace their home. My grandmother dies at forty-five after years of ill health and leaves behind a depressive husband, my twelve-year-old mother and her older sister to raise two younger siblings.

I hear the story often yet it never ceases to affect me. My grandmother's destiny was predetermined. A young, illiterate girl from a rural area living at the turn of the century had few choices, in fact, probably none. I felt as though I had to resurrect her; I owed her that much for my life of opportunity.

During an independent study concerning memory undertaken with two other students in the summer of 2001, I decided to work with this narrative because it

continued to haunt me. I wanted to concentrate on a joyous moment in my grandmother's mostly miserable life, that instant when she sang to the pigs.

I resolved to keep a journal about my process although what I ended up with was a chronicle documenting the trials and tribulations of my own life interwoven with reflections concerning the imminent painting. I also produced little drawings of pigs in different situations. They quickly took on a life of their own, each becoming anthropomorphized and imbued with personality. I only used two of these pig drawings in the final painting.



© Curious Pig, 5" X 7", 2001



© The Climb, 5" X 7", 2001

I experienced an incredible number of emotions as I carried out my research and began the work. Snippets from the journal read as follows:

I am looking at a picture of butchered pig carcasses. They could represent my grandmother's butchered children. All those dead children, it's really too much! How will I find humour or joy in this tale? How else can one survive?

I can capture an animal's personality better than my grandma's. She is staring at me through the ages. She has taken the stiff old-fashioned pose most photographers contrive. I cannot read her face. I may have to project my own feelings onto her.

I wonder about the sadness a woman is forced to live with when she loses 9 children. Could there not also be a sense of relief? Imagine raising 14 children! The stress alone is enough to kill a person, (a person like me).



© Léonie Dubois - my grandmother

As I look at the pictures of my grandmother, I realize something is drawing me to her. She is beautiful and it fascinates me. I wonder if she ever thought about other possibilities? Few women had any, except for the nuns, and even they were married to Christ.

When I first married, I spent hours in the kitchen perfecting my cooking skills. One Christmas, as usual, I invited the whole family for a feast that took me a week to prepare. This particular time, I decided to cook a goose and a suckling pig, something I had never attempted before. I can't remember where I went to order the baby pig but I managed to find a place. During the week prior to the feast, I felt rather peculiar. I was part of conspiracy to murder a baby pig. When I received the phone call saying the piglet was ready, I went to pick it up. It was incredibly small, very pink, incredibly cute, and very dead. I felt horrible. The pig was deceased because of my need to show off my cooking skills. I decided I should at least honour it by eating it. The meat was unbelievable. Tender and delicious, I had never eaten anything like it in my life. That was the only time I ever had a direct hand in the killing of a baby pig.

When a thunderstorm loomed overhead, my grandmother ran around the house throwing holy water. She was religious. The family had to recite the rosary every evening after supper. Religion must have helped her through the rough spots.

*It is raining as I write, tears from the sky, tears for a woman enslaved,
and tears for a child forced to become a mother.*

*I went to scan grandma's face. She looks like a little girl in women's clothing.
I wonder how she would look with a punk haircut? Grandma as a punker!!!!*



© The Audience, 72" X 48" (2 panels), 2002

*I realize that this painting has not really been about my grandmother at all. It's
about women and their traditional roles as mothers and wives. I haven't dealt with
answers but rather emotions, my emotions.*

What I discovered during the writing of these journals is that although the final painting is humorous, the motivation and process underlying the work is very serious and deals with gut-wrenching issues. This painting, unlike others

included in this thesis, has symbolism that is so deeply encrypted that most people are unaware of its presence.

Reactions to the painting have been diverse. Many generally respond with laughter because the image is initially perceived as nonsense or just plain fun. Others find it sinister, reacting with uneasiness to the personalized pigs, especially the dark one. The primary mechanism used in this painting is exaggeration and a form of caricature since the animals' expressions are unlikely to be discerned in reality.

At one point during the painting process, the young woman character became very pretty and stylized, possessing a sweet, Disney-like quality that I abhorred. I knew my grandmother was a beautiful woman and this biased my interpretation of her. I put the painting aside until I could resolve it with an objective eye. Later, I provided her with a pig-like expression and painted in more pigs to induce a suffocating, cramped, and crowded feeling. The resulting work is a heavily disguised parody of an actual situation. Viewers immediately invent a humorous narrative when viewing it.

Chapter 11

PATTERNS

Much of my work involves parody and satire. The difference between the two is that parody tends to be milder by poking fun at societies idiosyncrasies while satire is a more aggressive phenomenon, a "stinging assault," that reveals contrasts between what is and what could be. Satire's mission is to seek out truth, awaken the complacent and to destroy sacred cows. Comic artists walk a tightrope when they create satirical art for they must find the right balance between bitterness and lightheartedness if they intend to have their image appreciated humorously (Rourke, 1997, p.83-85). Nancy Walker (1998) believes much of women's comic art must be considered political, whether overtly or subversively (p.104). This certainly applies to my work, which deals primarily with sexual politics.

What is particularly revealing from this research is that the source of my visual humour is comparable to that of the other women artists. We perceive the world around us as riddled with absurdities. Frustration, confusion, and anger concerning our role in society seem to be the motivating forces in the making of humorous art. My struggles to reconcile early conditioning and the feminist movement are evident in the "Week of Laundry". Bourgeois's "Femme Maison" series and Hollander's comic strip deal with similar concerns. In these instances, humour responds to the culture and seems to function as a survival instinct.

My work flirts with caricature, which is mocking portraiture (Rourke, 1997, p.89) however I tend to caricaturize body types or expressions rather than specific individuals. My purpose in exaggerating human characteristics is two-fold although

both don't always apply in all works: firstly, I create a visual lure in an effort to secure interest with regards to the work, and secondly, I highlight metaphors that channel the message I wish to communicate.

According to Rourke (1997) visual humour comes from acutely perceptive individuals who have "their own philosophy about contemporary issues" (p.53). "...ideas come in two ways, either through a sudden flash of illumination that seems to come from nowhere, or through an applied methodology" (Rourke, 1997, p.55-56). Verbal and visual clichés or stereotypical views can set humorous visual artists on a joyride of associations. I believe that the "applied methodology" Rourke refers to is akin to playing a game. Like Oppenheim, I love incongruity. Finding connections and associating disparate elements just for the fun of it is an activity I pursue on a regular basis. The way in which analogies evolve over time denotes that personal preoccupations tend to eventually float to the surface and end up dominating the imagery. Conflicting value systems and continuous efforts to reconcile them seem to emerge over and over again.

I have an affinity for brilliant symbolic colour as does Niki de St Phalle. I personally equate colour with passion. Perhaps by conjuring up carnival-like gaiety, we both attempt to eradicate the darker or mundane side of life. Colourful illusions disguise deeper meanings that only become evident after intimate scrutiny of the work.

De St Phalle expresses herself on a colossal scale, an aggressive attention-getting device. My work has up until now been limited to a personally manageable format, although I have often been told that my figures appear to burst out of their

frames. De St Phalle's work engulfs the viewer while mine offers in-your-face imagery. Viewers cannot remain indifferent.

Another similarity between de St Phalle and myself is that we both refer to ancient mythology and fairytales to give life meaning. Neither old nor modern-day myths and fairytales appear to fill the void since we invent new stories ad infinitum. We make up our religion as we go along.

Visual humour offers relief under extreme stress. When life becomes overwhelming, expressions of accepting, "that's life" humour make life bearable. Louise Stanley in the "Functional Family Dad's Version" uses appropriation to show how the more things change the more they remain the same. She cuts humanity down to size reminding the viewer that much of our behaviour is instinctive or culturally defined. This sentiment permeates much of my work as well.

Both Cathy Guisewite and I scrutinize a crazy technological world that somehow manages to unite and alienate people at the same time. Individuals in cyberspace can become close friends while simultaneously distancing people in their immediate surroundings. Lack of anonymity, virtual friendships, and feelings of isolation emphasize the fact that life can rarely be viewed in terms of black and white.

Bourgeois' banquet performance is similar in spirit to my confined characters. People are often invisible in society, reduced to mere body parts. "Out to Pasture" addresses how women become invisible after a certain age. Hollander has similar concerns when she reveals that in creating her main character Sylvia, she chose to depict a very *visible* and *vocal* middle-aged woman who had important things to say (Walker, 1998, p.114).

The making of humorous art promotes freedom of thought and boundless expression of ideas that I might not feel comfortable articulating in another context. I choose to either disguise my concerns in order to make them palatable to the viewer or present shocking imagery designed to shake people out of their indifference. I let my ideas simmer on the back burner until certain approaches are revealed to me. My mood affects the way I choose to communicate.

Whether the comical stems from mundane and routine events, immediate surroundings, personal mythological research, fear mongering via the media, or stories passed down from a parent, life is perceived as a farce. Humour helps individuals cope with and adapt to frustrations and painful emotions. It never ceases to amaze me how personal sentiments expressed in my work evoke a collective response, regardless of whether or not my image is construed as I conceive it.

Rather than express continuous frustrations about my surroundings, I philosophically view events as situations that need to be turned on their heads in order to be understood for what they really are, varying degrees of insanity. Not unlike other humorous artists, my ideas are a combination of external stimuli interlaced with internal thoughts, feelings and preoccupations. Interestingly, the origins of humour are generally grounded within serious issues. This confirms what I have sensed all along; that a humorous artist is a serious artist.

I was quite surprised to discover that in rummaging through twenty years of work, I relived many painful emotions and felt rather distressed during the writing of this thesis. It is obvious that in my case, the creation of humour is to some degree therapeutic. What I experience when making humorous art is a coping mechanism,

part of my nature, and essential to my existence. Without humour, I have no cathartic valve to let off steam.

I was superficially aware that I made connections and links between things but was shocked to discover that I continued to link ideas over long periods of time, in some cases, years. The creative lateral thinking process is something that incubates in the unconscious, and pops up unexpectedly as needed. Humour keeps me thinking laterally, gives me permission to set logic aside, so that I may enjoy the nuances of life.

I remember often reiterating to some of my professors during the academic portion of this Masters degree that academia's constant focus on logic and seriousness disrupted my creative process and affected my artwork in a negative way. I find that when linear reasoning dominates in my life, I am an unhappier and less creative person. My general well-being seems dependant on a lateral thinking process and humorous perspective.

Chapter 12

Humour and art education

The field of education has traditionally been a serious one. Most of us can count on one hand the teachers who made us laugh or encouraged the use of humour in any subject. Nor is humour the first thing that comes to mind when contemplating art. Perhaps mainstream reticence in embracing humour as an important creative element within the visual arts is due in part to its revolutionary power. If humorous artists are stereotypically perceived as being non-serious then by implication, they must be poking fun at the very core of the art world. This repressive attitude has to change.

Rourke's (1997) humour triggering mechanisms identify how humour is produced and examples included in this thesis demonstrate their application. The actual processes used to achieve humorous conclusions are similar and in some ways identical to techniques used to stimulate creativity. The two are in fact kissing cousins (Goodman, 1983, p.18). Guy Robert (1998) in Le Pluralisme dans l'art au Québec astutely describes my process:

"Elle travail par association d'idées et de formes, de motifs et de thèmes, à partir de ce qu'elle nomme ses « turbulences émotives », et ses « récits visuels » font écho à la condition humaine actuelle, mais aussi intemporelle, entre vie et mort, érotisme et grotesque, violence et tendresse" (Unnumbered pages).

Translation :

"She associates ideas and shapes, patterns and themes, from what she refers to as emotional mayhem. She recounts visual stories about today's human

condition, but then again, one that is also timeless, lying somewhere between life and death, eroticism and the grotesque, violence and tenderness.”

This hardly describes the work of someone who takes the creation of art lightly. The association of ideas, shapes, patterns and themes, the use of metaphor and analogy are familiar devices used in creativity training. Goodman (1983) puts it this way: “One often leads to the other, for example, funny ideas leading to breakthroughs in perspective or solution to a particular problem; creative ideas having a tendency to liberate laughter” (p.18) The application of creativity techniques are extremely valued in all fields and taught extensively in colleges and universities. I see no clear reason why humour techniques, which are almost identical to those used to stimulate creativity, cannot be also be taught and be of great benefit to visual arts students. Goodman believes “the ability to develop a comic vision of life can be nurtured intentionally” and describes an interesting ritual used by one parent to enhance the development of humour sensibilities in his child (p.8). Sheri Klein (NAEA Advisory, Winter 1999) also alludes to a link between humour and creativity when she states that humour helps students *see* differently.

Morreall (1983) presents another interesting perspective concerning the advantages of living with a comic vision. He draws comparisons between humour and aesthetic experience and argues that humour is in reality *a type* of aesthetic experience. Both have intrinsic value for us as enjoyable activities and both are connected to play and imagination. The humorist and artist both surprise others and themselves, and enjoy humour for its own sake (p.90-91). Humour is a valid area of study because it promotes the examination of assumptions about reality, encourages flexibility of perspective, is useful in getting students to see more

aesthetically and creatively, and gives them the opportunity to exercise their imagination in the classroom (Morreall, 1983, p.97).

Morreall (1983) questions Plato's charge that laughter is a kind of scornful emotion. In his view, humour is not a suspension of reason, but a non-serious use of reason and absolutely necessary for the comprehension and appreciation of an incongruity.

Klein (NAEA Advisory, Winter 1999) believes that visual humour is part of children's lives and "cultivating this interest may be imperative for a sustained inquiry into art." Klein lists a number of parodied Western masterpieces that appear on everyday items such as T-shirts and mugs. "Issues of race, class, and gender in visual parody and satire" offer "opportunities for discussion" and a curriculum that is meaningful to students. Victor Borge's truism "laughter is the shortest distance between two people" certainly applies here (Goodman, 1983, p.8). The researching of other world cultures can be undertaken through humour-triggering mechanisms, "aesthetic issues such as reproduction versus originality, fine art versus crafts, and art versus non-art", and concerns about censorship can also be explored. The choice of visual humour in the curriculum however must be adapted to age groups because "prior knowledge" is essential in the understanding of some types of humour. Investigating visual humour expands students "views about art" and sends a message that this is a subject to be taken seriously (Klein, NAEA Advisory, Winter 1999).

Rourke (1997) believes that "educators recognize the importance of humour in establishing a positive learning environment in their classrooms. Humor helps to keep students alert and responsive. A good sprinkling of fun and jocular, mixed

in with education, serves as an anxiety regulator, which encourages a freer atmosphere that can bond people together and nurture self-esteem and social empathy" (p.xiv). Diane Loomans and Karen Kolberg support this argument in The Laughing Classroom (1993). The two women approach child and adult classes with humorous exercises divided into warm-ups, laughing lessons and play breaks. Regardless of age group, these educators are convinced that laughter and play creates "a safe atmosphere where the creative genius within each student" can "flourish" (Loomans and Kolberg, 1993, p.xi). They have discovered over a period of fifteen years that when humour is included in teaching, learning improves and occurs "without fear, struggle, or self-deprecation" (Loomans and Kolberg, 1993, p.x). In my view there is no doubt that visual humour in art education is a valuable tool that can be used to connect with a vast number of students.

Chapter 13

CONCLUSION

Visual humour is a powerful vehicle that can stimulate discussion in the classroom, promote creative and imaginative thinking on the part of students and viewers, and awaken the complacent in our society. It unites individuals and different cultures, promotes understanding and educates. Humour offers a pathway towards introspective reflection, which in turn, can lead to personal change and creative expression. When life becomes difficult, the comical helps to relieve stress. Artists who create humorous work often deal with serious issues that stem from anger or frustrations about society or from internal, psychological concerns that are frequently universal. Humour is rich with possibilities, a fertile, common ground that enhances communication and general well being.

This inquiry concerning the creation of visual humour reveals that certain mechanisms are used to achieve humorous conclusions but first and foremost, as in creativity, humour involves the concept of play. Because it entails the use of imagery, its appeal can be widespread, however, humorists must remain aware that humour doesn't reach everyone and its appreciation often depends on cultural context and whether viewers are free from anxiety. There is always a risk that visual jokes will not be understood and that these may in some circumstances, generate anger rather than laughter.

Visual humour needs to be promoted and valorized in educational settings as well as in the art world. It offers a roller coaster ride that makes life exciting and passionate. Humour and laughter are good for both our physical and emotional

health (Rourke, 1997, p.xiv). "Life with laughter is more fun; you are healthier, learn faster, are a better communicator, and are more enjoyable to be with. Furthermore, you are less likely to burn out from stress or what might be called "terminal professionalism" (Rourke, 1997, p.xiv).

Most of us have the option of including humour in our lives. The beauty of jest and art combine in visual humour to create messages that are intelligent, loaded with meaning, and have the added bonus of making us smile and laugh. This multi-layered mode of expression is unique to our species and embraces a gods-eye or goddesses-eye view. What more can a mere mortal ask for?

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1. **Association:** combining, juxtaposing, free association, connecting, comparing, superimposing, coalescing. Uniting anomalous elements from different physical or psychological realms. Making stretched analogies and associations that produce surprise and incongruity. Hybridizing. Producing "unique crossbreeds" by mating disparate elements.
2. **Transposition:** Shifting, transferring, switching, exchanging, adapting, substituting, replacing, displacing, relocating. Transferring a subject into a new context or situation, into a different time or gender; moving a subject out of its normal placement; changing historical, social, geographical, or political settings.
3. **Transformation:** Changing, evolving, progressing, transmutating, metamorphosing, hybridizing. Altering composition, structure, form, character, condition, or appearance of a subject. Stylizing, abstracting, transfiguring an image or form by caricature, exaggeration, or distortion.
4. **Contradiction:** Reversing, twisting things around, producing incongruity, ambiguity, paradox, irony, displaced logic, double-entendre, mixed metaphor. Representing through the opposite.
5. **Exaggeration:** Overstating or understating, hyperbole, embellishing "truth," distorting, caricaturing, prevaricating. Exaggerating to ridiculous extreme, bombast. Magnifying or diminishing an object, idea, or situation; tomfoolery, jocularly.
6. **Parody:** Mimicking, burlesquing, spoofing, comic representation, "roasting", or lampooning. Making comic or mildly satiric references to human behaviour, customs, conventions, beliefs, or creations.
7. **Punning:** Wordplay, word/image play, comic ambiguity, double meaning. Creating humour with ambiguity or double-entendre. Use of silly titles, malapropisms, spoonerisms, alterations of the unexpected.
8. **Disguise:** Concealing, deceiving, camouflaging, obscuring, obfuscating. Hiding or encrypting certain elements. Masking, making something ambiguous. Use of personal (or cryptic) symbolism or metaphor, double or multiple meaning, or subliminal information.
9. **Satire:** Ridiculing, mocking, applying trenchant wit, irony, or sarcasm to tweak the conscience, or trigger awareness. Poking fun at human hypocrisy, vice, and folly. Iconoclasm, deriding "sacred cows." Targeting imperfection and malpractice in social and political groups and organizations. Criticizing ethical, moral, spiritual apathy, and corruption.
10. **Narration:** Storytelling, myth making, discourse by words and/or images; graphic presentation of actions or events; sequenced graphic representation (for example, narration in a comic-strip format).
11. **Appropriation:** "Borrowing," taking, annexing, conscripting, quoting, referring. Creating new work by adapting an image from a previously known art form, or from other realms of human expression. Transforming or reinventing an appropriated subject by redrawing or restyling it, or by setting it into a new context.