

Invisible Monsters
OR
Little Girl and the Phallus

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(translation by Izabela Potapowics)

"La peur est au centre de mon œuvre"

Alone. Yet, never truly alone. On a white background. From a world that lightens her dim gaze. That fills her entire body. And those who are loved around her. Never alone. A teddy bear, a guard dog to caress. A swarm of friends, sisters, mothers, affectionate dolls facing the infinite. Facing death. In front of which she comes undone, stands beside herself, in order to scream injustice. She plays and outwits reality with the help of an accomplice, a soul mate. Intuitive, behind a shameless mask, insolence is her only weapon. It suffocates, anesthetizing her heightened sensibility, her fear. Alone in her multilayered shell, she struggles. She faces the world. She manipulates negative forces. She makes a way for herself by creating her own space where she lets her imagination wander between dogs and wolves, between mockery and tenderness. She invents rules for her own game; she outlines her roles: the malicious seductress, the defiant girl, the fearful woman, the devoted mother. These are perhaps the parameters of a fictional space, but they apply to the realities found in the universe in which little girls grow up. Little girls like those drawn by women artists Kim Dawn, Ève K. Tremblay and Élisabeth Eudes-Pascal.

Nostalgia, mourning, seduction, combat, and struggle all seem to vibrate in the heart of the works. Yet these themes are lightened by the spontaneity of the drawing gesture or by the models' bewildered expressions, giving them a certain freshness, a charming candor. Indeed, the three artists express a certain youthful energy, a kind of spontaneity, an exuberance that is generally found in children's drawings, or in portraits that are made of them.

The blunt, unswerving skilled line of Kim Dawn's drawings unmistakably portrays the little girls' right to speech. This right to speak compels us to listen carefully. We are not dealing with childish remonstrations, but with demands which take us off guard, revealing much about the little girls' state of mind and the condition of being a little girl. Spontaneous and rapid gestures, these drawings fall on paper like a heavy fist, filled with hate and anger. "I deserve respect" and "I want to forget" — statements that need no comment, while hinting at a deeper drama. What does she wish to forget? And at the same time, why does she ask for respect? The equation seems easy to solve, especially at a time when the media constantly remind us of human nature's dark side, of certain human beings who up until now seemed socially marginal, but who, according to statistics, constitute an

increasingly disquieting number. Kim Dawn's little girls, who seem to have lost their hands from praying or punching, mostly seem to have lost their confidence, their ingenuity, their innocence — perhaps even their virginity — when faced with this dark side of the world where invisible monsters of pedophilia roam. Kim Dawn's anonymous little girls, unlike so many others, dare to demand a little dignity; in hushed tones, though threatening to come undone, stretching their long, thin necks in an expression that stands for an insult: "banana split" — *here's what I'll become*, she seems to say. In the meantime she finds some human warmth in the company of a faithful and affectionate companion, a dog, a real animal. It is through these violent marker strokes that the artist prints, black on white, the danger that brushes regularly against the little girls, living in a world where ignominy reigns in the cellars of instinct, where evil is linked to the need of survival. In a world where transgression becomes synonymous with desire and pleasure, as it breaks human — perhaps even animal — laws dictating the protection and love of one's progeny. These drawings speak to those who break the law as much as to those who fail to enforce it. These drawings — painful black stains on the white page of silence — convey, through the use of an insolent line, childlike originality, a sign of hope in the future. This is precisely what makes this work so powerful. By bringing forward issues we tend to repress, it disturbs our apathy.

Élisabeth Eudes-Pascal expresses little girls' vulnerability and sensibility through a more nervous line. In an imbroglio of colourful pastel lines. Purple/mourning, red/blood, blue/solitude entangled in black lines that trace strange rituals where mothers, daughters and female friends seem to meet around the same mystery. They seem to give themselves to secret ceremonies seeking fearsome powers hidden at the bottom of a cave, or in the branches of an ancestral tree. Or are they falling into trances in the hope of finding deliverance, freeing themselves from fears? The shaky line denotes uncertainty, apprehension when faced with malevolent forces, when faced with guilt, when faced with the secret that binds them. They seem to chant in unison: "I want to forget" and "I deserve respect." Together, in what seems to be an initiation ritual, they ward themselves from the women's curse. The silhouettes, mnemonic shadows of vestal priestesses, haunt the paper sheet; they haunt our consciousness through the hazy lines and stains, tainted by suffering and pain. Found guilty, the little girls deride the very idea of original sin. And, in that same mocking spirit, they find shelter in a model of typical family life, whether it be dream or reality, drawn by the artist in cartoon boxes, reminiscent of a life's labyrinths with its spectacular games; the labyrinth of an abode where the queen finally loses herself.

It is also through these uncanny games that the little girls or young teenagers in Ève K. Tremblay's photos counteract the apprehension and the anxiety of being locked up behind the high walls of a boarding house, away from the dangerous stares of those found on the other side. Their uniforms unbuttoned, they give themselves to playful rituals, acting out their own signs and codes that symbolically refer — not to banal quarrels — but to the mourning of a childhood that fades away: a skirt pulled from one side to the other, a face with an inquiring look, a face streaked by tears. More vulnerable this time, though always linked by

complicity, they act out their own fear: half-nude torsos, they reenact the shower scene from Hitchcock's *Psycho*, or the equally well-known scene of frightened Suzan, spied on by the old men. They find refuge in the heart of a heap of dolls, eyes fixated on the biggest one, where they find refuge, troubled as they are by their unstable identity, as if to keep the last vestiges of innocence they still have from the adult world that awaits them on the other side of the wall. Always in search of liberty, though fearful, they discharge their emotions into a ray of sunlight. The complexity of these emotions instill doubt in their hearts, to the point of pushing them to at once desire and reject their inescapable womanhood.

It is therefore through a nearly cinematographic staging that Ève K. Tremblay's photographs seem to catch these scenes suggestive of play, allowing the model's ingenuousness to show through in a striking way. Just like Kim Dawn and Élisabeth Eudes-Pascal, she transforms us into voyeurs of the emotions felt by girls on the brink of maturity who are exposed to an increasingly selfish, unconscious, and remorseless world. These girls victimize themselves, showing the discomfort of their existence, of their condition within an adult world that reduces them to a body made as a space for desire and pleasure. Pascal Quignard says "L'homme est un regard désirant qui cherche une autre image derrière tout ce qu'il voit." A sort of original image obsesses him. He also explains "Il se trouve une pierre où est sculpté un facinus grossier que le statuaire a entouré de ces mots: Ici réside le bonheur." Without knowing the true source of their torment, something in their conscience warns them. They live in doubt. They have premonitory thought, blurry thoughts that make them insecure. What are they protecting themselves from? Whom are they protecting themselves from? Still, they must relinquish their fears. In 1968 Louise Bourgeois was already exorcising her anxiety, creating a work entitled *Fillette* that represented a 51cm tall phallus — a sort of formless fetus, distorted by pleasure and horrific in format — a weapon she invented to combat and kill the specters threatening her conscience. She said: "in life, I am a victim, through art I am an assassin," admitting simultaneously that "fear lies at the center of [her] work."

Though the work presented by these three artists is inscribed in the aesthetics of candor, it shows, beyond a false naïveté, the sharpened conscience of little girls who are protecting themselves from the aggression and perversity of which so often they are the target. They allow themselves to play with this idea, in a sort of naïve, unconscious perversity. This is precisely what creates the ambivalence of the figure of the child-woman, who provokes through the need to self-protection or, inversely, becomes a seductress, a game in which she excels, as if by second nature. Developing weapons against male authority and power, the little girl's destiny outlines itself through a tension between two poles that give way to two figures, or clichés: the frivolous woman, hyper-seductress, and that of the *macho* woman, the hyper-feminist. Clichés found in numerous, and for the most part masculine, literary and film and visual creations.

In this way, the artists discussed here lend a human face to their drawings or their models, deliberately or intuitively, avoiding the representational canonical figures like Lolita or Alice, established by male discourse. In this they "escape the

internal language in which man imprisons them” and reveal “the importance for them to establish their own relationship to the sacred,” as articulated by Luce Irigaray.

Thus, the representations of the little girls brought together through these works reveal the hidden face of the standard portrayal of the angelic or diabolic icon. The motivating force for these productions seems to be fear, anguish. It is not an anguish of the unknown that has inspired an impressive number of works, not to say of all of art production from its origins, but fear of a very concrete unknown, one that lies in certain beings made of hands, arms, legs, sexes, of lascivious — even murderous — movements, though lacking a head and most of all, a heart. These works provoke a dreadful vertigo; they drag us into the world of secret ceremonies, into the artifice of intuition, of premonitions, in front of doubtful times, of individuals incapable of seeing or, worse, not wishing to believe what is happening in front of their eyes. Is this not the great paradox of a humanity that for so long believed what it never saw? Who is more likely to doubt its capabilities of perception than its potential for imagination? The imprisonment behind walls, behind a *tchador* or under a *burga* is not enough; it does not solve the problem and perhaps even stimulates vice. For Naddeje Laneyrie-Dagen, “the body is the space for the last doubts and the greatest anxieties.”

In this way, the hallucinating secret that often links the aggressor and the victim throws the latter into extreme confusion, into a cycle of guilt that pushes her to make such pleas as: “I want to forget,” and into the silence of the white page that closes itself up after each episode. Completed in a time of trouble, of uncertainty, of the infinite, the works of the artists discussed here, much like those by Louise Bourgeois, seem to rely on an incommensurable knowledge. And like Bourgeois, the artists presented here seem to say “I have confidence in the unconscious.”

These seemingly innocent works denote a powerful enunciating process that reveals a phenomenology in action that, through the intercession of a few signs, takes us through the empathy into human dramas that humanity itself cannot get rid of, cannot eradicate despite the shame they leave on our supposedly civilized societies. “I deserve respect” the little girls murmur in unison.