

Catriona Shaw, by Ken Pratt (Curator) 2009

The Scottish artist Catriona Shaw headed for Munich after completing her art degree at The Edinburgh College of Art in the late 1990's. In Munich, where she entered the Academy of Fine Art for postgraduate studies, she soon became involved in the vibrant underground art and music scenes of the time. Whilst still at the academy, she co-founded Club Le Bomb, and assumed one of her own music performance monikers, Miss Le Bomb. The gritty and illegal antics of Club Le Bomb – a platform for music and happenings- soon became a familiar entity on the European circuit.

Known for her rather unpredictable and quirky performances in the various musical configurations with which she has manifested her musical expression – Miss Le Bomb, Hektor & Rositha, Queen of Japan or as a frequent collaborator with Electronicat- Catriona Shaw can claim impeccable underground credentials. In the case of Queen of Japan, she can also claim to be the voice behind one of the definitive anthems of the jubilation of the early years of the dance/electro scene, so definitive of the first decade of the new millennium.

Shaw's practice as an artist is eclectic, ranging from painting and conceptual installations to performance. But, drawing, in its most extended forms, remain at the heart of her practice. Her drawings, whether in the more traditional sense of works on paper or in the form of mobiles and three-dimensional installations of drawing, having a fleeting, rapid quality about them. These are rapidly observed moments in the great mess of contemporary life that sometimes give a sense of the artist committing them to paper, uncensored or unmediated, lest the very specific moment be lost. And perhaps it is this aspect – informing their style and indicating the rather arch position of the observer- that give them a certain quality of familiarity. Here and there, they convey a strong sense of Weimar drawing; Neue Sachlichkeit bile turned on a contemporary cast of grotesques and unfortunates.'

In other works such as 'La Carmagnole des She-Romps', (2008) a collaboration with Pauline Curnier Jardin and Goodiepal we soon realise that the immediacy and spontaneity of the works on paper should never be taken as evidence that Catriona Shaw's practice is that of a dilettante artist with a hobbyist's interest in drawing. 'La Carmagnole des She-Romps' is a visual and audio installation representing the process and results of a 'remote' collaboration on an MP3 opera by Shaw and Jardin using the free computer tool 'Garage Band', including a filmed notation and re-interpretation of the music by Danish artist Goodiepal.

In this work, we rapidly make the connections between a strong conceptual framework to which the scrappy, devil-may-care DIY aesthetic has been applied with careful thought. It is at once a visual pun that reformulates the aesthetic orthodoxies of familiar computer GUI's and coincidentally questions the aesthetic orthodoxies of dry conceptual art that have become so familiar in the hermetically sealed worlds of an over-intellectualized artistic practice. Familiar things are composed of –and question- their opposites. Within Shaw's practice the cynical streetwise attitude of pop cohabits with an intellectual approach to art.

But, within this work and numerous others that use drawing and sound as their main conduit, Shaw's humour snakes through all the layers; something it shares with numerous parodic and irreverent music projects. And, once again we come in a circle to her connections with artistic positions of the Weimar Republic which are barely explicit and never usually directly stated. Perhaps she is even unaware of them. There is nonetheless a strong common sensibility between the work of artists like Dix or Heartfield and that of Catriona Shaw, a cutting refusal to deny the compatibility of 'serious' artistic practice and inappropriate humour.

If Dix and Heartfield were of a generation in which the broader politic landscapes of the day seemed more real in their ability to inform social change, Shaw is from a generation in which suspicion of any formulated politic ideology is almost a prerequisite for survival. It is no wonder then that her work offers us less clear comment in socio-political terms but instead engages with a world of nebulous ambivalence in which no one is any more attacked than advocated. We are – including the artist herself- the inhabitants of a complicity and tarnished environment in whatever political critiques remains must share space with quirky moments of existential absurdity, never quite a society nor self-indulgently entitled to the claim of 'alienation' emoted by the Expressionists.

Shifting through the layers of engagement in Catriona Shaw's work, it also becomes clear that the polar tension between her love for (and participation in) a poppy immediate world and the slower, more reflective

realm of philosophy and theory surfaces from time to time. One might assume this has something to do with her relatively recent decision to return to study at the UDK in Berlin for an MA in the theoretical area of Art In Context. The reality however is that if one looks at earlier work or stage personas of Catriona Shaw is that it becomes clear that such intellectual questioning has always informed her artistic practice.

Catriona Shaw has released a broad range of solo and collaborative music projects on various record labels and continues to tour internationally, playing in clubs, festivals and institutional venues. As a visual artist, she has shown at various galleries and institutions including Badische Kunstverein (Karlsruhe), Artspace 300m3 (Gothenburg) and the Lonnstrom Museum (Rauma). She is the recipient of various art scholarships and prizes including the Helen A. Rose Bequest, both the DAAD Scholarship and the DAAD Award for Foreign Students and the Pépinières Européennes Pour Jeunes Artistes. She has organised and participated in many art projects for radio, public spaces and festivals.