

STRANGE NEIGHBOUR



CREEP SHOW

POLIXENI PAPAPETROU / PIP RYAN
HEATHER B SWANN / TONY WOODS

The debut exhibition from Strange Neighbour, *Creep Show* fittingly explores the strange and the strangely familiar. The works engage in part reality, part fantasy, where recognizable childhood motifs are combined with surreal, horror aesthetics. Original forms are turned upside down, flipped inside out, changed in scale, reversed in age, yet remain decipherable. The characters in *Creep Show* are at once playful and dreamlike, however, just like our childhood memories; there is an eerie, dark undertone of the uncanny.

Pip Ryan's *Happy Orang*, sits ominously in a corner. Familiar to most, the replica of a childhood toy has been up-scaled to human size. This personification immediately creates a sense of dread. Then as we move closer the gorilla comes alive and 'feeling' our presence, he plays the drum. The scale, shock of the sound and movement throws us back to a psychological state of infantile nightmares. Distant memories of our childhood, when objects, animals, people and things were unknown, unclassified and otherworldly. Where inanimate objects did have a life, were possessed, were animated. When the fear resides we feel empathy for the gorilla, it's intimidating appearance is misunderstood. It is after all just a playful creature awaiting the viewer to activate its functionality; to drum for you.

The characters in the photographic series *The Dreamkeepers* by **Polixeni Papapetrou** appear outcast, misunderstood. Due to their unusual appearance they exist outside of culture, people whom society have rejected. In a civilization where so much importance is placed on the fleeting superficiality of good looks and youth, these poor creatures are old before their time. They possess a tender sadness, of those who are lonely, marginal, fringe dwellers, freaks. There is strength however in their poses, and a sense of promise in these brightly coloured palettes and familiar landscapes. Perhaps these folk are wise beyond their years, and maybe every outsider hopes that if they exist, there is also someone out there to which they can hold a mirror. Not so outcast as to be destitute, they remain spirited, and as seen in *The Holiday Makers*, are happy to document their lives and loved ones.

In *My Goldfish and I* by **Tony Woods** we see the artist filming himself through a fish bowl, reflected. His image is dwarfed and distorted, mutating his appearance. The Goldfish, a common childhood pet, appears larger than life, even possessed. Both characters, in an apparent attempt to communicate with the viewer, are trapped inside the looking glass. The reverse of scale and function between them creates an eerie uneasiness. Childhood motifs are repeated and inversed once again, enhanced by the nearby sound of children playing. The theme of age is present in this work, however, in contrast to *The Dreamkeepers*, in *My Goldfish and I* the protagonist has aged naturally but is contained in a childlike bubble.

In the work of **Heather B Swann** we see a darker, surreal influence. Seemingly innocent childhood games, such as Leapfrog, have horrible consequences when the playful pastimes shape shift and coalesce with the individual, creating a part human, part beast. In an abstract space between the spirited world of folklore and that of 'reality', Swann's work entices us back to our primordial, otherworldly beginnings.

With the underlying darkness there is often humour evident in these works. The characters are strangely playful, weird and retain a funny juvenile spirit. The works in *Creep Show* engage with primeval belief systems and appeal to our childhood sensibilities. Human- animal imagery is consistent with mythological motifs employed by our primitive selves. These human-animal images are used in rituals and represented in transformational stages of the psyche. The same cultural archetypes are present in our childhood toys and games, animated and amplified by our developing brains. The characters in this show are caught in the space between the unreal and the real, a place of every imaginable possibility. As adults we can recall this space; as like a dream or a nightmare it is strange, yet strangely familiar.

Linsey Gosper, 2013