





IONE RUCQUOI

Words & Interview
by TULLY WALTER

Metaphoric, allegorical and disarmingly emotive; lone Rucquoi's powerfully surreal photographs are both sensually confronting and captivatingly evocative. Her recent exhibition, *Birds, Fishwives and Bunny Girls*, consists of a series of images centering on women and the exploration of womanhood, emotion, psychology and humanity. Laden with symbolism and visual language, Rucquoi "externalizes the internal," via profoundly intimate, challenging compositions, often fuelled by her own personal experiences.

www.ionerucquoi.com

Meanwhile, it is the nature of the delivery that renders Rucquoi's narratives all the more poignant. Almost classical in quality, each portrait is composed, in a seemingly traditional, formalized and often exaggerated style. Lone's works, whilst finally captured through the medium of photography, are constructed through meticulous research and craftsmanship. The actual "building" of an image can take months from conception. Each image is constructed throughout the artistry of layering- from the theatrical backgrounds to the dressing of the model- with the use of prosthetics, costume and props. Many facets are combined, to achieve the surreal and dramatic complexities of each image.

Despite the resonant macabre and even unsettling tones and representations in *Birds*, *Fishwives* and *Bunny Girls*, Rucquoi proves herself a master of balance, evoking a conflicting audience engagement and response, similarly imbedded in the vast emotional spectrum that she explores. Undeniably, *Bird's Fishwives and Bunny Girls*, is filled with challenging imagery and an often unnerving tension. At times confrontingly grotesque, the "shadows" that plague human nature seem to envelope the protagonists within each composition. However the intimate, autobiographical and emotive landscape each photograph is set within, evokes a peculiar tenderness, in the sense of a delicately identifiable, visceral, human tension. These tensions, whilst comprehensively challenging to the audience, are imbedded within the challenges explored throughout personal identity, emotion, rites of passage, and the human journey. The unease encapsulated in the projection of challenging imagery, taking form in the visual presence of raw flesh, "guts" and disfigurement, whilst sensually confronting, has a certain nurturing quality. Despite the shock, conflict and subsequent discomfort of the imagery, when presented with the visualization of our internal matter, our subconscious bridges the very fact that what we see externalized, is a counter part of humanity, and truly "unites us all." Rucquoi doesn't endeavor to be subversive; rather she challenges the audience with her beautifully haunting exhibition, by means of the visualization of emotion, psychology, taboo, and

human matter - things that we as humans, are ultimately made up of.

Your work is so much more than photography. How would you describe your work?

I certainly wouldn't describe myself as a photographer; the fact that the finished product is a photograph is incidental.

You have described elements of your work as autobiographical. What do you mean by this?

Yes, my work has been fairly autobiographical over the years. Quite often an idea will be informed or inspired by my own experiences and relationships. The intense experience of loss and bereavement and that of motherhood have been big motivators in my creative process.

How does emotion inform your work?

Emotion is a huge and integral aspect of the work. Often an image is about conveying or portraying an emotion. The symbolic and allegorical characteristic of the work is used as a vehicle to communicate an emotion. In as much as I work with making emotions visible through the physical, the images themselves should elicit a strong emotional response, as do my new 3D object based works.

What other intangible themes and ideas do you like to explore?

I tend to work in metaphor, with archetypes – tapping into the unconscious by using imagery that is steeped in meaning...I see my work as a kind of modern day alchemy. I am interested in man's close relationship to nature, the untamed and darker side of human existence, what psychoanalyst Jung referred to as the 'shadow'.

What else inspires you?

Lots of things inspire me – life inspires me! Other artists, designers, films, writers, the lady who works in the post office, going abroad, churches, snippets of



Second Skin
106 X 109CM
2010

"I tend to work in metaphor, with archetypes – tapping into the unconscious by using imagery that is steeped in meaning...I see my work as a kind of modern day alchemy"

- Ione Rucquoi







conversation I shouldn't be hearing, personal relationships and formal ones, where I live, strong emotional responses to situations, music, the farm next door, my mother, my daughter, death and what lies within it, birds, women and men, memories, cities, the list goes on...

How does the conception of an idea or rather, the choice of a theme or concept come about?

Ideas/concepts vary in their gestation, some are fairly instant, some are informed or inspired by an individual in relation with a specific prop. Sometimes I'll be working on a particular theme, and the ideas will grow out of this.

Your work has been described as confrontational and even at times, shocking. Why do you think this is?

I think confrontational, as it deals with subject matter that we would rather not confront. Shocking, I have a problem with as it is not my intention to shock and it tends to get in the way of the complexities and subtleties of an image. I don't understand why people are shocked by the things that we are physically made up of, it is a subject I am really interested in; I am currently working on some Placenta prints (the placenta is an incredibly complex organ) it is where we all came from, it unites us, and yet we are repelled by its bloody and visceral nature.

You actually began your studies in textiles, how did the transition to, and focus on, photography emerge and evolve into such a signature aesthetic?

Recently my work has evolved back into 3D object based and 2D mixed media. The transition from textiles to photographs was really a way of documenting the notion of clothing speaking before the person, how

we shape and yet are shaped by this, the language of clothing as masquerade and identity in relation to public and private persona. Photography was always just a way to capture an idea. I never studied or trained in photography but I did spend a lot of time in the colour dark room at college. It doesn't come that naturally to me as I'm not technically minded and I like getting my hands dirty.

Can you tell us about some of the things you collect and how you use them in your work?

I collect all kinds of things, I'm always on the look out for curios – sometimes they hang around for years before I finally use them. I recently got a lighthouse bulb from an auction, it is a lovely object. I might use it for something one day when the time is right! I've been collecting broken eggshells for about 5 years, I think they will become an installation some day, when I have enough. I am currently using infant pointe ballet shoes and knackered kids boxing gloves juxtaposed with gold plated acupuncture needles in some new object based work. I use organs and guts as an analogy for the depth of feeling and emotion we have for things. Plants carry symbolic meaning, either in the name or the medical use. The props I use are usually a metaphor for larger fundamental subjects, i.e. life, death, hope, fear, pain, drive, force.

What other creative exploits/ mediums do you enjoy?

I enjoy drawing very much and cooking and hats.

Explain to us the role and importance the written word plays in your work?

I will quite often start with a list of words, kind of word association – a list of its attributes –

what it means to me, the dictionary definition and what it means in association to it's juxtaposed material. Past titles have been extremely important to the image, a play on words or punning. They are still important but becoming less playful, more serious.

Who are your favourite artists / photographers?

I can't answer that question, there are too many, they change constantly and they are extremely different.

Describe to us your studio?

I have a workspace at home, which is more like an office and a studio up the road which I use as a photographic backdrop and stage – at the moment anyway. There is a lot of stuff in both of them. I've taken to using the kitchen table recently for some small pieces I'm working on.

Can you tell us about what you are working on at the moment?

Currently I'm working on an installation consisting of 28 photographic colour panels (8ft x 3ft) female nudes who, reminiscent of the saints depicted in Roman Catholic prayer cards, all bear gold-leaf halos (transferred onto each individual image in 24 carat gold leaf).

The work addresses body image, including during and after pregnancy and post-birth struggles, both mental and physical. By exposing issues that are often taboo, I seek to heighten awareness of what Jung refers to as the 'shadow': the repressed or disowned part of the personality and the animal instincts of human nature.

Using symbol to communicate emotion,

I'm externalising the internal in both a literal and abstract sense: reproductive organs and viscera are painted directly onto subjects' skin; feelings and emotions are made tangible through representation.

Butterfly Collection
100 X 80CM
2009

