

Betwixt and Between - the fraught world of Ryan's Arcade

In a scene from the film *Out of the Blue* the protagonist Cebe lays curled up on her bed sucking her thumb. She wears a leather jacket, smeared mascara sideburns and slicked back hair in an anxious attempt to metamorphose into a kick ass Elvis/punk. Throughout this over wrought film everything about Cebe is out of place. She is neither male or female, child or adult Her identity is largely unreadable for she is fluid and indiscriminate in her reactions and attachments. Like many of the characters that inhabit the yellow hued world of Ryan's Arcade, Cebe is both an innocent and a freak. She occupies a space between meanings in a landscape of ambivalence.

The cast of characters Luanne Martineau assembles in this body of work are gleaned from diverse sources including historical cartoons the Yellow Kid, Buster Brown and Little Nemo, the children's books Little Black Sambo and the Little Prince, *Out of the Blue* and Goya's caricatures. They come from worlds fraught with hyperactivity and strife. In many of these tales nothing is as it appears and Martineau explores the moments in a story when peculiarities can be explained away, when the phrase "but twas just a dream" functions as an excuse. The dreamscape becomes a vehicle for permission and transgression and she takes advantage of this to reorganize the characters while altering them at will. In one scenario Little Black Sambo becomes a girl in a bikini while a Goya figure sports the head of Little Nemo.

Taken from delineations of change or passage in the original narratives the figures in Ryan's Arcade engage in unspecified actions without context or identifiable ends. Cebe raises her arms in a gesture of either defiance or attrition. A gnome-like hobo rushes to nowhere, a snake coils around a man as it clutches a bottle with its tail. While these images are funny and bizarre they are also disquieting. The majority of characters in the Arcade are grotesque stereotypes freed from their historical origins. Representations of Little Black Sambo, drunken Irishmen or hillbillies are undoubtedly questionable, but they are images of their time representing specific attitudes of the day.

Without the framework of the original narratives the intention or meaning behind these representations become complicated and arbitrary. Where and

what they are or are not becomes the primary concern and it is this realm of interpretation and authentication that most interests Martineau. Simplified encapsulations are conspicuously missing from her work as she generates open ended possibilities for interaction between the characters. The proposterous figures of the judge/professor, grouped on the floor and occupying the same space as the viewer, give blind witness to the antics of the other characters.

Notions of density and superficiality are at play in the Arcade as are ideas around value and authority. The materials Martineau,s uses (watercolour, crude embroidery, Super Sculpey) defy standards of fine art currency. Like the figures that populate Ryan,s Arcade, the materials are specimens of genre. Sifted and re-organized they belong to Martineau,s archive of cultural debris. The archiving process remains in the work without defining its content. It is not a passive display, but an active arena of association and implication.