

onespace



Welcome to the Dreamhouse

Amy Carkeek

1 - 25 August 2018

[...] Reality itself founders in hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another, reproductive medium, such as photography. From medium to medium, the real is volatilized, becoming an allegory of death. But it is also, in a sense, reinforced through its own destruction. It becomes reality for its own sake, the fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal.¹

– Jean Baudrillard

The condition of hyperrealism, which Baudrillard described in 1976 in response to the rise of the mass media, and concurrent cultural manifestations such as pop art, has persisted into the 21st century. As the virtual worlds of cyberspace and reality TV have expanded their reach, we have become increasingly detached from our lives. It is this dissipated state of hyperreality and conspicuous consumption that Amy Carkeek targets in her unsettling yet captivating photographs.

Drawing on her background in advertising, Carkeek turns the industry's tools in on themselves, using its conventions to subvert and critique the 'luxury frenzy' that these induce.² The artist employs a multilayered technique meant to intensify the sense that we are looking at a simulacrum, or a copy without an original. She adopts the roles of prop maker, set designer and director to fashion *mise en scène* that are both perplexing and disconcertingly familiar, hermetically sealing the results through the photographic process.

To create her images, Carkeek sources found ceramics of the mawkish kind, produced in multiples and sold in gifts stores and bargain houses, or, in their more exclusive form, the home décor departments of stores such as Myer and David Jones. The consummate trash and treasure hunter, she trawls thrift shops for ornaments that were once cherished but have been discarded, and become, in her words, 'a shell of their former life ... waiting for someone to select them among the sea of other obsolete commodities.'³ The figurines are then modified with modelling clay, so that ornaments that might ordinarily have taken pride of place in nanna's glass-fronted cabinet assume a more sinister meaning. The inference is that things are not what they seem.

It is no coincidence that the curios are mass-produced 'collectibles' designed to incite buyers to acquire. It is this impulse that Carkeek interrogates. In her latest exhibition, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*, she continues her scrutiny of our voracious need to consume, both through reproducing the reproduced, and the vacuity that this act represents. The title plays on the concept of the doll's house, a world of make-believe, and on the illusions conjured by theme parks such as Dreamworld, whose façade has fractured in recent weeks under the weight of the tragic failure of its Thunder River Rapids ride.

In the photograph *Sweet Pea: It's Just an Illusion* (2018), the artifice is palpable. The cutesy figure, replete with pinafore and kerchief, is shown taking off her 'face', an allusion to the masks that we frequently project to the world. A second photograph, *You Can't Learn by Forgetting* (2018), sees a crinoline-clad protagonist, embellished with a shotgun, turn away from the viewer. The image suggests a denial, perhaps of our colonial past, and most certainly of our blindness to the perils of our mercenary present.

¹ Jean Baudrillard cited in *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 1018 (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003)

² Clive Hamilton cited in Amy Carkeek, 'Cultural Illusion: Consumer Imagery and the Construction of an Artificial Dream,' in *Proceedings of the 5th Annual Popular Culture Association of Australia and New Zealand*, ed. P. Mountford, 141–150 (Hobart: PopCAANZ, 2014).

³ Amy Carkeek, email to the author, 28 June 2018.

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