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Georgina Starr: *Before Le Cerveau Affamé* at Cooper Gallery, Dundee

British artist Georgina Starr's *Before Le Cerveau Affamé*, currently on show at Cooper Gallery, curated by Sophia Hao, is an adventure from a sleepless mind.

It melds forms: installation, drawing, video, performance and object. It inhabits a territory between studio, gallery, theatre, and tarot-card palmistry sideshow. It is present in the liminal spaces of the mind: moments from film, photographic archives, the erotic, childhood, TV and dressing-up. It consists of drawings, brain sculptures made of bubblegum, cats, a large curtain backdrop, framed photographs and mirrors. A vinyl record with the voice of a French actress reads, in a strict manner, a set of instructions like a ringmaster, while a troupe of female dancers, acrobats and gymnasts perform hypnotic rituals and physical configurations all the while blowing bubblegum. Starr is the conjurer of a genre of her own making. Her tableau of mystery and hallucination is also the set for a film, to be premiered later in the year.

In this panopticon of ideas are traces of the drawings of August Natterer, illustrations from a mind affected by schizophrenia. Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*, and the scenes of the child sleepwalking, manifesting her "brain fever", causing hysteria in her household, prompting fears of a haunting. Frank Wedekind's *Mine-Haha, or On the Bodily Education of Young Girls*, a novella that relates the story of a pastoral all girls school. His text is full of precise descriptions of adolescent girls' bodies, clothing, features and hair. A school where there are lessons on walking on your hands, physical accomplishment and musicianship. This learning leads, as the girls mature, to "graduate" during a theatre performance. Its drama is a weird combination of fairy tale, impregnation, decapitation and acrobatic gestures. The girls in the text are debutantes of the bizarre.

# TRACY WILLIAMS

The bubblegum spheres that appear on photographs and video are moments of perfection. The internal externalised before an inevitable collapse. They are breath membrane sculptures to accompany Starr's poetry published later as *A History of Sculpture*. Terribly beautiful, they speak of allure, innocence and death, and are deeply moving, displayed as a collection like butterflies in a secret location behind the curtain.

Starr uses a recurring motif of colour in contrast and spiritual meanings they suggest: the installation's lighting, on grey and brown plinths which hold the bubblegum brains, the costumes (opulent purples, greens, reds), the curtain and ceramic cats. These ceramics use sancai lead glaze, an ancient – the Tang Dynasty – technique that intermingles three colours for decoration.

This trick from clairvoyants of using three different coloured ribbons to commence a “reading”. The selected colours representative of the subject's past, present and future. Here Starr uses this device to create parity to the “reading” of art in terms of feminism, psychoanalysis (particularly Jacques Lacan), film theory and queer culture, their critical examination of cinema, pornography, Hollywood and fashion. Starr's framing of intermingling cultural references in this staged manner evokes ideas in Susan Sontag's *Notes on Camp*. Evidencing its regard for style, artifice, the attitudinal and melodrama. While the magical, ritualistic and superstition brings to mind Marcel Mauss' *A General Theory of Magic*. How science, art, ritual, the unconscious overlap. How conditions like possession, clairvoyance, spells and fate form part of the script of our social habits and beliefs. Starr's play is an exquisite expression of the magical “everyday”.

Alexander Hetherington

Georgina Starr: *Before Le Cerveau Affamé*, 10 October until 13 December. Cooper Gallery, College of Art and Design, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, 13 Perth Road, Dundee, DD1 4HT. [www.dundee.ac.uk](http://www.dundee.ac.uk)

Credits:

1. Georgina Starr, Installation Details *Before Le Cerveau Affamé*, 2013. Courtesy Cooper Gallery
  2. Georgina Starr, Opening Ceremony and Install Details *Before Le Cerveau Affamé*, 2013. Courtesy Cooper Gallery
- See more at: <http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/blog/georgina-starr-before-le-cerveau-affame-at-cooper-gallery-dundee/#sthash.oRcql9XX.dpuf>