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UNCANNY TALES

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Uncanny Tales brings together the work of Paula Rego, Ana Maria Pacheco, Marcelle Hanselaar and Oona Grimes for the first time. As a group, the artists embrace that which is 'strange', or in Freud's terms 'uncanny', employing mythical, psychological and biblical

tales to evoke the beauty and the terror within us. And the decision to stage the exhibition in the home of gallerists Hank Gulickx Burg and Harry Burg Gulickx allows the viewer to experience the work in a fluid space where the *heimlich* (homely) and *unheimlich* (unhomely) are in constant flux.

In her series *Nursery Rhymes*, Rego appropriates well-known children's tales and opens them up to new interpretations. In *Little Miss Muffet* (1989), for example, the dynamics

of the tale are altered by Rego's manipulation of scale and design. Miss Muffet dances with flirtatious excitement as a grinning, larger-than-life spider sits upon her stool. For some the sight of the 'spider-man' might provoke nightmarish associations, for others these associations may tap a deeper collective unconscious, and Rego's appropriations point particularly to the formation of infant sexuality, a process that, for Freud, could be compared to a set of reoccurring horrifying images.

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Oona Grimes, *How Clever of God, No. 85, 2003*, ink and gouache on paper. Courtesy: the artist

While Rego's use of etching and aquatint renders her prints all the more vivid and dreamlike, Ana Maria Pacheco makes a more dramatic use of colour. In *Tales of Transformation*, vibrant colours introduce a series of character types. All her figures share reoccurring characteristics – almond-shaped

eyes, strong sturdy bodies and wide mouths peppered with sharp little teeth – and appear like actors from a lost dream, one that we can almost remember, but never fully recall. Like Rego, Pacheco speaks of the unconscious by contriving effects through activity in and the manipulation of, the symbolic realm, conjuring the surreal aspects of simulation by creating multiple fictions.

That Dutch artist Marcelle Hanselaar views life as a double-edged sword is evident from her use of masks, a revelatory motif repeated throughout her work. In *The King and I*, a masked, sharp-toothed repellent creature advances from behind the king towards the coquettish young female protagonist. Hanselaar's work highlights the male and female within each and every one of us. The observer has to decide whether what he sees is a man or a woman, a mask or a face, whether it is playful or serious, terrifying or beautiful. The work, with its far-

reaching ambivalence delivered via a brute materiality echoes Freud's belief that the human psyche is concurrently male and female.

Hanselaar's work might also be approached via Klein's explanation of the 'part-object' and the logic of introjection/projection that underscores her theories. Klein was concerned with mind-body psychological processes whereby the impact of physical separation from our mothers, the parting of what once was 'whole', enforces a continuous drive to overcome our separation anxiety. This physical sensation, while tangible in Hanselaar's work, is deeply etched in Oona Grimes' *Disturbed Earth*, a collection of small etchings depicting pregnancy and birth. Within larger foetal forms a sea of intricate and delicately rendered minute beings struggle and tumble, whilst small particles seep from larger anthropomorphic shapes, dissolving before life has even begun.

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