

## **Imperfect**

**Gila Myers**

In this series Myers presents some unique, grotesque creatures, beautiful in their ugliness, with a pervert and “imperfect” viewpoint. It is difficult to define the identity of the characters, which seem to flow between androgynous and alien. Myers’ works are imbued with a double presence - on the one hand they project innocence through the pallid shades of brown-pink-yellow that are dominant, while on the other hand the facial images present a threat, and the red trickle could hint at bleeding. At first glance the characters seem childlike and even slightly naïve, but on further inspection they appear to be distorted and flawed.

Some of the characters possess no body, requiring the viewer to use his imagination in order to complete them. In those which do have a body, only the upper part is represented, and this is hollow, typically limbless and lacking identifying features. The enigmatic facial expressions of the characters appear sometimes frightened, angry, surprised, showing difficulty and even suffering, anxiety and detachment. A few of the characters have gaping eyes that stare with a vacant expression, while others wear a mask, at times covering the whole face, sometimes covering just one eye. Most of the characters are ethereal, without physical mass, as if they were floating in air, much like the light plastic sheeting on which they are painted<sup>1</sup>. There is no clear time, place or concrete space to testify as to their belonging, and they are frequently drawn on a white background with no perspective, projecting foreignness, marginalisation and coldness.

The grotesque base is emphasised in Myers’ works through hybridisation, discord and exaggeration, and includes varying types of conflict: between the rational and irrational, between the amusing and the frightening, between the living and the lifeless, between innocence and anxiety<sup>2</sup>. The characters’ faces exude pathos and their bodies are drawn with pale outlines to the extent of appearing ghost-like. In some of the works the facial organs gradually fade away. The characters’ countenance is flawed, their facial expressions are bizarre, and their mouths are represented by a bloodstain, or alternatively as a mocking spasm, protesting and disturbing. Their anguished expressions project a sense of distress and pain, and their body gestures are distorted. The distortion and the exaggeration are also expressed through the scale of the characters - giant heads that appear to be a hybrid merging of a human with alien motifs. Absurdity, ridicule, terror, undefined personality, mystery and internal paradoxes are additional grotesque elements that can be identified in the characters.

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<sup>1</sup> The use of transparent plastic sheets as a media for painting has been a challenge for Myers in recent years as non-conventional material. Additional, similar media which she uses include nylon, PVC, slides, perspex, acrylic sheets and more.

<sup>2</sup> In-depth discussion regarding the grotesque body can be found in Dr Sarah Cohen Shabbot’s book “The Grotesque Body” - A philosophical view of Bakhtin, Merleau Ponty and others, (Tel Aviv, Resling, 2008)

The paintings project “outsiderism” and even human rejection. As such, it is possible to an extent to categorise the works also as “abject art”<sup>3</sup> that involves, among other things, the malfunctioning of the complete structure, fragmentation, an expression of trauma, an outcry regarding self-identity and regarding the system, non-respect of borders, positions and rules, and creating a sense of menace and alarm.

The way in which the culture treats the body is functional, and is measured by the level in which it functions. As such, a flawed body is considered exceptional, and a threat to the correct order of things. Society in general frowns on the exception, the different, and whatever doesn’t belong is considered “defective”, is received coldly and finds itself on the outside. The exception symbolises a social attitude which presents a challenge to social correctness. Accordingly, the response of anxiety towards one who doesn’t belong is universal, and originates in a fear of destroying the social order. The exceptional characters are necessary to society in order to define the borders of what is “normal”, but those same exceptions might well be considered as perfect in a different society. Indeed, what is a perfect society? How does one define a flawless society? A society is not measured by the way it treats the accepted, but by the way it treats the different, the weak, the lonely.

Myers’ paintings may well provoke mixed feelings in the viewer - an aversion to the distorted body, alongside an attraction to the mystery and to the beauty of the different. At the same time, her paintings awaken questions such as - what is considered exceptional? On the other hand, what is perfect? Does perfect exist? What is beauty? Can beauty be defined? Myers’ characters present a strange and different look, far from the accepted ideas of beauty in Western society. But her paintings are imbued with great beauty, and they are proof that beauty is concealed even in places where apparently, according to accepted social convention, it doesn’t exist. As such, she challenges the accepted views of beauty and ugliness, and forces the viewer to re-examine his aesthetic positions, to deepen his moral and social feelings, and to pose questions about the place of the “other” in society, the treatment he receives and the prejudices through which he suffers. The allegoric and emotional power of the eccentric characters lies in the way in which they are portrayed as a metaphor for essential solitude, for a detached world and for a flawed society. The grotesque dimension which accentuates the undignified areas of existence, serves here to criticise acts of racism and prejudice. The mask - which has the power to conceal flaws - enables, in this instance, a return to integration within society.

In some of her works Myers uses 2 sheets of plastic, one on top of the other asymmetrically, forming a duplication of the character. Since the character is in a state with no stable identity, “wearing” the extra plastic allows the creation of an additional, temporary, identity. This is a process of “acquiring” a new, more perfect, identity (as opposed to the deterministic perception

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<sup>3</sup> The term is taken from the writings of the psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, from the French: Noam Barukh (Tel Aviv, Resling, 2005)

of an innate identity) that can change as necessary. The alternating assembly and taking apart of the human elements creates new forms - vulnerable, but courageously exposed - thus the light, permeated media becomes metaphorically heavier regarding its significance.

Indeed, the works in this exhibition are not seeking to disengage from reality, but rather to reflect it from within a deeper examination of our daily environment. This is sober painting, looking directly and critically at itself and at society. Despite the morbid feelings evident in the paintings, the works relate to an instinct for survival and an inner strength, and to an exception that doesn't testify to the person. Thus Myers' paintings relay a message of hope and opportunity for change through an awareness of the "different" within them, and through their ability to project a meaningful message for social reform.

Curator: Galit Semel