

GEORGINA STARR

the betrayal of identity by the mass media



In *The Bunny Lakes are Missing* installation at Pinksummer Genoa, 2000??, Starr created an allegorical installation based on Otto Preminger's 1965 thriller *Bunny Lake is Missing*. Preminger's film is set in London where an American single mother arrives with her four-year-old daughter. We never see her child, even when she is supposedly dropped off at a nursery school, and when she goes missing the police and the viewers are left in some doubt as to whether she ever existed. Starr's *The Bunny Lakes are Missing* is not an appropriation in the sense that Hans Haacke, Victor Burgin and Barbara Kruger appropriated mass media in the late 1970s and 1980s. It is instead a poetic interpretation and intermixing of Preminger's concept with many other intertextual threads including Peter Bogdanovich's film *Targets*, 1967, Starr's childhood and adolescence and more general reflections on female identity within a postindustrial world saturated with cinematic, televisual and commercial representations of femininity. For example, she uses a group of young teenage girls who she calls the Bunny Lakes and organises a fashion show complete with elegant models dressed in costumes designed by Starr. In the course of



this show the Bunny Lake teenagers gun down the grown-up models amid a flurry of red taffeta 'blood' terminating as a well dressed heap of bodies at the end of the catwalk.

The performance-installation is expanded by graphic photographic imagery, videostills, costume designs, a logo and 'merchandising' such as a T-shirt and CD. Starr also created a 'Bunny Lakemobil' shown below, blood besplattered, at the drive in cinema.

Starr transforms *The Bunny Lakes are Missing* into a brand. But the crucial question in any marketing scenario is what are the brand values? In this case, as Petra Schröck has noted, they appear to involve the existential confusion of a generation fed by television from toddlerhood to the maelstrom of teenagehood. Starr's Bunny Lakes appear to symbolise a generation that has 'gone missing' due to the interpenetration of their reality with the fictional constructions of film, television and marketing. From this point of view Starr's fashion models have to perish because they represent the unattainable perfection used by mass media to condition behaviour. Instead of buying the product the impressionable young teenagers kill it. In this manner Starr constructs an entirely new layer of meanings on top of Preminger's original film.

For Burgin, Haacke and Kruger working in the 1970s and 1980s the message was clear: mass media and consumerism are bad. But this ideological certainty is less pronounced in the work of artists who have come into prominence in the 1990s and 2000s. And the media associations are subjected to significantly more elaborate processes of translation and intertextual mixing.

Starr's reference to Bogdanovich's *Targets*, 1967, has been





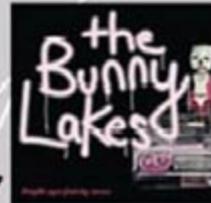
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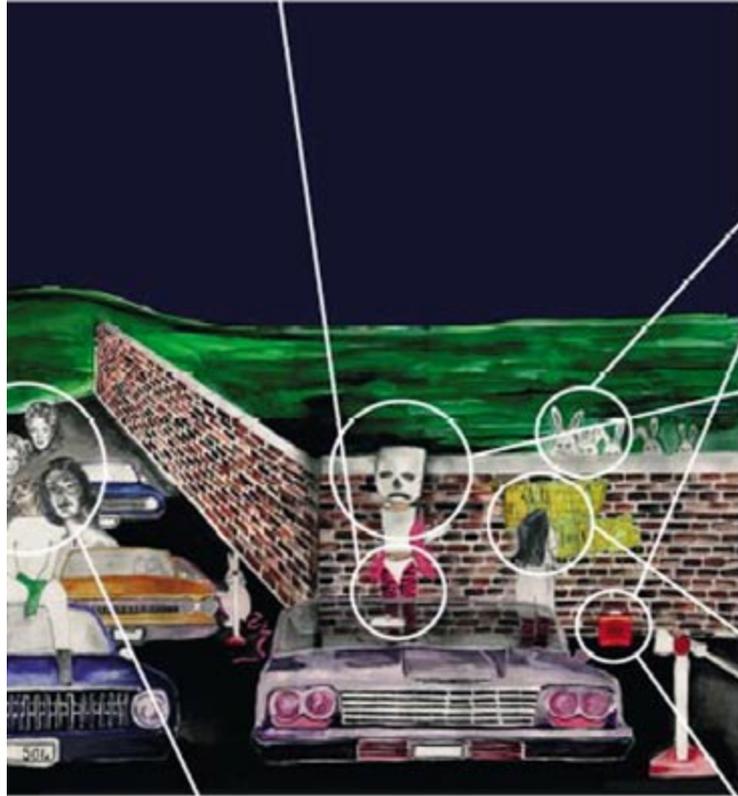
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1. *Bunny Lake is Missing* (Otto Preminger, 1965)
2. *The Bunny Lakemobile*
3. Illuminated Drive-In movie speaker
4. *The Bunny Lakes* (teens)
5. *Misty Roses* playing in *The Bunny Lakes are Coming*
6. Scenes from *The Bunny Lakes are Coming*, 2000
7. *Misty Roses/Bright Eyes* white vinyl 45rpm record
8. *The Bunny Lake Collection*, 2000
9. *The Bunny Lakes* (Killer Bunnys)
10. Scenes from *The Bunny Lakes are Coming*
11. At the Drive-In
12. Magpie from *The Bunny Lakes are Coming*
13. *Targets* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1967)



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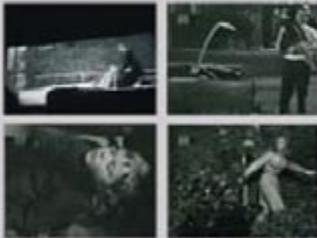


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THE BUNNY LAKE PLAN



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mentioned. In this film, gun fanatic Bobby Thompson shoots his family and then takes a rifle to a drive-in movie where he snipes at members of the audience through a hole in the screen. Clearly this story plays on the intertwining of fiction and reality that plays such a key role in the hyperreality of a media-saturated postindustrial world. For example, the idea of flying a jet plane into very tall buildings in New York resonates very strongly with Hollywood action movies. It would appear that the constantly increasing technological amplification of imagination that is mass media is outstripping rational control of that apparatus.

The basis of Starr's Bunny Lake system is the Bunny Lake plan, which charts the complex interrelations between the individual elements in form of a pattern. On three horizontal displays a pictorial history is outlined in the manner of a cryptic puzzle

Also within this system the Starr works with a mixture of styles and media. the ultimate foundation of which is the comic strip. Confronted with the flood of images the viewer can decode the puzzle-like 'media landscape' with the help of the encircled the reference fields and data lines. The lower image plane is introduced by a block of four with film sequences from the Preminger film. Clips from both films are the source from which the artist sketches her central fantastic panorama picture from which the Bunny Lake system expands in all directions. A distant, hilly landscape that serves as the location for Bogdanovich's " Reseda Drive-In

Apart from some early examples like the dramatic five minute video work *Crying* (1993), Georgina Starr's works tend to involve a multimedia synthesis of the arts, whose



Georgina Starr filmed unwittingly filmed herself bursting into tears during a difficult phase in a project she was working on. The question she poses with her video installation *Crying* is whether the action remains genuine or whether it has been translated into artifice. The location of the video in a gallery and the fact that it is an endlessly repeating loop seriously problematize its authenticity.



elements are systematically interlaced together with interrelationships with her previous work. Starr mixes expressive forms and reality levels (from film and television) with her personal life creating a baroque image-world so replete with personal references that it defeats viewers' attempts to make sense of it.

Petra Schröck notes that a sceptical analysis of her identity plays a role in many of Starr's works, for instance by swapping identities with other London artists (Schröck ??). Schröck also observes that the cinematic myth of the missing Bunny Lake provides Starr with an allegory for the search for identity characteristic of modernity-postmodernity. And one can add that the strategy Starr deploys in *Bunny Lake* is not simply one of attack but also of co-option. Starr immerses herself in fantasy which is the principal substance of marketing. She even takes on the role of merchandiser. But all of her actions are synthetic. She lacks the punchline of all marketing which is the demand that we part with our money. We only have to give her our attention. Those wealthier than ourselves: collectors or museums will buy the work.

Starr's baroque enfolding of attack upon and collusion with the mediatized world is akin to the frenzied struggle of one who discovers they are in a prison from which there is no escape. Her obsessive systematising of the fantastic fabric she has woven presents us with yet another layer of self-frustration.