

TINE MARIA KOEFOED ANNE MARIE PLOUG ANN SOPHIE STÆRK

DCA Gallery, New York – Horsens Museum of Art, Denmark



Quirky
girls



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WELCOME TO

QUIRKY GIRLS

TINE MARIA KOEFOED ANNE MARIE PLOUG ANN SOPHIE STÆRK

in co-operation with art historian Johanne Løgstrup

The world of Quirky Girls revolves around things that interest a young woman – things that add to her personality. We wish to expose an art form devoted to a feminine mode of expression. The works are based on the dream world that we experience in visual culture as well as the intimate memories of the individual woman. Women differing from feminine perfection as well as those epitomizing dreams and glamour are brought into focus.

"Quirky Girls" is a tribute to modern femininity and the pleasures of being a woman. The works employ a number of different media in order to present different aspects of female identity. Colours and content create a hybrid of dreams, illusions and hyper-realism.

This catalogue has been published in connection with the exhibition at the DCA Gallery, New York, June 1 – July 13, 2002 and at Horsens Art Museum, Denmark, November 2 – January 5, 2003.

We would like to thank Else Marie Bukdahl, dean of the Royal Danish Academy of Art, and Rune Gade, associate professor of Art History, University of Copenhagen, for their contributions to this catalogue.

On behalf of Quirky Girls

Johanne Løgstrup



Tine Maria Koefoed







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ANNE MARIE PLOUG























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0107 | 14 | BACK OUT



ANN SOPHIE STÆRK



01. Cool smoke reflection: Don't feel a part of the showing off crowd, do look rather cool just watching, though!



02. Cool Smoke: It was all about parties, having fun, being beautiful and glamorous. Now, I'm an observer!



03. Dream house: More interior, less superficial, please! Now reaching the height of glamour and image of perfection.



04. I know, what I want! Flirting is like shopping, checking out what you like and do not like, knowing off course how irresistible you are yourself!











09. Am I a freedom junkie, living in my own dream universe, maybe!? It's a question of choosing, and the choice limits your freedom!



10. Tangled up in love, not complicated, nearly perfect. Do you want to compromise? Anyway, if you forgot, you're not perfect yourself!



11. Which do you prefer: a man, a dog or a baby, maybe!?



QUIRKY THEORY

BODY CONSUMPTION/IMAGE HYPNOSIS

Your body is an instrument, brought to use cynically and with calculation by commercial interests. An image comes to dwell within you, without your being aware of it. It makes its way under your skin, it haunts your dreams, it fires unmentionable desires in you. Your body is addressed by interests smuggling obscure impulses into the depth of your nervous system, implanting unambiguous dictates of changes, purchases and improvements in secret parts of your brain. You are not yourself. You are manipulated to think this: I am not myself, I want to be someone else, I want to be better, slimmer, firmer, faster, wiser, friendlier, more seductive, more mysterious, gentler, kinder, more sensitive, determined, decisive, consistent. You are thinking that you are not yourself, you want to be someone else, thereby becoming neither one or the other but instead a homeless hybrid, in-between, hopeless, a failure. Someone has torn you out of your skin, removed you from your own body, made it partially uninhabitable because it now suddenly contains so many flaws and shortcomings, hidden and openly evident that you can no longer bear it, cannot face seeing it reflected in the mirror, stupidly displaying its countless misfits, its unfortunate sides and its inadequacies. An image has come to dwell within you, almost without your noticing it and it is inescapable like a body part, an organic part of your self. You dream of the small changes, the insignificant surgery, nothing special, just a little here and there. It could be slightly different, just a bit more perfect, without becoming vulgar or scary, but just a little. Your modest wishes are exactly unattainable enough to settle discretely and imperceptibly in your mind, almost without disturbing your thoughts but as a permanent stimulation resound as an almost inaudible undertone, a persistent yearning, a constant dissatisfaction, an inescapable humming in the cells of your body. To be there instead of here, someone else instead of me. This is the way you dream. This is how the image makes you dream. And you are always there a little bit, a little obsessed by this dream that extorts from you the movement out of your body, the transition towards something else. You live in this gap, a limbo swathed in desire, sweet and bitter, constantly on the way to becoming something else but strangely frozen in action, never really anything else than on the way. The image has monopolized your body, sown discord within your inner body image, created this empty space that can be filled with easily marketable dreams and risky rescue plans. Your body has become an instrument, accessible to commercial interests through your eyes, each day roaming through media landscapes studded with well-known brands and cinematographic

ultra-real images of desire, visual utopias of impulse settling somewhere inside you, filling you with the impossible dream of being somebody else, not yourself. An image has besieged your body, organized a colony of parasites inside you. As parasites of the mind they have stolen your dreams and replaced them with expansive advertising campaigns, promising your disappearance from yourself, your escaping all flaws and shortcomings. You are consumed while consuming, sold before you buy. You are out of yourself, never completely at home. But you love it.

IMAGINARY WHORES/ SALES FEVER

The images inhabit us in ways we do not fully understand but that we are fully aware of. How do they permeate us? How do they plot themselves into our psychomotoric behaviour? How do they shape our self-knowledge and our patterns of action? The more images flowing through our everyday lives, the more urgent the questions grow. How do the images affect us? The more they carry the signature of the commerciality, openly impregnated with the nature of money, the more important it becomes to examine how they affect us. Whose power do we surrender ourselves to, when we look at the slightly tempting, separated thighs of the commercial, the discretely accentuated breast curves and when our gaze is drawn to hazy destinations while a brand name or a logo etches itself in our mind? Is somebody selling us a product when the commercial forces itself into our vision or are our body and our minds sold, in a deeper sense, to the idea of financial exchanges? The little obscenities of everyday life that confront us in the shape of the increasing audacities of the commercial - are they merely innocent interventions in our busy lives, or are they symptoms of a far more extensive obscenity, that is to say the one that all human relations have turned into commercial relations? What is being bought and sold, when we strive to turn into our ideals in front of the mirror, if not our own integrity, deposited in favour of the never frictionless, always slightly goofy imitation of the seductive surface of the role model? We look at the images and wish to be a part of their particular reality, entirely different from our own, much more spotless and unproblematic, much more clean and odourless. We invest our identity in the image, study it and wish to be there. The reality of the image seems so much better than our own and we long for its more colourful and attractive surfaces, its lifelikeness, making our reality look strangely inert. We look at ourselves in the mirror and the image in there is imperceptibly overlaid with the memory of the perfect body we saw in the ad for running shoes, an image we studied for seven seconds while absent-mindedly thumbing through the paper this morning. We see ourselves through the eyes of the commercial and the reflection becomes unbearable to look at, as if it were an unsuccessful copy of the flawless body of the ideal, the ultimate failure. We look at ourselves with the

ruthlessness and mercilessness the ideal world of the commercial has brought upon our gaze. We measure ourselves through its images. We sell ourselves to become a little more like it. 'Take me' we purr, for we want to be taken, raped, to be torn out of ourselves. We want to offer ourselves up, the way commercials offer themselves to us. We want to sell ourselves. We love this sale.

PSYCHOGEOMETRICS / THE BIOTOPES OF CAPITAL

We are all part of the grand sale. Different levels of reality converge, cross each other in this euphoria of exchanges. At least three areas are in dialogue with one another: the inter-subjective in shape of the psychology of the individual (dreams, fantasies), the extra-subjective in shape of actual interaction in the social field (IRL conversations, personal contacts), the virtual in shape of the collective imaginarity of the media public (the internet, the tv-images). None of these areas are autonomous, but instead in perpetual dialogue with one another. The virtuality of the TV-images forms our individual dreams, and in an extensive perspective form the basis of the performative, inter-subjective posing in the social field, i.e. our specific ways of socializing. But the mediated sphere of the public not only works as a catalyst of desire, breaking its way through to our (sub) –consciousness. It also a projection-sheet for our individual dreams. Are we necessarily seeing the same things? Do we not profit in different ways from the exchanges taking place on the big market place, precisely because we invest in them in different ways? My identity is never completely yours. Nevertheless, it is exactly the ideas of western culture of the uniqueness of the individual, the characteristics of personality that are being contradicted by the late modern commercial industry, drawing us up with great precision in segments of attitudes and taste. The balancing act, mastered with great skill and efficiency, is about addressing large groups as if one was approaching the unique individual. Nokia 8210: Style isn't something you simply put on the morning. It is a way of living when you are in touch with yourself. The mass-produced product must be rubbed with the aura of singularity through the symbolic manipulations of the commercial. I am made to believe that this pair of pants is just my style. My particular identity is addressed by the collective imaginarity without the mass-communicative approach-requirement appearing paradoxical or self-contradictory. I am sold to this idea of my style being different to yours, even though we are wearing identical pants. Different morphologies are gathered here: The particular shape of my identity dressed in the shape of a particular product, additionally brought to play in a social space where it is recognized as an aesthetic marker, referring to a certain stylistic community. We wear the uniform in each our own way because we each weave our own dreams into the uniformity of the material. The product grips me with its luggage of symbolic meanings, but on the other hand I embrace the product with my own dreams and bring it to play with others,

precisely as a linkage between my own shape and the shape of the product. Our ideality, our remaining ontological certainty has been shaped with the product, whose symbolic value now has a share in us and makes us recognisable to others. I can make myself recognisable only by selling myself to the product. It is on this free market that our lack of freedom is really determined. I am in love with the thought of being exceptional, of being different and unique, but in being it together with everyone else.

BARBIE WORLD/ IMAGE THEFT

What does visual art do in a world satiated with images? If art once was about imitating reality, representing objects in the world, this reality is currently so well-equipped with images that the real and the virtual often are impossible to tell apart, making it difficult to accurately determine the motif of visual art. If visual art is imitative, what does it express? You do not have to take a long look to make sure that the motif of visual art today is the reality of images, the mediated reality subjected to aesthetic reflections and adaptations. Art is about the reality of images, it clutches on to images circulating in mass-culture and uses it to its own ends. If the images have come to dwell within us, if they have got under our skins what is then more obvious than to practise a type of exorcism by confronting them, adapting them, manipulating them? Innovate, don't imitate. If images use your body as an instrument, how reconquer power over your own body if not through appropriation of images? The appropriation consists of stealing back the image that has been stolen from you, twisting it slightly to remove it from immediate recognisability but without making it recognisable – in other words creating an image that right away lets itself be enlisted in the general stream of images but at the same time offers some resistance to it. Not to insist on the resistance of an exterior counter-world, but to place oneself in the exact same image-reality that is subject to the raid. To be a Barbie Girl in a Barbie World, to let the image maintain its power but to take possession of it, to use it for one's own purposes. To turn the power against itself by holding up a mirror in front of it, letting it face itself, bewildering it with its own phantasms. The saturation of images is corresponded by the gesture of appropriation with a kind of visual bulimia, the overbidding of the pig-out in images – not fewer, but more images. Images that no longer appease one's hunger, but are devoured for their symbolic content, swallowed and spit out again, undigested but gulped down, regurgitated from the very body that is the object of the image. A form of revenge, but undertaken with the affection that still surrounds the image, the form, the particular possibilities given to us by the reality of the image.

FEMALE-IMAGEBODY

Nothing has been more extensively described in the latest century's stream of images than the anatomy of

the female body. Its smallest details have been exposed to every gaze. The accumulation of descriptions of the female body does not stop the need for it, but instead seems to magically create a basis for more of the same kind, as if the degree of detail and the accuracy of the scrutiny only generated a longing for more, as if the descriptions surrounded the actual body, covered it up rather than undressed it, wrapped it in a magic cloak. The inciting movements are in this respect not only about the woman, but about the desire that has found its cultural medium in the female body, a universal code. The female body is capable of expressing everything, it can communicate any message, sell any product – including itself. It seems to encircle the whole world, enveloping the globe with its curves, its inviolable skin surfaces, its landscapes of young, firm skin encouraging and enticing the eye to wander. The world picture of late modernity is the perfectible female body, palpably appealing but at the same time definitively distant, compelling but cold, incitingly unattainable. It meets our gaze everywhere. We leaf through a newspaper and it steps out to meet us, we turn a corner in the street and it crowds in on us, we push a button of our remote control and it pours out towards us. We meet the feminine body everywhere, manipulated and refined to a certain alluring elegance. It is a monstrosity, that we correspond with desire, irritation, lust, envy, fear, awkwardness. It is an ideality, a utopia of the immaterial body, an image body pure and simple, more capable of awakening our desire, stirring our dreams or turning us on than any real body. Men and women alike, we are attracted to this inhuman body and surround it with determined veneration and reserve. It dominates us all, forces us to think in its image, to initiate any speculation at precisely this point, in this flesh, in this image. We are able to close our eyes and imagine a world without the image of the female body stuck to our retina, but no sooner have we had the thought than we are hit by withdrawal symptoms and we long for its landscape of fascinatingly perfect skin and smooth surfaces. We inhabit this image that dwells within us. No one can escape this tight-fitting image skin of the female body, encircling our lives like an enormous synthetic womb.

QUIRKY IMAGES

Quirky memories (Ann Sofie Stærk) – Looking back on the decadence of the 1960s: an excess of ideas, money and desire. Chelsea Girl in split screen, the triumph and the elimination of gender. The blue veil of cigarette smoke at receptions, the plans for next day's parties. The psychedelic threads of bright colours exploding like rings in the wake of the reckless consumption of chemical stimulants by an impatient youth. Nobody escaped the sixties unchanged. 30 years later we can only gaze with longing and a little envy at the combination of enthusiasm, naïveté, innocence and idealism that held up the youth revolution. Free hash, free sex, free love. Today things are different: Freedom is now sponsored by

Diesel. The decade of freedom only exists as a symbol, an image, a particular shade of colour, pale soft pastel that can be distilled into a couple of ingredients unmistakably signaling the variant of freedom of the decade. The irony and the subversion of the avant-garde has disseminated into mass culture where it shames its point of departure while at the same time – doubly ironical – honouring the original utopia of the democratization of creativity through a transgression of the boundary between artistic creation and life. Sheer surface. A world of images pretending to capture the essence of moments, the sense of the hectic everyday life, the small toss of the head, making the model's hair whirl back and stand out as a shiny halo around her face, while the men turn towards her in admiration. Memories in negative, laterally reversed and soft, bleached by time. I'll be your mirror. Pastel-green monochrome memory. Intermission image. Turbulent figurations, beauty queens floating freely on the surface of the images, no longer emblems or signatures but freed bodies, strangely weightless and unanchored. All tomorrow's parties are over long ago, even the hangover has eased off. The little toss of the head, in all its innocence, awakens an image at the back of our minds, for a short moment sells us the name of a particular shampoo. Freedom only haunts us as a ghost, a homeless spirit moving around restlessly without the ability to materialize itself. Wherever it tries securing itself, it assumes the form of the product, a marketable freedom, modern liberalism. There is a lounge atmosphere here, relaxed conversation holding cocktail glass, lips discreetly tainted red. Distance. Surface. The smoke doesn't burn in the eyes, it hangs as an imperceptible visual veil over the picture, the cataract of the painting. The alcohol no longer soothes the nerves, it intensifies the light trembling of the body. Freedom only exists as this nostalgia, manifesting itself as a world beyond the power of gravity, a nonchalance, an absence of plenty. Monochrome absence, the fermata of figuration.

Quirky bodies (Anne Marie Ploug) – The memory of the body as a sentient medium through which the world is perceived. The taste of sugar on sticky fingers, the feeling of droopy socks against the ankle, the dress caught up in the wind. Fragments of memory, implying a forgotten universe of sensations and impressions, of carefree exuberance. Knock-kneed Lolita-posture. Unarticulated sensations, a feeling from the depths of the body, a tickly feeling, a smell from a secret place, the pain mixed with pleasure of crashing on the lawn, feel the soil burning in the flat of the palms. Childhood games, the exploration of the possibilities of the body, discoveries, motoric innovations. To run around screaming, exciting each other in rough play, games without rules. Crusts on wounds, boredom, movement. Girlfriends under the covers, warm intimacy. What body is more overdetermined than that of childhood? The retrospection adds a cer-

tain sensory abundance, a satiation with experience that we long for each day. The images of it are filled with our adult dreams, because we are cut off from it forever, only able to see it as a suggestion, a fragment, a short glimpse of emotional recognition. It is a storehouse for our hopes, our last wishes. It blinds us, so that we are unable to see it as anything else than this mirage, an unreal place achieving supernatural nature through its magical attraction. In the light of memory, the intensity of our sense impressions appears much stronger than we now have to content ourselves with. The red colour clings to the retina, the taste of nose-bleeding, salty tears, a runny nose. Our longings are that strong, that the recovery of that which is lost forms the basis of entire industries of memory phantasms. We are able to dream of a place where reality hits us in the face, where everything is new and everything seems innocent and pure, even in its most obvious manifestations of evil. The body as a vessel of sensations, uninfested by sexuality. We imagine this possibility, a sensuous plentitude that is not sexual, although everything tells us that the reverse is true: every sensation is impregnated with our desire. Childhood is never pure, never good but on the contrary large expanses of goodness sprinkled with uncontrollable condensations of absolute evil. Nowhere do our longings live better than in the images that gush out towards and invite us to disappear in it. A place where beauty lives and breathes. We love the image of the plentitude of childhood, love it and buy it, change our money for its stimulating glow because it fulfils our needs to be somewhere else better than money does, to uphold an earlier version of ourselves. We become ourselves through our past, whether our not it is something we buy. Even stolen memories work.

Quirky fantasies (Tine Maria Koefoed) – 13 years old, years smeared in fate, where a mysterious initiation takes place. The rites of initiation of late modernity are under the sign of the product, adulthood is bought, virtually acquired by consumption. The emancipation of puberty does not consist of a breakaway from the parents, whose consumption is an ideal for the younger generation. The emancipation consists of a detachment from the image the consumption is depicted in. The initiation consists of a demonstration of the ability to control the new image, unambiguously to declare that one is being formed in a different image, that on the surface the ideal is something else than the one put forward by parents. Without reducing the importance of ritual, things are now about surfaces, about skills in manipulating appearances. 13 years old and exhausted by the growing pains of one's own body, brutally overtaken by one's own physique, the tyranny of hormones, forcing you out of childhood without mercy. Teenage emptiness, eyes staring impassively and lethargically because the perspective is twisted, because one is still looking back at what one is rapidly losing. 13 years old and inhabiting

the image, allowing an entirely different sense of belonging than one's own body, that has become a strange, unrecognizable and odd, almost embarrassing packaging, something that one no longer wants to acknowledge. Going in two directions at once, suspended between the past and the future. The image powers are particularly connected to gender, large amounts of capital are invested into its reliable recognizability. You become a gender through the image, capable of performing the identity of gender, manifesting its differences and characteristics with greater confidence than anything else. You are able to practice in the image, the repeated contemplation of it sharpens your eye for little details, ensuring the identity of gender. To look at your ideal is to perform this mental exercise, to quite simply become someone else through visual devotion to her, idolizing the perfect exponent of precisely the gender you wish to become. 13 years old – indolent and uncomplaining surrender to the impossibility of the success of the project, the drama of initiation, whose inevitability stands in front of you. Shaky, fidgety fingers, awkward body. The greatest temptation is to close your eyes, to dream of becoming one with your image. But the life of a 13-year old is inhabited by all the other images, continuously pulling them away from themselves. This is where all their pocket money goes, into the image that can take them away from themselves, give them the dreams of an identity. As if they didn't already have one.

ICONOPHOBIC EXORCISM

I close my eyes because I no longer want to see, but the images find other ways of entering or they are already there, indelibly lodged in my mind. I screw up my eyes and feel my own breath slip my throat, out through the nose, heavy and warm. Respiration, pulse. I see nothing but my mind is filled with images. Each time I open my eyes just a little, new images cover up the other ones. I close my eyes but then immediately see myself sitting there with eyes closed. I am beside myself, transformed with my entire body into my own image. The expulsion of the image only doubles it, as if my aversion itself were an alternator of the production of the very thing I want to ward off, to dismiss. At the very moment I want to fall into myself, become one, I completely fall apart. At the very moment I try to control my own image, I really let it go, let it live its own life, throw it up for grabs and open myself to the invasion of new images.

My body is a building of images, a construction of overlapping perspectives that I slide in and out of. I recognize the image of someone else in me, a gesture I have borrowed, lovingly imitated, subversively appropriated, transformed into my own, until now when its originator again claims it and I admit my loan, my open theft. I am not myself. I close my eyes and forget myself, while the images settle inside me.

Else Marie Bukdahl

NEW IMAGES FROM MASS CULTURE AND THE SPHERE OF INTIMACY

In the 1990s a number of new artistic activities and new expressions of well-known genres are created; the works focus from widely different perspectives on new interpretations of close surroundings, self, body, nature, religion and tradition. A "New Sensibility" or a "psychological realism" dominates, "drawing on the body, the subject and the identity as starting point of an artistic construction of meaning and a relevant updating of our time."¹ The increased tendencies of globalization and the rapidly growing information society that has become a new global space has no doubt inspired artists to call attention to community life and the intimate sphere as important points of orientation in individual as well as social contexts. The social as well as the intimate space gain a prominent place within the the often quite varied artforms of the 90s, where the showdown of the 1980s with modernistic belief in universality, artistic progress and mutual sets of values by now has been completed. But on the other hand something Mats Hjelm, inspired by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari calls "a free, nomadic thinking" is exposed, capable of "decoding hidden power structures and the inbuilt ideologies of the technological systems". For this purpose new cultural and critical operations are needed: "To do this we need a new type of critical cultural activity, one not concerned with trying to find elegant or logical mathematical models for existence, but instead reads and explores each factual individual situation. (...) This new form of politico-philosophical resistance is at once artistic and intellectual, and it restores to art its function as an integral part of the human community."²

Several artists, such as the Swiss painter Helmut Federle are careful that criticism of the anonymising tendencies of globalization do not lead to a biased focus on individuality and community life. Interaction between global and local, between social and individual is the optimum position in society life as in the world of art. Federle himself has articulated this point of view in the following way: "There are two dangers here: being solely international in orientation, or being only local. Both are necessary. One needs both roots and a universal base of knowledge."³

Mass culture and everyday life, elements that entered art life with a vengeance in the 60s with pop art, also become central themes in the art of the 90s. They are however, visualised in new and unpredictable ways. Several artists

of the 90s are aware of the fact that the trivial and the familiar routines contain aspects that can be exposed and illustrated in the artistic interpretation. Or as the Belgian artist Guillaume Bijl has put it in 2000: "An eye for triviality can take you far, but this stops when it comes to art. There the trivial acquires another kind of significance. In art, like in philosophy or communication, there's something that turns the eye for the trivial into an eye for more basic, existential conditions. The triviality of objects can reveal far more than their triviality."⁴

In the 90s the new artistic activities – particularly installation art – and new expressions of well-known genres, first of all painting, photography and the graphic arts have gradually gained a more important position in Danish art life. Several young Danish women artists have contributed considerably to these innovations in the last half of the 90s. The curator of this exhibition has rightly called three of them – Tine Maria Kofoed (b. 1971), Anne Marie Ploug (b. 1966) and Ann Sophie Stærk (b. 1973) – Quirky Girls. This title alludes to the fact that it is about remarkable and strong women, who use humour as a prominent operational device.

Tine Maria Kofoed has experimented in expanding and renewing the photographic field. She has an exceptional ability to depict the intimate sphere in a way that leaves room for visualising our longing for new creations and exposing those aspects of the world, that we either turn our backs to or simply do not notice in our busy everyday lives. She has personally expressed this ambivalence in outlook and artistic interpretation in the following way: "The world is an outlook. The world can be a limited place, a barren and ruthless place without prospects. The world can also be a striving for existence, a dismissal of the repeat of perception. Choose one, and the distortion disappears – the distortion that can be found where reality is contracted, only to unfold again later. And it disappears with the experience of fear of the past – and how fear can be overcome. But if you are chosen by the other, certain restrictions are untied and the senses find their own way. They take you to the place where things we take pains to overlook, suddenly become visible."⁵

Personal experiences and close-ups of familiar surroundings are central elements in the creative process of her art. She has stressed how she has always sought out important places in her past in order to "get away from the familiar. This is where I look back on where I am coming from, wishing to abandon it and move on, further." She makes the intimate sphere or the small local room visible, providing the framework of what the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard has called "le petit récit". But her artworks also expose the unfamiliar and the new horizons. They contain a fusion of two extremes: the real world and the dream-world. This contrast is evident in her series Water Tanks, containing photographs of the sensuous sliding of veil-tailed gold-

fish in a fish tank. Finn Thrane, the head of the Museum of Photographic Art in Odense, has described how the micro-universe of the small fish involves the spectator in a new, open space of experience: "Water is outside of you, but also within you, rising and falling with your biological cycles. It's omnipresent, fugitive, transparent and can transport your hopes to the edge of time and space. The camera is the means by which the fleeting and elusive can be captured. With its use and slow exposures colours are made to explode in all their splendour, a space is opened up for contemplation and gradual appropriation. Life can be lived, then – on land too, even without fins and natural buoyancy."⁶

The same ambivalences stand out in a series of photographs of teenage girls.

Anne Marie Ploug and Ann Sophie Stærk have primarily interpreted the trivial images of mass culture from a new and unexpected perspective. They are indeed inspired by American pop art of the 60's and by the appropriational art of the 80's. But their idiom has a more ambiguous nature and their images of their contemporary age are characterized by a much more critical distance, than their sources of inspiration was dominated by. Add to this that the two artists' depiction of the mass cultural information society often does not limit itself to European or North American scenes. They have also brought non-European countries into their artistic universe. Particularly Japan, whose iconography has been a source of inspiration for Western commercials, computer games and other visual fields.

The artistic universe of Anne Marie Ploug has always been replete with action, drama, dynamics and speed. At first she was particularly inspired by comic strips, magazines, commercials and television series. Her work is sometimes characterized by a fascination of the endless possibilities of mass media, sometimes by an indirect reaction to the takeover of individual minds by the same media.

But in 1995 the European imagery is abandoned for Japanese. She is first of all fascinated by Manga, the most widespread cartoon image in the world, with spin-offs in television, film and computer games, action dolls and food. In Manga the reckless, the seductive and the dangerous constantly change places, and energy, raw strength and creative force are primary focal points. It was - as art historian Trine Ross quite rightly remarks - "exactly this flexibility and the ability of these female figures to wear bikinis and fight karate that captured Ploug."⁷ Add to this that this kind of image world, where everything can be turned around and the most surprising changes can take place, becomes a free space, making room for otherness and the unanticipated, hereby making the repression mechanisms and inflexible gender roles of our time disappear by magic. Ploug has

expressed her fascination with Japanese imagery, which she experienced intensely during a visit to Japan in 1998, in the following manner:

"I was particularly fascinated by the energy in the graphic arts, by the interplay of faces, figures and signs. The starting point is the figures, capable of transforming themselves from women to men. They are able to change gender and identity, gain new powers and suddenly appear in new stories. The illustrators give the Japanese heroines European features. They are given our hair, large breasts and long legs. They become sheer products of imagination."⁸

The image stories of Anne Marie Ploug are always open. It is up to the spectator to work out how he or she should decode the hidden layers of meaning and interpret the ironic attitude of our time towards the strong man and the weak and gentle women.

In her paintings – often in large scale – and graphic works Ann Sophie Stærk works freely and provocatively with images of mass media, culture, science and everyday life. She keeps an ironic distance towards standardised cartoons, the commercial world and consumerism. Her colour pictures obtain an almost filmic character through their evocative flow through interiors and exteriors. They are replete with strong effects of colour, pushing themselves in almost physically as sections in the surfaces.

During a trip to Japan in 1999, Ann Sophie Stærk was also fascinated by Japanese imagery with many surprising fusions between written characters and visual expressions of east and west. Through an imaginative playing with signs and motifs, she calls attention to obscure, sometimes grotesque, sometimes poetic aspects of Japanese everyday life and imagery. It is evident in several of the works created between 1997 and 2000 how she creates independent imaginary pictures by combining photographic fragments and written characters from western and eastern mass culture and from the anonymity of everyday life. She undermines the original purpose of the images by isolating details and reconnecting them in a seductive or shocking way. Anne Marie Ploug and Ann Sophie Stærk have succeeded in creating relevant, startling images of the multi-cultural information society of our time, where so few hard-and-fast boundaries between fiction and reality exist, that it often appears to be a labyrinthine hall of mirrors. Or as art historian Kristine Kern has put it;

"(The artists create) images, that act not only within a narrow art context, but that express something overall about the culture we live in, not only by relating to it but by being a part of it. The reality of the present time, the hyper-reality as the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard has called it, is the era of mass media and popular culture. And when art has a dialogue with reality, it goes without

saying that it must relate to both reality and the simulacrum (the delusion) as inevitable conditions. Or in the words of Andy Warhol: "I don't know where artificial stops and reality begins!"⁹

Tine Maria Koefoed, Anne Marie Ploug and Ann Sophie Stærk have each in their own way created artistically convincing works. Even though the three of them are all young, they have gained a prominent position in the Danish art world. But even today it is important to stress that the struggle for women artists to gain distinction in the art world still isn't over. It is therefore important to continue this struggle, in order to permit male and female artists alike to work under equal conditions in the future and to give them equal opportunities to present their works in various public contexts. Or as bell hooks has put it;

"As women artists expressing solidarity across differences, we must forge ahead, creating spaces where our work can be seen and evaluated according to standards that reflect our sense of artistic merit. As we strive to enter the mainstream art world, we must feel empowered to vigilantly guard the representation of the woman as artist so that it is never again devalued. Fundamentally, we must create the space for feminist intervention without surrendering our primary concern, which is a devotion to making art, a devotion intense and rewarding enough that it is the path leading to our freedom and fulfillment."¹⁰

Else Marie Bukdahl

D Phil, Rector of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts

- 1 Sanne Kofod Olsen, "A history of the 70s, a theory for the 90s". In *Art theory. Positions in contemporary art debate*, ed. Hans Dam Christensen, Anders Michelsen, Jacob Wamberg, Copenhagen, 1999, p. 117.
- 2 Mats Hjelm, "War, Art and Intelligent Machines – humanistic criticism in the information society." In the anthology *We are All Normal (and we want our freedom)*, ed. Katya Sander and Simon Sheik, 2001, p. 380. I am referring to Deleuze and Guattari's book *Mille Plateaux* (1980), where creative processes in philosophy, science and art are parallelised and analysed.
- 3 Helmut Federle, "Beyond Analytical Painting." In Stian Grøgaard, *The Restless Object. 12 Conversations on Contemporary Art*, translated by George Morgenstern, Oslo, 2001, p. 68.
- 4 Guillaume Bijl, "The Eloquence of Triviality". In Stian Grøgaard, *The Restless Object. 12 Conversations on Contemporary Art*, translated by George Morgenstern, Oslo, 2001, p. 132-133.
- 5 The quote is from a catalogue text for the exhibition of new Danish photography, *Focal points with Sorø as starting point*, The Art Museum of West Seeland, Sorø, 1998, p.12.
- 6 Finn Thrane, "Water Tanks". In *Images of the World. Festival of Light*, Odense Foto Triennale, Odense, 2000, p.33.
- 7 Presentation of Anne Marie Ploug in connection with her exhibition in Politiken's Gallery in 2001.
- 8 Quoted from Peter Michael Hornung's article on Anne Marie Ploug in "Pop and dynamics", *Politiken*, January 4, 2001.
- 9 Kristine Kern, "Contemporary images – pop in Danish contemporary art", article in the catalogue of the exhibition *POP-up. Strategy and humour in contemporary art*, curated by Folke Kjems and Annette Stabell, Holstebro Art Museum and the Kastrupgaard Collection, Hbolstebro, 1999, p.5.
- 10 bell hooks, "Women Artists: The creative Process."

Johanne Løgstrup

TO BE A QUIRKY GIRL IS TO.....

(a passage from the audio-tour)

To be a Quirky Girl is to catch your girlfriend's wandering glance across the coffee shop as you get to the climax of the latest story from your love life in the middle of a café au lait. To be a Quirky Girl is to smell anti-septic and suddenly think back on summers in the countryside when you fell off your bike and got huge scratches on your knees. To be a Quirky Girl is to spot the long forgotten knee stocking in Vogue, to go out hunting for it, and then to find it in the supermarket for a dollar.

To be a Quirky Girl is to lie on your grandmother's blanket out in the park and move the strap of your top to check if the sun has left a tan line.

Are you able to see if a piece of art has been made by a woman or a man? Do women choose other colours than men? Do works by female artists appear more delicate and intimate? In some cases it is obvious whether the artist is a woman or a man. In other cases it will be a surprise to see the name and realize who made it.

For instance: is it particularly feminine to paint flowers? Art historian Cynthia Freeland remarked that Monet painted waterlilies and Van Gogh painted sunflowers. These artists are not considered especially feminine.

Is that something you think of when you look at art? Do names, colours or themes you see in art puzzle you? What do you make of that?

If the works of five men were exhibited together today, the fact that they were all men would not come up. But similarly, if five women did the same, it would be labelled as a women's art exhibition straight away.

How can an exhibition created solely by women not be considered to be political?

Does gender play a role in what is good or bad art?

The story goes about the New York writer Djuna Barnes. A man said that men are better writers than women because they can pee a whole sentence in the snow. Djuna Barnes' answer was: "I can pee a full stop."

To be a Quirky Girl is to stand at the bar and smoke a cigaret and watch the red ring that your lipstick left around the yellow filter. To be a Quirky Girl is to tell him that you don't want to see him anymore, only to find out that you didn't really mean it. To be a Quirky Girl is to flick through Wallpaper and see to your satisfaction that the chair you bought second hand last week is in the magazine. To be a Quirky Girl is to hang up the phone after speaking with your grandmother and realize that she will not always be around. To be a Quirky Girl is to get slightly irritated when you see that your girlfriend has bought the same perfume that you use, and then afterwards to convince her that it smells pretty much like a different perfume when she is wearing it.

"Why have there been no great women artists?" Art historian Linda Nochlin asked in her essay from 1971.

Is it because they don't have the talent? Or did they just not have the opportunity or the interest?

Linda Nochlin's answer was that there are no women artists, just as there have been no black American artists.

Another answer could be found in the 17th century by a rather unknown feminist, Poulain de la Barre, (later to be discovered by Simone de Beauvoir.) She said: You have to distrust everything men have said about women because they are both judges and parties to the case.

Or perhaps the answer should be found somewhere else. Women and men do not always have the same interest, and this is why women's art may be different, just like Djuna Barnes answered: "I can pee a full stop".

To be a Quirky Girl is to look in your mother's closet and see her old shirt, that she was always wearing when you were a child, now looking completely different. The washed-out blue stripes suddenly have just the right colour. To be a Quirky Girl is to look out the window of the subway without focusing on anything in particular and then suddenly see the little girl opposite you is watching you in the window. To be a Quirky Girl is to hit the punching bag, sweat dripping, and feel as strong as the big guy standing next to you. To be a Quirky Girl is to drive with your windows down singing along on the chorus "Until she's proven wrong".

LIST OF WORKS

TINE MARIA KOEFOED

Born 1971, Lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark
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Colour print

01. **Køkkentilfælde** – Kitchen case. 50 x 50 cm. 2002
02. **Mor, søster, mormor og niece** – Mum, sister, gran and niece. 50 x 50 cm. 2002
03. **Hawaiibløst** – Hawaii flower. 50 x 50 cm. 2002
04. **Marianne 15.09 1987, Louise 20.03 1987, Johanne 20.03 1987, Cindy 12.06 1987.** 100 x 100 cm. 2001
05. **Fyrværkerihus** – Firework house. 75 x 50 cm. 2000
06. **Sommerdag** – Summers day. 75 x 50 cm. 2001
07. **Stue** – Living room. 60 x 40 cm. 2002
08. **Telefon i det grønne** – Phoning on the green. 45 x 30 cm. 2002
09. **Over det røde hus** – Over the red house. 45 x 30 cm. 2001
10. **Campingvogn i sne** – Trailer in snow. 45 x 30 cm. 2001
11. **Pernille i rødt** – Pernille in red. 45 x 30 cm. 2002
12. **Krøl** – Curl. 75 x 50 cm. 2002
13. **Japansk udsigt** – Japanese view. 45 x 30 cm. 1999
14. **Tisser** – Peeing. 45 x 30 cm. 2002
15. **Orange skyer** – Orange clouds. 60 x 40 cm. 2001
16. **Solnedgang i Norge** – Sunset in Norway. 75 x 50 cm. 2001
17. **Mig og Runa** – Me and Runa. 60 x 40 cm. 2001
18. **Sommerhus** – Summer house. 75 x 50 cm. 1999
19. **En hvid sag** – A white thing. 60 x 40 cm. 2002
20. **Pakker ud** – Unpacking 45 x 30 cm. 2002
21. **Ny tatovering** – New tattoo. 60 x 40 cm. 2002
22. **Hul i himmelen** – Hole in the sky. 60 x 40 cm. 2000
23. **Køkken historie** – Kitchen story. 75 x 50 cm. 2001
24. **Stars**. 60 x 45 cm. 2000
25. **Anna i Amerika** – Anna in America. 45 x 30 cm. 2000
26. **Rødternet gardiner** – Red chequered curtains. 30 x 45 cm. 2001
27. **Gyldne sko** – Golden shoes. 50 x 75 cm. 2002
28. **Røde Sarah krøller** – Red curls of Sarah. 60 x 40 cm. 2002
29. **Drømme situation** – Dream situation. 45 x 30 cm. 1999
30. **Os to** – Us two. 75 x 50 cm. 2001

ANNE MARIE PLOUG

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Oil on canvas.

01. **PLAYTIME.** 110 x110 cm. 2002
02. **PURPLE RAIN.** 110 x110 cm. 2002
03. **SUNDAY GIRL.** 110 x110 cm. 2002
04. **UNDER COVER.** 110 x110 cm. 2002
05. **COWBOY GIRLS.** 130 x130 cm. 2002
06. **HANG OUT.** 130 x130 cm. 2002
07. **A GLANCE THROUGH THE MIRROR.** 110 x110 cm. 2002
08. **FLYAWAY.** 130 x130 cm. 2002
09. **L.POPS.** 110 x110 cm. 2002
10. **WAITING FOR THE SUN.** 110 x110 cm. 2002
11. **HAPPY GO LUCKY HEAD.** 130 x130 cm. 2002
12. **HANDBAG LADY.** 130 x130 cm. 2002
13. **IDOIDONOTIDO....** 130 x130 cm. 2002
14. **BACK OUT.** 130 x130 cm. 2002

ANN SOPHIE STÆRK

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Oil and acrylic on canvas. 130 x130 cm. 2002

01. **Cool smoke reflection: Don't feel a part of the showing off crowd, do look rather cool just watching, though!**
 02. **Cool Smoke: It was all about parties, having fun, being beautiful and glamorous. Now, I'm an observer!**
 03. **Dream house: More interior, less superficial, please! Now reaching the height of glamour and image of perfection.**
 04. **I know, what I want! Flirting is like shopping, checking out what you like and do not like, knowing off course how irresistible you are yourself!?**
 05. **Time to dress up, shopping supernova!**
 06. **Good curves, without sticky bones and a butt on the size of two baseballs!**
 07. **Why live without aesthetic and luxury: I would say" The beautiful".**
 08. **Glam Rock, glamour can be anything you want to be!**
 09. **Am I a freedom junkie, living in my own dream universe, maybe!? It's a question of choosing, and the choice limits your freedom!**
 10. **Tangled up in love, not complicated, nearly perfect. Do you want to compromise? Anyway, if you forgot, you're not perfect yourself!**
- Oil on canvas. 150 x150 cm. 2002
11. **Which do you prefer: a man, a dog or a baby, maybe!?**
 12. **Taking fashion from behind, too irresistible to resist.**

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01. **Audio tour**

