

**Anna Gonzalez, Hocus Sulcus/Something Fishy
Webb Gallery, Queensland College of Art, Brisbane**

Anna Gonzalez' photographed collages belong to a world without sunlight. Strange cut-out figures navigate her dark interior and landscapes with disturbing menace and glee. In *Toilet Murder* (2020), a naked wife dashes from the scene of her husband's drowning. Three limbs appear akimbo from the toilet, underneath an excess of toilet paper. Splayed fingers and toes conjure an undignified wail of surrender. In *Running Away* (2020) it is the husband who flees the scene. With oversized teeth the family dog lunges for his leg while his wife brandishes a dagger. Behind them, two further figures pose in dramatic dance shapes atop a two-dimensional sea and staircase. Their nonchalant lack of engagement with the violence of the foreground suggests the displaced emotions and confusing logic of dreams.

To view Gonzalez' constructions is to enter the real and imaginary world of Gonzalez' mind. Her works are saturated with the memories and symbolism of her former life under Spain's authoritarian regime. In *Idolatries* (2020), repetitive rows of bowing figures evoke a terrifying military-cum-religion, characterised by subservient regularity and anonymity. Above them a collection of eyes perform Big Brother surveillance disguised as the glittering jewels of (false) gods. Gonzalez' works simultaneously hint at the Australian landscape and point to contemporary events. The teetering telephone pole of *Dusk at the Field* (2020) can be seen in real life through her front window, while the miniature rolls of *Toilet Murder* were inspired by recent inter/national shortages of this humble bathroom staple. Gonzalez makes her works from everyday items found around the home. In some photographs peculiar shapes reveal their former lives as blu tack. In others, the disparate decorative surfaces are repurposed elements from earlier prints and drawings. The artist's material resourcefulness and her repeated use of closed and closing spaces can similarly be traced to the social-distancing requirements of COVID-19, which tasked us to stay safe by staying home. To view these artworks is also to imagine Gonzalez physically trapped in the studio of her family home while her creative mind roamed far and wide.

According to their charismatic leader, André Breton, Surrealism offered a utopian resolution of the contradictory states of waking life and dreams. In their wake, Gonzalez' works are fundamentally Surreal. Correlations between her works and the revolutionary artists abound. Uneasy constructions of space, mirrored forms and secret nighttime rituals recall the Surrealist paintings of Leonora Carrington, Paul Delvaux and Dorothea Tanning while Gonzalez' use of textured surfaces brings to mind Max Ernst's dark frottage forests. Specific imagery in Gonzalez' photographs also echo Surrealist obsessions. The disembodied yet bejewelled eyes of *Idolatries* operates as an extension of the Surrealist's complex relationship with vision, as seen in variously in Victor Brauner's *Self-Portrait with a Plucked Eye* (1931) versus Salvador Dalí's brooch *The eye of time* (1949) and René Magritte's *Shéhérazade* (c.1950). In the former, Brauner depicts himself with one eye enucleated, symbolising the Surrealist desire to see anew. Meanwhile, Dalí and Magritte encircle the eyes in their creations with real diamonds and painted pearls. An even more striking parallel exists between Gonzalez' work and the collaborative output of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore. In the lover's photo-montaged frontispiece for *Aveux non avenues (Unavowed confessions)* (1929-30), two fragmented forearms similarly reach around an oversized eye. In their artwork, the two hands cradle the globe of the eye, suggesting a gesture made just moments before or after that captured in Gonzalez' work.

Inspired by Sigmund Freud, the Surrealists embraced forbidden and dangerous themes. This is especially true of their recruit, Hans Bellmer, who constructed strange school-girl *poupées* (puppets). Removing limbs and turning torsos upside down, Bellmer produced disfigured bodies of excess and loss. He placed his creations in and around his parent's empty house, and photographed their sullen bodies. The resultant works are powerfully disturbing. They brim with macabre sexuality and ripple with allusions to crime-scene photography. Like Bellmer, Gonzalez is a puppet-master. Her figures hang from unseen fishing wires. And like Bellmer, she creates and tortures their bodies in order to photograph them in strange distant worlds.

But where Gonzalez differs from her Surrealist predecessors is in her use of humour. Exaggerated facial expressions liken her figures to cartoons. Their paper thin bodies elude any real risk of harm. In contrast to the Surrealist's sombre nightmares, Gonzalez' deaths and other catastrophes are dark yet delightful.

Words by Louise R Mayhew
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