

MONITOR

Lisbon

GRAHAM HUDSON

MAJOR TRAMUA

Interview with curator Caroline Elbaor

Caroline Elbaor : What is the plan for Lisbon?

Graham Hudson: It is the opening of Monitor's new space. They took the lease with the place in a state of charming disrepair, with a plan to fix it up, but before doing so, they asked if I would be interested to show in it's raw state. At first there was still rubble everywhere, no power or water, perfect, I was into it staying just like that, to build the show from this psychological rupture of architecture. In the end, we have power, the rubble has gone (some might be coming back though), otherwise it's rough and ready, with a show titled; Major Trauma.

CB: That being said, we can start very simply with one straightforward question: it seems to me like the new work is a departure from the sculpture works I'm familiar with. Why the switch to figurative paintings -- especially of subjects like Jane Fonda, who is not a personal figure in your life, but rather an icon that has been portrayed many times? Why Fonda in particular?

GH: I started using Jane Fonda's Workout video as a back projection to some installations; 'Work Out' was a suitable pun for my preference for works that fall over and appear often unfinished or at the point of breakdown. The fact that Fonda's Workout was funding the Black Panthers and Native American causes pulled me into Jane Fonda's story. She had wanted to be a painter before an actor or activist, it was because of this desire to paint that she first moved to Paris for art school where she met Sartre and De Beauvoir in the late 50's. For the March 2017 exhibition in Rome, I produced a series of paintings, a process of me learning to paint, displayed on the canvas. They were all based on images of Jane Fonda in the period after she returned from Paris, working her

first Hollywood roles, where the radical embers were flamed by the misogyny of genre roles in the period. They are paintings, but the decision to paint became a necessity once I was aware of the roots of her radicalisation. Ideas of psychology drive my interest in Jane Fonda, in Lisbon there will be a small series of Rorschach inspired paintings from the original workout book which pre-dates the video.

CB: I'd like to talk about the Rorschach paintings as related to Jane Fonda. Correct me if I'm wrong, but your interest in her stemmed from knowledge about her activist efforts as well as desire to be an artist. Are you looking to use the Rorschach paintings to reflect on Fonda's psychological state at that time in her life specifically, or is Fonda sort of a player in your overall general interest in psychology and art?

GH: The Rorschach's began from a formal starting point, the workout book features a series of aerobic poses, I saw them in a historical context of the body in sculpture. Rosalind Krauss discusses figurative flatness before Rodin, I was playing with these images and the Rorschach arrangements started fortuitously. The psychological references riff with Fonda, the duality of the figure, the divided self as R.D Laing put it. I'm using her as an archetype; it is kind of both your propositions.

CB: I understand your interest in Fonda, but is there a reason why she would play such a large role in Rorschach paintings, which could be manipulated to depict any public figure? What I'm trying to ask is – Rorschach paintings are designed to be used on nearly anybody. Is her role in your paintings a side-note because of your on-going interest in her, or are you trying to say something specific about Fonda's psychological state in particular?

GH: I think it's her as a pivot into thinking about us. You are right that this Rorschach approach could be for anyone, but for me it's the formality of the aerobic poses that opens this door.

CB: Further to this, it could be argued Rorschach paintings are now obsolete in the contemporary practice of psychological treatment, or at least have taken a backseat to other forms of psychological testing or

evaluation. I think it's interesting that you're painting them when the height of their popularity parallels time in Fonda's life in which they would have been a key tool in psychology.

GH: I like that observation, you are right that it's pegged to a specific period, but classical Freud is also back in vogue, it happily jostles with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy like an old married couple. The notion of the unconscious, while scientifically unproven, is considered as certain as gravity in everything from management and unconscious bias training, to mental health practices and water cooler conversations.

CB: Can you tell me a little bit more about the Tonka truck and site-light totem pole?

GH: I used to have these Tonka trucks when I was young, so credit my mother there (Its always about 'mother' right?) We brought some for my son who is nearly 3. Tonka is Sioux for great, the company originated in Sioux country, modern day Minneapolis. They are kind of unbreakable toys, they also have this Native American heritage, my kid is also a fraction Native American. Jane Fonda campaigned hard for Native Americans in the 70's, inspired by Marlon Brando, who was the first celebrity to use his fame politically and tutored Fonda. The Dakota pipeline disaster was bubbling along when I developed this, so it all hung together. Plus, the space in Monitor has a small footprint, about 3m x 3m, but its 5m high, a totem like sculpture was a logical response.

CB: I have a few questions about the keyboard false floor. What is the intention behind the floor emitting (somewhat startling) noises when activated by a person? I think it's interesting that it requires active engagement in order to sound off. Is this to create a psychologically disquieting effect on the audience, or does it aim to address the building's history as being in an "unpolished state of disrepair," as you said?

GH: It's kind of toy inspired again, childhood is always cited as the foundation of our adult behaviours and neuroses. I first made a sculpture with a toy piano about 3 years ago. A hammer was balanced on one key, playing a horror movie style deep tone of fear, but the piano was a foot long and pink. So I was always looking for a moment to blow that piece up. The downstairs space in Lisbon is

bigger, but not so big I couldn't fill it with keyboards and a kind of fun fair wobbly false floor. I hope it combines the unfinished state of the building and the equally unfinished/uncertain self we all inhabit.

CB: I'm really interested in the title "Major Trauma." That's quite a loaded title. I myself am incredibly interested in trauma, so I'm wondering how the experience of trauma might tie into the content of the works being shown, as well as the context of the psychological rupture of the building. Trauma can be experienced in many ways – some affecting only our daily lives, others inducing a total psychological breakdown. I would say major trauma falls under the latter, so how would you say major trauma relates to tone of the show in general?

GH: I think your contextualisation is what I would hope the audience gains. The show has a lot of bright colours and sounds, so the title counters that. I always like the story of how Goebbels' favourite movie was the Wizard of Oz, (or was it the sound of music?) anyway he loved show girls and hedonism. The dark and the light sit so well together. I have been working on some proposals with medical training, actors and scenarios of both everyday doctor visits and full on Major Trauma. The two words are like a double adjective, Pow! Pow!, it also reminds me of Major Major in Catch 22, which is a kind of divided self Rorschach/reflection. With the phrase Major Trauma, we each immediately project our own scariest idea of Major Trauma onto it. Freudians would argue life is bookended by the Major Trauma of birth and death and the rest is all musicals.

CB: Can you tell me about the painting of the woman with the eye patch? She seems sprightly and cheerful, despite her circumstances...

CB: Janice Darling was an aerobic instructor at Jane Fonda's Workout Studio in Beverly Hills. Then she was in a car crash, breaking her pelvis, losing an eye and left in a coma. She made a miraculous recovery and appeared in the Workout book, Janice claims in religious fervor that aerobics saved her life. Major Trauma.