GIANNA D’AMICO

Freak Show

This exhibit is a self-project inspired by my drug addiction, my demise and my checking into rehab last August. I have become fascinated with institutions and the institutionalized. The characters in my drawings, such as the moon with John Lennon glasses, the pig holding a newspaper, or the alien man and his cigarette, represent institutionalized people from various societies with various conditions. I have met lots of these people in my 20 years. Medically speaking, I am one myself.

I have made a strong connection between institutions and abnormalities, and this observation has led me to. So, I have been researching an interest in American freak shows of the early 1900s, in which people were put on display because of their physical abnormalities. Many of these American ‘freaks’ of the 30s are represented in my art, including the bearded lady, the man in the dress, and the tiny man.

The sketches in my sketchbook often inspire me. I often build on drawings from my sketchbook, some of which are familiar characters that I have invented in my head- some and developed over years, and some are from sources. Some of my pieces may seem like they came out of a children’s book, containing clowns, dolls, exaggerated smiles, and wide eyes. But the characters from this children’s book have been taken out of their context and faced with the realities of hardship, isolation, desperation, and finally institutionalization.

I have recently recreated started to expand a series based on a character I had sketched while watching the 1932 drama, “Freaks.” He is the announcer at the beginning of the film and introduces the freak show, using critical statements like, They did not ask to be brought into this world…
I used black ink and pastels in the gray scale to mimic the black and white film. However, with more cartoon-ish animation and stylized rendering, I have created made him into my own character. I have also written a poem about my own insanity and how it led me to be institutionalized. I animated my ink drawings of this announcer character as if he was to recite my poem. The beginning of the poem reads:

The girl was disturbed it seems
For she preferred poppy nightmares over rose dreams

The idea to animate my image comes from two sources: First, a more recent sense that my studio contains many images of lively personalities, and they seem to want to tell a story. And second, since I was a child, my drawings always have had a detailed story behind them. At seven years old I could explain what has happening in the scene, who the characters were, where they were going and where they had been. This show portrays my process and thoughts as well as the animation itself. Animation has always been an interest to me and this project shows research rather than a flowing animation.

I have taken images of each movement on my iPhone 4. I have brought them into an app called Flip-gram©. This app works as a flipbook, showing my images quickly in order. I am familiar with this program and it is how I imagined my project working. This animation will be projected on the wall, and although it is a silent animation, the words of my poem are hung in the exhibition as well because the story is important to me.

The animation is broken and awkward—not fluid at all—and that is how I intended it to be, emphasizing struggle and imperfection.

*Untitled*, ink and pastel, 22” x 36”, 2015
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