



CHANTAL ROUSSEAU • *Harbingers of Doom* • March 14 to May 2, 2014

LIST OF WORKS

Memento Mori, looping animation, 2004 • *Fight*, looping animation, 10 seconds, 2005 • *Fish Squish*, animated gif, 2013
Bird Love, looping animation, 2005 • *And now let us weep for the lovely lovely ladies of CSI: snowy owl*, looping animation, 2009
In the spirit of all artists who have disappeared mysteriously while canoeing in Algonquin Park: FAIL, animated gif, 2013
lightning, lightning, YES! animated gif, 2013 • *Sexy Ghosts: ghost Kate Upton, Cat Daddy dance*, animated gif, 2013

Chantal Rousseau's artistic practice includes painting, drawing, animation, animated gifs and installations. She is a member of the Agitated Plover Salon, an artist collective who created and run the "Unapologetically Expedient" series of short duration exhibitions in non-traditional venues. Shows in 2013 included a duplex and a garage, and in 2014 the group will invade the old Kingston City Hall jail and a limestone basement, among other sites. Rousseau was featured in theeternalinternetotherhood.com, an online pavilion curated by Lorna Mills for The Wrong - New Digital Art Biennale (<http://thewrong.org/>), which ran from November 1-December 31, 2013. In 2013, she also participated in Allumage, with site-specific installations of animated gifs in 5 storefront locations in downtown Kingston, a project curated by Michael Davidge for Artignite arts festival presented by the City of Kingston.

Rousseau has exhibited at artist run centres and galleries including: Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre, Kingston ON (2012 and 2008), Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston ON (2009), Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound ON (2009), York Quay Centre at Harbourfront Centre, Toronto ON (2009), Forest City Gallery, London ON (2008), Artspace, Peterborough ON (2007), The Tree Museum, Muskoka ON (2007), The New Gallery, Calgary AB (2006), Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris France (2005) and Rodman Hall, St. Catharines ON (2005). She was a member of Persona Volare, a group of 11 artists who showed together nationally and internationally from 2000 to 2009. Rousseau completed an MFA at the University of Guelph in 2005. She currently resides in Kingston, Ontario.

<http://chantalrousseau.ca/>

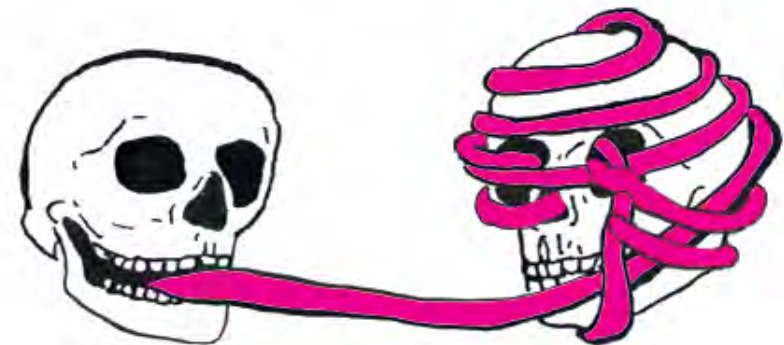
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The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

Chantal Rousseau

Harbingers of Doom





It's all hilarity, sex, and dread. Or so it would seem.

The gif-based works of Chantal Rousseau, deceptive in their simplicity, are acute examples of how much emotion can be wrought from concise means, direct imagery, and the subtlest gestures. They are alternately humorous, salacious, or exhibit some underlying darkness. Sometimes all three emotions reside in the same piece, which is both remarkable and unnerving. In pictorial terms, they seemingly depict very little. In emotional and psychological terms, they open up dark hearts and resonant anxieties.

The gifs presented here are both hand-rendered and rotoscoped in pencil and ink and are often derived from short gifs originally appearing on the internet, that real/imaginary land of hilarity, sex, and dread. Gifs, memes and the like are one of our most immediate versions of pop culture voraciously eating its own tale and while Rousseau has based a number of pieces on internet gifs that may have been wildly popular at one time

Interestingly, while Rousseau works from internet gifs that may have been fresh and new at one time, those are quickly subsumed by the sheer volume of perpetually new internet ephemera. It becomes like sourcing something from a bygone era of art history. A dancing Kate Upton gif? A budgie balancing on a tennis ball? They are undoubtedly still out there somewhere, but long since overshadowed by newer hilarities and visual mishaps.

In some of the works, a more painterly drawing style is applied to the images, giving them the hazy connotation of a dream half-remembered and amplifying some of its darker tones. We see a picturesque landscape and a lake. A canoe begins to languidly glide across the water and readily slides under the surface. It happens smoothly and quickly, a joyous moment turning troublesome before we've even had time to enjoy it.

That rapid turn of emotional tone demonstrates a duality that exists in a lot of Rousseau's works. A bikini-clad gal squeezing a fish—over and over again—is an

undeniably funny image. Until it's not. Until you start to wonder what's up with that gesture. Is it innocuous or tawdry? And why is she smiling like that? Likewise, a pair of hazy, sexy gifs appropriately titled *Sexy Ghosts*, gives us parallel loops of models dancing. They are sexy, and yet after awhile they begin to read as though they are the ashen leftovers of desire.

Rousseau's use of animal imagery also contributes to a complicating of the psychological depths in the work. The exception might be that budgie on the tennis ball, which reads as eternally plucky, an icon to living a carefree life. But in a series like *And now let us weep* for the lovely ladies of CSI, predatory animals are perched on and around female victims from the famous crime series. The gesture might at first sound too flippant, but a few seconds of an owl impishly hopping atop a corpse is unerringly disturbing in ways that are difficult to articulate. It's a juxtaposition that strikes sideways at our expectations.

Similarly, an early gif work called *Bird Love* gives us an image of a woman with legs splayed, wearing nothing but a bondage harness, which is innocuously dirty as she tugs gently on the harness. Then a peregrine falcon flies in to land on her left arm. She continues tugging to remove the bird, but it's the same sexual gesture, so it's an ambiguous cue, mixing sex and distress. Or does the distress amplify the sex? As with many of Rousseau's works, the meaning that is concocted is often an intentionally mixed message, leaving the viewer somewhat uncertain about what to feel.

There is great potency in that kind of imagery because that which you cannot anticipate tends to be that which you remember. An early rotoscoped piece entitled *Fight* has stayed with me for over a decade—a hawk and a rodent

tumble over each other, rolling around in a combative blur that is recognizable pictorially, yet still feels as though it will collapse into an inchoate scribble at any moment.

In the course of very few works, we encounter violence, sex, implied sexual violence, the undercutting of romantic tropes about landscape and the potency of all these references is all the more impressive for the extreme brevity of many of the works. It's one thing to create an animated short of a minute or two. It's entirely more challenging to reduce that to a few seconds. Rousseau smartly focuses on an effective image/gesture that always builds in interesting ways through the mechanism of repeated looping. And there is a trajectory to their rhythms—where they often seem coy and humorous at first, laughter turns to nervous laughter quite quickly, and then we often stop laughing altogether and begin to question what we thought was so funny. The speed of that arc is unsettling to recognize.

In *Memento Mori*, we are blatantly confronted with darker themes as animated skulls and elongated tongues engage in a stop motion dance of death and desire. It's pretty damn delightful and a little disturbing. Not because Rousseau's imagery is particularly scary, but because, as with many of her works, she is tapping into deep veins within us. Desire and Death, ultimately, are it. Those are the key parameters within which we all operate, pursuing desire as an ongoing defense against death.

We tend to lose, and succeed, at both. Which attracts us and frightens us.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator

