

[New York] Marina Zurkow: The Poster Children and Other Heroes of the Revolution

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September 29, 2009



2007 Series of 2 works
Animation, (4) 22" monitors,
(2) custom PCs, custom
housing 78" x 14" x 6" (Poster
Children) 9 minute loop, silent
(Heroes of the Revolution)
3'30", silent Editions of 5

Animation in art has an interesting albeit brief history. One can see its gestation in the static forms that preceded it including the comic book iconography of Roy Lichtenstein that he created in the early 1960s, and later with Art Spiegelman and his effable *MAUS* (1986-1991). Animation as a temporal-based medium, however, begins to achieve recognition in the early 1990s with the short films of William Kentridge. His works were initially based on narratives about his native South Africa, and were transformed from his non-temporal drawings made from charcoal and limited palette often reduced to the color blue. Topical and critical, Kentridge established animation as an artistic force to be reckoned with; since then, this temporal medium existing somewhere between film and drawing has reincarnated within the field of media art. In the wake of digital culture, this particular artistic practice has absorbed a myriad of sources including old video games such as Nintendo and what ostensibly appears to be high-tech computer digitization or other cutting edge modes of animation. Like the technophile albatross that once weighted media art, digital animation as an art form can succumb to a kind of a formal sheen; a patina of the virtual underscored in the Pixar aesthetic, for instance, that has generated revenue for the Hollywood machinery via the banality of the digital spectacle.



Installation views

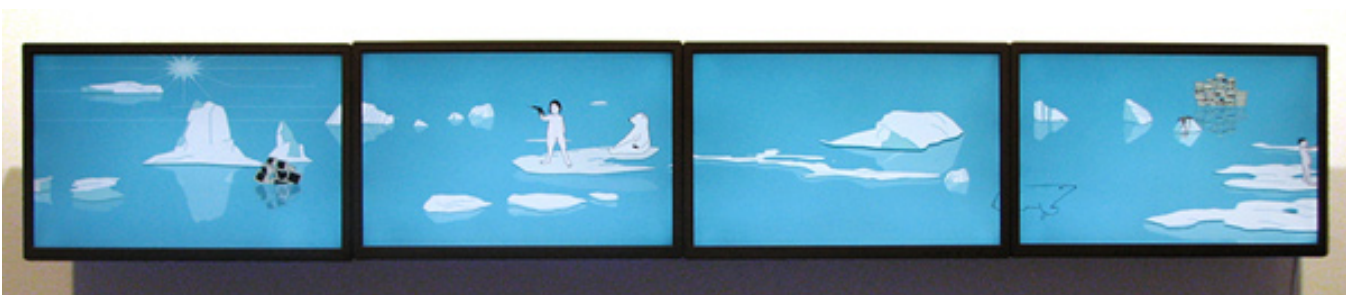
Like different genres of cinema including horror, film noir, and the documentary that have been appropriated by artists such as Stan Douglas, Douglas Gordon, Shirin Nishat, and Kim Sooja, digital animation has been a hallmark of recent works by Carlos Amorales, Kota Izaka, and Marian Zurkow. Amorales digital animations, however, convey a gothic and even sinister tenor evinced in works such as *Manimal* (2005), while Izaka is well known for his animated fictitious encounters between various figureheads of both popular and intellectual history including John Lennon, Joseph Beuys, and Susan Sontag. In *Lennon, Sontag and Beuys* (2004), a triangulation of sorts ensues from their dialogic interaction; a disquieting conversation that runs the gamut from philosophy, aesthetics, politics and more ubiquitous subject matter that often consciously derails the aura of seriousness of these cultural icons.

Like Amorales and Izaka, Zurkow's work is an admixture of visual cultural sources articulated through computer programming; and the formats in which she presents her works are just as broad. Some of these display configurations include single, double and multi-channel projection where audio more often than not plays a crucial role. Two recent works, often seen in tandem but nonetheless are independent pieces, have been expanded into a display configuration consisting of four LED screens each. Titled *The Poster Children* (2007) and *The Heroes of the Revolution* (2007), they dovetail on a kind of post-Pop aesthetic that is rich with Zurkow's stylized imagery that includes children, polar bears, icebergs, umbrellas, birds, and flotsam and jetsam set within an arctic environment.



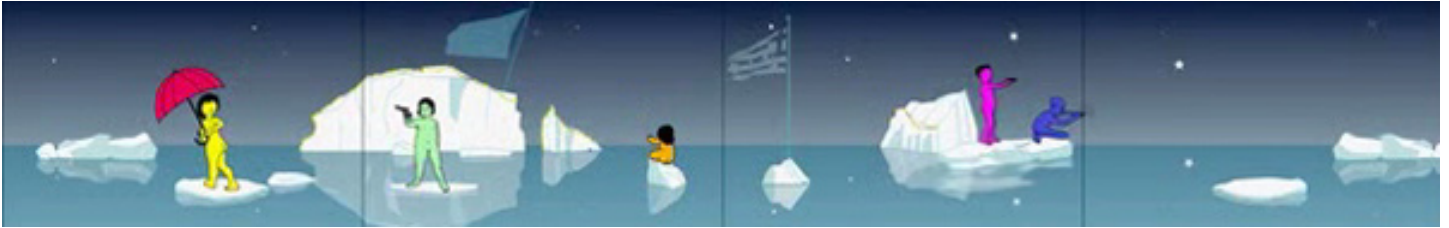
Installation views

The motifs that inundate the two works and the eight LED screens are consciously playful and even border on the innocent; yet Zurkow infuses them with aggression and confrontation by arming the children with guns and flags which give them a partisan allegiance. Apart from references to Japanese manga and anime, as well as the ubiquitous American animation film, there is something slightly unsettling about the purported innocence of Zurkow's imagery. It could be that her artistic vocabulary is closer to Henry Darger than conventional animation, especially because the images of children maintain a mischief that borders on violence. It is the undercurrent of militancy and subtext of eco-politics that pushes Zurkow's work beyond that of, let's say, Murakami and more into the realm of Darger. What also adds formal texture to Zurkow's work besides a lush palette is its temporal setting of day and night. *The Poster Children* unfolds during the day, while *Heroes of the Revolution* takes place at night. As such, the bracket of day and night coupled with the animation's slow temporal duration create a slight sensation of suspended animation.

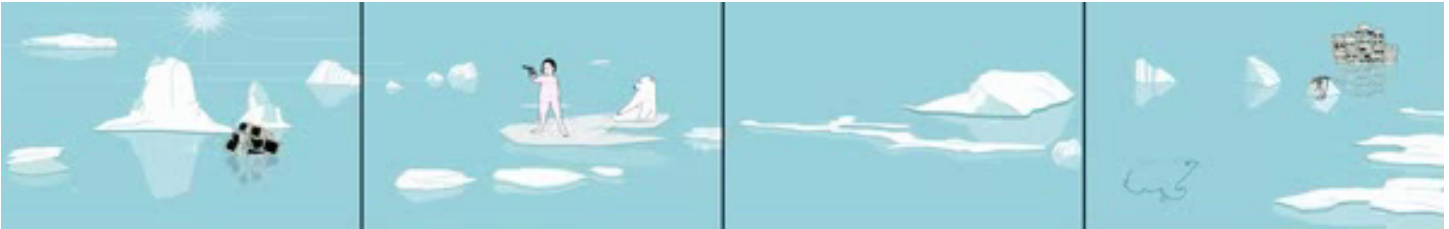


The Poster Children

The Poster Children and *The Heroes of the Revolution* are meant to be displayed on two opposite walls. This creates a continuum paradoxically achieved via the splitting of architectural space as both works play in a kind of point/counterpoint. But what further adds to their mobius strip effect is that they are looped, thus they have no beginning, middle or end. Temporality germane to the works' narrative and formal structure foment an experience of time within each piece as anti-teleological. In this sense, the works operate like slowly moving paintings; they are the figurative equivalent of Jeremy Blake's digital, pure abstractions of colors and forms that melt and morph across LED screens. Marina Zurkow's *The Poster Children* and *The Heroes of the Revolution* allude to apocalypse and dystopia paradoxically via an innocence that is so pristine it's almost utopian. Through this poetic dichotomy, she has created an alternate universe where politics, the unconscious, nature, humanity, and preadolescence collide.



Heroes of the Revolution clip



The Poster Children clip