

## EXHIBITION

### *Bonnie Marin: What are you scared of?*

By Courtney R. Thompson



Bonnie Marin, "They can't hear you when you scream!" (2012), wood wax collage, 61 x 91.4 x 5.1 cm. Photo: Ernest Mayer.

Bonnie Marin's solo exhibition "What are you scared of?" is a suffocating encounter with image. This newest body of work addresses fear and anxiety through collage in both two-dimensional and sculptural forms. Her material is largely selected from art books and reproduced through black-and-white and color photocopies carefully cut to integrate figures in pastoral and urban settings. In a series set in wood with wax, genre and gender are subverted and exploited through her techniques of image repetition—sets of photocopied images are positioned within a fragmented grid of uneven levels, mimicking a broken film-strip and suggesting loose narratives. While the generous amount of artwork on display evokes terror and foreboding, the most successful paper collage pieces present more subtle depictions of

skewed utopian domesticity culled from mid-20th century advertising. In *I have something to tell you* (2012), a female figure provides understated tension to a blissful vision of modern underwater living; in *Keep off the Grass* (2012), a neighborly lawn congregation turns violent.

In addition to the paper collages, Marin has more than a dozen wood wax collage pieces that resonate with Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, an image archive conceived in 1925 and developed until his death in 1929. Warburg wanted to illuminate collective social memory by identifying "pathos formulas": repetitive instances of gesture or expression that link trauma and the mnemonic throughout history; his project manifested itself in nearly 80 constructed panels, of which only a fraction survive. Using images from Renaissance paintings to

contemporary newspaper clippings and ephemera such as postage stamps, Warburg attempted a psycho-historic tabulation of visual culture in a time of critical flux. Marin's investigation of anxiety follows a parallel path that reverberates with our own culture of fear. However, unlike Warburg's eclectic image selection, Marin looks to specific dramatized moments in painting, largely from the Renaissance and Baroque, and seedy pulp fiction covers as a blueprint for heightened tension. The wood wax pieces offer a cinematic montage of high and low culture. While her image selection can appear didactic, Marin's use of fragmentation produces a complicated relationship to the dissemination of an image.

"They can't hear you when you scream!" (2012) consists of 29 panels, including color photocopies of Caravaggio's

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Bonnie Marin, *I have something to tell you* (2012), paper collage, 14.6 x 21.3 cm.  
Photo: Ernest Mayer.

shockingly violent *The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* (1599–1600), *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1599) and *David with the Head of Goliath* (1606); 11 panels on the left are devoted to Richard Hamilton's *Swinging London, 67 II* (1968). In an interview with gallery director Mary Reid, Marin says the piece could have been titled "I don't want to see what's going on." The observation is apt in light of the anticipation, act and aftermath of canonical moments in biblical execution. At the lower left, a figure from *The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* is disconnected from his original context. He is now a fascinated witness to Holofernes' death and David's look of ambivalent triumph over Goliath, though the figures above avert their eyes.

A further complication is produced by the inclusion of Hamilton's painting, itself based on the transformation of an appropriated image. In 1967 *Daily Mail* photographer John Twine caught Robert Fraser (Hamilton's art dealer) and Mick Jagger in handcuffs after their arrest in conjunction with a drug raid at Keith Richards' home. Jagger received a 12-month conditional discharge on appeal, but Fraser was sentenced to six months in prison.

Andrew Wilson has written extensively on Hamilton's selection of Twine's photograph—there were several published, and Fraser and Jagger alternately appear as arrogant rebels or martyrs, depending on the framing, accompanying text and publication venue. Hamilton revisited this image extensively with a series of six paintings; studies on paper; an etching with aquatint, die stamping and collage; and a poster composed from a collage by Hamilton of newspaper coverage of the trial. His title ironically juxtaposes the free expression attributed to the image of 1960s "swinging London" with the restraints placed on that freedom through the "swinging," or severe, sentence, as the judge himself put it; Marin's alternate title speaks to the power of images and to our own inaction or silence in response to representations of violence and/or injustice.

The sculptures—more accurately tableaux—in the exhibition cover the gamut of collage practices. It is as if Edward Kienholz and Kurt Schwitters got together and read nothing but Freud. Giant rubber boots appear with femmes fatales, zombies and fishing hooks in

bizarre, indeterminate encounters. The sculptures function as spatial narratives with an uneasy concurrence between interiority and exteriority. Their sense of dread derives from both their subject matter and materials—old mail order catalogs, children's toys, fun fur. Marin plays with identity politics and social constructs, although some pieces feel more resolved than others.

It is heartening to see Marin's diverse strategies receive their due in a solo exhibition, her first in many years. "What are you scared of?" recognizes fear as its own assemblage and illuminates our relationship to historic (re)constructions of traumatic events. Perhaps most telling is the subjective response to the exhibition; an illumination that hints at our own pathos formulas and the visual equations that mark them. ■

Courtney R. Thompson is an arts professional living in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

### Exhibition:

"Bonnie Marin: What are you scared of?"  
School of Art Gallery  
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg  
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### Catalogue:

The exhibition was accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with a conversation between Marin and School of Art Director / Curator Mary Reid.  
*Bonnie Marin: What are you scared of?*  
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13 pages, fully illustrated