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G A L L E R Y

Artist Statement: Richard Niman – Making the Incredible Believable

"I frequently work with dolls, mannequins, shop window installations and other ready-mades. I regard such objects as aesthetically dead. I have always tried to administer some form of surprise or shock to the viewer, but in order to do this I have to bring the dolls to life. This I do by transforming - by decontextualising, stripping them of certain things and bringing in other parts or objects that don't normally fit with them. I believe my function is to make the incredible believable."

By the above I mean that I try to create the illusion, to dupe the viewer into believing that the impossible, very often the physically impossible, is actually happening. Perhaps I don't always succeed, perhaps I rarely or never succeed - but in the final analysis that is for the viewer to decide. My art is an expression of my paradoxist view of the world in which in the main I believe that if a statement is true, then so is its exact opposite. The seeds of this philosophy were sewn and formulated during years of my earlier life in which I shared a bedroom with my late younger brother, when we both came to the view that the completely absurd and the deadly serious were two sides of the same coin.

The first paragraph here is a direct quote from myself in a book called "Voodoo, Hoochie Coochie and the Creative Spirit", a compilation of writings and images to support an exhibition by several artists, including myself, in a show from January to April, 2009 at Riflemaker Gallery, London. A third person version of this statement also appears in the catalogue in an exhibition entitled "British Surrealism in Context - A Collector's Eye", currently on show in Leeds City Art Gallery until November 2009 and in which one of my bucket pieces or "Heads in the Clouds" appears.

Rather than write an art-speak, goobledgook text I prefer to let my art works speak for themselves. Despite the apparent similarity of my art works, some say, to some

contemporary, perhaps even cutting edge art, made by people much younger than myself, I am still an old-fashioned modernist of heart. I believe that visual fine art is primarily a visual affair. It is now fashionable in art schools and art departments of universities to demand of students some form of verbal text as subject matter before they set to work representing it visually. I will have none of that. That to me is nothing more than illustration by the back door - or maybe even by the front door - it is certainly not fine art. I begin by playing with forms, colours, space and images. Whatever text and words that may arise, flows from the visual things I have initially created - rather than the other way round. For me and for other old-fashioned modernists there is such a thing as visual language, which exists as much in its own right as verbal language. When I make art works, I am speaking in that visual language. Sometimes rather inadequate verbal translations can be made - but that is all they are.

I accept, that there can be several, indeed any number of verbal interpretations of any one work of mine, each interpretation being in my opinion as valid as the next – and indeed as valid as my own interpretation. In fact the more interpretations there are the better, as this phenomenon would be evidence to me that my art piece was working and had some universal quality.

I suppose I am what people would call a figurative rather than an abstract artist in that my images, strange though they may seem, are forms of representation of things we see in the real world - or are at any rate based on such. Yet, perhaps, for this very reason I choose to give them oblique titles. To give my works merely descriptive titles would be rather like a one-time neighbour of mine, a craftswoman, who had a tool rack with a hammer on it labelled "hammer" which of course we could already see for ourselves. At least giving a work an oblique or esoteric title operates as an extension of the work. Instead of allowing the viewer's mind to go down the route of literality and banality this device challenges the mind and imagination to go off on a flight of fantasy of its own, which may of course be closer to the real truth of the matter.

Richard Niman - September 2009