



JAMES JOYCE: DRAWINGS AND OTHER OBJECTS

Exhibition reviewed by Mike Dempsey

HOW TO BE AN ILLUSTRATOR
BY DARREL REES

Book reviewed by Lawrence Zeegen

EJ MAJOR: TRY TO DO THINGS WE ALL CAN UNDERSTAND

Exhibition reviewed by Mitch Miller

DANIEL PFLUMM

Exhibition reviewed by Richard Battersby

**REDEFINING THE LINE:
A SYMPOSIUM EXPLORING
CONTEMPORARY ISSUES
IN ILLUSTRATION**

Event reviewed by John O'Reilly

LUSTRARE

MAKING THE UNBELIEVABLE, BELIEVABLE: WHAT IS A SUCCESSFUL FICTIONAL WORLD?

BY HAYLEY POTTER

The verb 'to illustrate' comes from the Latin *lustrare*. It's also the name of an occasional series where illustrators are invited to meditate on an issue of importance. Here, illustrator and recent RCA graduate Hayley Potter looks at the psychological, creative and professional challenges surrounding creating believable fantasy worlds.

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EJ MAJOR: TRY TO DO THINGS WE ALL CAN UNDERSTAND

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If I had to choose one essential thing from the recent EJ Major exhibition at the Glasgow International Art Festival, it would be the third last image from her piece *Marie Claire RIP*. This work commemorates an article in the popular magazine of the same name that used mugshots of an unknown woman to illustrate the ravages of heroin. Here Major presses her own distinctive face into service as the unnamed drug addict, a woman who 'had no control over her own image.' Passing over the recreated photographs, from bright-eyed rebel to shattered husk, has a strangely religious feel, like some blasphemous, profane Stations of the Cross, emphasised by wry captions. These range from the loved up *Can Ride* to the pleading *Tried Hard*, and offer the viewers all the narrative explanation they need. But it was the third from last image that typifies the subtlety and complexity of Major's feel for her subject. In 1988/*Carried On*, the hair is snarled into tugs and knots and her eyes are mere bruises –

yet somehow there is a curious twinkle in her expression that is hopeful, affirming, pleading, defiant, still waiting for something more than the end.

Marie Claire RIP typifies the puzzles set by an audacious solo debut; ostensibly photography, its power rests in the artist's ability to imprint a mood and a tone into the picture. So is this also performance art? If it is, then it is unusual in taking illustration – in this case, the conventions of photo-journalism – as a starting point for a performance.

An ex-social scientist, Emily Major seems fascinated by illustration and how it focuses (or muddles) our capacity to frame and define the world around us. This is nowhere clearer than in *From a Distance* (2007), built around images culled from old *Brownie* annuals and text from William Faulkner's 1930 novel *As I Lay Dying*. The colour scheme smacks of sepia and brown paper, the feeling immediately nostalgic. But once you pick beneath the surface there is the sense of being gently savaged.

Ostensibly ruminating on the tendency for words to fail us just when they are most needed, *From a Distance* comments on the false innocence of images. The method is topsy-turvy. The apple-cheeked youths lifted from these abused and ripped-off *Brownie* annuals, do not illustrate Faulkner (annotated in full by Major as a precocious, yet withdrawn 17-year-old) but are illustrated by him, so that his words, ripped unceremoniously from the original paragraphs, act as sardonic, sometimes shocking exposures of hidden agendas. Reading lines such as 'a significant shape profoundly without life', or 'hearing the dark land talking the voiceless speech', makes these beautiful objects (available as postcards you can use to recreate the exhibit at home) as furtive and disquieting as street corner porn.

Major has fun with captions. In her *Try To Do Things We All Can Understand*, film stills and their corresponding dialogue are jumbled up so that narrative and figurative integrity is lost. What is

being said and shown is entirely in the hands of the audience.

Major likes giving power to her audience, as in *Love Is...*, where thousands of postcards (each with a still from *Last Tango In Paris* on the front) asks randomly selected participants to provide captions that define love. Some of the responses are sickly, others plagiarised; occasionally the contributors add something beautiful, but there are also mean spirits who send back the image calling Major 'a loser', and without any sense of the apparent irony, 'in need of a life.' Maybe so, but I hope the need continues for at least a little while longer.

EJ Major: Try To Do Things We All Can Understand
Streetlevel Photoworks
(29th March—24th May, 2008)
The show travels to Germany, Toronto and Australia.

www.ejmajor.co.uk

- 1, 2 *Love Is...*
Film still – 2004-2006
- 3 *Marie Claire RIP, 1983/Can Ride*
C-Print – 2006
- 4 *Marie Claire RIP, 1985/Do Not Care*
C-Print – 2006
- 5 *Marie Claire RIP, 1986/Dread It*
C-Print – 2006
- 6 *Marie Claire RIP, 1989/Hear Rain*
C-Print – 2006
- 7 *From A Distance*
Digital Print – 2007

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1983 / can ride

4



1985 / do not care

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1986 / dread it

6



1989 / hear rain



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