



masquerade, the Berlin-based illustrator, a memorable, witty pairing of anti- and contemporary decadence (February 18–March 20, 2010). Known as an illustrator for big-name magazines, *The New Yorker*, Taschen books, and *Post*, Hajek's work often evokes the turn-of-the-century, where aesthetics are strong influences. So are the Sixties Mary Quant and Pucci look. In fact, legion. He is as deft in referencing the primitive look of turn-of-the-century shop signs, vintage film poster art, and artists like Chris Ofili. In Hajek's work, the grotesque and beautiful decoration collide with a more brand of sensual naughtiness.

Hajek's fanciful illustrations, done in acrylic, evoke theatrical tableaux, with decorating the main action and characters played as if with an audience in mind. His work is a lovely winking wit to the work of mollusks and octopi or beautiful wings—pass through the cabinet of curiosities. In *Tattooed Flowerhead*, a figure whose body is ornately tattooed with flowers, wears an enormous flower blossom head. A halo of vaguely sexual pitcher plants surrounds him—a character of embellishment for Hajek.

Of masquerade is one of his favorite themes. Figures wear blooming flowers, fish on their heads, blissfully or shocked from the real world by their masks. In the utterly charming *Underwater*, a human-sea-creature hybrids

perform a kind of underwater follies, a chorus line promenading and dancing alongside more conventional sea life in a style that suggests the mad-capped anything-goes allure of vintage cartoons. That altered state only adds to the air of enchantment in the drawings. A sense of ravenous possibility also reigns in confectionary, pastel-tinted works like *Charlotte-magie*, 2008, whose painterly proscenium is busy with visual information: a woman with a flower body and butterfly wings flies through a landscape of Pierrots, cartoon figures, dogs, seashells and ripe fruit. An air of fecund abundance and an erotic sumptuousness of nature evocative of Henri Rousseau characterize much of Hajek's work. Nothing seems outside the realm of possibility in his paintings, from birds with ladies' heads to a mermaid whose curly hair and maquillage stay intact even on a deep-sea dive in *Charlotte-wasser*, 2008.

The delight-factor so omnipresent in Hajek's work is undeniably enhanced by his juicy color schemes—Technicolor fantasias that alternate with more subdued vignettes in greys and blacks, as in *Masked Girls*, 2007, whose doe-eyed, dark-haired lass is reminiscent of Louise Brooks in G. W. Pabst's silent classic *Diary of a Lost Girl*. Hajek favors a vocabulary of cantaloupe, magenta, and vascular purple combined with a grainy, mottled wash of color that can suggest the aged patina of frescos.

Occasionally, Hajek's abundant, celebratory lyricism turns melancholy, as in the feverish, grim, but also hyper-imaginative *Dead Bird*, 2007, in which a crow's corpse seems to conjure up his grim fate in an overhead cartoon bubble. In the bubble, which suggests a window into the bird's thoughts or a porthole into the business going on inside his guts, a horrifying throng of bugs—beetles and crickets, caterpillars and centipedes—prepare to do their decomposition business. It is a grim, but typically imaginative, beautifully realized punctuation on an otherwise merry, delightful show.

—Felicia Feaster

### THREE SISTERS ATLANTA

For the Chinese, three is a perfect number (*ch'eng*) expressing wholeness and fulfillment. Instances of this predilection for triplicity abound: Lao-Tzu's trifold treasures, deep love, frugality, and the wisdom not to be ahead of the world; Buddhism's triple jewel, appropriated by the Taoists as the Tao, Books, and Community. Featuring works on paper by Chinese siblings Ling, Bo, and Hong Zhang, the exhibition *Three Sisters* operates in this tradition [Whitespace Gallery; February 26–April 3, 2010]. Growing up in Northeast China during the Cultural Revolution, the Zhangs present engaging individual responses to the precipitous Westernization of their culture. Whereas Ling, the eldest, seeks transcendence in Tibetan spirituality, twins Bo and Hong effect a subtly humorous and often surreal collision of their traditions with the West.

In Ling's ink and watercolor drawing *Culture and Nature*, 2006, twisted branches emerge from a vintage school desk, cascading to the ground. Dried and leafless, the branches are set against a ground of soft yet bright pastel hues, the image a metaphor for the burgeoning effects of education, suppressing the past while it lends hope for the future.

Its markings rendered in smudgy dark ink, a butterfly dominates *Dream of a Butterfly I: Pilgrim*, 2008. Above to the right, a monk walks forward into an abstracted space, as though toward the infinite, his back to the viewer like a Western Rückenfigur. Occidental, too, is the narrow triangular shadow he casts. An emblem of beauty and freedom but also of transience—its loveliness short-lived and easily destroyed—the butterfly echoes the monk's quest for release from material hindrances. Bo's response to the changes in her country is less spiritual than wry. The prints in her *Treasure Series*, 2008, admirably juxtapose spare, sharp-edged antique Chinese bowls from the Qing and Ming Dynasties to a gamut of "things," from drain covers and plumbing pipes to embossings from inglorious toilet seat covers. The wooden handle of a bathroom





## VIRTUOSO ILLUSION CAMBRIDGE, MA

plunger, for instance, fits into a delicate white and indigo porcelain bowl, which, turned upside-down, imitates the tool's rubber cup. Another bowl with blue and red motifs sits like a sink on top of curved PVC pipe fittings. As though suspended in air, a stunning red bowl—the color propitious in China—is surrounded with impressions of McDonald's coffee cup covers. And a chrome-plated drain cover hovers well above a bowl rimmed in blue and decorated with a dragon, esteemed both for its mythological associations and crimson hue. Drawing her imagery from objects connected with food and eating, as well as with elimination and waste, Bo makes a gently jocular statement about the memory of past glories in contrast with present realities. *Three Graces*, 2009, Hong's charcoal drawings on three Asian-style hanging scrolls, presents a dramatic trio of light-kissed *chevelures*. Seen from the back like Matisse's famous nudes, the luxuriant tresses hide all hints of the bearers' face or body, and stand for the three sisters, with Ling, "like a mother," in the center. On the side scrolls, the hair swings in graceful curves. In the center, a thick braid opens out into a fan-shaped expanse. The title also brings to mind the celebrated emanations of goddess Venus, a motif from Antiquity revived during the Renaissance. Equally important to Hong's conception, however, is the symbolism of hair in China: an expression of beauty, life force, and sexual energy. Significant as well is the observation that until the 1920s Chinese men often wore braids, which lends a humorous ambiguity to the image.

The work of the Zhang sisters offers intriguing and sometimes droll glimpses into an ancient culture experiencing millennial transformations.

—Dorothy M. Joiner

Andy Warhol was maybe the last man who should have been doing drag in the 1980s. His wrinkled skin formed creases in his foundation—as visible as the Great Wall from space—with canyons of skin filled in by lines of powder, another appropriate image for the era. Warhol's films were always sexually charged, but as an individual he was virtually asexual—although it was rumored that he had occasional phone sex with Truman Capote. As a woman, however, Andy may be his most sexually ardent incarnation, and the opportunity to see him in this role is a rare one. It's a good thing the video in which he's featured is silent, however, because you wouldn't be able to hear it anyway. Curated by Michael Rush, former director of the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, *Virtuoso Illusion: Cross-Dressing and the New Media Avant-Garde* is a kind of drag retrospective, charting audacious gender exploits from Marcel Duchamp to Ryan Trecartin with great candor [MIT List Visual Arts Center; February 5–April 4, 2010]. Unfortunately, however, not much care is given to the work itself.

In addition to a visible knowledge and respect for drag in art, Rush's other obvious fondness is sound bleed, which invades each space here well beyond a comfortable level. The audio for avant-garde film gems like Charles Atlas' intensely iconic *Hail the New Puritan*, 1985–1986, starring Michael Clark and the incomparable Leigh Bowery, is lost behind wave after wave of surrounding noise, and intimate performances by John Kelly—in any number of female personas—are upstaged by something as simple as sound. In its long history, drag has *always* made its presence known, and the cacophony of auditory stimuli here is—in that sense—just as in-your-face, but a severe disservice is done to nearly all video and film as a result.

Ryan Trecartin's movie, *K-Corea INC. K (Section A)*, 2009, is like a tranny *Girls Gone Wild* on methamphetamines, complete with a raucous bus of fake blondes making out. The video bounces in and out of several vignettes with each character, including Trecartin

himself, donning a blonde wig. The scene is frenetically edited to any other trait you might associate with drag. Every bit of dialogue is lacinated into terms, rephrased and delivered in fragments. In thirty-one minutes, the film is a mindfuck of quickly moving images, cheaply produced like YouTube. By a cast of boys in drag, however, the issue isn't so much ratio for the projection was revealing only the upper left corner, cutting out the text inherent in the exploits.

With so many films—genuinely forty, sixty, even eighty minutes—viewing in small rooms with no method of sound protection or earplugs. It would even seem to be were ample room to sit and eavesdrop. Rush's exhibition is obvious selection of work is brilliant: gender-bending practices over time. *Virtuoso Illusion* ultimately defines be known for—originality—but these things for what they are otherwise—should always be

ABOVE: Ryan Trecartin, *K-Corea INC. K (Section A)*, 2009, HD video, 31:20 minutes [courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York]