

15 MINUTE INTERVIEW BY MAUD JACQUIN

Maud Jacquin In 2008, we collaborated on your series of solo exhibitions at the Marc Chagall National Museum, the Picasso Museum and at the Frac Paca. Since then your work has taken a new turn. At the time you were hiding with alter-egos such as Peter Pan or Alice from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland whereas you have now fully accepted the autobiographical, or shall we say auto-fictional, dimension in your work.

Alice Anderson I used to play with the characters of Alice and Peter Pan, but also with other characters, all red-haired like me, in my films and sculptures. I'm getting to the point where I see how an autobiography can be purely fictional. An autobiography can manifest itself somewhere else other than in the immediate or literal truth of a story. It is now clear to me that my work is a compulsive and obsessive production through which I explore and give shape to my childhood. I'm reinventing my childhood by playing with the fictional nature of memory – which is concerned with the notion of time – and its infinite layers. For me, memory is the master of fiction. Memory is a reconstruction of a reconstruction, which constantly changes. Each memory is a distortion; therefore each memory is a creation in itself. Images that we create with brain are not linked to what our eyes can see but to the work of memory itself. The philosopher Henri Bergson says that in order to talk about the past, we must dream.

MJ I have the impression that you have been creating more connections between your filmic and plastic works recently. You could say that the drawings, photographs and sculptures now draw the films out into the gallery space. But unlike Matthew Barney, whose sculptures are often taken from his actual film sets, you create new situations in a more abstract way, elaborating on the characters and motifs of your films.

AA Further than Barney's? [Laughs] Well, I don't see any difference between working inside or outside of a filmic space. The sculptures are other aspects of the narrative in an exhibition space. A body of work that has crystallised. In my films time runs in a linear way –but also develops in successive layers like in sculpture where time plays differently.

MJ And the doll who had an autonomous existence has now penetrated the filmic space. At the Picasso Museum, you made an installation – Spectre (2008) – in which she was exhibited in a glass coffin. What could have been the end of something marked the beginning of the doll's story, as if you had decided to go back in time.

AA The starting point of the loop you are describing started in 2006 when I had my exact replica, scaled down to a height of approximately 50cms, made by a sculptor at the Madame Tussauds waxworks museum in London. I had the strange feeling that this little doll took control over me in

some way, so the first thing I produced with this doll was a series of photographs called Master Puppet towards the end of 2006. In that series one could obviously see that the doll is controlling me. Month by month, my anxiety about this increased, so I decided to put her in a glass coffin to get rid of her. I was in a double bind. In a way I couldn't commit myself to such an act, but I knew I had to do it. I went for the glass so it was less definitive.

Months later, the writer Louise Gray, a great friend of mine, gave me a book called *The Dolls' Day*, a 1915 children's novel by Carine Cadby. The title and its illustrations inspired me a lot. As the title suggests, it is a story about some dolls escaping from the playroom to have adventures in the outside world, but the photographs accompanying the text are fascinating – all the animals that Cadby's dolls encounter are dead, in that they have been stuffed by a taxidermist. The book led me to imagine a long internal journey with the doll, a sort of a circular novel with many chapters happening in different locations. I decided to start with a chapter directly called *The Dolls' Day* (2008). It was shot in an abandoned water tower in Lille. The story about a doll with no name who goes back into her parents' past to seek revenge. The subsequent chapter *The Night I Became a Doll* (2009), was filmed in a 17th-century mansion in the middle of the swamps of the Camargue, about a girl who stops moving, eating and speaking to the point where she becomes a doll to her mother.

MJ Does the fact that you started with *The Dolls' Day* relate to this idea of going back in time? Could it be that *The Dolls' Day* is in fact the second chapter of the "circular novel" you are talking about? I would like to know more about the storyline connecting this film and *The Night I Became a Doll*.

AA The two stories are entwined. Obviously, things are not as simple as they first appear! If you place yourself in the girl's point of view, *The Dolls' Day* comes first, because this is where the girl's birth takes place. If you now look at it from the doll's point of view, *The Night I Became a Doll* comes first because this is where the doll's birth and its revenge takes place.

MJ Your recent films articulate more fragmented narratives, multiplying the instabilities of time and space which brings to mind David Lynch's films for instance. Is this an attempt to mirror the functioning of memory itself?

AA Yes. Memory works this way and you're right to say that disconnections of time and space are the basic language I use for my films and my sculptures. In *The Night I Became a Doll*, for instance, I'm using a gigantic circular magnifying glass to create a dialogue with the idea of a non-Euclidian space. The lens generates a physical sensation of the world becoming suddenly upside down. In fact the world I'm talking about is just an alternative experience of the world itself. However, this process seems to be the way the brain works

and drives our memory. We learn so hard to articulate the way our brain works along a linear and chronological canvas to fit within the cultural and social reality. It is a permanent pressure we've been taught to repress our perceptions into common acceptance, you don't have to do a lot to unleash our perceptions into completely alternative mind routes. This undisciplined intelligence of what surrounds us embeds itself in childhood. Another book by Lewis Carroll – Sylvie and Bruno – plays with the dislocation of time as children construct parallel worlds. The Dolls' Day and The Night I Became a Doll haven't got one layer, but many layers.

MJ These architectures are often circular and claustrophobic. Circular rooms, menacing towers and narrow spaces form your obsessive universe. If, for you, the circularity refers to the idea of endless repetition and non-linear time, it also symbolises the isolation experienced by your characters. Could you tell us more about the oppressive dimension of these circular shapes?

AA I'm obsessed with the circular shape; it has a lot to do with anxiety. It refers to enclosure. The circle is the only shape I can see properly, and therefore comprehend, properly. Even though the more I think I understand it, the more I realise how much I'm far from this understanding. Circular, isn't it? Even when the shape itself is not a round one in itself, it is the obsession, which works in a circular way. For example, Rapunzel (2008), my installation at National Museum Marc Chagall talks about enclosure, about

being enclosed, and it uses 3,000 metres of red dolls' hair to do this. In the pop tale of the Brothers Grimm, the character Rapunzel is imprisoned in a tower. My Rapunzel echoes a specific period of my childhood, the fact that someone is enclosed in a room.

MJ Architecture occupies a central place in your films, a space that is generally permeated by a psychological charge. Is it fair to say that your narratives both originate in and reveal the buildings' own stories?

AA Architectures have always been the starting point of my stories. This is the triggering point of recollection. It reminds me of the late choreographer Pina Bausch when she explained that dance begins when we remain speechless in front of architectures. And then there's Alfred Hitchcock and his continual attention to architecture – he would re-write a sequence of his script, to make it fit to some peculiar architecture he was confronted with.

MJ You also create analogies between architecture and bodies. In *The Dolls' Day*, for instance, the organic dimension of the space gives the viewers the bizarre impression of penetrating both a bodily and mental interior. Do you agree with this reading? Why this connection between bodies and buildings?

AA That's absolutely right. Our relation to memory and childhood is very much a physical relation. When I remember things, I live them in my body – it is also a physical experience. We were talking about the brain's role in the memory process like if it was disembodied we know this is not exactly what it is. All this happens within a body. The idea of the body is very important to me. I believe there is a true “thinking” of the body. In my work there is always something that says something about the body. There is always a physical emotion in what I show.

My body has always been my main material. I started as an artist doing performances and since then I have been working with elements of the body. As far as the architecture is concerned, there is an obvious intimate connection between the body and the architecture.

When I discovered the water tower that I used in *The Dolls' Day* it was an immediate shock. It was, for me, the perfect metaphorical projection of the body and a perfect mirror for my story. When I saw the hole in the ceiling, I immediately thought of a cervix and the *mise-en-scène* became obvious. The sequence where the daughter puts her head into the hole to come into the world was so clear to me. And when I discovered the large central leaking pipe I immediately made the analogy between childbirth and the pain that the mother has when she realised that she has given birth to a girl and not a boy.

The body becomes a piece of architecture in *The Night I Became a Doll*. I've made the body as part of the site. The body of the young girl merges with the architecture and furniture, as if she was part of it. It is as if the girl wanted to merge into the walls of the labyrinthine tower.

MJ There is a new element in the content of your stories as well. While in your previous films the daughter was systematically the victim of her mother's malicious intentions, *The Dolls' Day* and *The Night I Became a Doll* stage the revolt of the daughter who performs the most horrific crimes to complete her revenge. Are you aware of this evolution?

AA There is always some sort of violence, which comes out of the relation between the mother and the daughter. You're right to say that in some of my earlier films this violence was self-directed and it is now more towards the mother. However, the whole point is about power, the idea of power. Power is always the central point of my work. Manifestations of power come and go both ways. For me, the family is the footprint of all political organisations. It is an original unit where we have many aspects of relationships and cultural traditions. In the mother-daughter relationship there aren't two actors, but three. Power is the third element.

MJ For me, these two films investigate the role of storytelling with relation to identity and the resolution of traumatic experience. If in your previous works you were interested in questioning traditional narratives and the act of rewriting, you now seem to engage in a reflection on narration itself.

AA We've mentioned earlier on that autofiction and storytelling are directly linked with the work of memory. In *The Dolls' Day*, the father reveals his story to his daughter and this is what gives her enough strength to revolt. In *The Night I Became a Doll*, it's a matter of silence.

MJ True to your circular narratives, can we conclude with the beginning of a new story... can you let us know what your next chapter will be?

AA The next chapter will take place in Algeria where my mother comes from. In a few years' time, all the chapters will come together as one circular novel.