

Cathy Watkins

In order to escape the weighty artistic legacy of St Ives and the seductive landscapes of Cornwall, Catharine Watkins has been studying childrens' toys. In particular, females from the Bratz™ series of sexualised dolls, masks of the Overlord, weapons of the Underworld, toys produced with a theme for Halloween and the ubiquitous Barbie™. Based in St Ives and Penzance, Watkins finds a plethora of subjects to study, draw and paint, in the two local Woolworth stores. Barbie is an 'icon' and powerful presence in her personal childhood and is remembered as an object of compelling desirability. Barbie also happens to be one of the most successful brands of the twentieth century.

For Watkins, Barbie represents much of what is most damaging (and misogynistic) in our culture, particularly regarding the representation of the female form. Barbie's anatomy bears no relation to any female at any age and worse still, she plays a large part in the extreme sexualisation of children's toys and the extent to which current notions of 'beauty' are established in relation to the influences of pornography. In the artist's attempts to represent her she quickly discovered that she is not only incapable of standing unaided (her feet are at an angle in order to fit her into high-heeled shoes), she is also unable to sit without her legs open. Her most stable position is either on all fours with her ass in the air or attached by a wire to her plinth.

In *Head First* 2006 Watkins is playing on the originality and power of a cultural brand image as well as pondering the post modern status of American culture (from where Barbie originates). In choosing to paint Barbie, she has realised the medium's unique potential to fashion a new version of reality without the need for props. In her fantasy world Barbie is not a heroic protagonist occupying a canvas in the convention of painting (or in the mind of an eight year old). Instead she is portrayed in her most stable position, almost incidentally and as much of an accidental occurrence as are the splodges, paint rings and other paint remnants which appear on the cardboard on which she is represented.

Selected Biography

1963
Born Portsmouth, Hampshire
1979–81
Portsmouth College of Art
1981–4
BA Fine Art,
Goldsmiths College of Art
2002
Moved to Cornwall
2006
Currently studying University College
Falmouth, MA 20th Century Art and Design

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2005
Postcards from St Ives, The Gallery in Cork Street, London
2003
Coast to coast, The Gallery in Cork Street, London
2001
Beside the Sea, The Gallery in Cork Street, London
1999
Painting holiday, The Conningsby Gallery, London
1992
Intimate distance, The Photographer's Gallery, London

Selected Group Exhibitions

2005
The Little Picture Show, Rainy Day Gallery, Penzance
Artaid 2005, Royal College of Art, London
Tremendous, Falmouth Art Gallery, Falmouth
2004
The Little Picture Show, Rainy Day Gallery, Penzance
2003
Women at Charles Russell, New Fetter Lane, London



Head First 2006, Charcoal and oil paint on cardboard, 33 x 54 cm © the Artist