

NATHANIA RUBIN , *BALLET OR THEATRE* . by Vanessa Desclaux

Figures, often drawn with pencil or charcoal, surface from Nathania Rubin's relentless daily, often nightly, work in the studio. These figures are mostly characters, neither real, nor totally imaginary. In some of her works, well-known historical characters, drawn from photographs found on the Internet, stand-in for the people she is close to. These characters suddenly seem awkwardly familiar; Anne Frank, Shirley Temple, Sigmund Freud or Bob Dylan all have in common a physical or psychological trait of the person they embody in Rubin's drawn world. Time and movement are introduced in her drawings through video animation, revealing how the same sheet of paper is worked through over and over again, letting shapes and figures disappear and reappear in order to produce a fragmented narrative, a series of actions, a dialogue.

Women are the central protagonists of this ever-changing landscape that Rubin keeps drawing, erasing and drawing again in the confine of her darkened studio equipped with a smart apparatus composed of a drawing table lit from below and filmed from above by a camera capturing all of her hand-movements. A certain sense of isolation transpires from Rubin's short animated films and drawings as we are introduced into intensely intimate settings: a young woman's sleep (*Untitled (Reader/Sleeper)* 2011), a father-daughter conversation (*My girl: a case study* 2009), the representation of a young girl's obsession (*DSM series: attachment disorder* 2010), or a sexual encounter (*Crowded Chapters 1 and 2* 2012). Identity appears in her work as multiple, contradictory and elusive; and femininity comes close to a black hole capable of swallowing us into a maddening labyrinth of transformative potential.

*Ballet or Theatre* is the title of one of Rubin's drawings (2011) depicting six young girls of different ages, all facing the viewer quite frontally, although the faces of two of them are almost totally blurred. The title first captured my attention for its unresolved character: *Ballet or Theatre*. In ballet, dancers, with the exception of the soloist or prima ballerina, are anonymous; like pawns in a game of chess, they are interchangeable. In theatre, on the contrary, each character is unique, embodied by an actor absorbed in his role. But ballet, much more than theatre, suggests shifting movements on stage, endlessly producing patterns. To the fluidity of ballet, theatre evokes the structure of an organised narrative (in scenes, in acts), the rhythm of actors' voices as opposed to the rhythm of dancers' movement. If Rubin's drawings and animations seem inhabited by a multiplicity of characters that might even take on different faces in the space of one film, her work nevertheless carries a demanding ambivalence in regards to whom these feminine figures might ultimately represent. The authorial figure, the artist herself, could be seen at once embodied in all of these characters, divided and transformed through this intense polymorphic movement. I have recently come across American poet Judy Grahn's writing; she wrote portraits of what she calls "common women". And yet there is nothing as singular as a common woman; I think Nathania would agree with that.

*On weekends, she dreams of becoming a tree; a tree that dreams it is ground up and sent to the paper factory, where it lies helpless in sheets, until it dreams of becoming a paper airplane, and rises on its own current; where it turns into a bird, a great coasting bird that dreams of becoming more free, even than that, a feather, finally, or a piece of air with lightning in it. [1]*

The pensive Anne, the wonderful Alice, the philosopher, the writer, the artist, the daughter, the lover: they all take turns and make appearances; they disappear, change into another character in the next scene, in the next drawing, in the next film. Spectators are warned: Rubin's stage is crowded.

[1] Judy Grahn, *Carol, in the park, chewing on straws*, in *The Work of a Common Woman: Collected Poetry (1964-1977)*. New York: St. Martin's Press (1982)



*Ballet or Theater* . 2011 . graphite on paper . 47 x 62,5 cm