

## Bridget Baker

JOÃO FERREIRA GALLERY, CAPE TOWN, 8 - 25 FEBRUARY 2006



*The Blue Collar Girl*, 2004, triptych, lambda print and diaec 5450x2415

*But being a sensible woman, she subdued her terrors and turned over and went to sleep again* is an immaculate display of artistic perfection. The exhibition consists mainly of lambda prints mounted in Diasec, a cold lamination process on Plexiglas, a method Baker had done in Düsseldorf. This is a very beautiful yet expensive mounting process that probably requires a second house mortgage. I first saw this kind of mounting at an international art fair, a process that has since become flavour of the month. Although very fragile (collectors beware and God forbid it gets dropped by the hanging team), it is a beautiful process. It

has an extremely magical quality that draws the viewer to the printed surface. This is exactly what Baker's work demands.

When I first saw *The Maiden Perfect* on a group show at João Ferreira Gallery in 2005, the picture was printed on the old "look - how - clever - arty - I - am - digital - print - on - canvas - from - Scan - Shop - that - all - us - lonely - wretched - art - students - use - and - we - never - get - on - a - show" format. It didn't really work. This time it did, very much so. It is not only the minimalist format and presentation that saves this exhibition. It is Baker. From the early years we were all aware of this artist's obsessive nature – the hand-embroidered kick-boards, the thousands of leaves cut out in Stellenbosch, the hours spent giving wax jobs to numerous strangers in Basel. For her *Blue Collar Girl* series of photographs Baker employed similar strategies as the ones she is used to working with in the film industry. Every aspect of the shoot is performed. When this reviewer once dared question, "Why not use Photoshop," he was immediately met with the retort: "Are you mad?"

Baker hangs people (actors) from tall buildings with thin strings. She also hangs people from rusty shipwrecks in Maputo (rumour has it that this was in fact gallerist João Ferreira fully kitted and wiggled). Her subjects vandalise familiar spaces with the Baker slogan: "*Only You Can.*"

While *Blue Collar Girl* has seen many an actor nearly plunging to their demise, it is an interesting project. *Blue Collar Girl* (an actor) has been spotted dangling from Old Mutual Heights in Cape Town, working her way through the crowded streets of Delhi; she was even seen finding her feet on a tower at Vooruit Art Centre, in Ghent. This is a venue famous for hosting – early in their careers – the band REM and the late, dead, Kurt Cobain.

In these performances, *Blue Collar Girl* wears a Joan Collins wig and a blue coat. It is a chroma-key blue coat. Chroma-key is the film process by which a subject or background is removed from a particular scene. It is the process by which Wonder Woman gets to fly. But, in this case, our *Blue Collar Girl* does not fly. She is ultimately there. She can be keyed out, and therefore does not exist. She is the forgotten *Invisible Woman*.

This particular project within the exhibition's context seems the most sound. While *The Maiden Perfect* and *The Botched Epic Attempt to Escape the Maiden*, are amazing works in their own right, they sit a bit dry. No doubt, these will ultimately find their place in the mind of Bridget Baker, but for now, formally, they don't really cut it. The show was neatly packaged with a nice little catalogue produced by Bell-Roberts Publishing, with an all-you-need-to-know piece of text by Kathryn Smith. This saves me from going into all that feminist stuff.

Ed Young

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