

S raphine Pick

b.1964

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The shadowy figure of the wolfman moves through S raphine Pick’s art as he does folklore, fairytales and horror films. This is a connection that runs deeper than the use of a shared motif. Pick delves into the same pool of imagery, devices and effects as these other cultural forms, and seeks to move the viewer in similar ways.

Pick’s art crosses between the real and the imaginary, inner and outer worlds. Hybrid half-human, half-beast figures, like the mythic wolfman, prowl this transitional zone. Here, Pick links the wolfman to the power of drawing.

The wolfman is a symbol of transformation, the ‘beast’ that forces his way out of ‘man’. Pick uses drawing as a tool of transformation, a way of bringing something into being through mark-making.¹ Pick’s drawings hover between resolution and irresolution, between concealing and revealing. Like the wolfman, her drawings are perpetually caught in the process of becoming something else. This is the source of both their power and anguish.

Pick’s drawing method is intuitive and driven by the process of mark-making rather than the need to tell stories or clearly present imagery. Her drawings often resemble scribbles or doodles. In this case, a pristine white-painted surface is attacked with a variety of different forms of mark-making. A flurry of rapidly made dense horizontal strokes suggests a body of water, while a delicate spidery line faintly traces the body of the wolfman. Claw-like marks run up and down one side of the composition, channelling the spirit of the wolfman into the pencil. In some places, the painted surface has been worked into rather than worked on, as though pierced by sharp claws. The surface of the drawing here becomes like the skin of a victim, ripped open through the frenzied attack of the wolfman, or the artist.

While emphasising the process of drawing, Pick’s work channels a host of forms and images. This drawing has the scattering of disparate figurative elements in various states of resolution that characterises Pick’s dreamy, hallucinatory paintings. But in Pick’s art, these recognisable elements always sit oddly beside each other, withholding or frustrating

interpretation. Like the fairytale or horror film, this is an art that speaks to the sensory and the imaginary rather than the intellect. Pick refuses to offer us the silver bullet of easy interpretation; it would kill off the wolfman and all he represents in Pick’s art.

Pick is often grouped with the ‘Pencil Case Painters’ who emerged out of Christchurch in the early 1990s, such as Tony de Lautour and Bill Hammond. But she can also be placed within a longer tradition of imaginary and fantastic art in New Zealand; this grouping would include Tony Fomison and Leo Bensemann. Fomison also invoked the wolfman as a symbol of the creative artist, prowling the edges of civilised society. All of these artists look back to a longer tradition of European art, especially the nightmarish visions of Hieronymus Bosch and Spanish artist Francisco Jos  de Goya.

Aaron Lister

¹ *S raphine Pick: Painter* is a film made about the artist in 2007. It shows Pick painting and talking about her work.

Galleries and museums:

www.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz
www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz
www.hamishmckaygallery.com
www.michaellett.com

Web search:

Leo Bensemann
 Hieronymus Bosch
 Tony de Lautour
 Tony Fomison
 Francisco Jos  de Goya
 Bill Hammond

