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SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Foal" by Sarah Fox
Where: STC Art Gallery, Bldg. B-103, Pecan Street campus
When: March 2 – April 2, 2020
Hours: Regularly: 8am-3pm Tues., Wed., Thurs.
Contact: artgallery@southtexascolleg.edu

About Masculinity

Concepts of masculinity and gender neutrality are questioned through the unusual medium of cyanotypes on cotton.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

"Foal" is a medley of gender-linked influences absorbed by the artist and whipped into a visual fantasy. This exhibition by San Antonio artist Sarah Fox, brings together related techniques to consider concepts of masculinity. The tension of masculinity and gender neutrality are presented through collages and the cyanotype technique on cotton, which produces a surreal mood. Originally used for schematic blueprints, the cyanotypes print negative, reversing light and shadow. This exhibition welcomes visitors at the South Texas College Art Gallery through March depending on the schedule of school closures.

The trigger for this series was the birth book, “And Then I Met You”, an imaginary version of the creation of her family unit that Fox made for her adopted son. Charmingly illustrated, the family is represented by fantastical hooved creatures, and the document evokes the feeling of mythical creation stories. Its dreamlike quality erupts into the subsequent works which comprise “Foil”. The photographs and collages evolve into a general thinking about male masculinity and what it means.

Why shouldn't boys be allowed to be sensitive beings?

Fox explained that she grew up with an imperfect body and she relates to strange hybrid creatures that deal with a flawed body; to her, they have a feminine effect about them, which blurs their sexuality. The cyanotypes with their intense blue hues symbolizing the male gender invite an immersion into a poetic vision of the masculine. While blue is a trustworthy hue, the darker blues can move into opposition. For instance, “Stud” elegantly combines a horse's head with the upper torso of a human male. Even though horses are typically genderless beings in Fox's work, the dualities of both sexes are considered—they are beautiful yet strong, graceful yet tough. Dominance is in question here, along with gender neutrality.

A featured work is “The Story of the Pony Boys (After Darger)”. This work exists as a cyanotype as well as the original collage from which it was photographed; it is a playbook of influences that are blended, re-worked, and shaped to Fox's message. The concept of pony boys has come a long way since the early 1900s when it referred to men who owned a horse. Ponyboy has also come to refer to sexual dominance in role-playing. S.E. Hinton's 1967 novel, *The Outsiders*, portrayed a Pony Boy as the more sensitive and innocent counterpart to the aggressive, brutish males that dominate his book, and it was this character that resonated with Fox's feelings toward gender neutrality. In her work, hybrid horse-boys cavort in a pastoral setting; one dozes amongst blooms of poppies, while a youth playfully throws flower petals in the air. As the mother of a young boy Fox had begun questioning cultural roles of gender, foreseeing the future stereotypical male activities awaiting him.

“A lot of work in this show is me working with the idea of feminine-masculine and okaying that little boys may be sensitive, too,” she exclaimed. The storytelling art of Henry Darger had an impact on Fox through shared sensibilities and their thematic fascination with childhood innocence and the unreal; interestingly, Darger's major book was typed with a blue ribbon. Like him, Fox creates a utopia that gives her horse-boys the permission and freedom to be as feminine as they wish. “Crying Colts” shows two young adult horse-men crying in a mirror composition. Their heads are lifted upward in unison as tears flow copiously past their tattooed shoulders in a defiant display of unbridled “feminine” emotion. “Foil” questions the pressures and constraints that are placed on little boys early in their life.

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