



## ATHENA PAPADOPOULOS Emalin, London, UK

In 'The Smurfette', eight anthropomorphic sculptures strike poses on a wine-stained carpet, as if straining to stand upright after a long night of revelry. Athena Papadopoulos has made simple frames from wood and deer antlers, which have been transformed into hairy, boisterous creatures. They stamp the ground with chunky high heels, while an assortment of gothic tat dangles from their arms: shrivelled G-strings hardened with glue, freeze-dried worms and gold chains strung with taxidermy charms (my favourite: a crow's foot with red painted nails).

These over-preened figures teeter on a disturbing threshold between woman and object – and intentionally so. Papadopoulos has dolled up the frames with almost every cosmetic enhancement available on the high street, from hair dye to lipstick, pasting their limbs with a skin-pink concoction of glue and synthetic hair that's been tinted with self-tanner, foundation and freckle concealer. As a result, the figures become feminized consumer archetypes, evoking a sleazy fantasy of 'white trash'. The exhibition title is equally damning: 'smurfette' is urban slang for 'slut' – a lone woman in an all-male world, made for men to fuck.

Papadopoulos's installations are populated by familiar female character-types – monstrous brides and seasoned cougars – literally objectified. In her show 'Wolf Whistles' at New York's Shoot the Lobster late last year, Papadopoulos took objectification to an extreme, casting her protagonists as lumps of meat. Styled like haunches of pork, dainty pigskin cushions draped in gold jewellery were hung from butcher hooks. They dangle somewhere between the cute and the abject: celebrating and violating the female body in equal measure. 'The Smurfette' continues in this vein. On one hand, the ornamental dames are nothing but clothes-hangers for chintzy pins and bras. Yet, on the other, these smurfettes are not without agency. While beauty creams are the materials of self-objectification, they are equally those of self-construction. And revelry is its own form of empowerment – as in the witches' Sabbath, which this gathering of animistic presences somehow recalls. These bedraggled smurfettes, then, take ownership of a stereotype, indulging and accelerating it to a point of transfiguration.

Four black and white collages surrounding the smurfettes show Papadopoulos's doodles and photographs, as if torn from a scrapbook. She has transferred these onto fabric, as though they were temporary tattoos. *Dough-Eyed Foxxx* (all works 2017) depicts a wrinkled woman in various guises: here in a tiny bikini with tattoos on display, there with a cigarette dangling from her shrivelled lips. In one corner of the collage, a spit-roasted pig burps out the word, 'WhoreMoan'; in another, a squall of maggots is overlaid by gruesome female faces, blackening into a cloud that looks ready to break.

Papadopoulos's perverse misogyny and string of pantomime-esque characters seem to ask: can voyeurism be exacerbated to the point of empowerment? As if informed by the wall works, each smurfette is decorated with a chain of resin letters that spell out acts of physical degradation: 'BRUISED', 'BATTERED', 'SPIT OUT', 'CHEWED UP'. The words double as titles and are somewhat reclaimed as wordplay – phrases that describe Papadopoulos's methods of production. To soil the carpet just so, the gallerist told me, Papadopoulos filled her mouth with red wine and spat. There is also a masticating, digestive quality to all her works, which use gastric medicines like Milk of Magnesia, Gaviscon and Pepto-Bismol as fabric dye. The imagery exaggerates a battered stereotype and in the process transforms it: the ugly, over-sexualized crone, reclaimed as an outrageous, orgasmic heretic.

Izabella Scott

ens to spill the viewer into the screen, this film begins with Van Lieshout deciding to collaborate with his parents and siblings, nearly all of whom are social workers, on a 'family movie' that will 'make a difference to others'. His brother's response is brusque: 'This is bullshit.' What follows is a funny, painful portrait of Van Lieshout family values, in which the artist shadows his relatives as they meet with aggressive clients, run art classes for child refugees and massage sick patients in a mission hospital. In short interview fragments, his father discusses his own spiritual journey from childhood Catholicism to adult atheism. The confession of sin comes up a lot, as does the concept of vocation. We might note that his son's nervy, pitilessly honest work embodies both these things.

How, then, might art escape the artist's ego and make the 'difference to others' Van Lieshout describes? The film *Basement* (2014), in which he refurbishes the subterranean living quarters of the Hermitage Museum's resident mouse-killer cats, provides one answer. This home improvement project was the artist's contribution to Manifesta 10 – not that the Russian kitties noticed. They were too busy enjoying their new scratching posts and blankets. What did they care if we strange, hairless apes call such things art?

Tom Morton

