

Jacinthe Loranger

Neon knight is a digital bitch

Jacinthe Loranger's work is an exploded scrapbook of fantasies. One might imagine her as a metalhead girl in a basement bedroom, collaging to Black Sabbath in the 80s. Now Jacinthe reigns over gallery rooms and fills them aggressively. This is how a girl gets off to heavy metal.

For her exhibition entitled *Neon knight is a digital bitch* at Eastern Edge Gallery, Jacinthe pulls out all the stops. Her past work includes video, performance and photography, as well as installations driven by silkscreen and collage. Also, papier mache props – painted glossy and rainbow-hued – figure prominently. To walk into her spaces is to fall down the rabbit-hole.

The viewer may recognize visual imagery from the music she references in the title of the exhibition; "Neon Knight" and "Digital Bitch" are both Black Sabbath songs. However, knights and swords are only the beginning. The work in this exhibition demonstrates dissatisfaction with the confines of heavy metal imagery. Jacinthe throws the whole game gleefully into the abyss of imagination. Hilarious creatures lurk around eye-ball piles, severed heads do a psychedelic dance and colour bursts over every surface. Furthermore, in Jacinthe's imagination there are no confines to the identity of the female player in the quests and battles of metal lore.

She's not the only woman bored of just being seen as a groupie at the concert, a position that places one outside the real action, or as an inferior character in the narratives of the music. In her article "Smoking in the Grrrls Room: Feminism and Cock Rock" (www.thestranger.com/seattle/smokin-in-the-grrrls-room) Hannah Levin ruminates on her love of 80's heavy metal, saying "I've always thought that a key facet of my personal feminist identity was built on the motto 'Go where girls aren't supposed to go.'" She goes on to say that it was part of empowering herself to collect knowledge of pop-culture's language of misogyny and to also develop a sense of humour about it. Like many marginalized groups in society have found, owning the language of repression – turning it on its head (as in the fond usage of homophobic and racial slurs within the communities once victimized by the terms) as well as lampooning that language – is an act of power.

Jacinthe does a similar thing, sauntering into Black Sabbath songs that are drenched in misogyny (especially "Digital Bitch") and throwing a wild party with what she finds there, on her terms and with a raging sense of humour. However, she doesn't seek to satirize the genre out of resentment; rather she celebrates it as the silly, raunchy, cartoonish, fun time it is. Jacinthe doesn't doubt her right to head-bang in unison with the guys, in fact she knows she rocks the fantasy harder than most.

Sure enough the battle between knights and digital bitches seems like a pretty fun time. This work is not alienating – it's feminism for all, and gore to be laughed at and relished *Ren and Stimpy*-style. In this fantasyland, girls gross-out the boys in vagina shoes, the boys swing maces around, everyone gets drenched in blood – it's like a Gwar concert! However, the one part where the clouds darken over the party is when the Gorgon shows up. Rather than actively threaten, she disturbs. Her rainbow-hued snake-hair is as animated as ever but she herself is a charred grimace.

The Medusa is a potent symbol; her visage represents the pinnacle of female rage, the slaying of her is an obstacle to be surmounted by a hero. Her decapitation Freud saw as a metaphor for castration. Perhaps her presence in this exhibition is simply a grim reminder of everything that could go wrong. Amid the raucous good-times there will always lurk the underbelly of reality; true violence, exploitation. Medusa, with all her complex readings, may here represent psychological trauma in all its forms. Like the one party guest who is permanently scarred but insists on showing up, the party can't quite ignore that person and the risks they represent to everyone.

This exhibition is a tour de force, a grandiose collision of the ridiculous and the sinister. Jacinthe Loranger shows off her imaginative powers with wild abandon, conjuring a fantasy world with papier mache and silkscreen. The grandwizards of heavymetal would be impressed.

Stacey Watson is a Calgary-based artist, instructor and curator of Pith Gallery.