Blurred Vision: New Narrative Art – Steven Psyllos

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Blurred Vision (Blurred Books) is a visit to the other side, a journey more familiar to some of us than others. If the book was sold in comic shops it would be a more highbrow selection than the latest Marvel offering. But to approach this collection of narrative art from a capital-A art perspective, the fare is light and freeing. We all know most things in art these days swing conceptual, yet this blend of narratives offers just as tasty a plate. The mind is intrigued while the eye is tantalized.

Some pieces are presented with a mature comic book feel. No longer limited to the men in tights and flying ladies, other sections of the brain are here tinkered with. With a quick flip through the pages, you can see the varied manner of illustration at play: some works are life-like ("Hangover" by Karl Stevens), others sweet and poetic ("Love Song" by Bishakh Som).
Toc Fetch’s acid trip "The 20th Century Tuesday of a Norman (V.2, No.1)" is the most intense of the offerings. The dark labyrinth of a storyline has the delicious undertone of Rosemary’s Baby, fully utilizing the possibilities of this medium as Fetch quickly shifts realities sequence by sequence. Fetch indulges in the thick syrpy lifefluid of philosophy and theology, his beautiful realistic illustrations are cinematic, laden with dramatic lighting and composition to ground the fantastic in the everyday. This blend makes the story that much more grotesque and disturbing—an absolute pleasure to read.

Hans Rickhart’s "Cochlea and Eustachia" also realizes the opportunities afforded by the artform. The seductive line of these illustrations enriches the experience while box by box the story moves forward without ever moving. When Eustachia’s head gets stuck in a giant spiked land mine, Cochlea picks up a sharp rock and rips through the surface—releasing dozens of trapped birds—and then pulls the flaccid balloon sac from off Eustachia’s neck, only to elongate the neck into a thick sprouting tree. Surprised, Cochlea cracks the tree in half, etches a face onto the bark, and walks off with her transformed friend, all smiles.

NY Arts’ own D. Dominick Lombardi’s "Post Apocalyptic Tattoos" grace the cover, more specifically Heads #601-700. Lombardi’s style is a graffiti-ish turn of mutated surrealism. His bulbous forms seem boiled or made of clay, with a texture that piles on the page. If it weren’t for the adjoining poems/narratives, one might think the characters exist in a darker realm, one of decay and nuclear radiation sickness—perhaps the "post apocalyptic" tag. He contributes three poem pieces: "Hercules and Digitus," "Boy with a Clubbed Foot (Potato Eyes)" and "Blue Boy at Ground Zero." The poems are a unique way to tell the story, line by line giving life to the character drawn beside it.

Dash Shaw’s "Cartooning Symbolia" begins as an exposition of a cartoon’s devices, or vocabulary—proven tools to say something through images. For example: a dotted silhouette connotes an invisible person. After the second or third example though, the reader/viewer finds the subplot that is really driving this work. Yet another example of an experimental form of storytelling, Shaw is here toying with the structure of the narrative, adding another interesting element to deepen the meaning.

The relationship between text and image as a means to tell a story brings a certain truth not able to be captured by one method alone. This collection is refreshing in many ways, more complex and intriguing in others. Ultimately, you should just sit back and enjoy the ride.