

RUGGED

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DAME FINE
IN THE WORLD
OF TATOUGES AND
LOW-BROW ART

WORDS - ERIC HESSEN



The Lazy Day

SUNNY

BUICK



Sunny invited us to her home in Paris where we talked with her about her life, her work and her very special recipe for one over a lovely petite déjeuner (that's breakfast for some of you).

«What's inside a girl? - Sugar, spice and everything nice, of course. On the outside she's a candy-coated illusion of sweetness. Inwardly she's famished for all that's out of reach, forced a diet of self-loathing in search for perfection, a sweet confection feeding on herself, recycling her identity from what she culls from the outside. Corrosive like sugar to the teeth. She seeks her sanctuary inwardly and cannibalizes it. Hungry because she shouldn't take too much. Taking too much because she's so hungry.»

SUNNY BUICK, MANIFESTO

Goldfield and worked at his tattoo studio for about seven years. Since 2003, she has been living in Paris where she works as a painter and freelance tattoo artist. Sunny calls her own artistic vision "cannibal bonbon". Her paintings are the product of her fantasies and dreams combined with female intuition. "They often work themselves out, intuitively, like the subconscious work of dreams," she says. The subject of her art are lonely girls that possess an element of danger - "fighting girls" as she calls them. A bitter sweetness surrounds these female characters in what she describes in her "Manifesto" on her website

SUNNY BUICK was born in British Columbia, Canada, and raised in California by her mother, a single parent. When she was fifteen she moved to San Francisco where she studied art at the San Francisco State University. She received her tattoo training from the legendary Henry

sunnybuick.com as a "super sugary dark appropriation/conservation of the images of the past century". For her, they are symbols of the dangers of female sexuality, and the fear of one's own appetites, stand-ins for the delirious conflicts of internal desires. Her work deals with feminine violence, anger, and chaos. According to her, the subtitle of the movie "Faster Pussycat Kill Kill" just as perfectly fits her art, too - "an ode to the violence in women". Sunny's text "How to make a cannibal bonbon" gives a good rendition of her very own recipe for this strange kind of candy.

HOW TO MAKE A CANNIBAL BONBON

- » Take one girl in full blossom
- » Strik her in the wrong era, one full of despair, modern enough so she has the choice to be more than just a factory of procreation
- » No father, no family
- » Fill her head with romance and colours
- » A dash of divorce and drug addiction
- » 1/2 a cup of total loss of control
- » Marinate for two weeks on vacation in Paris
- » Add daily mass quantities of sugar and caffeine
- » Add tattoos and pretty clothes
- » Bake until spiritual awakening then
- » Voilá! Dreams come true



You've been living in Paris for quite a while now. Why are you so fascinated with this town?
My mother was once married to a French Canadian for a short while, when I was really little. I became obsessed with the language in high school, and also with the 1920s when art and surrealism were centred in Paris. After that, my love for fashion, food, culture, and history all fell into an intense Francophile-ism.

Could you imagine living in another European city for longer?
I like Lyon, Vienna, Berlin, and London but not in the same way I like Paris. I'm quite lucky that at the moment I'm in a position to visit and live in different European cities for a week of work and get to experience them like a local.

You make your living as a tattoo artist. What interests you most in tattooing?
It's so mysterious, painful and exotic, plus I can make a living as an artist without having to come from a rich family.

Do you remember the first tattoo you ever saw?
That would have to be my older sister's. She had a rose tattooed between her breasts. I fell in love with the first heavily tattooed boy that I saw and he later became my boyfriend.

What were the important steps in your career so far?
I guess, the first step was to decide that I wanted to make a living as an artist. Then I discovered that by tattooing I could make art without having to compromise my sensibilities. Then there

was a long period of discipline while I tried to get a small body of work together in order to find a position as a tattooist. After that, I systematically spent my free time producing artworks for myself that I could show. Little by little, at around the same time I was trying to find a job tattooing, I started to participate in group shows, sometimes creating a piece to fit with a theme. Then I contacted the press and galleries that I liked, and set up a website. Now I've reached a point in my tattooing career where people know my style and I mostly do custom pieces inspired by my established themes. I'm able to travel and do conventions and guest spots because I'm not tied to any one shop. I've also started to make prints of my work and to sell them online, which has been a big step forward for me.

Tattoo art in general has become more socially accepted with many people getting tats mainly because it's fashionable. Let's say 20 years ago it was rad to sport a tattoo on your arm. Today it seems a tattooed hand is what you need to distinguish yourself. What's your perspective on that?
That's exaggerated in a way. It may be more fashionable, but only in our generation. Tattoos are definitely a part of fashion, a way of expressing the rung in society that you belong to - whether it was yesterday's sailor or today's rock'n'roller. Those who go for the hand tattoo maybe wish to show that they are married to the tattoo lifestyle. That's a real commitment to the crowd you hang around.

Do you only tattoo your own designs?
No, I'm still okay with tattooing stuff

that people bring to me. I prefer adding something of myself to the work but it's not always possible. I still like the exchange with the customer, to talk with them and get to know them a little, even if they aren't interested in or aware of my little universe.

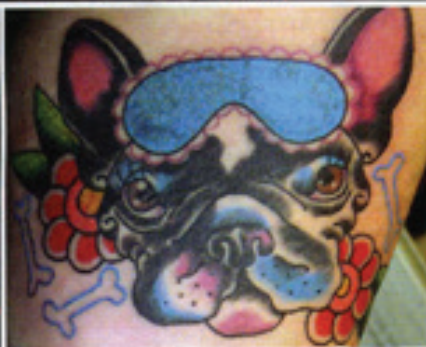
Are there any tattoo jobs you wouldn't do?
I don't do irresponsible tattoos, for example, the hands or neck of a young person with no other tattoos. I try not to do tattoos that are too challenging to my artistic level. I don't tattoo people I get a bad feeling from, no matter how much they pay.

Which impact do female artists have on the tattoo world in your opinion?
Women have always played a part in electric tattooing, from the tattooed circus ladies to the tattooist's wife that helped out when the fleet was in. Having a woman in the shop is very important. There are some people who are more reassured by a female

touch. Apart from that you'll find that it's not exactly evident how to manoeuvre in a predominantly male profession. Some girls try to be one of the guys, partying and swearing like sailors. Others just do their own thing and find their own way. I think sex has something to do with our profession but in a very latent form.

You're a big fan of music. What do you listen to and what's the impact of music on your work?
Music represents a whole universe of fantasies and feelings for me and it also fuels those long periods of concentrated work. I've always been attracted to older music genres and everything that derives from Rock'n'Roll. My husband is a record collector and has a different taste than I. I'm always discovering new stuff like Post Punk and No Wave that are really inspiring and different. Just now I'm learning about Punk Rock and the effects might show up further down the road.





You have a fascination for monster movies. Does this affect your work in any way?

Pulp culture is a huge inspiration for me and monster movies will always play a part in my work. I think, I want to be Godzilla really - an essentially good person with the capability to sometimes go stomping around destroying cardboard cities. Apart from that, the colours are really fantastic in those films. I would love to be able to capture that innocence in my paintings. I have deeper theories about the trauma of living in the nuclear age. The dangers mankind puts our planet in have something to do with my desire to create fantasy environments in my paintings.

You make lot of your clothes yourself. Where do you get your inspirations?

I look at so many old films and expensive fashion magazines but it's just an impossible burden on my budget

to buy these things. So I try to create them myself. I like to make things myself to be original and eccentric.

Lowbrow art is getting increasingly popular with people discovering it as a fascinating alternative to the established art scene. Do you consider yourself a lowbrow artist and do you think lowbrow is still underground?

Yes! I'm proud to say that I'm lowbrow. Tattoo artists are one of the many factions of this art movement. I think it's still pretty underground, even the most successful lowbrow artists are not known to people interested in art in general. For now it's the alternative because it's still rejected by the art establishment. But not for much longer!

Who are your favourite artists?

For the most part, I like surrealists, like Clovis Trouille, Max Ernst, Otto Dix, and George Grosz. I also enjoy Mexican artists, such as Posada, Jesus Helgera, Diego Rivera, and Frida Kahlo as well as Japanese artists

from the superflat movement like Chihō Aoshima, Aya Takano, Junko Mizano, and Takashi Murakami. Then there are the comic book cover artists of the mid-century and before, like Alex Schomburg, Wally Wood, Jack Davis, Carl Barks, Basil Wolverton, Enoch Bowles, and Ernesto Cabral. Not to forget all the lowbrow talents such as Todd and Kathy Schorr, Alex Gross, John Willie, Mark Ryden, Dave Cooper, The Pizz, Fiona Hewitt, Miss Vann, Ray Ceasar, Nathan Jurvicius, Mitch O'Connell, Matsi and KRK Ryden. That's just scratching the surface really. There are so many friends and European artists that I'm discovering everyday.

You curated an artshow called "Sci-Fi Western" held at the 111 Minna Gallery, San Francisco featuring nearly 100 visionary artists. Please tell us something about that.

It was huge! I just invited all the artists I knew to do a piece combining science fiction and western icons and everyone seemed very inspired by the idea. I also figured out how

to get a catalogue published and we had a big party! I would like to continue to do similar shows in Paris, but it's quite intimidating here, like you must have a university degree in curating to do anything.

A few personal questions - what's your favourite food, your favourite pastime activity, favourite movie? Who's your favourite fashion designer?

I love tea and candy and of course baguettes and French pastries! I like to watch old black and white films or wander around in used book stores, more recently I enjoy reading and looking at design and artist blogs with lovely photos. My favourite movie is "The City of Lost Children" and my favourite fashion designer is John Galliano (I met him once near Portobello Road).

What are your plans for the future? Where do you see yourself in ten years from now?

I want to see more of Europe and travel to Asia, especially Japan. I'd like to hold on to the current balance between tattooing and the art world, but there's a chance that for long periods of time I may not have the opportunity to do both at the same time. Still, I always see myself with either of these matters close to me.

Merci beaucoup Madame!
De rien. ■

