

Anna Gonzalez, Hocus Sulcus  
Webb Gallery, Queensland College of Art, Brisbane

Anna Gonzalez' photographed dioramas belong to a world without sunlight. Strange cut-out figures navigate her dark interiors and landscapes with disturbing fear, menace and glee. In *Running Away* (2020) a husband flees the scene. With oversized teeth the family dog lunges for his leg while his wife brandishes a dagger. Behind them, two figures pose in dramatic dance shapes atop a two-dimensional sea and a staircase. Their nonchalant lack of engagement with the violence of the foreground suggests the displaced emotions and confusing logic of dreams.

To view Gonzalez' constructions is to enter the real and imaginary world of her mind. Her works are saturated with the memories and symbolism of her former life under Spain's authoritarian regime. In *Idolatries* (2020), repetitive rows of bowing figures evoke a terrifying military-cum-religion, characterised by subservient regularity and anonymity. Above them a collection of eyes perform Big Brother surveillance disguised as the glittering jewels of (false) gods. Gonzalez' works simultaneously hint at the Australian landscape and point to contemporary events. The teetering telephone pole of *Dusk at the Field* (2020) can be seen in real life through her front window, while the miniature rolls of *Toilet Murder* were inspired by recent inter/national shortages of this humble bathroom staple. Gonzalez makes her works from items found around the home. In some photographs peculiar shapes reveal their former lives as blu tack. In others, the disparate decorative surfaces are repurposed elements from earlier prints and drawings. The artist's material resourcefulness and her repeated use of closed and closing spaces can be traced to the social-distancing requirements of COVID-19, which tasked us to stay safe by staying home. To view these artworks is also to imagine Gonzalez physically trapped in the studio of her family home while her creative mind roamed far and wide.

According to André Breton, Surrealism offered a resolution of the contradictory states of waking life and dreams. In their footsteps, Gonzalez' works are fundamentally surreal. Correlations between her works and the revolutionary artists abound. Uneasy constructions of space, mirrored forms and secret nighttime rituals recall the Surrealist paintings of Paul Delvaux and Dorothea Tanning while Gonzalez' use of textured surfaces bring to mind Max Ernst's dark *frottage* forests. Specific imagery in Gonzalez' photographs also echo Surrealist obsessions. The disembodied yet bejewelled eyes of *Idolatries* extends the Surrealist's complex relationship with vision, as seen variously in Victor Brauner's *Self-Portrait with a Plucked Eye* (1931) versus Salvador Dalí's brooch *The eye of time* (1949). In the former, Brauner depicts himself with one eye enucleated, symbolising the Surrealist desire to see anew. Meanwhile, Dalí encircled his pupil-brooch with real diamonds, making the sense of sight a transportable treasure. An even more striking parallel exists between Gonzalez' work and the photo-montaged frontispiece for *Aveux non avenues (Unavowed confessions)* (1929-30), by lovers Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore. In their work, two fragmented forearms similarly reach around an oversized eye. Where the cradling gesture of Cahun and Moore suggests an offering of visionary sight, Gonzalez' manicured hands perform a distraction from a larger looming palm.

Inspired by Sigmund Freud, the Surrealists embraced forbidden themes. This is especially true of their recruit, Hans Bellmer, who constructed strange school-girl *poupées* (puppets). Removing limbs and turning torsos upside down, Bellmer produced disfigured bodies of excess and loss. He placed his creations in and around his parent's empty house, and photographed their sullen bodies. The resultant works are powerfully disturbing. They brim with macabre sexuality and ripple with allusions to crime-scene photography. Like Bellmer, Gonzalez is a puppet-master. Her figures hang from unseen fishing wires. And like Bellmer, she creates and tortures their bodies in order to photograph them in strange distant worlds. But where Gonzalez differs from her Surrealist predecessors is in her use of humour. Exaggerated facial expressions liken her figures to cartoons. Their paper thin bodies elude any real risk of harm. In contrast to the Surrealist's sombre nightmares, Gonzalez' deaths and other catastrophes are dark yet delightful.

Words by Louise R Mayhew