

Sizing Jack

Perhaps one of the first secret associations we can have with this picture is to any of the countless masterly paintings of Maria in the forest with the newborn baby Jesus. But after the first glance, it is quite clear that the Madonna in Carina Linge's photograph is not massaging the Messiah's back, but rather pinching that of a very alien looking animal: a skinned jack-rabbit with neither lucky paw nor eye – but still a full set of glistening teeth.

Were this a *momento mori* painting in oil on canvas made in the studio of an old master in the days before God was declared dead, the raw linen canvas fibers would have been ironically sized with rabbit skin glue as preparation for a gesso ground. As history has shown, the proclaimed death of God and the rise of industry simultaneously heralded the end of painting's privileged role as *Bildnistraeger* and opinion-shaper. Its usurpation by the camera's more perfect mechano-chemical eye-brain led naturally to the democratization and loss of monopolistic creative license that image-makers had long enjoyed at their easels. Suddenly time could be frozen, and the cracks and blemishes of age could be glazed over with the perfect assistance to memory that the photograph so generously and simply offered. No longer was the skin of rabbits needed to enhance the longevity and suppleness of the painting's canvas, for that we have Photoshop.

Marina Abramovic also employed a dead rabbit to help explain pictures in the 21st Century by staging a recreation of Beuys' performance "wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt". Clothed in the vest with head smeared in honey

and gold leaf like the shaman before her, she held the rabbit like a studied pupil. Unfortunately, Abramovic's recreation of the performance, although a touching tribute, did nothing to recognize the fact that the world we live in today is much more dominated by images and instantaneousness than ever before. This recreation had all the hallmarks of a band playing their greatest hits on one last revival tour because she, like Beuys, required the photographic documentation of the spectacle and distance from the audience for the work to function. Indeed, the only redeeming factor in the work is its naïve ignorance of the fact that in the 21st Century the commodity of images shapes our reality to such an extent that we believe only what we see.

Carina Linge's image, on the other hand, speaks of the threshold between life and afterlife and documents the subtle frailty existing at this phase of transition. The girl is becoming a lady, the rabbit is becoming food and as a symbol of the imminent and irreversible changes brought by the onslaught of time, the forest has already become wallpaper. This rabbit, however, is not the magical puppet of a wounded German mystic – it is naked. It is not the fluffy lovely thing with floppy ears that "hopped" around the pictures on the gallery floor. Fresh from the butcher, the transformation of life to food is so much in the foreground of this image that it is very easy to forget that this lifeless body in the image is becoming what it is because it lost something more than its life: its signifying skin. As Beuys proved, with a little help and imagination, even a dead rabbit can move like a "real" rabbit. However, a skinned rabbit just does not appear to be a "real" rabbit and this semantic fuzziness demands a title to tell us that this rabbit is on its way to the oven and that this lady, like both Beuys and Abramovic, shed tears in honor of the life lost so that she can continue to live.



"dame mit kaninchen" (lady with hare) - Carina Linge