

Hélène Crécent

## Trajectory

Born in Pau, France, Hélène Crécent has been living in Valencia, Spain, since 1999. She has studied at the Fine Arts Highschool in Bordeaux, and has worked in the audio-visual field.

In 1999 she founded the 'Mini-Monstre' artistic duo with Bertrand Mazurier, dedicated to the creation of artistic objects from everyday life. Their pieces combined ceramics and ironwork with the graphical elements and the artist's personal style. The collaboration with 'Mini-Monstre' has always been developed in parallel with Hélène Crécent's work. Along with these more cheerful and heartwarming works, she unveils, in her drawings, paintings and collages, her own universe, disturbing, rebellious, aggressive and full of irony.

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## The search for the post-feminist identity

A large part of her work has been consecrated to the theme "Urban Birds". Within this theme, the artist posed a fundamental question: what is the human identity? The birds represent metaphors of nature in a discourse that brims with poetry.

Throughout her career, Crécent has also worked on a feminine figure that has been through a logical evolution. Today, the woman, the crux of this artist's work, takes on a new form. In homage to Niki de Saint-Phalle's "nanas", a symbol of the strength and self-confidence of the 70's feminist movement, Hélène Crécent's women, her dolls, define in them a new femininity. In her work, she regularly employs cultural clichés as iconographical elements. She worries about such issues as crossbreeding of bodies and mentalities. She uses the eroticism and esotericism of her dolls to capture, with irony, the realities which motivate her as a human being: identity, duality and cultural crossbreeding.

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Crécent chooses two characters: the dolls Afro-beat and Lolita. These enable her to communicate her sculptural message and to develop her poetry.

For Crécent, the Afro-beat doll is European, white or of mixed race. She dreams of Africa and listens to afro-beat music, almost certainly that of Fela Kuti.

When she dances to the rhythm of her favorite music she falls into a trance and wears a mask. The way she is dressed reflects the music; a mix of African and Western elements, with 70's-style shoes and a silver belt, reflecting Afro-American womens' style.

Her Lolita doll is far removed from Nabokov's, that Kubrick and the cinema's industry further revealed. Nabokov's inspired sexual obsession, while Crécent's is androgynous and

cultivates ambivalence. As much as Nabokov's inspired possession with her role defined as that of an object, Crécent's is very independent, and could be male or female, young girl or woman.

Crécent's Lolita plays with her breast and enjoys herself. She is also a muse who inspires men; "L'amusement, la muse ment" she says, using a play on words that emphasises this Lolita's personality, who appearance deceives, and who knows how to play freely with the feelings that she kindles.

Crécent's narrative refers to both characters in their own worlds. How they develop and manage in different situations. But, their game goes further still. Lolita and Afro-beat meet and begin a struggle to find their own identities. What do they have in common? Where is the feminine essence they behold? Both characters face each other in this struggle doing violent battle. They are submerged in a feminist combat in search of the identity that they define. The series of drawings and paintings "Lolita against Afro-beat" captures perfectly this fierce, no holds barred, struggle between them. Lolita even uses her breast as dangerous weapons, while Afro-beat is more astute in her fight to destroy her supposed enemy. The drama is accentuated by the paintings' black background.

The series "Lolita loves Afro-beat" depicts the reconciliation of the two dolls, a symbol of the acceptance of both personalities, both continents and both cultures. But, this acceptance takes place in a theatrical play, with a rehearsed choreography of erotic content. Both characters appear to join together, their movements synchronised, in perfect harmony. But it is for appearance sake. Half of each doll hides behind the other, leaving in evidence the "politically" correct of both characters. A fictitious harmony, that could present an understanding.

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## Crécent's Dolls

Hélène Crécent's work is direct and veloce although, non exempt of thoughtful components. Harsh representations of her interior, lacking in stereotypes that belong to the pluralist movement of contemporary art. We approach a world unaccustomed to the evolution of new questions and with an unusual treatment of material. With her quest for truth in the representation and the sincerity applied, she appears far removed from any influence. Her work springs from daily life and the flow of her real feelings.

The use of certain materials (cardboard, oil on paper, lead, nails, ink and unfinished wood), suggest the artist's intention to move away from "cultural" art, as did the artists of Art Brut, even some of American Pop Art albeit for different reasons.

In response to Warhol's prophecy "all is pretty", Crécent carries out a spontaneous speech regarding beauty, that begins with a direct criticism of those who treat woman as uniquely "beautiful object". She believes that if the woman is beautiful then all her attributes are equally as beautiful: her breast, hair, skin colour, her dress and even her identity. To formulate her idea of beauty, Crécent's women undergo a deconstruction of all of their elements (which are self-sufficient), to compose a different reality, replete with a special

beauty. To a frenetic and crazed rhythm she reorganises, intent on combining all these fragments, giving life to her characters.

Her compositions-deconstructions show an intensive use of colour in its pure state, already habitual in her creations, with major importance given to the illustrations and calligraphy. There exists an enormous passion for drawing in her work, a dominating facet evident over the recent years. Surfaces become a field of graphic experimentation forming results without ramblings. The subjects are deeply internalised and emerge with the ability of her stroke, in a direct automatism where doubt fails to exist. The poetry that nourishes them is converted into a subjective element that strengthens creative action. It is not the artist who controls her hand but the prisoner of an expressive necessity that forces her to adopt a constant objectivity. Finally, it is Crécent herself that must choose a valid result.

Crécent's style blends elements of artists that marked her work, from the drawings of André Masson, Saura, Dubuffet or Zush-Evru to the treatment of colours evident in the work of Karel Appel, Asger Jorn, Munch, Miro and Basquiat. Details all perfectly blended and mixed into her work whilst maintaining her own artistic personality.

The sizes of the pieces concerned are not excessive (about 50 cm) allowing the artist to explore the composition and the expressive possibilities of the chosen themes, providing her with a private "custom-built" world, which is amplified according to the specific needs of her works.

Here we have an artist of great expressive strength, who also transmits her plastic message in its actual context without falling on easy and discriminated declarations. Her work is a point of reference for the post-feminist tendency presenting the woman as a central point and refusing to enter into a game that some artists and critics persist in defining as "feminine language".

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