

# *Being Andrea du Chatenier*

*It's a beautiful world we live in  
a sweet romantic place  
Beautiful people everywhere  
the way they show they care  
makes me want to say  
It's a beautiful world  
it's a beautiful world  
it's a beautiful world  
for you, for you, for you*

*Excerpt of lyrics from 'It's a Beautiful World' performed by DEVO, written by Mark Mothersbaugh, 1981, from the New Traditionalists album.*

If truth is stranger than fiction, then the art of Andrea du Chatenier ought to evoke a sense of familiarity. We each have our own fictions and truths so it is likely we will see glimpses of the artist's truths. Every one of du Chatenier's fictitious creatures stream from her consciousness: fragments of whakapapa (lineage) - European paganism, feminism, science fiction and politics. Each other-worldly gaze, each pose, each fragile soul and grotesque being is part of her and part of us. The truth is, humanity is imperfect, yet beautiful.

Andrea du Chatenier has a hankering for the grotesque as part of the truth of being human. Within each photograph or clay being, she has already imbued an individual life-story; we are let into a particular point in each of their lives, usually when they have been wounded, been immersed in grief, or pondering life. Akin to Artaudian theatre (Theatre of Cruelty), her creations unapologetically expose every bit of ugliness and pain. So many of du Chatenier's works operate on this kind of premise, a (sur)reality that is enacted within the work. This same kind of unflinching boldness exists in the work of Frida Kahlo. For example, Kahlo's self-portrait, *Broken Column* is self expository: metaphorically and literally – she is exposing her bare breasts, we see through her chest cavity through to the Ionic column that represents her shattered vertebrae that were severely damaged in a horrific accident. Kahlo expresses the extreme pain she feels just by living in her own body. We know, if this image were to literally occur, she would be a mere cadaver. This same kind of vulnerability is present in the works of du Chatenier's beings, they are made to look like they are alive, and forced to live through the pain of physical affliction or tormented emotional states.



*The Broken Column, Frida Kahlo, 1944 image courtesy of FridaKahlo.org*

*Pink-Haired Boy* is a really great example of this cruel imagery. A perfectly pleasant Caucasoid boy with pink hair is filled with holes and weeping gold blood. His face expresses no pain, unlike the faces of *Weeping Men* 2013, which are distorted with grief. No, this boy is poker-faced, serene and confident in his affliction.



*Pink Haired Boy, Andrea du Chatenier, 2014 image courtesy of the artist*

One might wonder about the mental state of the maker and where these ghastly beings come from. What is happening in her head, how does she imagine such strangeness? Du Chatenier knows that to hide ugliness and raw emotion is to suppress part of the full experience of being human.

Some of the creatures are presupposing some kind of mythical futures. Mutated people whose DNA merges with rhinos, or birds, or thorny rosebushes. For du Chatenier, there is no longer animal or mineral, physical or spiritual – only the hybrid, the mutant and the *anthropomorph*.

### ***Politics in outer space and society***

Kirk's Girls are mutant beauties; aliens of local and galactic origins.

New Zealand in the 1970s abounded with a sense of possibility. Outer space had been penetrated, freshly made human footsteps were made on the moon; science fiction flourished as a genre because of it.

There was a great sense of excitement akin with the zeitgeist; the Age of Aquarius and people were cosmically aware. Women insisted on their own self-determination rather than the become slaves to conventional roles and beauty.

Andrea du Chatenier was a teen at the time the popular science fiction series, *Star Trek*, first screened on television. Norman Kirk was the Labour Prime Minister of New Zealand at this time and his strong left approach indicated shifts in power in favour of the average working class person.

The title, *Kirk's Girls* is intended as a double entendre relating to a period of time. In the television series, Captain Kirk was seen as the quintessential white hero, he was faultless and without fail, he always 'got the girl'. Like our own captain of New Zealand, he was bold and gallant and was all for the underdog, the minority. Both Kirks were champions for the people... in Captain James Kirk's case though, there is the inference that he didn't discriminate between species or race, he liked to charm any female character. These *Girls* are the illegitimate off-spring of Kirk's interspecies dalliances; feisty and feral. They exist quite happily without Captain Kirk, they are sensual, they are ugly (according to human aesthetics anyway), they are not limp lilies but real characters with their own life going on. Here the artist pays homage to Norman Kirk's New Zealand; a time memorable point in New Zealand history.



*Detail – Kirk's Girls, Andrea du Chatenier, 2003 (2/11) Images courtesy of the artist*

The photographic series of *Pack* depicts humans made up to appear as dogs with their dog names and dog personalities. We, like dogs, are pack animals. Here du Chatenier blurs the line between us as primal animals and humans. Not in some hierarchy in the 'chain of being' but rather humans on the animal spectrum.



*Detail – Pack, Andrea du Chatenier, 2000 (3/8) images courtesy of the artist*

When it comes to finding meaning in the art of du Chatenier, all we have to go on are the parts of her work that resemble us in some way. She's neither after accuracy, nor truth, but to rouse in us the ability to relate to a multiplicity of life forms: fictitious or real. The artist reserves the right to their own subtext and we will never fully know their truth or intent, but looking into the faces of her beings might leave us a little less smug about being human.

## About Andrea du Chatenier

**b. 1958, Hamilton**

**Currently resides in Whanganui.**

*“Drawing from a range of theoretical texts including art history, feminism and psychoanalysis my figures explore aspects of the human condition, in particular, the ironies associated with the human endeavour to seek an understanding of our place in the world – a definition of Humanness as opposed to Naturalness.”*

*Andrea du Chatenier,*

Andrea du Chatenier is a nationally and internationally renowned artist who has been making work since the early 1990s.

Her works are often configured in installation works or in shallow tableaux/ diorama-type settings. The staging and dramatic aesthetic du Chatenier is famous for, lends itself to all manner of inter-media works that are a combination of sculpture, fashion, ceramics, photography, theatrics and painting.

Du Chatenier has lectured at University College of Learning, School of Fine Arts in Whanganui since being awarded the Tylee Cottage Residency at the Sarjeant Gallery in 2004. Her extensive exhibition history includes the 2001 San Paolo Biennale, Italy, solo shows at the Hastings Art Gallery, The Dowse – Wellington, Seed Gallery – Auckland, Sarjeant Gallery – Whanganui, Blue Oyster Gallery – Dunedin, Percy Thompson Gallery – Stratford, Lopdell House / Te Uru Gallery – Auckland. Her works are represented in several renowned collections: The Dowse, James Wallace Art Trust, The Barry Hopkins Art Trust Collection, Waikato Museum Collection, Te Manawa – Palmerston North, Sarjeant Gallery and Alexander Museum, both in Whanganui to name a few.