

Interview with O.B. De Alessi by Thomas Moore for the website TRANSDUCTIONS (June 2011)

'Theme of Sadness' is a collection of drawings by O.B. De Alessi that channel the seemingly inherent sadness attached to youth. Mysterious children stare out from the pages of the zine with expressions that appear to range from haunted to contempt. The kids cry, dance and scowl. They are very beautiful and they are very sad.

THOMAS MOORE: OK, so it'd be great if you could start off by talking a little about the genesis of Theme of Sadness. Where did the idea start?

O.B. DE ALESSI: One day I started making a small drawing of a girl dressed as a fairy. I wasn't really thinking of a series then, it was just a single drawing and I was interested in the expression of her face more than anything else. But then I showed it to Michael (who runs Kiddiepunk) and he liked it very much and I think he had already asked me to make a zine for Kiddiepunk. So I decided to draw more of these characters and make a series. And, thinking of it as a series, the whole thing immediately acquired a more solid aspect in my head, it became like a little world in itself.

TM: A lot of your work seems to focus around youth, teenagers and children. Is there anything specific that draws your imagination to this?

OBDA: Yes, the protagonists of my work are very often children and teenagers because my work is very much about playing and dreaming. I am very much interested in ideas that are still in a state of potential, that have not yet been fully developed and in the conflict between an idea and the translation of that idea into the real world. There are other qualities to childhood and teen-age that I'm drawn to, such as the rawness of its feelings, the lack of compromises related to lack of experience, the belief in magic and fantasy and a tragic view of life, mostly during adolescence, that I believe to be very Romantic (as in Romanticism, the cultural movement). My work is very often about expressing ones feelings or desires through the use of some sort of icon. I think children and teenagers do this better than anybody else, so sometimes I just like to watch and learn.

TM: Similarly, I remember talking to you in person once about our shared interest in/enthusiasm for Black Metal music. It'd be great if you could talk a little bit about your interest in the iconography that is present in that particular scene and - again - what it is that draws you to use some of that in your work.

OBDA: I never really listened to Black Metal as a kid, I was more into Goth back then and I guess Black Metal seemed way too 'masculine' for my taste, a world that I was never that interested in (even when being interested in maleness I was always exploring areas where masculinity was kind of androgynous). I started listening to Black Metal more recently as a continuation of listening to classical music. That did the trick for me, because I found out that of all types of contemporary music, Black Metal seems to be the one that most resembles classical music, in its grandness, in its pathos and in its use of recognisable iconography. Since classical music is my favourite music, I was very excited by this discovery. This also led me to draw connections between the use of extreme stereotypes (like 'Evil' in a pure form) in Black Metal and their choice in representing such stereotypes, which is very theatrical and simple - Evil is ugly and scary - and a similar use of stereotypes in, say, opera and ballet. In addition, Black Metal, with its music and visuals but also with its recurrent subjects like the power of the ancestors or the power of Nature, often summons something very archetypal and timeless, that instantly makes me think of some grand sound like Wagner's.

TM: I was wondering if in your imagination the various scenes that you've created in 'Theme of Sadness' have stories attached them or if they are just one-off images that occurred to you?

OBDA: The single drawings in 'Theme of Sadness' don't really have a story attached to them; I would say they are more of a mood, like I had very clearly in mind what kind of mood the character I was drawing was in. Even all the drawings as a series are not attached to a specific story or narrative. I did try to find a narrative, something that could have happened to them or something that was about to happen, and sure I did find many possible solutions, but none of them seemed relevant enough to make it more explicit. I was more interested in suggesting a general mood and I'd be very happy if people who see the zine created their own stories around it.

TM: If it's ok to talk about it without ruining the surprise! what is the music on the CD that accompanies? When I listened to it, it felt somewhat familiar but I couldn't place it. How does this tie in to the zine? Do you listen to music when you work? If so, what kind of stuff? But yeah, if you'd rather keep the CD as a mystery then I can live with that and understand!

OBDA: Ok, I'll tell you just because the zine is sold out! Ready? The music on the CD accompanying the zine is a track taken from the soundtrack of the film 'The Neverending Story' by Wolfgang Petersen. Well it's kind of hard to say how it ties to the zine to be honest! not because I don't know, I know very well, but it's one of those things that are a bit hard to explain for me, especially with that film and its soundtrack. Perhaps it's me that's extremely tied-in to it. I think at the time when I was making 'Theme of Sadness' I was listening to that soundtrack a lot, or I had it in mind a lot, or both. And so for me it tied in kind of naturally, as if what I was drawing were partly made of that music, if it makes sense. There isn't really any obvious rational reason, I'm afraid.

TM: To continue an earlier theme that I posted about on Transductions: I was lucky enough to see your stunning contributions to the recent Weaklings exhibition in London. Could you talk a little bit about your experience at the show and you felt it went?

OBDA: My experience of performing at the show was great. I was nervous the days prior to the opening as there were a few technical things that had to be fixed and also because, as is often the case when I do a performance, I do things that I'm not entirely sure I am capable of doing (this time I wasn't sure I would be able to keep my balance). But the actual performing time felt very good, as always it made a huge difference, if not all the difference to have an audience, and in the end it was a lot of fun too.

The nerve-wracking and tiring part of performing is always paid back when the performance is actually taking place, it's extremely thrilling and fun for me to be there doing what I do.