

Interview with O.B. De Alessi
by Luna Miguel (2010)

You like to draw girls and teens, could you tell us the meaning of these age groups for you?

I am very often interested in in between stages, transformation, rituals, and rites of passage. Adolescence, not only as a stage of life but also as a state of mind, contains all of these elements. Everything in teenagers, their minds and their bodies, is in transformation, what matters is the potential, what could be, because it never really is already, everything is an expectation, everything is waiting, daydreaming, longing, being bored and feeling pointless (perhaps). The adolescents in my work, both those in my drawings and my alter ego Oscar, need to identify themselves with some kind of more universal image in order to exist. They (especially, Oscar) exist exclusively as adolescents, so their life is cyclical, they transform and pretend to die, but never really do so. Their existence makes sense only if perceived through icons and cultural references.

For a couple of years, until only just very recently, my focus was on teenage boys. My fictional alter ego Oscar (Scar) is himself, or wants to be, a boy. He identifies exclusively with male figures for most of his 'existence'. In my graphic novel 'Becoming Oscar Scar' Oscar - supported by Virginia Woolf's semi-biographical character Orlando - travels through time, but he only confirms the fact that he is a boy.

In my current and still in progress work, though, Oscar is going through a new, much more radical transformation, which will cause him to turn into a woman. I still can't say too much about this, as this work is at a very early stage, but by taking this step, it will become somehow apparent that the character of the eternal teenage boy Oscar, who initially seemed to be the only protagonist, is in fact only one of the many characters acting in a wider 'play', the plot of which is written by the characters themselves as they appear on stage and play.

How do you feel: italian, french or british?

I never really thought about my nationality for most of my life. I never thought that I could be French or British. If nothing, I'd think that my nationality didn't really matter. I never really identified with 'being Italian'. I always wanted to leave Italy, and I did at the age of nineteen. But now, I'm happy of thinking about the fact that I was born there, that Italian is my first language and that that's where my family lives.

I guess, as for many other things, I had to take a longer, more tortuous path to get there, but the length of the process was nothing but useful.

Since you write too, what is, in your opinion, the relationship between art and literature?

Literature has always been closely related to visual art for me. I could easily say I was, and still am, perhaps more influenced by writers, even in the making of my art work, than I am by visual artists. I've always loved reading, and I think I perceive the way I create and develop my art work as similar to how I read a book, or how I'd write one. I've written many poems, some short stories, and a children's novel. Most of these texts are in Italian.

Who are your muses? And which artists have had any influence on you?

Muses...Arthur Rimbaud. Michael Jackson. Lewis Carroll. And then there's fictional characters. Can fictional characters be muses? Anyway, I always tended to identify with my muses rather than adoring them in detached way. I guess that's where my work comes from. I never had a muse right

next to me, I mean, a 'real' person.

Influences, apart from the ones already mentioned as muses, I'd add Edward Munch, JK Huysmans, HP Lovecraft, Vincent Van Gogh, Virginia Woolf, several Italian Renaissance artists, Caravaggio, Aubrey Beardsley, Brooke Shields, Buster Keaton, Dennis Cooper, Beethoven, Schubert, Dostojevskij. Haha. Was 'artists' to be intended in a broad sense?

Who are your most admired contemporary artists?

I'll be strict now and I'll stick to visual art. Louise Bourgeois. Pierre Huyghe. Urs Luthi (especially for the early work). Jordan Baseman, David Wojnarowicz, Cindy Sherman, Sally Mann, Nan Goldin, Rodney Graham, Michael Salerno (he knows it). And others I can't remember know.

As you have travelled a lot, which other places would you like to know?

I'd like to go anywhere really. I still haven't been to Japan, so I'd like to go there...and I'd love to go to Mexico, especially for the Day of the Dead.

I haven't been really far away for quite a long time, so I'd like to go on a very long trip somewhere. I have travelled a lot around the world since when I was a kid as my parents love travelling, but unfortunately there are some places I don't have many memories of at all. I think I always struggle a bit with the whole 'tourist' concept of travelling. There is always too much to see and do in too little time, so I end up not absorbing anything and kind of starting to see everything as mildly boring. I think that, ideally, I would have to spend more time in one place and do 'less'. That is what I really care about, after all, when I go somewhere. To capture the 'mood' of a place. Not a nice view, or maybe not just, let's say.

Tell us something about your past, present and future projects (fanzine, book, exhibition...)

I graduated from Chelsea College of Art and Design in London last September (2009), where I got a postgraduate degree, and I subsequently moved to Paris. There, I started working on a collaboration with writer Dennis Cooper. That is still way on going, but hopefully it will one day be completed. In the meantime, I took part in several shows in London, where I am being represented by Oblong Gallery, and a solo show in Palermo. Writer Jesse Hudson interviewed me for literature and art online magazine Fanzine, and one of my drawings was chosen to be the book cover of Luna Miguel's book of poetry *Estar Enfermo*. Currently, I am having group show in London at Oblong Gallery and I'll be doing a performance, again in London at the end of September. In October, my and Nick Brook's graphic novel's *Oscar The Cat* will be published by Romanian publisher Polirom and distributed during the International Festival of Literature in Bucharest. And I'll be taking part in an Art Biennale in Meridad, Venezuela. Oh, and in February I'm going to have a solo show in London, at Oblong Gallery. That's all for now.

O.B. De Alessi was born in Italy in 1984. She studied drama in Italy and London before taking a BA Fine Art degree at Accademia di Belle Arti of Bologna and a MA Fin Art at Chelsea College of Art & Design in London. She has exhibited both in solo and group shows in Italy, United Kingdom, France and Russia. De Alessi is currently represented by Oblong Gallery, London, and is artist in residence at Centre International Des Récollets in Paris.