

32 - POSTER FOR NO GHOST JUST A SHELL



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The image brings us full circle, back to Disney, to EPCOT, to pop stars and soda pop, to manufactured tourism, protests, and the like, and this is absolutely the point. It's all related. In an earlier M/M project with Philippe Parreno, Parreno and the artist Pierre Huyghe went to Japan and purchased the copyright for a manga cartoon character called Annlee. According to the project description, she was cheap. M/M explains, "The price of a manga figure relates to the complexity of its character traits and thus its ability to adapt to a story line and "survive" several episodes. Annlee had no particular qualities, and so she would have disappeared from the scene very quickly." Annlee was condemned to death. Parreno and Huyghe saved her life and set her to work, making her image available for any artist to use, free of charge. Whether the hell of an early manga death or a lifetime in image purgatory is preferable is left to the audience.

The project title, "No Ghost Just a Shell," drains Annlee of her soul in order to make her a vessel. While M/M concedes that "the 'life-prolonging' measures raise some 'melancholy' humanitarian questions," they also point out, wisely, that the project short-circuits fundamental assumptions about the artmaking process, and this is rare. The "same" image repeats again and again, but begins to articulate a kind of difference. Is an Annlee shell always the same? What is the role of the people who operate it? Are they subjective? How does identity come into being for characters in cinema and in art?

The Annlee of today is the Mickey Mouse of long ago, a commercial unit in a network comprising thousands of people in every part of the world. Her image is a poster for herself, which is a shell meant to be inhabited by others. There is nothing simple about her new life, but this may be what is beautiful and disgusting about it at the same time, what is so fundamentally true. As she stares longingly, sorrowfully out at us time and time again, we can not only stare back at her, but also know through her eyes. Annlee is ours, and we are Annlee. She has been saved by culture in order to be exploited by it, and she has been invented by culture in order to fuel it. That great symbol of fuel, the Shell Oil trademark, an arbitrary sign, replaces the word "shell," itself an arbitrary sign, in M/M's poster for the show. Arbitrary, perhaps, but essential to remember: I mean, wasn't our desire for oil part of what got us into this mess? And wasn't controlling others in order to save them part of it, too? It's hard to know, and it's hard to say.

This is the problem with posters.

– "The Problem with Posters," Rob Giampietro, Dot Dot Dot #7, 2003

M/M Paris,
Poster for no ghost just a shell, 2001,
silkscreen print, 174 x 119.5 cm