# PERCEPTIONS

The Work of Karin Szekessy, Paul Wunderlich and Claire Donnelly

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by

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#### INTRODUCTION

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The relationship between photography and painting has been explored in the past and up to the present day by artists, art critics, and historians alike. The importance of photography to painting can be seen by the statement made by Frank Kupka, "photography is a faithful, therefore, realistic representation of nature, which frees painting from imitative tendencies and permits it to travel its own path, which is increasingly departing from realism."<sup>1</sup> It is true that photography relieved painting of certain traditional functions, but at the same time the camera also gave expression to a whole new range of visual experiences. It became an intermediary between first-hand experiences and work in the studio.

My interest as an artist is also in this relationship. In my own personal work, photography has been a form of expression that achieves the kind of realism that is made up of component parts that can be manipulated. A lot of the time artists, like myself, who use photography, are not interested in creating pictures that can be directly compared with nature but see their work as a sign aggregate consisting of the conventional sign of the source and the usurped signs re-contextualized as art. I see photography as a medium which can sometimes depersonalize my relations to the world and in so doing uncover certain truths by enabling me to see reality clearer. I also find that the photographic image tends to give my work a stronger sense of conviction to my ideas which is more evocative than the use of highly imaginative images.

I have chosen to explore the work of Karin Szekessy and Paul Wunderlich, two German artists, in this study because I identify initially with their interest in this medium, and because of the relationship it has with their work in the form of process, source material and content. I find that their individual and collaborative work relates a great deal to my own in the sources from which they find inspiration, through to the symbolism and meaning invested in their work, to how each relies on the use of different processes.

1. Frank Kupka. Page 300. "The Painter and the Photograph" Van Deren Coke.

I wish to approach these artists and their work by focussing on particular areas of their lives and work. When I focus on their lives I will find out where their inspiration lay, where their work came from and the issues they were and are concerned with. When I explore their work, I will investigate their individual modes of expression, including similarities and contrasts in their use of source material, content and imagery and their individual work process. Here, I will relate personal experiences of their past to the work they have produced, finding out whether they have realised their apparent objectives.

Finally, I will relate my work in more detail to the work of Wunderlich and Szekessy, exploring the similarities and differences with their approach to source material, use of imagery and their work process. In this I will also touch on how the research effected my work and myself as a person.

In conclusion, I will bring everything together and into a coherent direction. I will highlight important points already explored and talk about their relevance to myself and the two artists. I will note how, despite common uses of source content or process, artists actual work can differ. I will attempt to answer how and why this happens by using Wunderlich's, Szekessy's and my own work to emphasize the point. Could it be that how the individual perceives what activity surrounds him/her, their personal experiences, conditioning and the effect of culture in their lives, is of vital importance to their finished work ?

The fact that artists provide each other with a creative atmosphere where their ideas can be stimulated, will be obvious from this study. When artists are known personally, as in the case of Wunderlich and Szekessy, or when the artistic discourse happens as part of a thoughtprovoking process made available by information known about contemporary artists, the relationship will be seen as being very influential and in a lot of cases advantageous to the enhancement of personal work. Likewise, I hope to indicate how such a close working relationship as Wunderlich and Szekessy's can also have its problems. Can the critical judgement of the individual be blunted by the ever-constant realization and subjective assumptions of a fellow artist, who questions less because of such a close relationship ?

In highlighting these points I will be able to examine the relationships involved in the setting up of an artistic millieu and how the individual's perceptions are of vital relevance to the creative discourse made available in this atmosphere.

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#### BIOGRAPHY

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#### Karin Szekessy

Karin Szekessy was born in Essen, Cormany, on 17th April, 1939. Her parents were middle-class Germans, who sent her to boarding school in Hertfordshire, England where she completed her education. She had always wanted to become a theatre actress but when she returned to Germany, she decided upon a photographic career, studying at the Institute for Photo-Journalism in Munich under Hans Schreimer. When she had finished her course she gained a position as photo-journalist for the German magazine "Kristall", where she stayed for six years. In 1959 the seeds of her artistic career were sown when she first began collecting old dolls and photographing them. Her first one-woman exhibition took place in Hamburg in 1966. This exhibition was a retrospective of these photographs. At this exhibition a German painter introduced himself and asked whether he could use one of her photographs as a silent model for his paintings. The artist was Paul Wunderlich and was to become her husband some six years later after their first meeting.

#### Paul Wunderlich

Paul Wunderlich was born in Berlin, Germany on 10th May, 1927. He studied in Hamburg and later served in the German army in 1945. After the war, he studied at Landeskunstschule for four years with fellow students such as Willem Grimm and Willi Titze. He then lived and worked in Paris for three years where he produced numerous litho-graphic series and has since been a professional artist working in print-making and painting ever since. He became a professor at Hochschule fur Bildendekunst in Hamburg from 1963 to 1967, but later gave up the position in order to concentrate solely upon his artistic career.

After meeting Szekessy in 1966, they both had an exhibition two years later in Hannover, where they collaborated artistically. Karin took up the position of Instructor in Photography in the Art Academy of Hamburg during this time and remained there for three years. Meanwhile Paul was travelling between Hamburg, Zurich and Paris for his personal work. Since her meeting with Wunderlich, Karin experimented with various print processes to enrich her photographs, finding the heliograph suited her ideas and expression well. After giving up her position at the Art Academy, she became a freelance photographer and has been a professional in this area ever since. The two married in 1972 and have been working collaboratively since. They have had countless exhibitions of their work together all over the world including California, New York, London, Japan and Paris. They have written a book entitled "Transpositions", which traces this personal and professional relationship since its beginning. They have also continued working and exhibiting their work as individual artists, the two also having written upon their work with various publications to their names. Each has gained popular recognition in their different fields of expression gaining prizes and awards from various art bodies. The two now live in Hamburg, West Germany with their three children and continue to work.

#### SOURCE MATERIAL

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Artists, in general, have sources from which to work. Cultural and social changes, childhood experiences and adult relationships all have a part to play in influencing artists' work. Impressions made upon the person find expression through the artist or creative mind. Having been shaped as people by our past experiences leads one to believe that the art work produced will have various sign aggregates in-built, which one can read and trace back to the original references or sources of inspiration for the work. In the work by Karin Szekessy and Paul Wunderlich this is evident.

"All things that surround us are inspiring."<sup>1</sup> Certainly, from Szekessy's work, one can speculate as to where her inspiration lay. As a child growing up in boarding school away from her parents, Szekessy's lonely experience must have inspired her quiet study into the world of dolls. Because she was a shy, introverted child, she may have created a personal world of her own which the dolls inhabited.

Certainly, the numerous photographs of dolls she displayed in her first exhibition, express an intimate relationship which almost makes the viewer uncomfortable at times. Her fascination with dolls came from the fact that they had so many human elements and through her exploration of the doll she seemed to uncover facets of her own personality and identity. In the series of photographs which she made, the artist's affectionate relationship to the object is reflected and the underlying associations and connections between herself as a woman and the doll image are explored. The decision to become a photographer rather than actress seems to reflect the artist's personality also, when she remarks, "Actors, similar to photographers, are able to give the figures they reflect, a special character and create with the figure and their own personality something new, which is called inspiration."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, some of these studies give the viewer a chance to read into the object a life-time of childhood experiences which tell their own personal story. Szekessy has been quoted as saying that the doll series may have been the introduction to the nudes for which she is now chiefly known. In her nude studies, Szekessy employs different techniques.

1 & 2 Karin Szekessy. "Girls, Furniture & Mannerium." Leica Photographie, February 1976





For some, the formal'elements of the human figure with object are explored. As a young woman her interest in collecting English curios and furniture led her into the unique relationship she now finds so exiting between the female human figure and furniture. In her studio, where she has acquired various pieces of furniture that reflect an English colonial type of atmosphere, together with the pieces she has collected from the turn of the century German period, she finds never ending contexts in which she situates her models.

She also uses the female nude in order to explore her own sexuality as a woman. In this the earlier doll series gave her a perspective from which to ask certain aesthetic and psychological questions. The female image as object had always fascinated her and in some of her nude series she examines some social and media-type associations.

In her later nudes the relationship between female and nature has sparked off her imagination. Mythological and cultural links can be clearly seen to be her inspiration.

Paralell with this kind of experimentation, Szekessy is also a straight verite-realist, capable of transforming a photograph into a meaningful portrait. (Illustration 1) This must surely have had something to do with her training as a photo-journalist and her experience at working with "Kristall" magazine where mainly portrait work was needed. She also has the Cartier-Bresson knack of replacing "reportage" with absolute moments of life - such as her "Woman with a gold Tooth", "Alcohol", and "Morning at the Mainline Knil Terminus". All in all, one can say that Szekessy's experiences have shaped her perceptions as a photographer and artist.

In the work of Paul Wunderlich, this can also be illustrated. Growing up in the troubled Berlin of the 1930's, Wunderlich's perception of the world was gradually being shaped. His experience of the war must have had a dramatic effect on him as a sixteen year old youth. After the appalling violence and squalor of warfare, his cultural perspective seemed hollow and devoid of sense. As an artist, this experience made Wunderlich feel the need to express his view of the world and humanity in an all-embracing definition. With the censorship and restrictions made upon society before and during the war in Germany, creative expression was stunted. However, after the war, when Wunderlich Travelled to Paris, this experience had a reactionary effect upon his work. There was no more fear of those depths which had been camouflaged or relegated to some remote corner of the human condition - Wunderlich felt free to express his view of society, the world, and the domonic streak in man. In his canvasses, feelings of pain, cruelty and perversity are conjured up. The human body, male and female, constitute his alphabet. His conventional art training had proviously nurtured his interest in figurative art, but it was during the war when his perception of the human figure in context was given a different perspective.

After 1945 Wunderlich was among the group of German artists who felt that they had to express their revulsion towards Nazism in images demonstrating their disgust at a completely bankrupt culture. They felt the need to convey their nausea and horror, "of yesterday's big mistake and today's escape into middle class smugness".<sup>1</sup> Dada had already been born in Zurich amidst World War I, and the disgust with contemporary civilization was evident throughout artistic circles. Wunderlich had, however, inner conflict over these feelings, as he had to come to terms with the seemingly contradictory fact that he himself had actually served in the war. Through his work at the time and even up to the present this personal questioning, and growth can be seen to be explored and in a way exorcised from his mind.

After Szekessy and Wunderlich met and throughout their relationship, one can see the influence they had upon each others work. Although up to this, they had both had German backgrounds and culture from which to emerge, their individual paths differed tremendously. Szekessy's isolation from Germany made her experience totally different to Wunderlich's. Wunderlich was, however, drawn to the photographs in her exhibition and must have felt something in common with her view of the human figure and its images. Could it be that perhaps her personal renderings of the doll reminded him of that other German artist, Hans Bellmer, whose disquieting surrealist doll photographs shocked earlier audiences. Szekessy's studies, however, draw one towards the object, whilst Bellmer's succeed in repelling the viewer.

1. "Macabre Universe" A. Werner. Page 39. Art Magazine, May 1970.

When the two started working together, their relationship took on the roles of catalyst and mentor. They have been a constant source of inspiration to each other, he, to prompt her with the strangeness of his imagination, she, to carry out with personal contributions, her own considerable craft as a photographer. Because both artists work with the human figure, this combination also works well to spark off various aesthetic explorations. When Wunderlich uses a Szekessy photograph for his painting, he is aware that it must not merely be an aid to memory but is in itself a particle of fantasy – arranged reality, an art form with its own identity.

#### Significant Sources and Interpretation

In the two artists' work, one can see common sources from which they work. What seems significant is the fact that they are both interested in the human figure and its relevant context, but each interpret this differently.

Even whilst working in close collaboration, their work differs in its psychological approach to the subject from which they have gained inspiration. Obviously, Wunderlich's impression of the female nude is different to Szekessy's but is this primarily because of their gender differences ? Szekessy is quoted as saying, "I am a woman, a lot of artists who work with nudes are men. Men see women as erotic, which shows in the picture. I want to learn more about my own sex and sexuality. My perspective is completely different."<sup>1</sup> I would speculate that their differing life experiences also have an effect upon the sources they choose to work from. Wunderlich chooses to explore the human condition through the erotic theme, recognising how well it can expand the mind and illuminate the illicit and tabooed. His figures in twisted poses sometimes engaged in complicated forms of sexual intercourse are not depicted to provoke feelings of lust but to shake the spectator out of his matterof-fact lethargy and expose the ugly and perverse side of life. (Illustration 2)

Szekessy's view of humanity has not been subjected to the same reality and therefore her work explores the more sedate or contemplative moments of inner vision. Her imagination goes less to these depths and inspires her to a different portrayal of life and the human figure.

1. "Girls, Furniture and Mannerism". Karin Szekessy. Leica Photographie. Feb. 1976.

I would speculate that the two artists' sources of inspiration will not change in their future work. Their past experiences have shaped their perspective and personalities. They will look to the same things to spark off mutual and individual creativity and will continue to use each other as a source of artistic discourse. Wunderlich, I feel, will always see with somewhat tainted vision, the human figure as signifier and symbol of a more universal condition, whilst Szekessy will succeed in expressing her personal relationship with the subject in her work. What inspires her, is to capture the nature of this relationship and explore it pictorially. Her portraits will remain intimate whilst Wunderlich's work will spark off more universal questions about humanity and the world.





In talking about the content of Szekessy and Wunderlich's work, I wish to approach the two artists individually and then relate their common uses of imagery and subject matter. Here, I will discuss the similarities and differences in the vocabulary they use in order to express individual ideas. Whether they work collaboratively or not, the meaning invested in their work will be different. It is interesting to see how they each can actually use the same physical subject matter but whilst exploring it aesthetically, achieve different results.

#### Imagery

Karin Szekessy's use of the doll as subject matter obviously expressed her love of the object but also her interest in the human figure. She herself, says that it was a natural step from dolls to nudes. Since this introduction she has worked predominantly with the female nude. If she is not exploring the figure in relation to its physical context she is tracing its relevance to society and to herself as an individual and sexual person. When she makes certain associations, both formal and psychological between the female and nude and furniture, decor, etc., strange things begin to happen. The signs or references already in-built in the object, work with the figure and become re-contextualized into another set of pictorial references.

In her portraits, there is something different at play when the subjects do not so much pose, as comfortably fall into a personality attitude. Szekessy also makes studies of the nude in nature. She finds that this kind of life photography can be difficult because the nude in nature can be sometimes too much. "I am afraid of naturalism, it is dangerous for aesthetic life photography. I try to escape it by using the body in extremes with different angles."<sup>1</sup> (Illustration 3)

Wunderlich also uses the body in extremes whether working directly from a Szekessy photograph or from his own imagination. Nude bodies constitute his alphabet.

1. 'Girls, Furniture and Mannerism''. Karin Szekessy. Leica Photographie. Feb. 1976.

#### CONTENT

What he wishes to express he says can be best dealt with through the use of the figure. These figures are presented in surreal settings that aim at attacking the common sense or rationale of the viewer. The sense of "arranged reality" is achieved by his use of photographs which disregard the natural proportions of the human body and situate the figure in a setting already made up of component parts. Wunderlich also makes use of the various relationships and associations between the figure and furniture. Working from their home or Szekessy's private studio, he includes his wife's taste in decor and props and then makes his own personal contribution to the image.

#### Meaning

Szekessy and Wunderlich both wish to communicate their views on life and humanity to the viewer. Because they have had different experiences from each other they have been preoccupied with different issues at times in their lives. How they communicate their individual perspectives is through their use of imagery. The vocabulary with which they choose sometimes to describe their world is already endowed with certain meanings. In this, their work lends itself to the use of photography.

When Szekessy made the photographic studies of dolls the subject of her work, she was trying to explore the doll image as a personal object from which she had found pleasure as a child but also as the model for female representation. Although the latter was not emphasized strongly, the social implications of the doll image were touched upon. She seems to have been more interested in expressing her identification with the doll rather than how it related to society in general. Her studies are intimate, describing the inner world of a woman feeling nostalgically towards the subject. The camera works as a means of recording this personal experience but also I think on a kind of voyeuristic level. Feelings of coming surreptitiously upon children playing are conjured up for me whilst viewing these photographs. The intimacy of some of the images with their unique representation of the doll seems like something that is usually kept hidden and secret. Szekessy's later nude studies came directly from her work with the doll. It was a natural step to take from the object which had so many human elements to the actual human figure. Her earlier work as photo-





Szekessy's later nude studies came directly from her work with the doll. It was a natural step to take from the object which had so many human elements to the actual human figure. Her earlier work as photojournalist introduced her to the world of portraiture. Her craft at capturing the essence of the subject in one still moment, is seen consistently from her portrait work. Because most of her work consists of nude portraiture, she likes to become familar with each individual. She understands the difficulties of nude photography and believes the relationship between model and artist is very important to the success of the image produced. She likes her models to be natural and so works permanently with girls she has known for a time. She does not like her models to pose when she is making a portrait. She likes to capture them in moments of ease where their individual personalities are given full expression. When she wishes to capture certain moods and atmospheres, she is also capable of making the image dramatic and full of tension. In some of her portraits, the need to express, on a more psychological level, the state of mind of the figure (and indeed sometimes, artist) is recognised. The context in which she places the model is an important indication to the space of the imagination or type of emotion which she wishes to portray. In (Illustration 5) the portrait takes on a personality which can be readily identified with. The woman's isolation is expressed well and touches the viewer intensely. The way in which the models face is turned brings a certain anonymity to the figure which lends itself to the viewers identification with the subject. It could be argued that because of this point, the image is not a portrait, but I feel that because the photograph describes the person in a moment which captures her essential feeling at the time, it succeeds, and identification with this person enriches the viewer's experience.

Szekessy's nudes also work on a purely formalistic level. In these studies, she chooses to appreciate the human figure as an aesthetic piece in itself. In these studies, her work reminds me of some of the work of Lucien Clerque, Robert Farber or Jeff Dunas. When she uses the human figure in this way and introduces pieces of furniture as props, strange visual associations are made. In "On a Visit" (Illustration 6) the figure blends in with the forms of the couch and create an image that is surreal or dream-like. As the head is out of view the spectator is unaware of the connotations a female figure in this position might have with the chair, one only seems aware of a completely new and different perspective while looking at the forms.





When Szekessy uses objects or assessories which bring a definite and clear set of references with them to the viewer, this kind of perspective can not be felt. There is too much noise or static (so to speak) coming from the objects and the already inherent meanings associated with them, work upon the figure also. For example, in Szekessy's nude with animal skin, the meaning being portrayed is uncertain. I am not sure that: Szekessy is deliberately trying to set up the reference of meaning between the figure and the skin. Media images are consistently exploiting the relationship between female and animal which seems to be used to create high-charged eroticism. (Illustration 7) One can speculate as to where this association arose initially. The tradional definition of woman as sphinx, mysterious, hidden and potentially threatening seems to have perpetuated the image of female as animal. Once this association is merely a clue to female representation, the references can be exploited fully in order to express her sexuality in an attractive, exciting and fetishistic way. Szekessy's use of this prop seems to place her in this category yet as an image the effect created is not one of eroticism. The human figure seems to take on the characteristics of the animal skin, the two blend in to create a metamorphosis of female and animal. When Wunderlich directs Szekessy to create images from his own imagination, the erotic element is very prominent. As the models carry out his stage directions, the images created are explicit in the connotations they derive. In Wunderlich's lithograph from this series (Illustration 8) one can see how the artist has brought to the fore the underlying references of the animal skin related to the female figure. I am reminded of the reference to female - "woman is at once apple and serpent". 1 The female is at once in the position of invitation to the viewer and the symbol of potential treachery. She sits in wait offering herself whilst at the same time ready to pounce.

In Szekessy's nudes in nature, the erotic element is also overlooked. It seems as if the model is used to refer to the myth of woman as elemental, closely related to nature. The idealised perspective of looking upon woman as natural, earthy and earth mother is exploited.

1. "Bodies of Knowledge" Liam Hudson. Quote by Heinrich Heine.

Her images reflect female sexuality in this sense, they attempt to define the female in terms of her biological destiny - earth mother and potentially life-creating. In her photographs on this (Illustration 9) the technique she uses also reflects this definition. The elements are used in such a way as to act as symbols and not as descriptions of one particular woman. The universality of the meaning is recognised and the figure is taken to stand for all women. Her later nudes in natural settings describe the individual models as having identities of their own. In these, I feel the sexuality of each model is allowed to express itself freely among conducive surroundings.

The fervour and energy with which these models relate and relax into the natural setting truthfully describes their experience. When I identify with the previous photographs, it is in a very abstract sense, almost from a detached or logical viewpoint. When I am confronted by the later studies, I can easily relate to the immediacy and spontaneity of the models response to their experience. They seem to describe the essential sensuousness of being naked in nature, free to express oneself and one's pleasure at the experience.

Wunderlich's work, on the other hand, works at creating a system of communication upon symbols and references. Through the use of paint or print, his symbols become more stylized and in so doing become more universal. They are not personal descriptions of individual characters but figures who work together to conjure up an idea, a concept about life or reality. In Wunderlich's use of imagery, he expects to portray humanity by focusing on sexuality as the key to all human experience. The German word "Wunderlich" means singular, strange, eccentric, peculiar, curious, odd, queer and fanciful. It is a coincidence that all these adjectives can be used to describe his work. His perspective of reality and humanity could be said to be very singular. Since the start of his professional career, his work has attempted to describe the totality of the human experience through the exploration of sexuality. He chooses to focus on this facet of humanity and this study has sustained his work up to date. His work has been likened to Hans Bellmer and Horst Janssen in this respect. These artists made the exploration of the erotic theme their life-long obsession or preoccupation. Wunderlich is no different, for most of his work takes on this search and the work that does not, to my mind, is not worthy of scrutiny.

When he is not creating pieces which represent the female sexuality he is reflecting his own fears and desires for the female. Some of his work involves the nude male also but still tends to express his view of humanity through the pleasures and horrors derived from his own private fantasies. He believes that in affording these fantasies expression, he can, in a sense, rid himself of them. (Illustration 2) He exposes the demonic streak in man, and his works serve as a release - eliminating destructive forces by bringing them to consciousness and affording them expression.

His fantastic art is the offspring of inner conflicts. In Alfred Werner's criticism of the artist's exhibition at the Staempli Gallery, he illustrates his suspicion over the artist's "'degenerate' pictures which raise the problems between art and pleasure, art and communication, art and their unconscious impulses into aggressively new provocations".1 As an artist, one is aware of the responsibility one has. Because art is a form of communication with a potential to touch an audience, the message one has to proffer has to be fully contemplated. An artist has to question and feel certain about the statement they make because it could impress their viewer dramatically. In a sense art that is created mainly for the artist himself is dangerous if it is purely therapeutic. Wunderlich may be reflecting the world by expressing his inner conflicts but he is also exorcising these feelings. When art describes pleasure, an audience can be seduced. When art describes perverse pleasure, lending legibility to thoughts housed deeply in the imagination, an audience can also be seduced. Being confronted with a piece of art which acts as concrete; proof of the existence of such feelings, can have a deep and lasting impression upon the viewer. If an artist is aware of this effect he must take full responsibility for it. The question of "art and the unconscious impulses into aggressively new provocations" is not easily answered. Certainly, I feel, some art has this effect but it is up to the individual to decide for themselves whether this risk is worthwhile in order to reflect reality truely.

I have mentioned Wunderlich's work which is not inspired by his view of humanity and does not claim to express any deep psychological perspective. It is interesting to look at this work in order to illustrate how the artist could, to my mind, fail to pursue some of his objectives.

1. "Macabre Universe" A. Werner. Arts Magazine, May 1970.





When one looks at his "With Feathered Hat and Black Coat" or "A Homage to Ingres", it is not clear what the intention of the artist is. The importance of process seems to override meaning. His prints show overworking of the subject. This consummate craftmanship and highly-stylized technique make his prints precious or far removed from human experience. One is not made aware of the importance of the actual subject matter and it becomes dubious as to whether the artist is merely adapting designs from Szekessy's photographs or Ingres paintings for want of something better to do. (Illustrations 10 & 11) If his objective is to communicate to the spectator and to "shake him out of his lethargy"! these pieces of art have failed. It is not sure what he communicates and these sleek and sophisticated images with reticence seemingly highly-calculated, do nothing to "shake one" or indeed make any lasting impression. I illustrate this point because I find Wunderlich's work sometimes leaves me in question as to where his motivation lies. Sometimes, as Alfred Werner says "The horrifying creatures in Wunderlich's universe are only well-rehearsed actors in a theatre of nudity"<sup>2</sup>, and they are "so excellently presented as to make them beautiful by their distillation of so much aesthetic charm and pleasure".<sup>3</sup> I am not convinced that his subject lies in reality and so question his statement of intent.

PROCESS

The use of process in artistic activity is very important to how the viewer interprets the piece. The process some artists use, acts solely as the incentive for the work. Other artists find that the process is an integral part of the piece which acts simultaneously with the other elements within the work to convey the impressions and meaning the artist chooses to express. The use of photography in art can either achieve this expression clearly or succeed in making the meaning abscure.

In the work of Karin Szekessy, I believe the use of photography enables her to successfully express her concerns. With the use of the camera Szekessy can record observations about life and her perspective. By the very reflection of these observations, the photographic image lends a certain truth to her work that the spectator finds it easy to relate to. She uses only natural light for her subjects but changes lenses and sometimes uses infrared film when filming outdoors. believes that every skin tone is overwhelmed in nature and that the nude can sometimes be too much. She makes various experiments with the camera and her technical approach and sometimes leaves a lot up to chance. Szekessy's prints sometimes develop into heliographs which can end up in a series of color combinations and have the finish of a "work of art" rather than a photograph. It was through her meeting with Wunderlich that she began experimenting with this medium. The heliograph or "light print" made it possible for her to print in black and white first and then manipulate the color during the printing process.

When Wunderlich works from Szekessy's photographs, he looks upon them as more than just a sketch book or diary. Because Wunderlich's approach to the world surrounding him is distance (he keeps it at arms length as a result of a distinct fear of it), he has interposed something between himself and reality - the camera lens. To Wunderlich, the photograph is already composed. Szekessy sometimes carries out his directions. She understands that the photograph must not merely be an aid to memory but in itself be a particle of fantasy - arranged reality, an art form with its own identity. Through this process Wunderlich makes effective use of the photographic sources which give his pictures that degree of legibility that highly hallucinatory images would not have for the viewer.

The surrealist element in his work that aims at attacking common sense or rational order, is exploited fully by his use of "arranged reality" through the camera. Through the use of the camera for painting, the technical observation made gives the viewer a primary understanding upon which Wunderlich can communicate further his deeply personal feelings. Having achieved this system of communication his work takes on a further type of distancing or objectivity by his use of another process - the print process. I personally find this dependence on process sometimes debilitating for his work. I find I am much less ready to try to relate to this form of expression. His finished work is a sign-aggregate consisting of the conventional sign of the source (the photograph) but through his further use of process, the usurped signs re-contextualized as art actually take over sometimes leaving the viewer with highly idiosyncratic signs or symbols which they cannot easily relate to. It is in this way that I can understand how his work can be called precious or highly stylized and can alienate the viewer into a state of cool appreciation only of the artist's talent as a craftsman. In this way, I find his inner conflicts or personal feelings about life become swamped by his commitment to process. If his aim was to solely express this commitment, his work would succeed, however, as an artist wishing to communicate on a deep level to the viewer, his moral and psychological perspective on the world "to shake the spectator out of his lethargy" and "to puncture the surface of reality with the needle of feeling"1, some of his work falls short. The debilitating effect his reliance on process has upon his work and the meaning he wishes to portray is illustrated in this way. Having looked at two works of his in particular previously, (Illustrations 10 & 11) the statement Keith Roberts makes, "To what extent can a serious work of art risk being mistaken for a perfume advertisement ?"<sup>2</sup> is very relevant. I feel it is necessary to define what "a serious work of art" expects to achieve before answering this question in relation to Wunderlich. I believe a serious piece of art should work on two levels. It should convey the proper meaning the artist intended and should also have aesthetic value. I expect to be drawn to the same art piece more than once and for the piece to be able to sustain some critical and aesthetic appreciation on my behalf.

- 1. "Macabre Universe" A. Werner. Arts Magazine, May 1970
- 2. "Homage to Ingres" Keith Roberts. Burlington Magazine critique of Wunderlich's exhibition at Redfern Callery.

In this, I think a serious work of art leaves the viewer with having learned something, having deepened the human experience in some way. With respect to Wunderlich's work, I am not made aware fo any critical questioning or evaluation he has made prior to creating these pieces. I do not know how seriously Wunderlich can expect an audience to take these works. In his "Homage to Ingres" series, I am in doubt as to whether he intends a serious act of homage to a great master or whether he is using the design to portray only his consummate craftmanship. I personally am not drawn to these images again and after the initial impression they make upon me there is nothing more left to remember, feel, or question.

I have illustrated in this section how individual artists approach to medium can help or hinder their communication. I feel that Szekessy's use of process lends itself to the insights and observations she wishes to express. I feel Wunderlich's use of photography in some cases definitely achieves the degree of legibility which is needed in order to describe his inner emotions and perspective. I think his further reliance on the printing process is debilitating and leads the viewer into confusion whilst trying to interpret idiosyncratic, highly-stylized and cryptic symbols. The viewer is expected to go more than half way to discern the artist's message and is confronted with a not altogether satisfying experience in appreciating some of Wunderlich's art work.

#### AUTHOR'S PERSONAL WORK

As an artist, one's social background and personal experience has an important influence over one's work. One's perspective has been shaped to a great extent and the work tends to repeatedly express this point of view. I have illustrated how important creative links with other artists are, whether in a personal sense or more general, in order to enhance work. With my own work I think this is also apt.

It is interesting to note that before I had previous knowledge of the work of Karin Szekessy or Paul Wunderlich, my work was likened to theirs. As I examined their lives and work in more detail I was surprised to find that I had even more in common with the two artists. I found similarities in all three areas of the work, from source material, to imagery used, to process. Obviously there were differences also, and in the following sections these will be illustrated and discussed.

#### Source Material

Since the beginning of my artistic career, I have always been interested in the human figure. I have always found inspiration and interest with this subject. As I became aware of my own sexuality, the female figure became my means of communicating my experience. I found constant references to the female nude throughout my life whether it was in my traditional art training or in the everyday images used by the media. As a woman, my identity seemed to be already defined, but I was not satisfied with the role I was to play. These feelings began various studies into female representation. My imagination was sparked into working with these representations and finding my own identity.

My work has been autobiographical to date in that it has traced certain experiences I have had in my life. As with Szekessy and Wunderlich, by relating these experiences, one's view of the world and the society in which one lives is expressed. I have found the issues that have sparked off Szekessy's work have also been of interest to me. When she has delved into her personal experience and relation to the world, her perspective is intimate, whilst Wunderlich's concerns are with much broader issues.

His personal experience it seems has been to evaluate all humanity and through his work, one finds the human figure as a symbol for humanity universally. With Szekessy's work and my own, the figure concentrated





His personal experience it seems has been to evaluate all humanity and through his work, one finds the human figure as a symbol for humanity universally. With Szekessy's work and my own, the figure concentrated upon, has a definite life of its own. Through the work, the relationship between artist and subject is explored in a more personal way, although my work sometimes communicates on a more general level too.

As I have found myself living in a society which is more politically aware of the role the female assumes, my ideas and artistic discourse must also reflect this. Working as an artist in this atmosphere has inspired me to express certain value systems and to question them in an artistic way. One can not pretend to be unaffected by one's immediate environment and as an artist, I find that my work pays comment to the importance of this atmosphere. Obviously as my concerns have been with the representation of female in a personal and social context, I derive the necessary information from my surroundings.

The first main piece concerned with female representation was made when I had come upon various media images of women and I had wanted to explore the associations and meanings inherent in the images. This led me to questioning why it was that female imagery was used to sell products in our society. I wanted to find out what made these images attractive and why they could be used in such a way. What struck me about so much of the media imagery was the association made between the female and the slightly animalistic. It seemed attractive to the viewer when these associations were made subtly evident. (Illustration 12) In a strange way, this attraction seemed to hold the viewer's interest long enough to let the advertisers message sink in. I too, was fascinated by this attraction but for different reasons. I wanted to subvert the imagery in some way in order to question the inherent associations in the first place. With this idea, my imagination was triggered into creating figures that were in themselves animalistic, with just a hint of the "feminine mystique" which was initially so attractive.

In the second piece of work, I attempted to explore the image of woman as musical instrument. I was inspired when I had read three quotations by Havelock Ellis, Balzac and Dr. Helena Wright on this very theme, to question its basis. Coming from a traditional art background, I had been made aware of this theme through the use of images such as Man Ray's "Violin d'Ingres" 1924. I was also struck by the fact that when women were seen in context with a musical instrument, they were very rarely taking pleasure from actively playing it. In comparison, in any paintings I had seen of their male counterparts, the male was actively involved and mastering the instrument. Growing up in a culture which perpetuated this kind of imagery led me into working with the piece called "Rhapsody".

When I heard of a German artist called Hans Bellmer and saw his photographs on "Die Puppe", I was fascinated. I felt so strongly about his work and how relevant it was to me as a woman, that it inspired me into making a video about my experiences and feelings in relation to the whole doll theme. (Illustrations 13 & 14)

As can be seen, the culture one is brought up in and the information made available about other artists and how they have related to similar personal experiences has a very definite relevance to the kind of work an artist produces. My surroundings socially and personally led me to solving issues and concerns on an artistic and intellectual level. The main source of inspiration for my work was my personal experience as an artist living in a society conscious of its artistic heritage and its ever changing culture. The similarities between my source of inspiration and that of Szekessy and Wunderlich, lies in this fact. As creative people, impressions made upon us are reflected through our work. That our individual impressions differ is no surprise, it is however, interesting to note that Wunderlich concerns himself with an allembracing definition of life through his work "with his focus on this world's dreadfulness, his art suggests, would it not be foolish to give up the chance of seeing, experiencing, enjoying so much delight, extracted from man's private hell ?"1, where Szekessy and myself are interested in showing moments and experiences of life as studies in themselves. Hans Bellmer was concerned with this all-embracing definition also. Is this similarity made up of the fact that these two male artists were influenced dramatically by surrealism and its aims or could it be that the male perspective tends to externalize personal feelings about one's universe and reflect these upon the total human race ?

1. "Macabre Universe" Alfred Werner. p. 40 Arts Magazine, May 1970





If there is a female sensibility in art, maybe it is to describe one's inner emotions in a very personal and intimate way rather than expressing one's experience through outer symbols. John Berger has implied that this difference in frames of imaginative reference comes from the biological destiny of the male and female. He suggests that because in "sexual anatomy, the onset of puberty, pregnancy and sexual potency occurs within the female body, she seems freer than the male to integrate her sexuality into a coherent sense of who she is."<sup>1</sup> In the same way, Szekessy's work, together with my own, makes no claim to describe humanity in an all encompassing definition but only expects to illustrate certain moments of our personal experience.

## Content

I try to communicate my ideas through the use of images that leave a certain media type resonance. For a lot of my work, I find reproductions and imagery that come from a known and popular source tend to give the meaning I want. Because my concerns are mainly with female representation, the figure constitutes a lot of the images I use. As I have mentioned, the doll image has become an integral part of one piece of work and to some extent, any representation of the female human figure relates to the pictorial vocabulary I use.

I like to situate the figure in a physical context that relates to other levels, psychologically and personally. When, for instance, Szekessy places her model in an empty room, the room also conjures up spaces in the imagination where lonliness or other emotions exist. In the same way, the context in which my figures are placed are relevant to the emotion I wish to portray. Even the lack of physical objects or surroundings give the viewer the feeling of a relevant context. In a piece where I chose to express the lonliness and isolation of the figure to its surroundings, I decided to emphasize the coldness of the immediate environment by using the color blue to fill the empty space behind. To me, this reflected on a psychological level, the complete emptiness of the figure itself. (Illustration 15) In this the context or scenery in the image is very important.

1. "Ways of Seeing" John Berger. Chapter 2.



Mustration 16.



Depending on the point I want to illustrate, the imagery is used as sign and symbol, where the meaning is inherent. When I choose to juxtapose images together, the associations brought out are very deliberate. In the work "Tryptych" where I wanted to represent the animalistic female, the imagery I used was a complicated mixture of female and animal figures which related to each other and in some places actually became the other. In this way, I expressed the idea through a metamorphosis of the initial elements. (Illustration 16)

With the piece on the musical instruments, the imagery was also used very directly. The actual physical use of musical instruments in the piece set up the relationships I chose to express and question. The female figure was used in conjunction with the instrument to make reference to other historical paintings and images. The musical instrument personified as woman has been portrayed by various artists throughout history -Ingres' "Odalisque", is one in particular which I chose to make reference to, by using my model in a similar pose. All the elements of the image succeed in conjuring up Ingres' painting and from this view, I could then work the meaning I wished to portray through the piece. In this, the piece worked on dlferent levels of meaning. It questioned past definitions and attempted to introduce future ones. (Illustration 17 & 18)

In a piece where I wanted to express the mysticism in human love, I wanted to use a language of symbols that could be read universally. I wanted to make physical associations in the piece between spirituality or some form of religion and the expression of human love. I described human love by making images of a male and female naked body interacting. I chose to show in abstract images the figures engaged in intercourse. As the images became more abstract, I super-imposed a lightening shaft through the couple. This was used to express the dynamism and power of the love experience. I positioned these images in alcoves of a churchlike space and headed the aisle with stained glass windows which reflected the lightening theme. The space conjured up feelings of some sacred place and the images were made to relate to the context in which they were placed.



Everything that constitutes an image is relevant to the meaning being portrayed. Every element in the image sets up associations within the piece but can also make reference to previous or present known information of the viewer. In the "Doll" video, I deliberately made use of the photographs of Hans Bellmer by using personal iamges that conjured up his work and from this I wished to set up some common ground in order for the viewer to question and discuss the basis for his work. In one section of the video, I made direct reference to a Bellmer photograph by using myself in exactly the same position as his model. I superimposed the two images together and then reacted to the physical position which I had been made to simulate. My reaction was one of defiance and anger which I hope made the viewer aware of the psychological implications of the images and the re-emergence of the doll or woman's identity. Bellmer was fascinated by the sexuality of young girls and the corruption of innocence and his images represent an attempt to explore, analyse and come to terms with this fascination. His fascination then became an obsession and through this obsession I feel his moral judgement became swamped. Because the "Doll" theme was so close to my own personal experience, I felt obliged to make some statement about his work. "The doll by its nature can have no responsiveness or desires."<sup>1</sup> But can be manipulated and abused because of its ineffectuality. It can be used as image for woman and object and in so doing perpetuates the notion that the female awaits the infusion of life by the male master. I felt so strongly about Bellmer's photographs that in the video not only did I attempt to destroy them but I also physically destroyed the actual doll image that I had made. Through this action, I wanted to express the suspicion and fear I had at the fact that such objects have existed in the first place and still do to this day. I felt that by their nature, irrespective of how innocent they appear, they were potentially, objects in the images of women to take control of.

Where the vast majority of sexually explicit works of art are produced as part of an overall desire to express the totality of human experience, very few artists have made sex their only motivation; Bellmer was one of these artists. It could also be argued that Wunderlich's work expresses this preoccupation.

1. "Sonya" Tolstoy. p. 109

Wunderlich, like Bellmer has been described as a pan sexualist. Indeed, Bellmer's work opened up the path for Wunderlich and other such artists as the surrealist resident of Hamburg, Horst Janssen, who recognised how the erotic theme could help people lose their inhibitions, expand the self and illuminate the totality of human experience. Bellmer is quoted as saying "If my work is found to scandalize, that is because for me the world is scandalous."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Wunderlich says his work is to "communicate to the public that reality is only a convention that must be punctured with the needle of feeling so that the essence of man can escape into freedom"<sup>2</sup> and in his portrayal of horrifying creatures engaged in complicated forms of intercourse who inspire us with awe and horror, he wishes to release destructive forces by bringing them to consciousness and affording them expression.

When Szekessy uses the female nude in her work, it is a source of exploration into facets of her own identity. She uses her work to express the web of perceptions from which memorable images of the body have sprung, and the bearing of this web on our attempts to make systematic sense of the lives we lead is recognised. When Szekessy creates portraits, the model tells something of the photographer too. Not only is her personal relationship to the model expressed but also the image has a way of discovering the limits of her own imaginative powers, almost as if the artist is "turned inside out" and the image answers back. With my work also, I have felt this kind of process happening. When I create an image of the female nude, what stands before me is also a reflection of myself. As the image chrystallizes, I also discover information about myself as an artist and as a female.

#### Process

I have previously illustrated how the use of photography has become inextricably a part of the artist's vocabulary. In Szekessy's work the camera captures aspects of nature and of the human situation otherwise completely lost in time past, which continue to exert their unique cachet through the photographic print. In Wunderlich's work the process of painting from photographs enables him to lend legibility to the highly imaginative images he wishes to use.

- 1. 'Hans Bellmer. p.12 Peter Webb with Robert Short
- 2. "Macabre Universe" A. Werner. Arts Magazine, May 1970.





The element of "arranged reality" in his work enables him to communicate to the viewer in a surrealist or dream-like manner. In my own work the use of the camera helps me to focus on facets of the female identity that may have been hidden by my subjectivity. When I explore female representation in society, it makes sense to look to the media for images and reproductions. Because with the nature of photography, it reaches a wider audience, a broader cross-section of society, concerns itself with art through this process. In order to make statements about this kind of representation, I use the same process or guise in which to house the message. For instance, in my work "Tryptych", my aim was to bring attention to the way the media makes associations between female and animal. The first panel of the tryptych described these very representations down to the fact that the prints were glossy and seductive. (Illustration 19) The second panel consisting of a hybrid of mixed media images of female and animal associations brought attention to the kind of process used in the first representations. The images were taken in exactly the same way, involving similar elements but this time the subtle connotations of the first panel are brought fully into existence. In this way, not only did I draw attention to the ideology behind the female/animal association, but I also made a pun of the media's devices to make images seductive. I am not aware of any other way that I could have questioned this process. In my use of this type of style in photography, my ideas became more satiric and I feel made a bigger impression. (Illustration 20)

I have also used photography as Szekessy does in capturing situations of human nature, otherwise lost in time. In the "Lightning Installation" I used this facility of the camera to the fore. The images of the making love were taken with slow shutter speeds in order to indicate the transience of the moment. The imagery in some prints is blurred, and quite deliberately so. I did not need an explicit description of the act, but wanted to capture the mood and atmosphere of the emotions felt. The photographic medium was also valuable for the superimpositions I had to make. Technically, these were very easy to produce. In sandwiching two slides together I created an image which worked on two levels of meaning. The composite image became more abstract and succeeded in capturing a subject which was more emotional and intangible than a three dimensional image. There was something there, (but yet not quite) that gave the viewer just a taste of the atmosphere. I find the use of photography extremely conducive to this kind of expression.

When one uses photography, one can also experiment with the image during the printing stage. Because the subject of the photograph has been recorded truthfully one can have more access to re-contextualize the image in various ways and so enhance the meaning of the piece. As the subject can be read and clear reference found to it, one can then re-work the image in order to get across for example, certain emotions or atmospheres. In the re-manipulation of the image an artist can find a more satisfying way of describing inner thoughts or creative ideas. This is illustrated in some surrealist photography where common objects can be treated in an uncommon or unusual way and so situate them in a context that conjures up spaces in the mind or imagination. The dreamlike quality of this kind of photography involves the viewer in a system of references already inherent in the individual elements being used and the statement or idea which the artist wishes to portray through the juxtaposition and displacement of the elements. As I have illustrated, a lot of Wunderlich's art relies on this quality to communicate his individual viewpoint. In Bellmer's work also, this approach is used. When Bellmer uses everyday objects in his photographs of "Die Puppe", the viewer is thrown off balance. One does not expect to associate the everyday objects with the pitiful object of Bellmer's dream world. The truthful representations of all the individual elements in the scene recorded mechanically by the camera lens, together with the three dimensional image of the doll gives the fantasy or narrative a commitment to truth or reality attacking the common sense of the viewer.

There are similarities in the approach I work with and the processes Szekessy and Wunderlich use. As yet, I have not worked, like Wunderlich, from a photograph to painting, to print. I feel the essence of the subject might have become obscure and the message I wanted to express would be hidden by the process which I had used.

I think my work will continue on in the same direction in the future and hope that my use of photography lends itself to the observations I wish to invest my work with.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one can see how artists provide each other with a chance to discuss and question individual artistic concepts. Whether artists are known personally as with the case of Szekessy and Wunderlich, or in a more general way, the influence they have upon each other is of vital importance. From examining the lives and work of these two artists this can be seen. One can, indeed, see how enriching the professional relationship has been to their individual work. Szekessy has been quoted as saying "I am very lucky that we don't only live and eat together but that we work on the same thing as well. We have a good influence on each other. We have exhibitions together and everytime new ideas arise" $^{1}$ Working together they have sparked off each other's imaginations and inspired each other, he to prompt her with the strangeness of his imagination, she to carry out with personal contributions her own considerable craft as a photographer. In working from Szekessy's photographs, Wunderlich's work is enriched, in being influenced by his experiments with printing her repetoire has been broadened. I am not sure, however, that their close personal realtionship has been conducive to any amount of deep criticism of each other's work. Maybe, they have agreed to differ, when their viewpoints diverge. They do not want to change eacher other's perspective but accept their individual approaches to life.

Living in a society which is aware of its artistic heritage has been very relevant to the work I have produced. The impressions made upon me by my culture and society have shaped my perspective and in so doing relate directly to my work. I have illustrated how this is evident in the work of Karin Szekessy and Paul Wunderlich also. Various influences and directions have come from the particular society from which they, as artists, have emerged and so the work they have produced is as much a reflection of this society, as their own personalities.

Artists do, however, despite common sources, content or process, differ from each other in their expression. This is due to their individual perception of this world. From studying Karin Szekessy's work it is clear that she wishes to express moments of experience, small observations and insights which describe her individual concerns at the time.

1. "Girls, Furniture and Mannerism " Karin Szekessy. Leica Photographie, Feb. 1976.

From my own work I would say that this also is true. With Wunderlich, as with Bellmer, I have illustrated how his vision has become a total description for life. His obsession has become, the need to define life and humanity in an all-embracing fashion. As I have mentioned before, if indeed there is a male and female sensibility in art, it lies in this fact or difference in perception. How an artist can focus on one particular facet of the human experience and state that it is the common denominator of all experience seems unnatural to me. But opinions will always differ on this and so too, impressions, perspectives and perceptions.

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# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration No.	Title
1	"Madame Récamier". Karin Szekessy. Echtachrome 1974.
2	"Hingegossen" (Poured Out). Paul Wunderlich. Lithograph 1968.
3	"Joanna with Ostrich Egg". Karin Szekessy. Infrared photograph 1970.
4	"La Belle et La Bête". Paul Wunderlich. Gouche 1969.
5	"Jutta from behind". Karin Szekessy. b/w photograph 1968.
6	"On a Visit". Karin Szekessy. b/w photograph 1966.
7	"Zebra". Karin Szekessy. b/w photograph 1966.
8	"Heavily Guarded". Paul Wunderlich. Gouche 1969.
9	"The Leaf". Karin Szekessy. b/w photograph 1972.
10	"With Feathered Hat and Black Coat". Paul Wunderlich. Canvas 1974.
11	"A Homage to Ingres". Paul Wunderlich. Gouche 1976.
12	"Tryptych" (Panel 1). Claire Donnelly. b/w photographs and mixed media 1985.
13	"Die Puppe". Hans Bellmer. b/w photograph 1934.
14	"Die Puppe". Hans Bellmer. b/w photograph 1935.
15	"Frames". Claire Donnelly. Color photograph 1985.
16	"Tryptych" (Panel 2). Claire Donnelly. b/w photograph and mixed media 1985.
17	"Rhapsody". Claire Donnelly. Slide installation 1985.
18	"Rhapsody". Claire Donnelly. Slife installation 1985.
19	"Tryptych" (Panel 1). Claire Donnelly. b/w photograph and mixed media 1985.
20	"Tryptych" (Panel 3). Claire Donnelly. b/w photograph and mixed media 1985.

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