

THE DANCE OF THE SCARECROW BRIDES

Rae Anderson

CROW.BRIDE.: a re-interpretation of a myth

The installation CROW.BRIDE., mounted at the Centennial Gallery, Oakville, Canada, in May 1986, unites my interests in both masks and scarecrows. The installation comprises a circle of nine cruciform figures clothed in bridal gowns and veils; a series of nine masks of "Crow" are set to hang in a slightly wider circle between each bride.



The Dance of the Scarecrow Brides, Rae Anderson. Photo by Rae Anderson.

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“The Dance of the Scarecrow Brides” is an outgrowth of a project begun in January of 1982 to experiment with the artform of the scarecrow. I am fascinated by the fact that we take our old clothes, stuff them, and place them out on the land as our representatives and watchdogs. When seen from a distance, they are startlingly human and alive.

I like to fashion objects from materials which may no longer be able to serve their original function. What new life can apparently useless things regain—useless things such as old wedding dresses? Where did all these dresses come from? Who wore these dresses, now yellowed with age? Do these brides not recall the day of your own wedding? Is it not a sacrilege that these gowns ended up in a musty bin in a secondhand shop? Where is your wedding dress? Have you kept it carefully wrapped, hidden away as a sacred vestment to be brought out perhaps for the marriage of your own daughter? Some of these dresses are very old—the brides who once wore them may now be dead. Is this a circle of ghosts—pale reflections of youth, health, and beauty? And yet they seem very alive.

Every bride is beautiful, so the saying goes—and every bride is beautiful because of this mask that she wears. Hours of love and care were lavished upon this lacy whiteness, this veil of seduction which holds out the promise of ripeness and fitness to bear children. Remember the dance of the seven veils. The veil also reminds us of christening clothes; this same veil then encompasses the final of life’s ceremonial robes, the shroud.



Scarecrow Bride, Rae Anderson. Photo by Rae Anderson.

BODY SHOPS

I can speak of how much the white circle of brides reminds me of the moon, one of the most female of symbols. There are the barely definable moments of approaching the circle, joining the dance, then daring to enter into the circle's centre. Each stage of participation has a different feeling about it.

And what of the link between scarecrow and bride? To start from the very beginning, I bought my first secondhand wedding gown in January 1982, simply because it was a very beautiful piece of art. Then one grew to two, to three. Eventually I had a whole collection. I don't know when the idea came to put these clothes out to stand in the middle of the field, but put them up we did... and it was breath-taking, an absolutely pure, strong image. They seemed to be waiting, watching as a silent chorus. It was only afterwards that the rationale, the historical basis for such a reinterpretation of scarecrows revealed itself. For the Greeks had a phallic scarecrow god named Priapus. He was a wooden fertility statue set up in the garden as a scarecrow, and offerings of wine and fruits were made to him to ensure protection of the garden. The original scarecrow as a fertility effigy overlaps the function of the bride as a fertile vessel.



Crow's Nest, Rae Anderson. Photo by Winston Romaine Fritz

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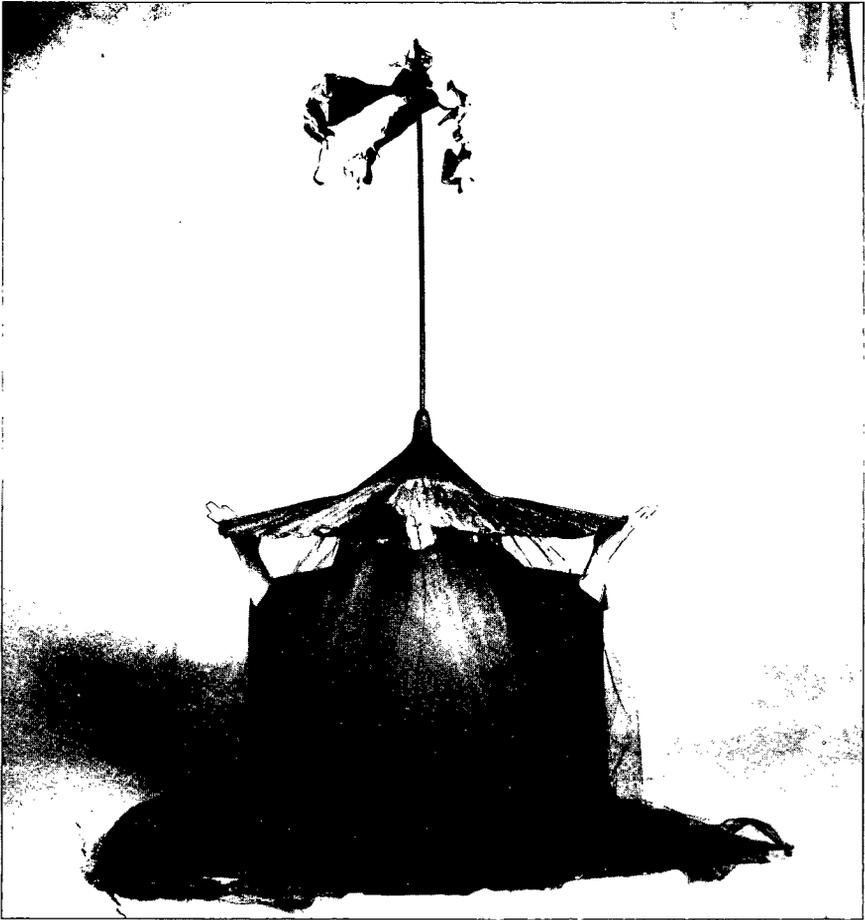
The black masks of Crow wait outside the white circle, never daring to enter. How doth the scarecrow scare the crow? The masks tell stories of that mythical creature, renowned in different cultures as the Trickster and the Creator. This is not the crow we know merely as a "pesky varmint". The masks offer a vision of Crow's birth, his youthful pranks, his maturation, and his own death in bringing forth new life. Dichotomies reverberate—the black and the white; the dark side of the moon, the full moon; the male and the female; the ambiguity of Crow's androgynous nature, the scarecrows as equally androgynous with their phallic cross structure and female overlay; Crow of many faces, the brides faceless; Crow's fertility as the mythical Creator of the world itself, the brides' circle as a pregnant image of fertility. Crow as harbinger of death and decay, an ill omen, echoes the brides' ghostly skeletal aspect. The concentric circles embody at once the womb that brings forth and the tomb that swallows all things.

Toronto



Crow Howls at the Moon, Rae Anderson. Photo by Susan Ross.

BODY SHOPS



Crow's Shadow, Rae Anderson. Photo by Rae Anderson.

HYPERREALISM

Tony Brown's Spinning Bodies



The following articles are from the catalogue for the exhibition, *Tony Brown Day Dreams*, held at *The Winnipeg Art Gallery*, September 14 - October 26, 1986. The exhibition was curated by Bruce Ferguson and Shirley Madill under the directorship of Carol A. Phillips.

Figure 1: Two Machines for Feeling, Ydessa Gallery, photo by Robert Keziere; *Figure 2*: Private Collection; *Figure 3: Untitled*, Ydessa Gallery, photo by Ernest Mayer.

