

Weirdo Deluxe (2010)



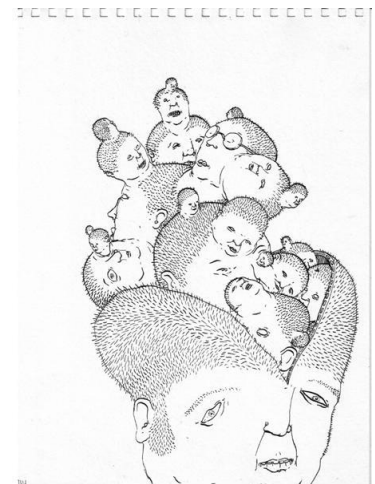
In 2005, Matt Dukes Jordan compiled and edited a book called, *Weirdo Deluxe: The Wild World of Pop Surrealism & Lowbrow Art*, that should be on everyone's coffee table for the simple reason that it will make you chunder and, you know, you feel better afterwards. Lowbrow art, as the name indicates, depicts a ribald, lurid world where all the normal values have been chewed up, swallowed and then horked back up again in strangely pleasing patterns. For

instance, children. In the world you and I share, children represent the future, innocence, curiosity, guilelessness, all that is good and adorable in the world. They're also sometimes creepy with their big heads and staring eyes, their mucous flows and predilection for bugs. Mark Ryden is a low brow artist whose portrayals of children bring to mind everything that is eerily corrupt in the sheltered toyland of the pampered child.



The lowbrow art that I've seen isn't just about the horrific tableaux of modern life. The work veers from lurid realism to cartoonish futuristic phantasmagoria (say that

5 times fast). Scott Musgrove and Skot Olsen bring the grotesque into Technicolor splendor. The content (aliens, families, snackfood, floating vermin) doesn't unsettle you so much as the surreal combination of emotional tones they pull off.



There's a lowbrow artist name of "Blu" (www.blublu.org) who perhaps takes the (deglo twinkie) cake. His pencil sketches are freakishly disturbing perhaps because they present us with the stark fact of our corporeality. We are tissue lumps who cling to each other in abject neediness. Not a flattering portrait of humanity, but not exactly a distortion either.

As much as I find myself drawn to lowbrow art and its cousin, outsider art, I also know I have a limit. I don't want to look at this chunder on a regular basis. And it's the surrealism—the making strange of our ordinary experiences and beliefs—rather than the iconoclastic grossness that draws me in.

And this brings me to the real subject: shock jocks and Superbowl commercials. Or I might say: the weirdo and the freako *without* the deluxe.

Its very clear to me that we've crossed a line in our popular culture. Take Imus, for instance, or Howard Stern. Or did anyone catch the racist Superbowl commercial about the Asian, Indian and Hispanic geeks trying to meet women? Or the misogynist one with the unbrow girl who everyone adores because she wipes Planters' nuts on her neck?

Its not like this "edgy" or "crass" humor is soooooo very different from the shock art I'm (periodically) smitten by. Its all about shocking us with taboos or grossing us out with the threat of our bodies being disfigured or contaminated. I guess we're so numb from so many images streaming into our eyes, adding layer upon layer of story and fantasy to our half-confused worldviews, that it takes a Freddie Krueger or a Blu to jostle us awake.

Sick shit can really wake you up for a moment.

But here's the difference: *deluxe*. Blu is art and Imus isn't because Blu's harfchunkage is carefully crafted to tweek us just so. And to blast us out of our complacency it doesn't rely on violating a standard of ethical decency (for instance, the right of people to live their lives without being the butt of jokes).

So, for me, anyway, you've got your bloated ugly dolls of underground comix, a species of weirdo deluxe, and then you've got your Just Plain Ugly of shock radio or superbowl humor. I don't mind occasionally screaming my cookies if its art. But cruel jokes just leave me nauseous.

