

*Tainted Love - Michael Shanahan's reflections on the day with*

Anna Fox last Autumn

*Sometimes I Feel I've Got To Run Away*

Maybe Anna Fox first started running away after arriving in Basingstoke. A town she seemed to find would be best recorded for posterity by using a Martin Parr based approach of hypercolourised imagery that somehow reminded me of the discomfort I felt watching Abigail's party or the Grand Guignol of a Punch and Judy show. And that was just how I felt at the start of bearing witness to Anna Fox's tableau of lovingly presented images and text that presented a terribly familiar yet very uncomfortable view of the last quarter century of contemporary European existence.

*From the pain you drive into the heart of me*

Images of Paint Ball war games brought the ideal of office workers acting in conformity to the management theory of macho team bonding unaware of how they were playing out their fantasies within the environs of the paint smeared walls of an abandoned hospital that, in a Bosnian context might echo the butcher stains witnessed by unfortunate torture victims. Other images showed a salaryman, jaws agape, tucking into a corporate feast of mechanically recovered meat and the howling gaze of sequestered village folk mutely screaming their discontent and imperilled fury about the threatening glower of female ordination.

*For I toss and turn and can't sleep at night*

I doubt if having taken some of the images that I could sleep at night. Cockroaches were shown crawling about the residence that she seemed to have naively shared with a group of unwashed others, And in another sequence blank stares came from behind the blacked up faces of Dutchmen celebrating an old fashioned Christmas representative more of a European myth based St Nicholas and his helpers than the sanitised US imposed Coca Cola comfort blanket version of a ruby faced, elf and efficiency loving Santa Clause.

*I give you all a boy could give you*

Even the *good times* recorded seemed to carry an immediate and alternative message. These included bodies collapsed in fields and woods after party goers had denied State imposed rules and conditions and had partied the night away fuelled by a variety of non sanctioned stimulants. She also illustrated her demented father's ranting and ravings released by a cerebral stroke in terrified response to sudden loud and unexpected interventions. In another sequence she showed us images provided by testosterone driven Italian juveniles as they presented their idealised poses and detailed interiors of their domestic environs as proof of their individuality. And there were images of trophies offered up as chalices of momentary overflowing love to each individual "Mum In A Million"

*I cannot stand the way you tease*

Anna also ran around with some confused girlfriends; one of whom spent some time in a psychiatric ward taking into her confinement a gasping gaze, metal filled face, strewn clothes and shock wigs. Another friend, shown prancing around an early post dawn cow filled countryside, seemed equally as likely to be doomed and yet found a different escape from mundane reality into the adoring rewarding arms of popular music. Perhaps one, or both of these individuals merited some pity, but both had fared better than the prior fate of a local girl butchered some 100 years ago by equally nonplussed but more violently inclined previous inhabitants of the same rural idyll.

*Now I'm going to pack my things and Go*

And so Anna left us. But not before having provided us with a whole host of images from various books and presentations. Each book had funded the next project, each presentation had sustained the next trip to an unfamiliar field of experience or perception. Travelling to the interior of bounded village life, or wandering the Asian sub continent or visiting the frozen wastes of an under-heated Bolney Village Hall Anna Fox seems to have a central core to her journey based on questioning the anticipation of those who expect that a photograph or any other work of art will generate “an important object”. Instead, it struck me that she takes a viewer by the hand to a more abstracted perception of a world that may cause a re-evaluation of anticipated values. Continuing the journey towards a restructuring of constructed values to form a new frame through which to reflect a while and consider the way in which the world presents itself whilst madly whirling and aimlessly focussing on the curious paradigms that it has set for itself. Some of which having been set by a certain individual called Mark Almond of Soft Cell whose lyrics have been used to structure this review and who somehow assumed a set of values that denied Anna Fox from stealing his image without permission. How precious we all can be!

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