

# CHARGED WITH DIFFERENT POWER

The Extraordinary Art  
of Helen Ivory

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“Working with ready-mades, as I so often do, is a little like working with words. A telephone as an object and the word *telephone* will each bring their own denotation and connotation with them. I actually get a buzz out of every assemblage I see; there is something magical—and fetishistic—about objects. And when they are taken out of their usual context and made strange, they are charged with different power.”

In the extraordinary art of Helen Ivory, images and objects, words and photographs can be swiftly transformed through the twin alchemies of symbolism and surrealism into the substance of (rather wonderful) alternative worlds in which birds are juxtaposed with telephones, an antique doll has the wings of a crow, and a cow grazes serenely on the mountains of the moon.

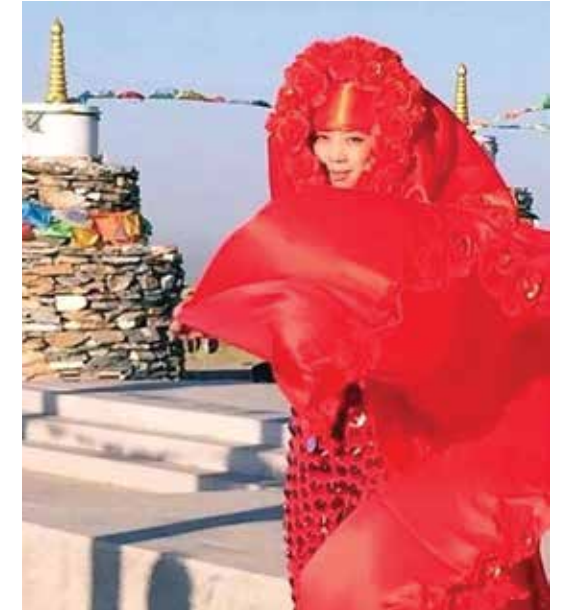
Ivory is that *rara avis*, an artist of equal stature in the worlds of both poetry and the visual arts, and although it is as a visual artist that she is being featured here, it would be an omission of the greatest disservice both to her and to yourselves, the readers, not to establish from the outset that she has published seven volumes of highly regarded poetry, several of which have photographs of her assemblages as cover designs, and one of which, *Hear What the Moon Told Me*, is a work of “found” poetry and collage and, indeed, a work of such visual brilliance and aesthetic integrity that I will consider it separately in the second part of this essay. As if this were not enough, there has also been a new (2016) version of the major arcana of the Tarot deck—a collaboration with the British multimedia artist Tom de Freston that breathes fresh life into a tradition at least six hundred years old. But for now, let us concentrate on Helen Ivory, the creator of



# VICTORIA MERKI

*“Enterprises endowed with virtue and talent, even if very often at the start they seem merely commonplace, always gradually climb higher; and they never pause or rest until they have reached the height of glory. This was clearly illustrated by the slight and common origins of the Bellini family and by the rank it then achieved by means of painting. Thus Jacopo Bellini, a painter of Venice and once a disciple of Gentile da Fabriano, worked in competition with the same Domenico who taught Andrea del Castagno how to color in oil. But although he labored hard to achieve excellence in that art, he did not acquire fame for it until Domenico had himself left Venice. But then, when he found himself without any rival to equal him in the city of Venice, adding all the time to his fame and reputation, Jacopo reached such a pitch of excellence that he became the greatest and most renowned man in his profession. And so that the name he had won for himself in painting should not only be preserved but grow greater still in his family and successors, he had two sons who were very much inclined to the art of painting and of shining intelligence: one was called Giovanni and the other Gentile, whose name he gave him as a loving father in fond memory of Gentile da Fabriano, his former master.”*

— Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (1568)



Kong Ning was born in Manzhouli, Inner Mongolia, on August 29, 1958. With her extraordinary costumes and flamboyant personality, she has become one of the most celebrated and recognizable performance artists of the twenty-first century. As a self-styled Bride of the Planet clutching her trademark Little Blue Man, she has been a gift for newspaper photographers and TV reporters in over forty countries since she first burst onto the scene of environmental activism street performance in 2007. But there is a darker side to this than meets the eye, and for the origins of her art, we must go back to when, having taken a law degree, she worked in the Chinese judicial courts.

“I often had to deal with prisoners who had been condemned to death. On one occasion I was an administrator during a multiple execution. When it began, I fainted. But I wasn’t just revived, I was literally kicked awake. What I saw then was that one prisoner was still twitching. Just as I realized he was still alive, a guard with a small pistol came forward and shot him in the head. He died instantly. From then on I had a horror and hatred of the death penalty and gradually this expanded to a wish to protect all life on this planet. But my experiences in the law courts were where it all began.”

# TOTI O'BRIEN

Born in Rome, but now living in Los Angeles, Toti O'Brien is a painter, collagist, poet, essayist, short-story writer, maker of exquisite handicrafts, and professional musician and dancer. *Other Maidens* (a collection of poetry) and *An Alphabet of Birds* (short stories) were both published in 2020.

But I must rewind to June 2016 when *Forage Poetry Journal* devoted an entire issue to a re-evaluation of the sonnet form, and it was there that I first saw *Sonetto in Morte di Madonna Laura*. And although I have since become a great admirer of all aspects of Toti's extraordinarily diverse art, it was inevitable that that particular work would be uppermost in my mind when I spoke to her recently.



*Hand-Made Map, #3*



*Anatomy, #4*

# ALEXANDER CHRISTOPH STERZEL

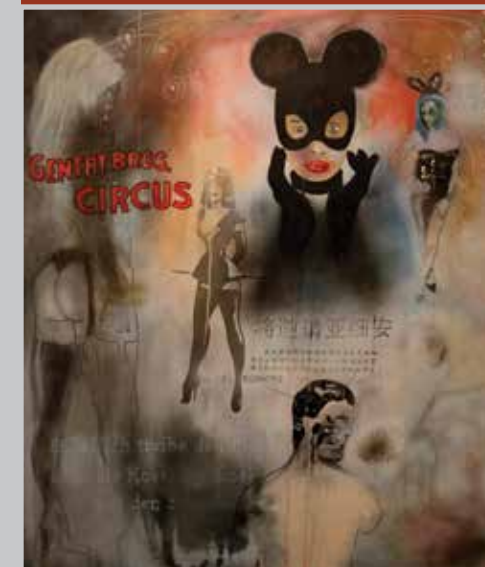


*Bonnie and Clyde or Dr. Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde*

Born in Ludwigsburg, Germany, in 1967, Alexander Christoph Sterzel now lives in nearby Stuttgart and has worked in a wide variety of artistic fields—including music, theatre, and film—throughout his career. However, it is as a painter that he has particularly made a name for himself, with exhibitions in Paris, London, and New York, as well as Germany, Poland and Italy.

One of Sterzel's favorite stylistic devices is anachronism: people, figures, characters, or pieces of text from the most varied of genres and epochs are connected to one another, leading to their own communication as imposed by the artist.

In this way, Sterzel creates a “pseudo-reality” in his pictures based on his use of independent stories that combine to form an expanded puzzle. It is through surrealism that he has found the appropriate artistic medium to articulate himself, but although analogies to the style of Max Ernst are inevitable, the references to pop art and comic books are no less important. In short, Alexander Sterzel invites us into a fluid surreal world where things come to be and inevitably pass away again. His recently published book, *Faked Diagnosis I. & II.*, provides an excellent introduction to his work.



*The Big POW Show*



*Violin Concerto of Devastation,  
No. 1 in A Minor*