

# DARJA BAJAGIĆ

## WHERE'S YOUR APPETITE?

by Franklin Melendez

Follow the links long enough and things are bound to get weird. Darja Bajagić knows this well – in fact, that might be how she stumbled onto the website, ‘maniacnanny.com’, though at this point who can really say? You can visit it if you like. Click and be greeted by a nicely legible header in a cheerful shade of pink – it boasts “The Best Serial Killers, The Best Gore, The Best Crime Scene Photos.” True to the billing the site scrolls down to reveal a hearty assortment of real-life carnage – crime photos (contemporary and historical), police mug shots, murder scene documentation, victim forensics and so forth. Each image is carefully indexed with an extensive catalog of tags (‘spree killing’, ‘racist’, ‘perverted sex practices’, and so on and so forth). Interspersed among some of the entries are long blocks of texts all in caps – detailed accounts of gruesome acts that unexpectedly morph into descriptions of foods being craved by the editor at that particular moment in time.

Depending on your temperament, Maniac Nanny’s tasty idiosyncrasies will likely elicit a queasy mixture of fascination and revulsion, together with an indescribable something else. Therein lies the rub for Bajagić, whose practice has always been attuned to those impulses that lurk at the fringes. Niche porn, fetish sites, murderabilia outlets and its neighboring nether regions have provided prime fodder for a widely varied output that to date encompasses zines, collages, videos, sculptures

and assemblages of painted and printed canvas that stand in for paintings.

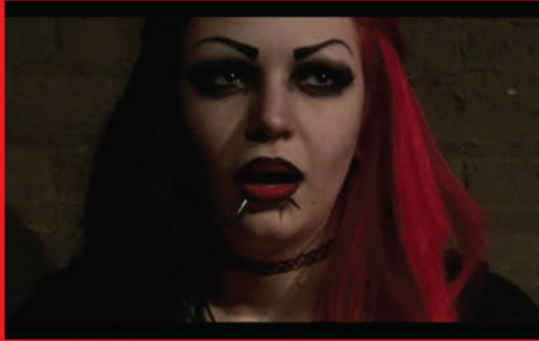
In all of these, the specter of violence hovers diffusely yet is omnipresent. At times, it can be coyly suggestive as in the mall Goth motifs that punctuate many of the compositions (*Untitled Collage (goths have more fun ...)*, 2015). At others, it hones in on more specialized fare, such as a group of hatchets printed with images lifted from a women-with-weapons fetish site – the resulting customized mementos implicating the viewer in all the fun (*Ex Axes - Sword*, 2015). Even darker still, there are the stage blood splatters on *Untitled Collage (Blutengel ft. Cathy Torrez)*, 2015, whose cryptic title, when subjected to a simple Google search, yields up its tragic real-life tale; then, there’s the crudely rendered pin-up drawing preserved in a plastic sleeve embedded in a framed collage (*Dacha: Robert Bardo 8x11 ink drawing of porn star ‘Gauge’*, 2014). Follow the clues and you’ll discover its origins in a controversial e-commerce site specializing in art keepsakes from killers on death row.

Neither sensationalist nor banal (or perhaps a little both?), these images have been described by Bajagić as ‘blanks.’ This is clearly not some claim to neutrality, for each is voluptuously laden with its own content and history. Perhaps she is simply acknowledging her own predilections: a willingness to leave things undigested, vulnerable and open to their own missed connections and random encounters.





4



It's a dangerous game to be sure – stripped of parameters, reliant on contingency

and staunchly resistant to the usual art historical points of orientation. Bataille, Oleg Kulik, Carol Clover, Laibach, Thomas Hirschhorn (to name just a few) are all equivalents in a field littered with fan art, clippings from gore-enthusiast mags, *Hel-raiser* memorabilia... I could go on. Far from a fixed endpoint, each fragment hovers before you as a volatile link, a seductive lure into the murky terrain where hidden fantasies and unspoken desires bleed into things still inchoate and unnamed. Seasoned surfers of porn will be familiar with that sensation: a curious click inadvertently eliciting endless pop-ups – windows upon windows, beckoning onto pleasures untold. There's a thrill, followed by instinctual fear – perhaps for uncovering personal cravings once thought unimaginable.

For this reason, Bajagić might be less interested in the accountability of images than the driving need to make them so. It is a philosophical questioning undertaken as intimate work, poetic and awkward for all its

proximity. The recent video, *Amazing girls.*

*With wonderful personalities. There saints. Talk to them about life. Love. Politics.*, 2015, speaks to this with a series of short interviews conducted at the now-defunct Chicago goth club, Neo. Each snippet is structured by four brief questions: 'what did you eat today?', 'What is a happy story?', 'What is a sad/scary story?', 'Parting words?'

The answers range from the mundane (cereal for dinner, a fortune cookie, orange chicken a bit dry) to the humorous (my rescue cat got fat) to the poignant (long distance partings, self inflicted wounds, a parent's death). It is an odd mix that never congeals into a single confessional, but rather lingers as morsels of information left unresolved. In that sense, this is never satisfying – perhaps in the same way that cereal for dinner can never be satisfying, even if it's sustenance for the world we inhabit. There's a small kind of pleasure to be derived from that knowledge, but one – as Bajagić aptly notes – you might be a little ashamed to admit to yourself.