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Sophie Jodoin, *Headgames: Hoods, Helmets & Gasmasks* / Battat Contemporary, www.battatcontemporary.com, March 19 - April 25, 2009

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Sophie Jodoin & David Jhave Johnston,
still from *Headgames*, 2008,
black and white video, 7 mins.

MONTRÉAL, QC

SOPHIE JODOIN

HEADGAMES: HOODS, HELMETS & GASMASKS

By John K. Grande

Sophie Jodoin's latest show adapts antique war-related headgear and gasmasks from the first and Second world wars, among others, to further investigate her subjects. As part of her ongoing War series, Jodoin's *Headgames* are arresting, not only for the paraphernalia of war these black conte on Mylar heads wear, but equally because they look seemingly innocent in many cases. Indeed, for the video that accompanies this show, as with the drawings, Jodoin included her nephew and niece interacting. A collaboration with David Jhave Johnston, the video piece encourages us to understand that Jodoin's *Headgames* drawings (they are smaller and more intimate than Jodoin's *Hoods* series inspired by media images of hooded prisoners at Abu Ghraib) in a sense address the commonplace character of human traits that, when industrialized and aggrandized, lead to war games on a global scale. This video's innocent children wearing masks and balaclavas, playfully interacting, sometimes aggressively other times innocently, suggests the "wiring" in humans for aggression could be inherent, part of our nature, and obviously part of history, as the ancient Roman helmets so gracefully and beautifully designed for the human skull, likewise affirm.

These new works which are a natural evolution from Jodoin's *Drawing Shadows* (2004), of the artist's mother, to *Diary of K* (2005) notational studies of one small person, (at Edward Day Gallery, Toronto). The same goes for the *Regiment series*

(2006-2007) of torsos (seen at the Nanaimo Art Gallery in 2007). Consisting of 75 cropped portraits of a wide range of people - all sizes, shapes, and ages - *Regiment* denaturalized these people. They were presented to you, the audience, frontal, anonymous, with body forms that would make Madison Avenue cringe, for they were not archetypes of beauty, but rather real people with real bodies marked by the wear of life.

As Sophie Jodoin states: "I felt the need to go back to the head as a subject. I chose headgear related to war. I do not play on the spectacular. These are strong, quiet images. I do not think I manipulate an audience."

Jodoin's *Headgames* faces are not just about war, but also about the human psychology. They enter into a dialogue with what the media presents to us as the human figures, again by countering the commonplace beauty, sterilized imagery of advertising we are inundated with. And by rendering these images that are potentially suggestive of war, this show awakens a string of connections between the mediatized Western world, and the grotesque violence of war, scenes we encounter on a flat screen, or web news document for the most part.

Jodoin goes on to say: "I originally came up with the subject for this series when I worked on drawings after photographs of mediaeval helmets I had taken at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 2007. I then went on to work with online sources for the gasmasks." Of course, one senses Goya's

etchings of the *Disasters of War* (1810-20) as an inspiration for Jodoin's latest series, particularly for their strong anti-war commitment and graphic, socially engaged strength of execution, the close crop, the isolation of elements, the stark black/white contrasts and softer gradations Jodoin works into her penetrating works, all recall new technology's capacity to manipulate imagery, to orchestrate and manipulate context. In so doing, the web-based images that Jodoin sources, become simply elements that expand the creative range for today's artists. Of course, the rapport is equally with photography, but not necessarily the still photo image, as these new works seem closer to video streaming and video's ambiguous sequencing. The 75 dramatic drawings seen at Battat Contemporary have a processional beauty, in that each individual image is part of an ongoing sequence, and we read them within the continuity of the series, as an entity conceives of. Jodoin breathes life into age-old themes of war, social anomie and media's influence on our perception of truth with grace, talent and humility.

EXHIBITION

Battat Contemporary
7245 Alexandra
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www.battatcontemporary.com

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