

JESSICA SOFIA MITRANI
Lupe and the Austrians
July 14–August 16, 2011

When an inner situation is not made conscious, it appears outside as fate.
—Carl Jung

I.

She is more interesting than her work.
Her work is more interesting than she is.
She is more interesting than her art collection.
Her art collection is more interesting than she is.

II.

Lupe was my first childhood doll, made out of baby blue plastic. When I was five years old, Lupe disappeared; I can't remember how she was lost, but I remember the void inside me. Years later, as an adult, I described the doll to a friend of mine: "Lupe was a little woman, her hands in the pocket of a coat that is always fashionable, with knee-high boots and short plastic hair that gave her an androgynous look. She looked like an urban flâneur such as you might see in New York's East Village." My friend replied, "Jessica, Lupe is a mass-produced doll, and you will find plenty in the market in downtown Barranquilla." The next week he brought Lupe to my house—this time she was bright pink! I was extremely happy.

When I moved to New York, I did not bring many things with me from Colombia, but I brought Lupe and placed her on my bookshelf. Sometimes I would put her in a corner, like a punished child, and other times I positioned her on the edge of a shelf, suicidal. At certain moments I felt like I was the object, and she was looking at me.

I spent many years contemplating Lupe, wondering why I was fascinated with this doll. I realized that she was the first to make me question, do I want to have her or do I want to be her? This was my first relationship to the issue of identity.

As I looked at Lupe, a vision of another doll started to appear—an immaterial doll that was joined to the real one. A black shadow, or bright red . . . a phantom Siamese twin.

III.

A few years ago, I became friends with Prince Josef von Habsburg-Lothringen of Austria and his wife, Michel. They lived in an enormous SoHo apartment with surreal decor: The ceiling was completely filled with chandeliers of every shape and color and decorated with upside-down Christmas trees. Then the *New York Post* published a story saying that he was actually an FBI informant, not a prince, and was arrested for not paying child support to his first wife.

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Galleria Christopher Pascall is pleased to present “Lupe and the Austrians,” an exhibition of new work by Jessica Sofia Mitrani. This is Mitrani’s first solo show at the gallery. The exhibition will open with a reception for the artist on Thursday, July 14, from 6–8pm, and will be on view through September 16.

In this exhibition, Mitrani continues her exploration of identity and doubling. In the first room, a series of text works humorously reflect on the relationship between art and life, questioning whether a woman is more interesting than her art (or art collection), or if the reverse is true. The inspiration for the “Lupe” series in the second room is a doll much cherished by Mitrani; this was the first image that led her to question, “Do I want to have her or to be her?” Here the doll is multiplied into several sculptures, each transformed into Siamese twins. The third room is presented as an installation: Sturgeon wallpaper and chandeliers made of corset boning set off “The Austrians,” a short video inspired by a fake Austrian prince, in which porcelain figurines play in a caviar landscape.

The same themes are seen throughout Mitrani’s practice, which spans sculpture, text, video, performance, and fashion. For the series “In a Single Shoe,” which Galleria Christopher Pascall exhibited at ArtBo 2010, the artist took pairs of iconic women’s shoes—from a girl’s Mary Jane to a sophisticated stiletto to a nurse’s white loafer—and turned them into single objects. Each is accompanied by a short video, in which a woman negotiates movement despite the restrictions of wearing one shoe for both feet. Mitrani has also “collaborated” with a series of doppelgängers: women of the past such as nineteenth-century American journalist Nellie Bly, who circumnavigated the globe (*Traveling Lady*, 2010); Bulgarian Surrealist Nora Mitrani, poet and muse of artist Hans Bellmer, her lover, in the 1940s (*Mitrani on Lust*, 2010); and Mitrani’s own Romanian aunts (*Some Historic/Some Hysterical*, 2004).

Jessica Sofia Mitrani (b. 1968, Barranquilla) lives and works in New York. Her work has been exhibited at venues internationally, including Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; MACRO, Rome; and the Oberhausen Short Film Festival, Oberhausen, Germany. The double solo show “Jessica Sofia Mitrani/Paulina Parra” was presented at the Museum of Modern Art Barranquilla in 2008.