

ZOE BELOFF

DREAMLAND: THE CONEY ISLAND AMATEUR PSYCHOANALYTIC SOCIETY AND ITS CIRCLE, 1926–1972

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English

For the exhibition at KIOSK artist Zoe Beloff (°1958, Edinburgh, Scotland) proposed to adapt her most recent exhibition, “Dreamland: The Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society and its Circle, 1926-1972”, to the particular architecture of KIOSK. “Dreamland” originated in 2009, when the Coney Island Museum invited Zoe Beloff to create an exhibition in celebration of the centennial of Sigmund Freud’s visit to Coney Island. Rather than focus on Freud’s afternoon at the Dreamland amusement park, Beloff decided to explore his legacy through the unconscious of the people who lived, worked and played in Coney Island during the 20th century by staging an exhibition of the work of the Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society, along with the visionary ideas of its founder, Albert Grass.

The Society was founded by Albert Grass, a designer of attractions, who proposed to rebuild the Dreamland Amusement park, which burned down in 1911, according to Freud’s theory of dream formation. On view in the exhibition are his sketches and plans as well as a working architectural model consisting of a series of pavilions (The Unconscious, Dream Works, Consciousness, The Censor), linked by a miniature locomotive (The Train of Thought). Most of the members were working people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, who wished to participate in one of the great intellectual movements of the 20th century. Many of them were keen amateur filmmakers who participated in an annual “dream film” competition where they re-created their dreams on film and analyzed them, revealing an incredibly brave, unapologetic exploration of their inner lives. The centrepiece of the show is the Dreamland model. Around it are several free-standing structures inspired by fairground pavilions from the 1930’s. Next to the central space, three rooms are dedicated to a history of Coney Island, the archives of the Society and “*Adventures of a Dreamer*”, a comic book created by Albert Grass.

Zoe Beloff works in a wide range of media including film, 3D projection, installation and drawing. Her artistic interest lies in finding ways to graphically manifest the unconscious processes of the mind. She considers herself a medium, an interface between the real and the imaginary. The exhibition’s depiction of historical artefacts highlights the ambiguity of Beloff’s role in its creation. Beloff aims to connect the present with the past and to call into question the assumed boundaries between historical fact and creative interpretation. In conjuring up Coney Island’s hidden history, Beloff elides the role of archivist and creator. She likes to quote the legendary showman P.T. Barnum. When Barnum was asked if one of his exhibits was “real,” he replied, “That’s just the question. Persons who pay their money at the door have the right to form their own opinions after they have gone upstairs.” John Strausbaugh interviewed Zoe Beloff for a review in the New York Times and asked her if the Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society really did exist? “That’s a good question,” Beloff answered with a smile. “What do you think? Freud was interested in interpretation, recontextualizing objects and ideas to see what that says about us. Maybe that’s the approach I took.”

The exhibition at KIOSK was initiated by Belgian curator and researcher Edwin Carels. The exhibition at the Coney Island Museum was accompanied with a book and a DVD published by Christine Burgin and edited by Zoe Beloff, *The Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society and its Circle*. Beloff’s most recent book is *The Adventures of a Dreamer* by Albert Grass.

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