

Art writer and historian Hamish Keith takes a look at one of the country's most important female artists



Photo courtesy of the Wexler Centre



# Jerry Doleze

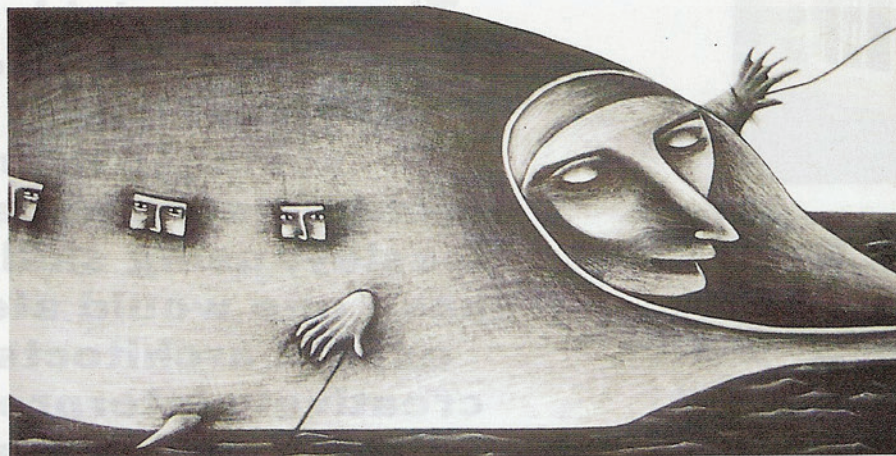






The big picture: Just wanna be a toy  
Clockwise, from top left: Having a ball.  
Protected vision. Real Life reversible head





**Just can't get any rest lately**

**I**n the art of Jenny Dolezel there is always somebody or something in charge. Circus ringmaster, theatre director, fantastic creature, some dominating persona controls the action. No matter how daring the feat, it is inevitably a command performance, never carried out entirely by choice and certainly never by chance.

In her Aotea Centre mural *The Circus of Life*, for example, the entire performance and the audience are directed and dominated by a towering self-portrait of the artist as a terrestrial globe. The controller is not always so obvious. In *I Wanna Be A Toy* its all-powerful presence is signalled only by a tiny pair of hands intruding into the extreme upper left of the image and grasping the reins of a rocking horse.

It is all too easy not to take Jenny Dolezel's images seriously. Her fantastic creatures and elaborate grotesques absorbed in their dogged games can be, and often are, misread for the stuff of children's books and the nursery toy box given just a slightly sinister edge. But penetrate beneath that layer and the encounters in her work are all about a relentless psychological control, both the power of it and the burden of it. The dominant figures, as in the mezzotint *Just Can't Get Any Rest Lately*, are often as tied to their subject creatures as they are to it.

frozen in their performance of it. Even in the earlier pieces from her first Auckland exhibition at Red Metro in 1986, the image took the form of a narrative encounter, a fantastic person with legs, for instance, confronting a fantastic person with wheels.

Some critics have dismissed Dolezel as being simply a creature of fashion pandering to a yuppie taste for punkness. They have got a little bit of that right; Dolezel has certainly got a message for fashion victims and other contemporary submissives — if they were in the business of listening that is. She is certainly coolly focused in her own time, place and style — which is exactly what we would expect from a serious artist in early career.

She also draws on some tough and long traditions — a rich and fertile soup of influences that feeds her work — the 16-century engravings of the martyrdom of saints and missionaries, the fantastic hells and paradises of the 16-century Dutch painter Hieronymous Bosch, the Surrealists, contemporary German painting and, in her own culture, Tony Fomison's work.

Dolezel, at 26, has established an enviable reputation and, as her Aotea mural amply demonstrates, a formidable technique. If her imagery were as shallow as the punk nursery tales some superficial observers mistake it for, she might have only the endurance of a 50 cent rocket. It is not, however, and the images of Jenny Dolezel

**Don't misread Dolezel's images as simply the stuff of children's books. There are dark forces at work here.**

A great deal of Dolezel's more recent work is organised in the same way as some theatrical production. The cast of characters is assembled, given their roles and

are likely to be around, getting more and more intense, as long as the theatre of the libido goes on performing its amazing shows 24 hours of every day.

**Hannah Keith**