

Press Release

Cathie Pilkington: Weird Horses

21 April–27 May 2023

Room 2, Soho, London

Open Tuesday–Friday, 11am–6pm; Saturday 11am–5pm

Somewhere between toys, sculptures and models for a monument, helpless as newborns, Pilkington's horses broadcast a rather different message, and unlike the Parthenon frieze, their parade is decorated with sparkling ribbon streamers. There's something archaeological about the stashes of spare body parts on shelves and the notes and numbers scrawled onto them. We can look at this worktable and imagine its component parts as found fragments that the artist has discovered and is now piecing together in the belief that all were once part of a common whole. – Hettie Judah in the accompanying exhibition catalogue

Weird Horses is an exhibition that proposes a return to equestrian sculpture. Here as elsewhere, Cathie Pilkington is characteristically drawn to engage with motifs that seem exhausted and overburdened by history, testing out what meanings and relevance they can have today. The image of the horse is a loaded one, rooted deep in the sculptural canon, a relic of past ideas, myths and empires. Pilkington's installations have been referred to as a form of 'art historical fly-tipping', a description apt for the current show. The serial arrangement of the horses is reminiscent of the Parthenon Marbles and perhaps also recalls the classical horses of St Mark's Basilica in Venice.

Although animals have long featured in Pilkington's repertoire, this exhibition particularly signals a conscious move away from the politics of the figure, in a problematic search for something pre-linguistic, even irrational. The making process adopted for the realisation of these part-forms is a kind of birthing, open to unforeseen results – it's messy and involves pouring, stuffing, containing, then assembling. This method of formal invention from intensively made parts recalls the impossible anatomies of Pilkington's more familiar doll-like objects of recent years.

The new work is characterised by a restrained formality, a latent classicism, instead of the sprawling excess and visual complexity foregrounded in the artist's previous installations. There is a sensual and awkward animation at work in Pilkington's Weird Horses as they curl, twist and stutter into being, silhouetted against the gallery's windows.

The central work in the exhibition, titled *On the Table*, is a huge workbench filled with sculpture. The only colour present in the work is formed by the muted tones of the brute material of its making – plaster, cloth, wood, car filler. Instead of the carefully painted surfaces we usually find in Pilkington's sculptural objects, it is as if the work is still in



Cathie Pilkington, *On the Table* [detail], 2023

progress. With the sculpture seemingly left halfway, the viewer is left to wonder: are these objects being made, repaired or falling apart? The process of traditional sculpture is on the table, both literally and figuratively.

Despite the decisive, formal clarity Pilkington is exercising in this show, the familiar restless shifting of cultural registers remains central in the work: tensions between domestic and studio space, the gallery and the museum, storage and display. These high and low cultural references become metaphors for deeper psychologies, alluded to by a trashed pile of discarded limbs, tiny flashes of glitter curtain, and a fluorescent beach ball mixed in with studio detritus and unfinished projects and body parts on the bottom shelf of the workbench.

In the back room of the gallery, the viewer is surrounded by a sequence of 12 small paintings, titled *Abnormal Presentation (Rainbow Room)*, whose imagery is drawn from diagrams explaining problems in foaling. These works form a contemplative sequence of the unborn, a meditation on the beginning of things. There is a sense of becoming here. Forming a sequential colour spectrum, the layers of paint give the images a murkiness, muting the luminous colour and accentuating the uncanny imagery of a foetus growing in a dark, constricted space.

Pilkington's unborn foals know what they are, growing their impossible, irrational anatomies, but they are not yet in the world. Located somewhere between the classical and the unconscious, *Weird Horses* is a dialectical mash-up of empires and civilizations, sex and death, birth and rebirth, girls, ponies and rainbows.

About Cathie Pilkington

Cathie Pilkington is an artist whose work engages passionately and critically with the canonical history of figurative sculpture. Crossing the borders of traditional, modern and contemporary idioms, her work combines intensively modelled and painted sculptures within immersive installations comprising a diverse array of props, materials and studio furniture. Her site-responsive installations are balanced ambivalently between chaos and precision and have been described as a kind of art historical fly-tipping.

Pilkington studied at Edinburgh College of Art (1985–91) and the Royal College of Art (1995–97). In 2014 she was elected a Royal Academician and was awarded the Sunny Dupree Family Award for her work *Reclining Doll*. In 2016 she became Professor of Sculpture and in 2020 she was elected Keeper at the Royal Academy Schools.

Selected solo exhibitions include: *The Value of the Paw*, V&A Museum of Childhood, 2012; *Life Room: Anatomy of a Doll*, Royal Academy Schools Life Room, 2017; *Doll for Petra*, Ditchling Museum of Art and Craft, 2017; Dorich House Museum studio residency 2018; *Working from Home*, Pallant House Gallery, 2018–19 and *Estin Thalassa*, Karsten Schubert London, 2021; Her work is held in the collections of Pallant House Gallery, Chichester; DESTE Foundation for Contemporary Art, Athens; Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester; The Hunterian, Glasgow; Omer Koc Collection and the Roberts Institute of Art.

About Karsten Schubert London

Karsten Schubert London is a contemporary art gallery in Soho, London, representing a list of prominent and emerging British artists: Rose English, Kirsten Glass, Tess Jaray, Sarah Kogan, Cathie Pilkington, Frances Richardson, Charlotte Verity and Alison Wilding. Since its founding in 1986 the gallery has presented a continuous exhibition programme in London's Soho, today operating at 46 and 44 Lexington Street. The gallery works to nurture the careers of its artists through commercial exhibitions, fostering institutional shows and purchases, commissions and publications by its publishing arm, Ridinghouse.

Press Enquiries

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