

KETELEER GALLERY is very proud to present *Golden Suicides*, a solo exhibition by Bjarne Melgaard (1967, AU). Melgaard's second solo exhibition with the gallery consists of an entirely new series of works on paper and a selection of recent paintings.

The world of contemporary art is often characterized by its diversity, challenging of norms, and reflecting the myriad facets of the human experience. One of the most notable artists pushing these boundaries is Norwegian artist Bjarne Melgaard. In his new exhibition, Bjarne Melgaard shows more than 100 recent drawings in which he probes into the dark, self-destructive impulses of humanity in his characteristically expressive, gestural manner and in a, for some, provocative but always personal and intimate manner. With *Golden Suicides* Melgaard delves deep into the emptiness of fame, the corrosive influence of ambition and the profound impact of societal pressures on the human psyche.

Melgaard's long time fascination is with the people who live just outside the realm of safety and pleasantness. His characters are not simply outsiders; they are individuals whose lives are marked by a frantic and unquenchable desire to live life to the fullest. In his art, we witness the struggle to transcend the mundane, to escape the monotony and conformity that often define mainstream existence. Yet, this pursuit is not without its pitfalls. Melgaard's work unearths the existential crises that accompany a relentless quest for intensity, pleasure and fulfilment.

Izumi Suzuki, born in the cultural landscape of Japan, grew out to be a real counterculture icon. She appeared in a few "pink films", an artistic subgenre of sexploitation cinema, and posed for the erotic art photographer Nobuyoshi Araki before devoting herself to writing full time. In 1973, she married the free jazz saxophonist Kaoru Abe who died of a drug overdose in 1978, one year after their divorce. She was extremely productive in the years following his death; writing short stories, novels, and essays. Her darkly playful and punky science fiction stories are nakedly real depictions of human failure to connect. Yet, beneath her creative brilliance, there was a void, a sense of being alienated from her own identity. She took her own life at the age of 36. Melgaard's drawings of Suzuki encapsulate this ambivalence, providing a stark portrayal of her internal struggles and the isolation she felt, despite her artistic achievements.

Theresa Duncan, on the other hand, was an American video game designer, filmmaker and blogger whose early success in the 90s hinted at a promising future. Nevertheless, the allure of fame and ambition came at a cost. At the age of 40, Theresa Duncan tragically took her own life, followed, a week later, by her partner, the artist Jeremy Blake, aged 35. This stunning, charismatic and successful couple had once shone as luminaries in New York's multimedia art scene. Over time, however, their behaviour became increasingly unpredictable, with reports suggesting they grew "paranoid" and preoccupied with conspiracy theories; convinced they were being targeted by Scientologists. The enigmatic tale of this glamorous couple captivated the contemporary imagination, primarily due to the mystery of why two accomplished and attractive individuals opted for their own fateful departure. Melgaard's drawings of Duncan poignantly capture the corrupting influence of ambition and the disillusionment and paranoia that often accompanies it.

In the tumultuous world of contemporary art, few names evoke the rise and fall of the New York art scene quite like Mary Boone. Scrutinizing the lives of Suzuki and Duncan, Melgaard connects it with the intriguing narrative of the 80s art star Mary Boone. Boone was an iconic New York gallerist who played a pivotal role in the careers of many artists. She represented a diverse range of artists, from Julian Schnabel to Jean-Michel Basquiat, contributing to the emergence of their unique voices. Yet, as time passed, the pressures of commercial success, ambition and the art market's demands

took their toll. Boone's career had a steep rise but ended in a financial scandal, a prison sentence and ultimately the fall of one of the most famous art dealers of recent decades.

Bjarne Melgaard's *Golden Suicides* invites us to immerse ourselves in the lives of those who exist beyond the mainstream. His work peels back the layers of the human experience, laying bare the failures of individuals to connect.

Also in *Sluts*, the recent series of paintings, Melgaard lays bare the unspoken longings, attachments, addictions, and the ever-present mechanisms of social control that shape our lives. Sluts are accessible, always available and willing to offer themselves in the client's desired capacity. They have nothing to reveal but everything to hide. They nonetheless claim their space and demand respect. These works allow Melgaard to play with the private, without getting very personal. At the same time it's a return to abstraction, to the fundamentals of painting: canvas, paint, colour. Devoid of imposed meanings or interpretations, the works create themselves while allowing the spectator to fill in the gaps.

*Koen Leemans, 2023.*

The exhibition will be on view 14 October until 25 November, 2023.