

## Vilma Gold, London

### Lena Henke and Marie Karlberg *One step away from further Hell*

28 March – 25 April

Private view Friday 27 March 6:30 - 9:30pm

The new and newer bodies of work shown by Marie Karlberg and Lena Henke at Vilma Gold are provocatively 'feminine'. Less on display, though, is their recourse to a determined, hypostasized anger. I'm not sure the duo would say so themselves; after all, are girls – is anyone – allowed to admit to anger anymore? And would such an anti-productive disclosure preclude activity?

The femininity in question is not the perpetual fecundity in nuce of a Venus of Willendorf, which may nonetheless be invoked by the bulbous, vulvar motifs of Henke's hoof-like sculptures; there is a certainly a displaced repression in their Freudian — Anna's — nod to girls' horses. There is some trash, too: the way the city washes itself.

Neither is such 'femininity' enclosed by the flatness and washing-way of another contemporary vulgate: the figuration of post-authentic selfhood. Karlberg's twenty Ikea mirrors are embossed with graphics – of the renaissance motif of Death and the Maiden; or of the artist's naked body, if it can still be said to be hers. In these mirrors, strolling as through a salon, we glimpse in passing Henke's urban obelisks, which recall physical dividers of personal space in those areas that are private/public (Starbucks). These have a surprising effect of domesticized, solid tar.

Is there a gradually ossifying fontanel on view? Karlberg's flush, inflamed series of watercolors is a bestiary of men and monsters depicting states of corporeal derangement. Charged, Boccaccian, grotesque, odalisque, these tableaux New-yorkais are neutralized in part, though, by their cool mounting on black rubber, then packaged in turn in a gelatinous transparent plastic. 'Are you — Nobody – too?'; 'Who's the Bosch here?'

Is it impudent to mention the prickly empathy of a nail salon? Yes. Then again one speaks of mirrors with an impunity that is the hallmark of sterilization. Some tubes are tied. Karlberg and Henke's works are dual, and speak to conjoined hair, Rosemarie and a metaphorology of cloven hoofs. Leaving the room, or evading the discussion, the cigarette-smoking viewer is delivered back to his solipsism, speaking on Bluetooth or shouting at himself.

**'Á une Passante'**

When the flights and projects began, I counted myself both lucky and deserving. No one said anything, nobody muddled. I came to see this as a lack of comment, commitment. Eureka, Europa. Little did I know I was being coaxed into what in the turbulent 2040s would be termed 'Lumpenprekariat'.

Arriving in London on a late, post-pilot flight, I found the tube closed. The island region was interminably unnavigable and empty in the most hostile manner. I asked a red bus driver how to get to the undeservedly and mercilessly far region of C– where I was to stay. My collaborator was not answering; this was before iMessage; he was asleep. The driver suggested I might be better inconvenienced by finding a nearby hostel. There was one by the British Library.

Longly I wandered the empty tubular streets toward the fleet-footed urn of sleeping books. I came upon a smoking woman and asked her where the library is. – You do know it's closed, she said cleverly. She was an illustrator who lived in H–. It's not like that, she said to her male roommate on the phone while we rode the bus back to her flat.

After I woke up gratefully and mercifully on her couch, her roommate served me tea, and the subject of conversation turned to his front teeth. They had recently gone missing, been punched out on his way to work by a fast cyclist on his own way to work. The roommate was calm and quaint and normal about it, serving me English breakfast in their illustrative garden. The possibility of kindness. I never saw either of them again.

This was before cruelty became algorithmic, incarcerated or invisible. I like to tell people stories about stupid/coincidental actions, or bad or failed experiences, to remind them that such lapses were once possible, and that their disappearance is not desirable, either. Kindness is possible. Yes, I am Christian. My answer to the suggestion that all should enter an economy of communicability, sex or money (exchange) – a libidinal economy – is 'no.' Whether you can meaningfully separate such an attempt from that economy is a different, though interesting, question.

Centuries earlier, the suicide Josef Kramhöller (A.W.M.) was in Hell. During and before this he photographed his finger grease on the windows of upscale London boutiques to express he was angry and invisible. A slight (sic) of hand. Why vilify that anger? Aught such anger be excised, like the roommate's teeth, or might we angels distinguish between two kinds of hell?

Written by Pablo Larios