

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L



\$10.00



Formally, too, the drawings approach the queasy reality of dreams or drugs. Daylight is rendered in black ink, squirming patterns swarm around the pictured figures, and hatch marks effect sinews and exposed muscle. The dress an analyst wears in *The Technique Is the Technology* has the same filleted quality as a naked man's chest, and in *Boyfriend and Girlfriend*, the squiggly gingham of a beach blanket bleeds into the texture of a woman's hair. Mannis's figures always seem on the verge of dissolving into abstract tangles of marks.

Time periods crossbreed in "Sexus," too: flapper haircuts and 1950s-style horn-rimmed glasses; psychoanalysis-type notepads and iPhones. The show's title, of course, nods to Henry Miller's 1949 novel of the same name, an account of the author's licentious youth in 1920s Brooklyn. This underlying literary reference seems to ground the drawings' otherwise anachronistic elements in the debauchery of Miller's modernist bohemia. Like Miller, the artist has a yen for an art so strange that what it might liberate in a viewer has the potential to seep into life—as though these spermy marks and sated expressions could penetrate even the most traditional social situations. Yet, like the squirrely patterns of psychedelia, Mannis's drawings throb with anxiety—the thrill and threat of voyeurism or the paranoid fantasies of the outcast. "Sexus" reifies the fear that ultimate freedom might not simply be the enlightened flouting of social norms, but the perky pleasure of the public masturbator.

—Travis Diehl

VANCOUVER

Ursula Mayer

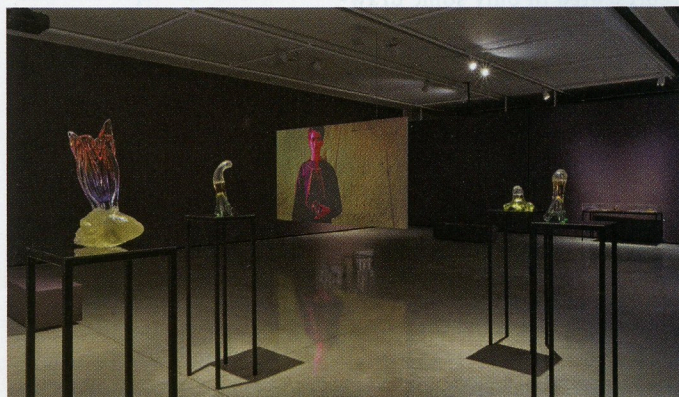
AUDAIN GALLERY, SFU GALLERIES

Ursula Mayer's recent exhibition "Not a curse, nor a bargain, but a hymn" offered a précis of the dominant culture, melding literary "classics," fashion editorials, the metapolitical propaganda of the liberal press, science-fiction mise-en-scène, soap operas, and high-end commercial display. This maelstrom of hypercapitalist spectacle referenced the ascendance of corporate feminism—we might call it "New Economy Feminism"—over the course of the economic restructuring that began three decades ago and continues unchecked. Drawn from the play *Ideal* by Ayn Rand (a key figure in this strand of feminism), the exhibition's title was excised from a man's idealizing description of an actress named Kay Gonda—the lead character of Rand's story and a recurrent figure in this exhibition. But it was Margaret Thatcher—her image gracing the gallery entrance in two framed historical press clippings commemorating her political career—who became here a master signifier in a larger cultural etiology that Mayer brilliantly excavated through negative dialectics.

After passing the press clippings, viewers encountered *The Golden Fleece*, 2013—a window-display-like vitrine containing a single hanging garment, a work reminiscent of Mai-Thu Perret's efforts in the early aughts and one that also constellated science-fictional Futurism, fashion, and design over that ur-symbol of zombie-capitalism, the mannequin. They then entered a thematically integrated multimedia montage. *Revision in Power*, 2013, a showcase featuring materials gathered under the sign of "strong women," contained a photograph of Rand, rare earth minerals, a copper object, and books, including Rand's major works and a Penguin edition of a collection of Euripides's tragedies named after women: Medea, Hecabe, and Electra. Next to this selection was another image of Thatcher (here on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph*); a stone was placed to cover her face, associatively evoking primitive accumulation enacted by an "ex-"colonial power as it perpetrates its share of the neocolonialisms confusingly known as globalization. Registering alternatively as some antinomic altar and as a barb aimed at right-wing feminism—at the powerful women of this new economy who endorse free-market policies and an individualism that borders on libertarianism—this display ultimately turned out to be the opening salvo in an indictment that unfolded over the course of the show. A latent thematic of the desert also surfaced here, as the material detritus of mining—the matrix of value—was presented alongside references to arid terrain, paralleling the depletion of the earth with the exploitation of second-wave feminism.

Beyond the display case was a hanging wooden screen. Two of Mayer's films were projected on either side: *Gonda*, 2012, on the recto; *Medea*, 2013, on the verso. The model Valentijn de Hingh is strikingly styled in *Gonda*, at once futuristic and glamorous (à la Barbarella or the action figures of 1970s pop feminism—say, Wonder Woman) as she stands alone in a barren landscape, looking to and past the camera. As a narrator delivers a voice-over monologue on the "disappointment" that accompanies the false promise of Enlightenment progress, the figure in *Gonda* becomes more and more legible as a representation of the betrayed "emancipated feminist subject" who gained power through recourse to a short-term buyout by capitalism. It's as though the apotheosis of New Economy Feminism were a regime of shoulder pads and sheer panty hose, or the scorched earth from which gold once emerged—paltry gains, in either case, from a hard-fought war. As the viewer moved past the screen, the trajectory opened onto a display of five sensual glass-and-polyester sculptures that might double as sex toys. The tips of the floral forms are morphologically genital-like, while also resembling strange mouths or eyes. The magical fluidity of these commodity fetishes underscored the tension between lushness and the barren aridity that hung over the show, informing a creeping sense of catastrophe.

—Jaleb Mansoor



View of "Ursula Mayer," 2014.

LONDON

Ed Atkins

SERPENTINE SACKLER GALLERY

The end of a night like any other, facedown on the bar with a cigarette turning to ash between two fingers, singing a perfectly acceptable rendition of the aria "Erbarme dich" from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* before your head deflates and everything goes dark. We've all been there, right?

This blackout into canonical bathos is the repeated fate of the computer-animated protagonist of Ed Atkins's video work *Ribbons*, 2014, the centerpiece of his recent solo exhibition, a triptych of simultaneously projected roughly thirteen-minute-long video works. These