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GEORGIA GARDNER GRAY

CONCORDE AT UKS

28 October –
26 November 2017

UKS
(UNGE KUNSTNERES SAMFUND /
THE YOUNG ARTISTS' SOCIETY)

St. Olavs Gate 3
0165 Oslo
www.uk.no

Opening hours:
Wed – Sun, 12 – 5pm
Free admission

Commencing in autumn 2017, a series of UKS solo exhibitions each employ both UKS' grounds and a part of the neighboring venue, Kunstneres Hus, enabling the simultaneous exploration of different corners of the artistic production in question, from the main streams to the fissures and crevices. First in this series of double exposés is the American, Berlin-based painter, sculptor, and occasional playwright Georgia Gardner Gray (b.1988).

In her dual exhibition, *CONCORDE*, Gray transforms the ground floor of Kunstneres Hus into a black box display for an approximately life-size model of the iconic sculptural bodywork of the turbojet, Concorde (see text on rear). UKS' brightly lit premises, on the other hand, offer a contrasting context for a new series of paintings and a larger installation of silver-wrapped furniture and Plexiglas vitrines carrying collectibles.

The display at UKS revolves around Gray's playful relation to painting as a place to perform and amuse with her often hysteric, grotesque, and decadent contemporary subjects figuratively depicted in deep hued colors. A resonating theme is one of status and loneliness. While accelerated neoliberal money flows create vast disparities between the super-rich boarding Concorde and the rest of us, in Gray's both somber and extravagant painterly world affective economies saturate even amicable or intimately loving relationships. This in turn creates a self(ie)-reflexive detachment and narcissism that is continuously perpetuated via the high (Concorde-) speed spin of fame and persona within the visual arts.

At UKS, glittery, tin-foiled elements, a heater, a dressing room locker, a dada-clock, and a work table, allude to the American 20th-century artist-icon Andy Warhol's famously silver-wrapped NYC studio, industrial-scale art fabrication, and high-profiled hangout, The Factory. In Gray's reshuffling of this image, the factory is no longer inhabited by a coked-up collective but by a single entrepreneur. One pair of hands operates in Gray's installation, as testified by remnants

of a solitary male character: his work-fetish pants are hung in a changing cabinet while his isolated labor of repetitious paintings are propped next to a ticking metronome on his work desk. Outlining the regimented, timed painting routine of a robotic, automaton persona, the male painter repeats the discount supermarket ALDI's emblematic pattern—originally designed by German op-artist Günter Fruhtrunk—as if trying to follow a Warholian dictum of creative work free of personalized touch or romantic trace. Yet, as Gray notes, in her vision of this worker's attitude, "He does not come close to Fruhtrunk's precision, his attempts are a bit pathetic and lacking in discipline. He only finishes a few small panels and many cups of tea."

Adjacent to this narrative tableau hangs a billboard blow-up of a photograph by the artist's mother. The view is from the window of her family home in New York, Roosevelt Island, which happens to overlook a factory. Resonating with questions of (industrial) labor and commodity, the personal image—both artwork and appropriation, private memory and prop—functions as backdrop for the exhibition and as an alternative view to UKS' Oslo street windows.

One of two Plexiglas stands—appearing like something between clunky air-cargo (of Concorde) and postmodernism design—holds absurd collectibles. A Jeff Koons edition from the cynical 1980s, an original mail art piece by Ray Johnson, and a watch with the inscription "toujours en retard" (always late) by Ben Vautier are all staged behind a yellow screen, itemizing past gestures by artists whose oeuvre engages specifically with the subject of self-reflexivity and commodification. Playfully appropriating these gestures, Gray makes these assorted male personas available for the viewer like products in a shop display case.

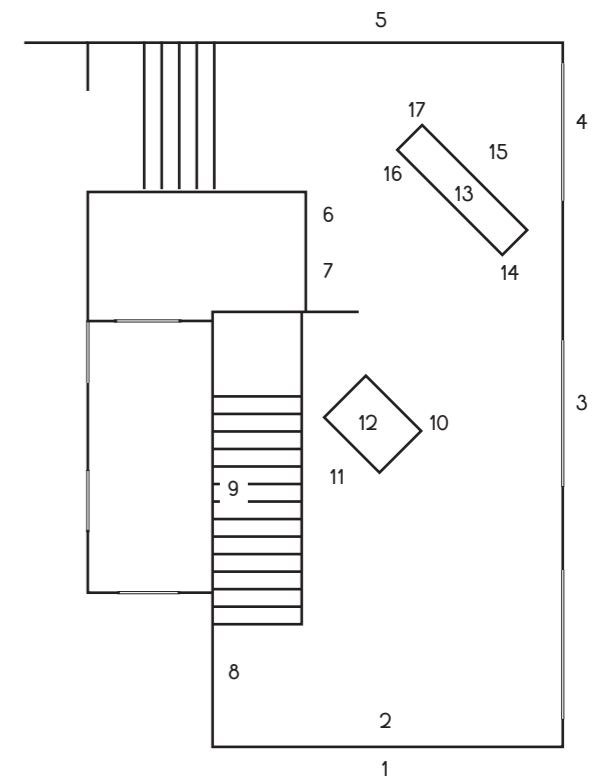
In the second Plexiglas trolley, which can be readily moved around the floor, lies a painting—a horizontal still life imitating a tabletop. The supine picture carries the sober declaration, "I Solemnly Swear to Tell the Truth", signed and dated by

the artist, tongue-in-cheek; meanwhile another painting, vertically hung on the back panel of the deep-blue display case, shows an austere woman closely scrutinizing the signing of such contracts as if overseeing ongoing attempts at interpersonal sincerity. Between realism and cartoon, the intensity of the silhouette on the glowing patterned background creates a lineage spanning from psychedelic 1970s designs by Pucci via Gustav Klimt to Lucas Cranach's earnest protestant portraiture.

The psychedelic and fin de siècle-inspired canvases depict Gray's signature libertine subjects and their gawky relations. Two works, entitled *Twinning*s, show entangled androgynous twosomes, closely connected yet simultaneously at odds. In one, a couple of tennis players push or pull each other. Its sister painting shows a couple clinging together in a leisure nature scene. The female distractedly gazes away, as Gray notes, "at a fuzzy caterpillar". The stylized markers of high-end sports outfits, eccentric clothing, and design items allude to a constantly self-mediated pecking order: how these subjects always perform and manipulate, distinguish and classify, whether subtly or bluntly, even in the closest of relations. Meanwhile, as if having used too much perfume, the colorful density of the work and intimacy of the couples equally invokes nausea. The use of pink, orange and contrasting bright greens and dark blues gives away a contradiction pointing to the gross darkness of the individuals' desire to become alike.

The largest work in the exhibition, *Bahnhof Zoo*, is a self-portrait set in the eponymous train station in Berlin which is notoriously burdened by homelessness and drug-trafficking. On this large-scale canvas, subjects circulate in the 24/7 supermarket. Behind the foreground of a screaming orange peel, people stroll while the artist's face, painted in blue shades, lurks in the lower left corner of the scene. Immersed in her flâneuring in the raw cityscape, the oscillation between personal investment, voyeurism, and detached desire creates continuous tension.

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- 1 *Aldi Paintings*
- 2 *Work Desk*
- 3 *Twinning i*
- 4 *Twinning ii*
- 5 *Bahnhof Zoo*
- 6 *Silver Spind*
- 7 *World Clock*
- 8 *Work Heater*
- 9 *View onto the Factory (Waking Up)*
- 10 *Industry Trolley i*
- 11 *Contract LXIX*
- 12 *Untitled (Contract)*
- 13 *Industry Trolley ii*
- 14 Ray Johnson, *Untitled mailing* (n.d.)
- 15 Jeff Koons, *Signature Plate*
- 16 Ben Vautier, *Edition Watch (Always Late)*
- 17 *Door Knob (Surreal Object)*

1–13 & 17: All works by Georgia Gardner Gray, 2017. Courtesy of Croy Nielsen.

14: Courtesy of The Ray Johnson Estate.

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GEORGIA GARDNER GRAY

CONCORDE AT KUNSTNERNES HUS

Kunstnernes Hus

Wergelandsveien 17
0167 Oslo
www.kunstnerneshus.no

Opening hours:
Tue – Wed, 11am – 4pm
Thu, 11am – 8pm
Fri, 11am – 6pm
Sat – Sun, 12 – 6pm



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In her dual exhibition, titled *CONCORDE*, Gray transforms the ground floor of Kunstnernes Hus into a black box display for an approximately life-size model of the sculptural bodywork of the supersonic turbojet, Concorde, simultaneously forming the stage-set for a live play taking place on the opening weekend.

With its slim body and elegantly curved wings, Concorde is iconic: the epitome of aerodynamic design. Traversing the Atlantic in under three-and-a-half hours at twice the speed of sound, it was the acme of air travel, a living vestige from the space age: at once retro and from the future. A French national pride, it boasted top-of-the-line service, only available to the mega-rich and celebrity clientele. While exceeding any standard, Concorde sagged under the weight of exorbitantly high maintenance costs: living out its last days on heavy government subsidies. September 11th and a tragic crash at Charles de Gaulle shut down Concorde for good. The sculpture-cum-stage-set *CONCORDE* at Kunstnernes Hus is a literal image of this emblematic plane, an accelerated vessel in an uncertain territory between bloated localized ambition, overheated transit, and trans-global disaffection.

Performed in this scenario on the opening weekend of the exhibition, Gray's play involves nine international performers acting *CONCORDE*'s solitary captives. The play follows a series of absurdist DIY-satires written and directed by the artist—among them *Precious Provincials*, which premiered at Kunstverein, Hamburg earlier this year and *Schaumstoffladen* at Acud Macht Neu,

Berlin in 2016—using untrained friends and colleagues as actors.

In the play, the utopian transatlantic transit of Concorde is followed from take-off in Paris as it accelerates en route to New York, hosting a crew of celebrities and art stars on the edge of the atmosphere:

CAPTAIN: Ladies and gentlemen, you are about to reach the speed of sound. As we break through the sound barrier, you will experience a loud sound. It is called a SONIC BOOM. Don't be scared by this. SONIC BOOM

Yes, ladies and gentlemen. We are now cruising through the upper stratosphere. Soon, we will be going twice the speed of sound...

BOOM BOOM

If you look to your left and right, you can see the curvature of the Earth. We are hugging the inner edge of the atmosphere.

In this nowhere at the edge of the world, an absurd set of characters meet. Namegiven celebrities include Andy Warhol, Princess Diana and her recent beau Dodi Al-Fayed who mingle with unnamed stereotypes such as the Paparazzi, the Celebrity (coined by Gray as the "a spirit of sordid soul sucking flat nothingness, a willing victim to the singularity, utterly still like death + GLAM"), and a rickety couple of Punk Rockstars.

Audience members experience the gone-wrong, non-existent, or nearly brain-dead interactions among the passengers:

ANDY WARHOL (to one of the Punk Rockstars): You should really get a haircut, that style doesn't really suit you.
PUNK ROCKSTAR (F): Wha'?'
ANDY WARHOL: I said, you should really get a haircut. That style is not working for you.
PUNK ROCKSTAR (F): Are u jolly well fuckin' with my teet? Wha' the 'ell, u just say ya freaakin cumbag? Ay babe, didya hear

that?!? He said I gotta cut me bits and toss em outta the tree!

And spectators observe the autopilot personas of the travellers, as heard in their monologues:

ANDY WARHOL: I really like to eat alone. I want to start a chain of restaurants for other people who are like me: "The Restaurant for the Lonely Person".
CHEWING
This salad is just so exciting. I don't know what to say.

The plot of the play is bordering on nill. Driving the satire is the Captain's announcement of time, speed, and altitude. The ticking clocks and measures evoke a strong memento mori motif—a remembrance of our mortality—which is repeated in both of Gray's dual exhibition displays (at UKS such elements include a watch and a metronome). Further, the Captain's elaborate announcements of proffered inflight meals punctuate the action of the play, invoking a kind of "nature morte". A lifestyle blogger's wet dream, the verbal images of gourmet feasts thus function as ironic still lifes painted in words, reminding the blasé overclass that the ending is near:

CAPTAIN: Hello again passengers ... We are now Mach 2. That is twice the speed of sound. To the right, you can see Venus. Our feast continues now aboard Concorde. We will only serve you the best. For our main course we will have Aberdeen Angus rib-eye, mushroom purée and beef tea.

CONCORDE – THE PLAY

Performance hours:
Friday 27 October, 9pm*
Saturday 28 October, matinée 3pm*
Saturday 28 October, soirée 7:30pm*

*All tickets for *CONCORDE – The Play* are free and available on a first-come-first-served basis at Kunstnernes Hus from 2 hours before the play begins.

Performers: Bradley Kronz as Andy Warhol, Eirik Sæther as Nini, Esra Padgett as a punk, Jeffrey Joyal as a punk, Joseph Geagan as the celebrity, Mia von Matt as the paparazzi, Mo Dafa as Dodi Al-Fayed, Steven Warwick as Princess Diana, Susie Yugler as salad and crackers.

The manuscript is authored by Georgia Gardner Gray in collaboration with Pablo Larios.

Georgia Gardner Gray

Based in Berlin, Georgia Gardner Gray (b.1988, US) graduated from The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art with a BFA in 2011. Previous exhibitions and projects include participation in the group exhibition *Monday is a Day Between Tuesday and Sunday* at Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin (2017); solo shows and plays *Precious Provincials* at Kunstverein in Hamburg (2017) and *Schaumstoffladen* at Acud Macht Neu, Berlin (2016); partaking in the presentation *New Theater: Selected Plays 2013–2015* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015), and participation in the group show *The Pipe* at the Gates of Dawn, curated by Grayson Revoir at Jan Kaps, Cologne (2015). Upcoming exhibitions include a solo exhibition at Croy Nielsen in Vienna and a group exhibition as part of Condo New York at Bodega.

The exhibition is supported by Goethe-Institut, Oslo and by Croy Nielsen, Vienna.

