

KARIN SABINE KROMMES

Swarm



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KARIN SABINE KROMMES

Swarm

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Karin Krommes: Cosmic Debris and Swarming Metals

By Prof. Paul Gough

Executive Dean, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of the West of England

Death is a matter of mathematics.

It screeches down at you from dirty white nothingness

And your life is a question of velocity and altitude,

With allowances for wind and the quick, relentless pull

Of gravity

Or else it lies concealed

In that fleecy, peaceful puff of cloud ahead.

A streamlined, muttering vulture, waiting

To swoop upon you with a rush of steel...

And then your chances vary as the curves

Of your parabolas, your banks, your dives,

The scientific soundness of your choice

Of what to push or pull, and how, and when. (1)

Barry Conrad Amiel

Karin Krommes' studio in Bristol is compact and clean; her pristine canvases are neatly stacked, their painted engines float in a talcum of whiteness, speaking of both mass and delicate weightlessness, of affinity and yet also of detachment. Neatly aligned on a narrow shelf small boxes contain the powdery remains of moths and fragile insects; other boxes contain the dismantled parts of model aircraft. Tucked between two boxes is a compact envelope. It contains exactly one hundred Austerlitz Insect Pins, used by entomologists and curators to display dry mounted insect specimens; double coated, black enameled spring steel with very fine points, each pin 52mm long, with a filament-thin diameter of 0.7mm. Such a high level of specification is crucial both to the proper display of the specimen but also to Krommes whose work similarly relies on exactitude of observation, on the precise rendering of differing metal surfaces, on a

sophisticated understanding of how a propeller once fitted into the gearbox, how it then connected to the compressor and thence to the turbine. In these delicately painted surfaces Krommes must be capable of distinguishing between the warm glow of a thin band of copper, the frigid reflection of an arc of aluminium, or the pewter-hued dullness of unpolished composite. But this is not the work of an obsessive individual; these are not mere illustrations of technical virtuosity, instead they are powerful renditions of machines, often of indeterminate scale, caught in a flux between action and paralysis.

Krommes captures the clamouring intensity, the tragedy of dereliction that so enraptured the war artist Paul Nash when he stumbled upon the huge dump of wrecked German aircraft at Cowley in Oxfordshire. Nash described the sight as like “a great inundating sea ... the breakers rearing up and crashing on the plain. And then, no: nothing moves, it is not water or even ice, it is something static and dead.” (2) But Krommes is not much interested in deadness, or in redundancy, or inertia. Her massive painted engines squat squarely in the middle of their chalky voids, threatening to unfurl their hidden proboscis or take up formation like a squadron of wasps. Threat, ambiguity and absurdity pervade these fine paintings. What is the exact scale of these menacing objects: are they ragged remnants of a helicopter engine or a miniscule and magnified metallicised insect? Where are they located? What are they about to do? Like her collection of moths, they seem to be pinned to the canvas with no hint of shadow or background that might provide some comforting context.

There is something both touching and discomforting in the way that certain paintings relate to one another. The pairing of the two ejector seats, for example, is like a husband and wife team, a partnership in which the cushioned straps, the sagging seats, the knobs and dials have something in common but are finely differentiated, espousing their own unique, even idiosyncratic, character, which Krommes in her relentless pursuit of the particular pins down and paints with unnerving steeliness. This diptych remind us of a couple, their history of closeness, the complexity and entanglement of shared emotions and interdependence, and perhaps the pain of releasing oneself from a relationship worn down and atrophied.

Krommes grew up with aeroplanes and gliders. She tells of occasions in which she assumed the controls of a light aircraft, quietly astonished and, perhaps, frightened for a moment by the sudden jerking and the throbbing liveliness of the spindly vessel as it was buffeted by the invisible wind. “Look up into the sky”, she says, “It is quite terrifying. All those apparently peaceful landscapes and bustling towns are overshadowed, overhung by deceptively slim shapes that trundle noiselessly across the sky. Even the feathery condensation trails suggest weightlessness, but we know these vast machines are not light at all. They represent in fact hundreds of tons of grimy metal, thinly concealed pipe-work, delicate circuit board and pulsating propeller.” Something of this quiet terror pervades these remarkable paintings, but also something of the fragility of human skin, with their pock-marked and pitted surfaces, corroded and aged by the elements.

Aeroplanes, jets, cosmic debris, space rockets can - and do - fall out of the sky, banking from the peaceful puffs of cloud, tumbling wistfully in a rush of twisted steel and torn pipes. In their descending they assume a fierce poetry, a purity of shape and colour that is brilliantly captured by this exciting young artist, sometimes frozen into a symmetrical stasis, sometimes lent an anthropomorphic air, sometimes steadily returning our fascinating gaze, yet always quietly impressive, disquieting and dazzling in their visual intensity.



¹
'Death is a Matter of Mathematics', Barry Conrad Amiel,
in The Faber Book of War Poetry, ed. Kenneth Baker, (London: Faber and Faber) p.131

²
Paul Nash reflecting on Totes Meer (Dead Sea) 1940-1, Tate Gallery, London,
in 'Outline: an Autobiography and Other Writings' (London: Faber and Faber, 1948)

Foreword

Karin’s work first came to our attention at the Royal West Of England Academy’s Open Exhibition four years ago. Her work was at odds with the majority of the other artists’ submissions. Her foreboding, yet witty, paintings were refreshing after viewing a succession of landscapes and still life’s by latter day Impressionists. It was also slightly unusual to see such a young artist amongst rather more established figures.

Karin was born in Gernsey and raised in Luxembourg. She gained a 1st class degree at Edinburgh College of Art, one of the best art schools in Britain. Since then she has lived and worked in Bristol. In her paintings and 3D work she has always tried to marry her creativity with a considerable technical ability. Her paintings are finely executed, but she leaves enough evidence of brushwork to highlight the artistry. The silhouettes that feature in the entomology drawers are painstakingly hand cut.

Karin clearly has a deep interest in aeronautical design, and she is extremely knowledgeable about the technical aspects of her subject matter. Behind each painting often lies a more human narrative. The Junkers engine that features in the painting titled *Relic I* belonged to a aircraft that crash landed into a Lapland lake during a cold World War II winter. *Relic II* (the companion piece to *Relic I*), by contrast, is a Rolls Royce engine belonging to a Spitfire, which crashed on an airfield still said to be haunted by the pilot who died in the accident. Stripped away from the militaristic emblems, we are left with two remarkably similar symbols of war, both equally scarred and both heroically rendered.

Karin’s work is always meticulously researched and is borne out of a deep passion and understanding of her subject. We are pleased to be presenting her first solo exhibition in the UK, and hope that the show will bring her work the wider attention it deserves.

Jamie Anderson & Jemimah Patterson

Waterhouse & Dodd

September 2009



1

Swarm (Transit)

Oil on linen 47 x 71 in / 120 x 180 cm



2
 Relic I
 Oil on panel 26 x 36 in / 66 x 90 cm



3
 Relic II
 Oil on panel 26 x 36 in / 66 x 90 cm



4

Untitled I

Hand cut card & insects mounted in a found entomology drawer

21 x 32.5 x 4.5 in / 53 x 83 x 11 cm



5

Still Series
Acrylic on glazed frames

Cat 5: 11.5 x 13.5 in / 29 x 34 cm
Cat 6: 8.5 x 6.5 in / 22 x 17 cm
Cat 7: 8.5 x 6.5 in / 22 x 17 cm
Cat 8: 9.5 x 11.5 in / 24 x 29 cm



6



7



9



8



12



11



10

Still Series
Acrylic on glazed frames

Cat 9: 10 x 8.5 in / 25 x 21 cm
Cat 10: 11.5 x 14.5 in / 32 x 37 cm
Cat 11: 7.5 x 9.5 in / 19 x 24 cm
Cat 12: 9.5 x 7.5 in / 24 x 19 cm



13

Prey

Oil on canvas 31.5 x 47 in / 80 x 120 cm



14
Hunt
Oil on panel 12 x 16 in / 30 x 40 cm



15
Swarm (Descent)
Oil on linen 47 x 71 in / 120 x 180 cm



16

Untitled II

Hand cut card & insects mounted in a found entomology drawer

21 x 32.5 x 4.5 in / 53 x 83 x 11 cm

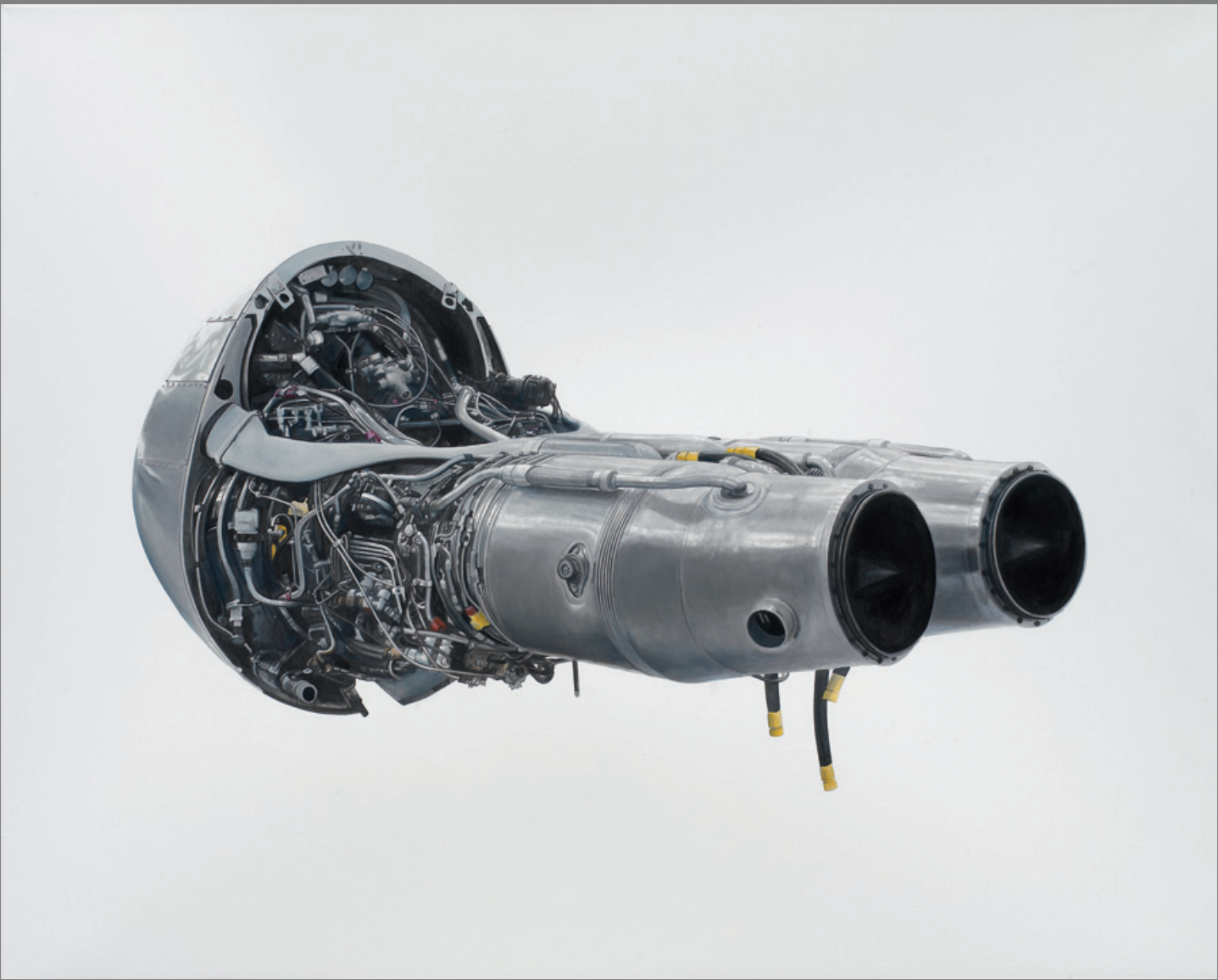


17
Remain I
Oil on panel (a diptych) 23.5 x 18 in / 60 x 45 cm (each)



18
Birth
Oil on canvas 31.5 x 39.5 in / 80 x 100 cm





KARIN SABINE KROMMES

Born 1979, Germany

Education

1998 - 04 MA (Hons) Fine Art
1st class + travel scholarship award
University of Edinburgh and
Edinburgh College of Art

Exhibitions

2008 London Art Fair, Islington, London
ArtParis-Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi

2007 ArtParis-Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi
London Art Fair, Islington, London

2006 Art London, Chelsea, London
Baggator charity exhibition
Tobacco Factory, Bristol
Jamaica Street Studios Open Weekend, Bristol
Flight

2005 Stroud House Gallery, Stroud
153rd Autumn Exhibition
Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
Merz Gallery, Edinburgh
SAA Annual Exhibition

2004 Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh
Postcards for Sick Kids charity exhibition
Lyon & Turnbull, Edinburgh
Braveart04, Atrium Gallery, London
Merz Gallery, Edinburgh

2002 *Artothek TUFA*, Trier, Germany
Turnhouse Airport, Edinburgh

2001 Sektscheune (solo), Nittel, Germany

Commissions

2007 *Trent & Pegasus*
A major commission for Rolls-Royce

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