

KATYA SANDER DUBLIN

About five feet tall with a uniform dark surface, dressed in clinging, unisex costumes, they don't look much like the homespun, cheery characters of the Bavarian Sister Berta Hummel. Nevertheless, they take their cue from several recent bodies of work by Connell that conflate Hummel figurines with Socialist Realism as public art. Those works suggested parallels between objective and subjective modes of propaganda, meditating on the repression of the concepts of self and conscience under authoritarian regimes. *Un-Home-Like* carries a broader, subtler message as it strives to describe the displacement of a sense of self produced by psychic injury in general. Here, the Hummels are mere costume changes for the morphing soul, modeled and draped around the negative psychic space where all that has been maimed, neglected, and destroyed invisibly persists. By the same token, however, not every poem is hypocrisy, nor is every Hummel repression, and Connell feels her way toward a poetics of fragments. Dramatic spotlights shine down on the scene, creating a riddling mix of shape and shadow.

But what, and where, is the drama itself? The narrative that coheres motivation, conscience, and character is understood to have dissolved. Neither adults nor children, the actors in Connell's tableau thrust their arms out in expansive gestures, like orators who have lost their notes or soldiers who have laid down their weapons but can never lower their hands. These movements lead away from the immediate scene, pointing beyond the installation all the way to the edges of identity. Dislocation and dispersal follow traumatic events. The exploded center of *Un-Home-Like* is the home itself, as represented by the cabinet/barque. Like C.S. Lewis' wardrobe, it leads to other, echoing, battlegrounds, and long, loveless absences.

Connell points out that the first Hummel figures were produced in Bavaria in the very year when the Nuremberg Laws were adopted, stripping German Jews of their rights and outlawing marriage—and sex—between Jews and other Germans. A decade later, American soldiers tucked the portable, Disney-like boys

and girls in their duffles and brought them home, along with wounds, purple hearts, and psychic damage. Whatever their aesthetic merits, Hitler was no fan of these figurines. Angered by *The Volunteers*, 1937, a satirical painting by Hummel depicting two hapless bumpkin children as less-than-lethal junior brownshirts, a Nazi Party newspaper said that her images of toddlers were “brainless sissies,” stating that “there is no place in the ranks of German artists for the likes of her.”

Poets and heroes are sometimes hard to identify, lit as they often are by the flares of hell. In her installation, Connell's battered chest, emptied of its drawers and packed with ghosts, is a bridge as well as a boat, reaching between forgotten pain and the realities of love.

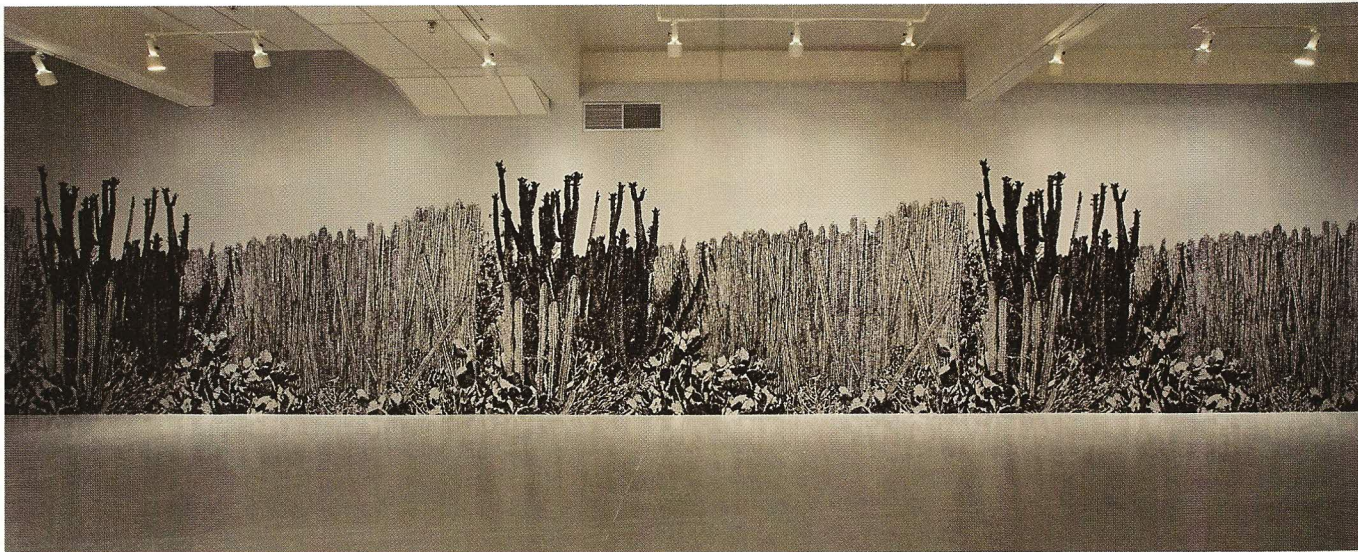
—Douglas Max Utter

Katya Sander's intriguing video installation *A Landscape of Known Facts* explores the relationship between nineteenth-century panoramic landscapes and cinema [Project Arts Centre; April 23—June 26, 2010]. Set in the center of a large, specially built and darkly painted drum, the projector operates like a lighthouse, its beam continuously tracking across the circular wall's surface. Mirroring the movement of Sander's camera, the projector delineates the interiors of several dramatically different panoramas. As we watch, we witness the harshness of a winter war scene, wild cats prepared to pounce on water birds, and the looming presence of a tropical tempest, but we hear the sounds of footsteps and snippets of conversation in which invisible viewers question the nature of what they are seeing.

At first, the installation's overall structure and the projector's persistent movement suggest we have been dropped into an oversized optical toy that illustrates an array of contradictions and inverse relationships. Unlike traditional cinema, this moving image literally travels, as do viewers who wish to keep its frame within their field of vision. Complicating matters are the figurative shadows painted by the artist on the wall. Mingling with our shadows and the silhouettes of viewers appearing in the video, they also force us to rely heavily upon our peripheral vision. This keeps us aware of others' presence, even if no one else happens to be in the gallery. The soundtrack contributes to this effect. Listening to the informal comments of people looking at the panoramas intimates a shared experience. Their remarks pique our curiosity, inspire critical reflection, and awaken our desire to participate in the discussion.

Taking issue with the correspondences that exist between the two art forms, *A Landscape of Known Facts* presents a complex weave of images, facts, analogies, and considerations. From the use of theatrical lighting and perspective construction to political agendas and the control of viewers' access and movement, the panorama—like cinema—contrives to amaze and enthrall by heightening physical actuality.

ABOVE: Katya Sander, installation views of *A Landscape of Known Facts*, 2010, revolving video projection, Quadrophonic sound, circular built room and wall drawings, 28 minutes [courtesy of the artist and Project Arts Centre, Dublin]



GISELE AMANTEA
JOLIETTE, CANADA

The disembodied voices, on the other hand, serve a didactic purpose. In articulating background information and differences of opinion, they draw attention to subtle, but significant, matters of interpretation. When one voice describes these fabrications as models of images, another voice immediately counters, saying, “models for images.” In the course of the discussion, they consider the producers and consumers of these painterly installations and equate them with television travel programs, reverse microscopes, and the Panopticon. The figurative and physical gulf that exists between seer and seen becomes plainly evident and the *modus operandi* keeps changing. The Panopticon, for example, confers power on the viewer, but at another point in the conversation it is the image that gives directions, choreographs movement, and organizes bodies.

In producing an installation that literally merges the panorama and cinema, Sander raises a host of questions regarding both their evolution and their relationship. The statement accompanying the exhibition casts panoramas as prototypical cinemas that prepared audiences for the movie experience. But as the impetus for such cultural and technological shifts is typically multi-dimensional, it seems too facile to simply state that the arrival of cinema brought on the demise of the panorama. The ease with which films can be copied and transported, for example, would have made the process of producing and touring panoramas uncompetitive. However, one cannot deny that there are many points of concurrence, especially in today’s world where we have examples of each wanting to be more like the other. This can be seen in the Atlanta Cyclorama which, with the installation of rotating stadium seating, has become more cinematic. Filmmakers have also been striving to create filmic versions of the panoramic experience, which has led to the appearance of CircleVision 360° presentations, OMNIMAX, and the latest digital 3D formats. Given these developments, *A Landscape of Known Facts* examines a fascinating episode in the past and unwittingly demonstrates its connection to the present.

—John Gayer

Postmodern art criticism often considers kitsch and other forms of gaudiness “eruptions of otherness” that exceed or subvert modernism’s socio-cultural hierarchies. More recent art criticism has become suspicious of the idea that such hierarchies can be overthrown merely by filling galleries with consumer detritus or cross-stitched references to color field painting. Curated by Eve-Lyne Beaudry, Gisele Amantea’s recent solo exhibition, *Sweet Dreams, Hard Truths*, brings this shift to the fore [Musée d’art de Joliette; January 31—April 25, 2010].

Ostensibly a survey of over twenty years of work, this well-crafted exhibition begins with two installations from the late 1980s. *White Folly*, 1988, and *Heaven (from Antidotes for Madness)*, 1987, are superb examples of what is often referred to as Amantea’s “rococo-kitsch” period. At once visually compelling and rigorously critical, these elaborate ceramic and plaster confections are composed of hundreds of decorative figurines. *White Folly*, for example, features an imposing, pristine white altar covered with casts of kitschy ornaments, such as one might find at a Dollar Store or flea market. Reverentially lit with a set of electric candles, this beguiling mass of collectables raises questions about the power and hypocrisies of good taste, which manifests in the paradox of feminine hysteria and docility associated with baroque domestic décor and handicrafts, ethnic stereotypes linked to gaudy manifestations of Christian kitsch, and the relationship between material accumulation and spiritual emptiness.

The second part of the exhibition showcases work from the 1990s. At the time, Amantea’s work had begun to focus on feminist issues, and particularly the ways in which ornament, kitsch, and taste contribute to the construction of gender categories. These concerns are perhaps best expressed in her work *In Your Dreams*, 1998, a mesmerizing three-channel video installation that examines stereotypical portrayals of women culled from a range of sources, but chiefly iconic European and vintage Hollywood films. The three looped, silent film fragments play on tiny LCD monitors inserted into thirty-

one small glass snow-globes. The visual effect is hypnotic: a flickering microcosm that evokes both a sense of innocent, fluttering nostalgia and relentless cultural programming.

If Amantea’s earlier installations are inflected with a postmodern understanding of kitsch as radically other, her most recent body of work complicates this perspective by linking it to historical and contemporary forms of oppression. *The Great Hedge (British India, 19th century)*, 2010, for instance, features a dense pattern of cactuses and prickly vegetation done in black flock on paper. Covering an entire gallery wall like wallpaper, this work plays upon a series of oppositions, such as the domestic softness of flock and the thorny harshness of the depicted barrier, as well as the relationship between refined, decorative English gardens and England’s history of aggressive colonialism. Its political aspect becomes clear when one discovers that Amantea developed the wallpaper pattern from research she conducted on the Great Hedge of India, a living customs barrier spanning approximately 3000 kilometers erected in the 19th century by colonial Britain. This instance of colonialist segregation and class struggle becomes less historically remote when placed next to *Fence of Sham (Mount Royal–Park Extension)*, 2010, a multipart photographic installation documenting an existing ornamental barrier “protecting” the affluent Town of Mount Royal from Park Extension, one of Montreal’s most ethnically diverse and least-privileged neighborhoods. By drawing tight connections between forms of ornamentation and enforced geopolitical frontiers, Amantea moves away from an understanding of kitsch as a critique of institutionalized culture, casting it instead as a device used to keep particular social groups in their place.

—Emily Falve

ABOVE: Gisele Amantea, *The Great Hedge (British India, 19th century)*, 2010, silver wallpaper with screen-printed and flocked image, 13 x 57.5 feet [courtesy of the artist and Musée d’art de Joliette; photo: Richard-Max Tremblay]