

# PearlLam Galleries

Hong Kong SOHO

## Nils Karsten solo exhibition 'Cutting Room'



Nils Karsten b. 1970, **Die Strömung**, 2015, Graphite and collage on paper, 28.2 x 27.9 cm (11 1/8 x 11 in.)  
**Out West**, 2015, Graphite and collage on paper, 28.1 x 27.9 cm (11 1/8 x 11 in.)

### Exhibition Dates

21 October– 30 November, 2015

Monday–Saturday, noon–7pm; Sunday, noon–5pm

Pearl Lam Galleries Hong Kong SOHO

No. 1, G/F & 1/F, SOHO 189, 189 Queen's Road West, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

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“*Cutting Room* is a harlequin invitation to dive into an ocean of visual fragments arranged in systems, narratives, and contexts; associatively, conceptually, and poetically.” —Nils Karsten

**Hong Kong**—Pearl Lam Galleries is pleased to present *Cutting Room*, Nils Karsten's first solo exhibition in Asia. The Brooklyn-based, Hamburg-born artist will exhibit over 40 collage on paper works, with some incorporating pencil and others graphite or graphite and acrylic, which he has created over the past four years.

Karsten “thinks” in collages. He meticulously cuts out images from various sources, such as magazines, flyers, newspapers, books, personal photographs, and propaganda material, and then either arranges the disparate images on paper to create surreal scenes in his graphite collages or places associative images together in a grid he has drawn on paper. In both instances, Karsten's goal is to “own all images”. The images become the artist's through the laborious and meditative process of cutting, the act of which is a ritual for Karsten.

Karsten first began to 'collect' images as a boy by tracing them with pencil into a sketchbook. He then moved on to meticulously cutting out images with nail scissors, as cutting the images gave them an object-like quality which made them more precious to him. Now, he goes through countless potential source materials to find odd and unassuming images that have a hidden potential that can be later uncovered. He is particularly drawn to historic figures, soldiers, tanks, airplanes, tools, teeth, bones, nails, and cigarettes in all shapes and colours.

In creating his graphite collages, Karsten usually studies hundreds of pre-cut paper pieces, playing with them, moving them around, and creating relationships between them. This process can take weeks, sometimes months, or even years. Karsten calls this organisational process "the act of playing out a story or creating poetry", as it is beyond intuition and knowledge. The works often make themselves. Karsten arranges and glues the found print media onto a rarefied graphite landscape, which he says "is best understood as an indeterminate mental space—an unencumbered field of consciousness—where these images exist." This space is full of playful moments and contradictions, often with a quiet social-political undercurrent, although the artist does not intend for his works to be political messages. Strongly influenced by Dadaism and Surrealism, the artist is fascinated by machinery, especially war machinery such as tanks, submarines, planes, etc, which often appear in his collages. Other influences include punk of the mid seventies to early eighties, which played a large role in the artist's teenage years growing up in suburban Hamburg.

An exhibition highlight is *Untitled* (2015), Karsten's large-scale triptych collage, which will be located on the second floor of the gallery. The process involved in this work includes layering, discarding, and redoing, all of which are responses to the process previously carried out. These three processes loosely address the experience of 60s and 70s rock music as a hopeful and perhaps naïve route to a distant utopia. The centre image of *Blind Faith* is a direct reference to the image used on the group's first and only studio album, *Blind Faith*.

Other exhibition highlights include works from Karsten's grid installation series *The Ever-Present Desire For Meaning*, which remains an ongoing project. Each work begins with a carefully drafted pencil grid with each compartment (about 50 x 50 mm) dedicated to one image, although there are sometimes exceptions to this rule. The artist says, "I believe in limitations and rules, but they can't be adhered to just for the sake of maintaining a system either." The grid installation contains approximately 3000 pieces (18 sheets of paper) that have been carefully cut and is in response to the artist's obsessive need to cut and organise images. According to Karsten, "The images are my colour palette, my inventory, and my visual encyclopedia."

Another feature work is *Onkel Otto* (2015), which is not only of found imagery—including chickens, a hand holding a beer and cigarette, a couple with helmets, a cassette tape labelled Iggy and the Stooges, etc.—but also techniques, complicating the materiality and process of conventional collage. Here, the images are prints from wood blocks that Karsten has carved based on his collage cut-outs. The graphite drawings with collage elements continue to inspire different processes.

Pearl Lam, founder of Pearl Lam Galleries says, "I have long been an admirer of Nils Karsten's artistic portfolio, having first introduced his work to Shanghai in a 2006 group exhibition. I am pleased to be holding his first solo exhibition in Asia, featuring a collection of works that reflect contemporary society with clever references to the past, in addition to a bit of tongue-in-cheek humour."

## About Nils Karsten

Nils Karsten (b. 1970, Hamburg, Germany) studied painting at School of Visual Arts, New York and Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, USA before receiving his MFA in painting from Vermont College of the Union Institute, Montpelier in Vermont, USA.

Karsten's work comprises a variety of material, including woodcut, pencil drawings, and collage work. The artist draws inspiration from everyday images that he finds from record

covers, magazines, newspapers, propaganda, photographs, and other images originally claimed by the political or the social. The process of his work is the reclamation of those images of influence through cutting, carving, moving things around, and gluing.

Nils Karsten has been shown internationally, including the following selected solo shows: *Suburbia Hamburg 1983* (2012–13), Churner and Churner, New York, USA; *1969, 1970, 1971* (2011), The Bogart Salon, Brooklyn, USA; *Can't Find My Way Home* (2011), Illuminated Metropolis, New York, USA; *Collagen & Zeichnungen* (2010), Anke Richter Galerie, Friedrichstadt, Germany; *Heaven Has No Happy Ending* (2006), Marvelli Gallery, New York, USA; and *60 Seconds in Heaven* (2005), Marvelli Gallery, New York, USA. Karsten's works have been featured in the following publications: *The Last Picture Show* (The New Yorker, 2014), *Best in Show: Gone Vicious* (The Village Voice, 2013), *Out of Heaven* (Figaro Japon, 2004), *60 Seconds in Heaven* (Artforum 2004), and *Deliberate Irreverence* (Los Angeles Times, 2004).

## About Pearl Lam Galleries

Founded by Pearl Lam, Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. With over 20 years of experience exhibiting Asian and Western art and design, it is one of the leading and most established contemporary art galleries to be launched out of China.

Playing a vital role in stimulating international dialogue on Chinese and Asian contemporary art, the Galleries is dedicated to championing artists who re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice from the region. The Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore collaborate with renowned curators, each presenting distinct programming from major solo exhibitions, special projects, and installations to conceptually rigorous group shows. Based on the philosophy of Chinese Literati where art forms have no hierarchy, Pearl Lam Galleries is dedicated to breaking down boundaries between different disciplines, with a unique gallery model committed to encouraging cross-cultural exchange.

Contemporary Chinese Abstract art is heavily represented in the Galleries roster. Influential Chinese artists Zhu Jinshi and Su Xiaobai, who synthesise Chinese sensibilities with an international visual language, are presented internationally with work now included in major private and public collections worldwide. The Galleries has also introduced leading international artists such as Leonardo Drew, Jenny Holzer, Carlos Rolón/Dzine and Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA) to markets in the region, providing opportunities for new audiences in Asia to encounter their work. Pearl Lam Galleries encourages international artists to create new work which engages specifically with the region-collaborating to produce thought-provoking, culturally relevant work.

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## Press Enquiries

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