

TALLINN

Gabriele Beveridge
and Marge Monko

KAI ART CENTER

The act of deciphering the sensuous language of retail display is always already nostalgic. Walter Benjamin realized as much when, in the 1930s, he spent years trying to uncover the hidden meanings of the shopping arcades of nineteenth-century Paris. Gabriele Beveridge and Marge Monko study this process with deep sensitivity, each in her own way, and, like Benjamin, without denying its lingering magic of desire. Yet, exactly because of the accord between their aesthetic missions, their works when exhibited together allowed the viewer to be seduced too uncritically by the very surfaces the artists set out to deconstruct—and foreclosed a deeper appreciation of the significant differences in their operations.



View of “Gabriele Beveridge and Marge Monko,” 2021. From left: Gabriele Beveridge, *Downpour*, 2021; works from Marge Monko’s series “Show Windows,” 2014–21. Photo: Mari Volens.

The two-artist exhibition “Great Pretender” began with twenty framed C-prints and nine photolithographs from Monko’s eight-year photographic series “Show Windows,” 2014–21. Hung in irregular clusters, these depictions of shop displays in Antwerp, Ghent, New York, and Vienna, as well as in the artist’s native Tallinn, range from the symmetrically straightforward to the fleeting, with the occasional distracting window reflection reminding us of the haptic barrier not only between the artist and the desirable objects on display, but between viewer and artwork. Almost exclusively captured at night, these illusory image spaces of consumer lust operate as three-dimensional still lifes. The framed black-and-white photolithographs flanking the photos of windows portray, in an archival style, instances in history when store windows have been broken on account of looting, war, or natural disaster—from London suffragettes smashing windows at the luxury department store Swan & Edgar in 1912 to the destruction of

shops by Soviet cannon fire in the Estonian border city of Narva during the 1918–20 Estonian War of Independence. Monko shows that, no matter the political or geographical context, broken display windows are intensely evocative symbols of the seductive consumerist image being momentarily torn or disrupted, thus exposing the affective tools by which it is constructed.

Beveridge’s sculptural works are often based on shop fittings and mannequin parts sourced from shuttered retail spaces in London, where she lives. Her training as a photographer reveals itself, perhaps, in her conjuring of assemblages reminiscent of still lifes—for instance, in *Downpour*, 2021, in which she decontextualized chrome-plated mannequin legs by hanging them from the ceiling in perfect symmetry, unclothed, attached by the feet and knees with industrial-looking rope. Elsewhere, display fixtures were colonized by amorphous blobs of light-pink blown glass that either rest languidly on their surfaces (*Thin Air* and *Fountain*, both 2021) or are trapped within their rigid structures (*Nest*, 2021). But while Beveridge’s sculptures work efficiently as negotiations of programmatic female and feminized desire as it relates to the materiality of retail, they here felt too defamiliarized, too void of context, to evoke a consumer historiography comparable to that in Monko’s work. Beveridge’s sculptures look like something you’d find in shopping spaces, but they also resemble many other shiny, expensive-looking things you’d find increasingly anywhere, and particularly in contemporary art, where deceptive beauty is nothing new.

This simple mimicry of a bygone language of femininity constructed by consumerism (which the exhibition seemed to propose is ubiquitous or universally accessed) was perpetuated by Monko’s video work *Sheer Indulgence*, 2021, in which four actors perform a choreography derived from 1970s hosiery commercials in a perfectly pleasant set of pastel colors. Rather than offering historical reflection on how such aesthetics were themselves contingent on social and economic questions of taste, the work’s enchantingly nostalgic aesthetics (and overpoweringly hypnotic soundtrack, composed of ambient melody and beats, which effectively underlay the exhibition as a whole) pulled the audience deeper into an ahistorical fun house of visual and sensory effects that may still be intensely alluring but are, in fact, obsolete, replaced by newer and more complicated visual techniques.

—Jeppe Ugelvig

TIMIȘOARA, ROMANIA

“Chronicles of the
Future Superheroes”

KUNSTHALLE BEGA

The starting point for the group exhibition “Chronicles of the Future Superheroes” is *Danielle: Chronicles of a Superheroine*, a 2019 novel by American inventor Ray Kurzweil that follows a young woman’s efforts to use technology to solve global problems. The exhibition, which includes seventeen works by twelve artists and collectives and features accompanying performances and workshops, raises questions about how to face the pressing challenges of contemporary society, among them global warming, migration, and a changing economic order, as well as more intimate issues such as emotional transformation and interpersonal exchange.

Though the exhibition’s unifying themes are society, knowledge, and progress—and, consequently, technology—it is important to stress that the show, organized by Anca Verona Mihuleț, refuses to succumb to a naive fascination with technology or the technological age. Moreover, the dialogues among individual artworks in different mediums, tradi-