

GLADSTONE

Travis Diehl, "The 'Blood and Treasure' of Karen Kilimnik," *Frieze*, October 18, 2019

FRIEZE

The 'Blood and Treasure' of Karen Kilimnik

Kilimnik's subjects are nearly always brutal – murder, empire, war – and just as often delivered with a practiced detachment



Karen Kilimnik, Untitled, 2019, acrylic on unstretched canvas, 140 × 152 cm. Courtesy: Kilimnik, 303 Gallery, New York, Sprüth Magers and Galerie Eva Presenhuber AG, Züri

The 1969 Manson 'Family' murders were savage. But what has made them myth is the unsettling, childish detachment of their hippie-naïf perpetrators. Karen Kilimnik taps into this deep adolescent sociopathy throughout her work, but particularly in a piece prominently on di Magers: *Helter Skelter* (1992), which is comprised of 'acrylic, costume jewellery and tur notorious phrases of Charles Manson's 'children' are reproduced on the gallery wall – in time, rather than in the blood of their victims. The effect is slippery and comic. Distanced context of the murder site on Los Angeles's affluent Cielo Drive, Manson's call to race w downright awkward, with little of the panic of the original 'gesture'. A trio of drawings, h amplify the effect – sheets of paper apparently finger-painted in blood-red acrylic with w 'Charlie', a peace symbol and murder victim Sharon Tate's old address.



Karen Kilimnik, *Paris Is Burning* (1991) / *Is Paris Burning?* (1944) (detail), 1992, instal Sprüth Magers, London, 2018. Courtesy: © Karen Kilimnik, 303 Gallery, New York, Spr and Galerie Eva Presenhuber AG, Zürich; photograph: Voytek Ketz

Kilimnik's subjects are nearly always brutal – murder, empire, war – and just as often de practised detachment. *Scout's map* (2004) shows North America etched by the boundarie tribes, like a children's guide to genocide. A 2018–19 series of untitled paintings on unstr depict (or *are*) maps of major conflict zones. Some are overlaid with troop movements, o on the Rhine and Rhône; one describes the occupation of Poland at the end of World War rendered in washy but bold colours – red, blue, grass green and black acrylic. Another ne far more chaotic, depicting the air battle over Europe during World War II. Brushy sketch and Nazi planes explode with orange-yellow flames and gunfire above the muddy green, landscape of a map marked in sky blue with national borders and a handful of cities. The abstract, loosely rendered; its relationship to history is just as rough. These paintings hav quality that conveys an almost polemical weariness with the details of current events. An work, *Untitled* (2019), shows the shape of southeastern China, marked only with a dot an 'Hong Kong'.



Karen Kilimnik, *Untitled*, 2019, acrylic and plastic crystals on unstretched canvas, 76 × 7
Courtesy: © Karen Kilimnik, 303 Gallery, New York, Sprüth Magers and Galerie Eva Pre
Zürich

Indeed, the map paintings are interspersed with a series of studies of clouds, at equal sea-billowy edges echoing the indecision of imperial borders. Kilimnik seems to relish this collapse. The clouds, for instance, also suggest the puffs of gunsmoke in *a set of 16th-century miniature pistols – the Duel* (1993), a painting of two flintlock pistols. The way the artist suggests the callous gentility of kings exchanging colonies across a banquet table. Her drawings of aristocratic women and interiors, likewise, feel violently abstract. The figures in *Makeup belonging to Baroness von Maquiriche* (1983) are dwarfed by the titular brush; their bodies are unfinished sketches. In a pastel portrait titled *Chantilly Snowflake* (1986), a horse floats in a torn-out sheet of textured paper. A half dozen quick pictures of women and girls from eras, dripping with jewels – not least the line drawing *lots of jewelry + eyelashes – must Taylor* (1981) – fetishize the doomed Hapsburg princess in a way that is as fluently low-resolution as maps.



Karen Kilimnik, *the Eiffel Tower of Jewels (Umbum Clever Paper)*, 2019, cardboard with and Swarovski crystals, 41 × 17 × 17 cm. Courtesy: © Karen Kilimnik, Sprüth Magers, 3 New York, and Galerie Eva Presenhuber AG, Zürich

Kilimnik hammers on this emptiness in a 2019 series of cardboard models of world-herit Big Ben and the British Houses of Parliament, St Basil's Cathedral in Moscow and the T all bedazzled with Swarovski crystals and plastic rhinestones. The faux jewels distend w down dignity the models had, while also amplifying the self-conscious absurdity of an ar would lead to such depressive crafts. If delusions of grandeur are born in the idealism of privilege, Kilimnik undoes that solitude by introducing it to the gallery. Yet, as the white similar cloister, the artist's didacticism, such as it is, comes out as watery and loose as a p monument. Her deflations cut both ways. One painting on paper is titled *the mastermind mastermind* (1990): under a map of Hitler's westward advance done in out-of-the-box red crayon, Kilimnik has written in ink: 'Girl's bedroom? & is Nazi troops / So pretty / color is an acrobatic collision of ideas – and only hints at the moral equivocations, the blood an takes to sustain such a frilly pink fantasy.

'Karen Kilimnik' continues at Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles, USA, through 26 October 2019