

# GLADSTONE

Sam Korman, "Karen Kilimnik," *Art in America*, May 26, 2016

## Art in America

Karen Kilimnik

By *Sam Korman*  
May 26, 2016 12:33pm



The collages featured in **Karen Kilimnik** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/karen-kilimnik/>)'s exhibition at **303 Gallery** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/303-gallery/>) (all works 2015 or 2016) included reproductions of classical tapestries that the artist adorned with a range of cutout images and stickers depicting birds, butterflies, perfume bottles, and, most frequently, cats. In one collage, there's a cat in Jesus's lap. Three or four others lie around his feet. Several more paw, climb, or sit amid this late-Renaissance tableau in which angels pay tribute to the Lord. One of the angels appears to make an offering of an orange tabby on a golden platter. The cats' impassive expressions punctuate the pious scene with goofy, secular irreverence. The title of the collage, printed on a plain card accompanying the work, is a good one, a stinker: *the adoration of the cats*.

Throughout the collage series, Kilimnik riffs on classical themes—landscapes, opulent interiors, battle scenes, and theatrical displays of religious devotion—often repeating the same source images. The tapestry reproduced in *the adoration of the cats*, for instance, also appears in *the adoration of the gods, fragment*, though with a new cast of cats and with blocky segments excised from it. The cut-and-paste feel of the piece transmutes the grandiose religious imagery into the realm of homespun arts and crafts. Three collages use images of luxurious dressing rooms. Cats appear to sit upon canopied beds, and the works' titles comically project the meaning of the animals' expressions: one is *thank you, I'm rested now. I'll have the lobster today, thank you*.

A specialized knowledge of art history would be necessary to identify all of Kilimnik's original sources—tapestries that are themselves reproductions of paintings in most cases. But the images' print quality and intimate scale most directly recall the illustrations found in coffee-table books that survey the Renaissance in Italy, or France, or wherever. They are common accoutrements in middle- and upper-class homes—aspirational stand-ins or representations of a particular kind of cultural literacy. Other works incorporate photocopied fragments of texts that may be found in such art historical tomes. One piece, *the historical presence of the cat in the tapestry market, netherlandish latter half 15th century*, includes a brief description of the Flemish decorative textile trade. Specific words in the text have been replaced with cat stickers so that it reads like a "Mad Libs" story: "The question remains whether these [cat sticker] belonged to the manufacturers themselves or rather to wealthy financiers . . ." In this work, Kilimnik's faux-amateur collage method becomes a comedic send-up of art's nuanced role in projecting class identity.

Kilimnik maintains the essential lightness and humor of these works in a group of paintings. The woodland scene of classical ruins in *the goddesses Artemis & Ceres return to their niches to sleep after a hard day's work* invokes neoclassical motifs by figures like Nicolas Poussin, but Kilimnik's brushwork is quick and impressionistic. The absence of faces on several of the depicted statues marks the composition as a study, or as simply unfinished. The apocryphal scene—Artemis, a Greek goddess; Ceres, a Roman goddess—is a historical fiction covered in glitter.

In the canvas *Velasquez's potteryware in Leonardo Da Vinci's Dining Room, Amboise*, some clay pots are situated beside a credenza. The image's source could be a coffee-table book, or a Pottery Barn brochure, or a Sotheby's auction catalogue. Leonardo died eighty years prior to Velasquez's birth; the title gives the banal scene an anachronistic spin. Art history passes through petit-bourgeois aspirations, the budding secularization of European society, and today's fraught class relations. Kilimnik uses humor to read her subject closely, and to roast.