

# DANCE REHEARSAL

*Karen Kilimnik's World of Ballet and Theatre*





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*Karen Kilimnik's World of Ballet and Theatre*

Curated by Melissa E. Feldman

With contributions by

Jörg Heiser

Kate and Laura Mulleavy of Rodarte

Apollinaire Scherr

Mills College Art Museum

Oakland, California

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an exhibition organized by the Mills College Art Museum  
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Mills College Art Museum  
September 12–December 9, 2012

Museum of Contemporary Art Denver  
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#### FRONT AND BACK COVER

*Candle Burning*, 1998

Oil on canvas

18 x 14 inches

Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

#### PRECEDING PAGES

*Psyche*, 2011

Sets by Karen Kilimnik for Ballet de l'Opéra national de Paris/Palais Garnier, Paris, France

Music by César Franck; Choreography by Alexei Ratmansky

*the enchanted forest Prince Desire and the vision of Aurora*, 2005

Water-soluble oil color on canvas

14 x 11 inches

Collection of David Chan

#### FACING PAGE AND FOLLOWING PAGES

*The bluebird in the folly*, 2006

Video stills

Courtesy of 303 Gallery









# CONTENTS

- 11 *Acknowledgments*  
Dr. Stephanie Hanor
- 15 *Karen Kilimnik's Renditions, Reconstructions, Variations, and Adaptations*  
Melissa E. Feldman
- 63 Kate and Laura Mulleavy of Rodarte
- 69 Apollinaire Scherr
- 77 Jörg Heiser
- 81 *Works in the Exhibition*
- 87 *Lenders to the Exhibition*
- 90 *Contributors*
- 93 *Artist Biography*



THIS PAGE, FACING PAGE, AND FOLLOWING PAGES  
*Sleeping Beauty and friends*, 2007  
Video stills  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Dance has a long and important history at Mills College. From the visionary choreography of the 1930s dance instructor Marian van Tuyl (with the help of John Cage as her accompanist) to the groundbreaking technique of alumnae such as Trisha Brown, Mills has been an epicenter for innovation in dance. The Mills College Art Museum serves as a forum for exploring art and ideas and as a laboratory for contemporary art practices. We are committed to showing work that engages the creative arts on campus and in our community, and in keeping with this mission, we are delighted to present *Dance Rehearsal: Karen Kilimnik's World of Ballet and Theatre*.

Karen Kilimnik's ongoing interest in historical theatre and ballet provides a unique view into her process. The opportunity to show Kilimnik's development of a single subject in depth opens a window onto her artistic practice, illuminating her incredible ability to work across diverse media as well as her consuming drive to create variations on a theme. This exhibition and catalogue would not have been possible without her kind cooperation and assistance.

Exhibition curator Melissa E. Feldman has done an outstanding job in bringing together a remarkable selection of Kilimnik's work. Her insightful scholarship and expertise provides a richer and more rewarding understanding of how this theme is





developed in Kilimnik's practice. I appreciate the dedication, creativity, and good humor that she has brought to this exhibition and publication.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the help of many people. Countless thanks go to Lisa Spellman and the staff of 303 Gallery, in particular Kathryn Erdman, Thomas Arsac, Simon Greenberg, and Peter Owsiany, who helped in innumerable ways including identifying and locating works, and helping with images and loans. I am grateful to Ludmilla Lencsés and Sina Deister from Sprüth Magers; Björn Alfers from Galerie Eva Presenhuber; Junko Shimada from Gallery Side 2; and Ingrid Schaffner and Kathryn Kraczon from the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Philadelphia for their help with the production of this publication.

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I am also indebted to the Museum's staff, Stacie Daniels and Maysoun Wazwaz, for their dedication, enthusiasm, and commitment to creating, organizing, and ensuring quality programming and beautiful installations. Sven Atema's skills as a preparator and builder also contribute to the success of this exhibition. I am also grateful to John Borruso for his thoughtful design of this beautiful publication and to Morgan Peirce for her sensitive editorial touch.

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Dr. Stephanie Hanor  
Assistant Dean and Director  
Mills College Art Museum







## KAREN KILIMNIK'S RENDITIONS, RECONSTRUCTIONS, VARIATIONS, AND ADAPTATIONS

*Melissa E. Feldman*

A pair of toe shoes in artificial snow, drawings of Leonardo DiCaprio and Marie Antoinette's little theatre, the sound of a Strauss march . . . the theatrical appears everywhere in Karen Kilimnik's art and has since the beginning. Emerging in the late-1980s, Kilimnik first became known for a new type of installation art that was like an impromptu stage set. Corralling an area of the gallery, she would turn the wall into a sketchy *trompe l'oeil* backdrop for the hand-crafted and dime-store items and effects casually arranged in the adjacent floor space. Fog, music, and sound effects might enliven the impressionistic *mise-en-scène*.

Fragmentary and impure, her renditions leave room for memory and the imagination. Kilimnik draws on the performing arts—and its evolution into television, film and the sideshow that is the entertainment industry itself—as both a frame of reference and a framework. She casts and costumes her characters, designs and lights the scenery, and dreams up a libretto, regardless of whether she is making a painting, a video or a live ballet. One scene or character is usually enough. Instead of swans on a lake or a ballerina in a feathered headpiece the near abstract *Swan Lake* (1997), freely painted in broad swaths of dark blues and violets, evokes the storm that ravages the lovers in the ballet's original, darker version.

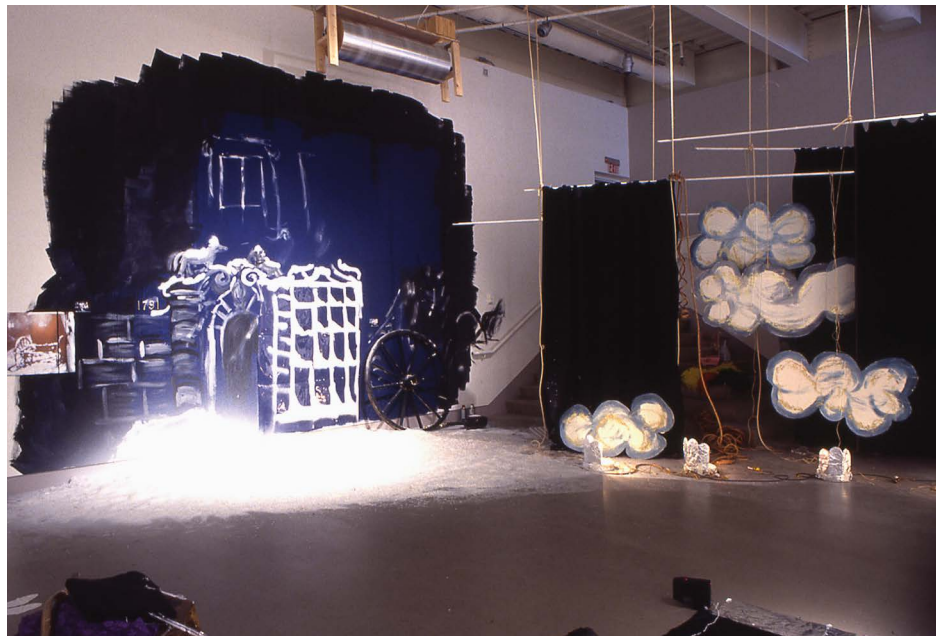


Historical story ballets and opera, in particular, have been Kilimnik's prototypes for creating a world more captivating than our own, "hold[ing] the mind, the eyes, and the ears under the same spell."<sup>1</sup> Ballet and opera have been linked since the eighteenth century, when ballet was *l'entr'acte* entertainment during lengthy Italian operas. The first independent ballets of the early nineteenth century were adaptations of popular plays and operas. Revolving scenery, trap doors, thunder machines, and flying apparatuses all date from the theatrical hijinks associated with *les merveilleuse* and *ballet féerie*, early forms of the genre. Kilimnik's love of fairytale plots, enchanted forests, supernatural beings, fog, storms, moonlight, and exotic lands from Silesia to ancient India finds its inspiration in these historical stages. Only the theater can accommodate her fanciful, insightful fusions of past and present, fiction and history, pastoral painting and stage backdrops, installation art and set design, and time-based forms from opera to movies.



PRECEDING PAGES  
*Swan Lake*, 1992  
 Mixed media  
 Dimensions variable  
 Ringier Collection

THIS PAGE  
*Backstage at "The Magic Flute,"*  
*Vienna, December 4, 1791, 1992*  
 Mixed media  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy of 303 Gallery







*Marie Antoinette's little theater*, 2005  
 Crayon and pencil on paper  
 6 x 8 inches  
 Courtesy of 303 Gallery

Two early installation works from 1992, *Swan Lake* and *Backstage at "The Magic Flute," Vienna, December 4, 1791*, based on the beloved nineteenth century ballet and eighteenth century opera, respectively, were the first to effect a true stage with ceiling-hung stage curtains and receding wings. *Swan Lake's* painted backdrop on semi-transparent fabric is lit front and back to feign perspective and time of day, a stage trick she borrowed from the romantic era.<sup>2</sup> The installation's centerpiece, a full-sized vintage swan sled, is more obscure. Tchaikovsky adapted the ballet's score from a song he wrote for his nieces and nephews, who liked to use their large wooden rocking swans as props in frequent at-home productions.<sup>3</sup> Apart from these trade secrets, however, Kilimnik's *Swan Lake* is more reinvention than revival.

*Backstage at "The Magic Flute,"* on the other hand, recreates a scene from the opera staged for the 1984 movie *Amadeus*, which was filmed at the Tyl in Prague, one of the last remaining Enlightenment-era theatres. Director Milos Forman had trouble getting permission to film at the Tyl, not least due to his wish to install 11 candelabra chandeliers (a total of over 2000 candles) in the wooden building to recreate period lighting.<sup>4</sup> No doubt, the controversy and Forman's grand vision drew Kilimnik like a moth to the flame. Referencing the movie in a few Xeroxed stills on the walls and





*Gelsey Stuck on the Matterhorn*, 2000, Water-soluble oil color on canvas, 20 x 16 inches  
Private Collection





*gretl in the Snow Queen's Palace*, 2000, Water-soluble oil color on canvas, 20 x 16 inches  
Collection of Andrew Freiser and Jessica Fredericks

*La Bayadère*, 1996  
Oil on canvas  
11 x 14 inches  
Holzer Family Collection

floor, *Backstage at "The Magic Flute"* is all light and air. Low-slung, crudely painted cardboard clouds and a single candle chandelier float above crown-shaped aluminum foil footlights, posing no interference to the sound of "The Magic Flute" playing on a boom box. Snow falls from hand-fabricated machinery overhead, completing the Viennese street scene painted on the adjacent wall. Kilimnik's "live" staging stands as a further reconstruction that restores the opera to its origin in firsthand experience.

By the mid-1990s, such rustic, ad hoc installations were phased out as Kilimnik embarked on constructing her theatrical remakes and re-imaginings in a medium more befitting their pedigree: old-master style painting. The canvas offers a ready stage for anything imaginable. There, the eponymous Giselle can be stranded on the Matterhorn or stuck in a blizzard, situations no farther-fetched than the real demise she met deep in the Harz mountains as a captive of an all female supernatural sect. In *La Bayadère* (1996) a cluster of colored candles sits on the floor of a clearing, as if left there by witches after casting a magic spell. The painting takes its title from the late nineteenth century ballet, "the temple dancer" in translation. While *La Bayadère* evokes the mystical ballet's opening scene of fakirs worshipping at the sacred fire, its connection to the ballet remains open-ended.





January 1779 December 1509 November 1603 January 1718 December 1413

powder  
puff

by Bram  
Stoker  
1897

It grew colder and colder still, and fine powdery snow began to fall. soon all covered with a white blanket. You could see ballerinas in the sparkling snow. the driver went off. wolves circled the Caleche. The horses jumped about and reared and looked helplessly round with eyes that rolled in a painful way to see...

What sort of grim adventure was it on which I had embarked?... Leningrad. St Petersburg Moscow. snow The castle is on the very edge of a terrible precipice. In 1412 Vlad's brother Radu, a voluptuous weakling and famous for his beauty... put on the throne.

Day 6 Vienna to Innsbruck blizzards expected avalanche warning in effect we leave Vienna this morning to drive via Bad Reichenhall into the heart of the Austrian Alps. we pass craggy snow-capped mountains peaks and snug chalet-filled villages as we wind our way towards Innsbruck. a town that combines Alpine scenery with urban splendor. we will have cheese fondue and chocolates while we ~~we~~ call information from our

Hotel.

*Powder Puff* by Bram Stoker, 1989

Crayon on paper

12 x 19 inches

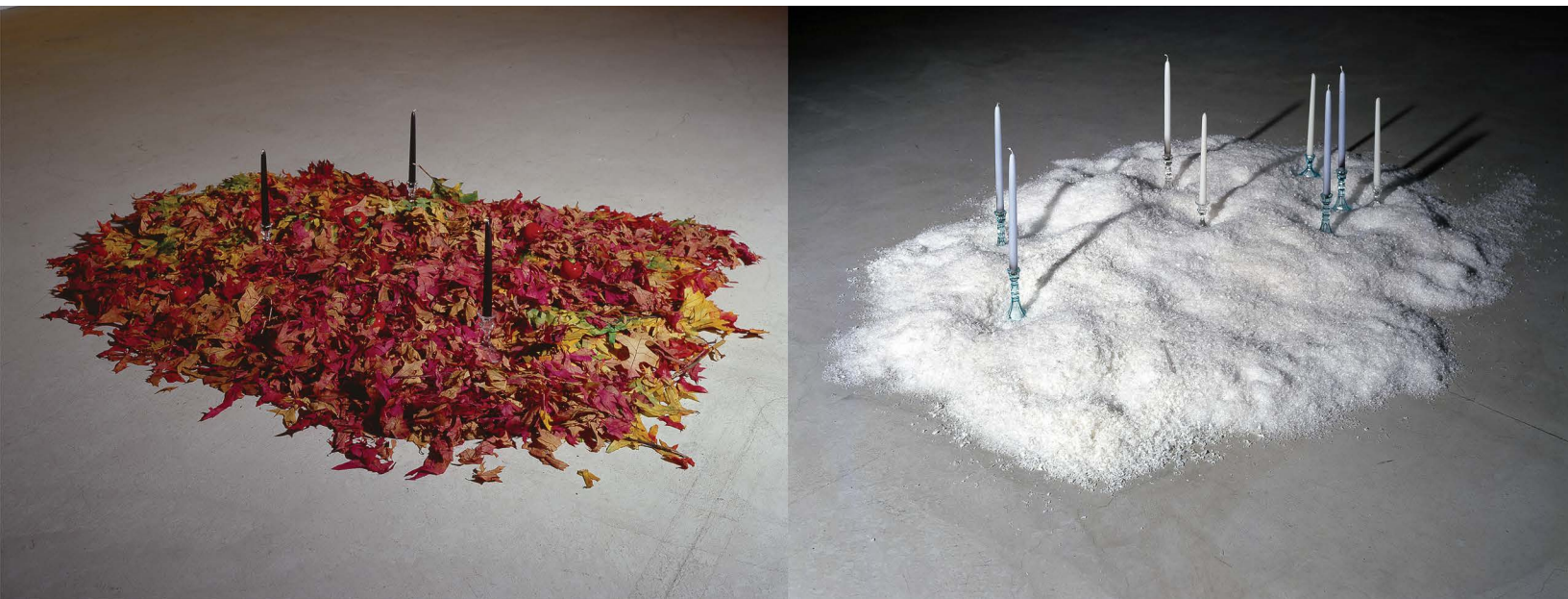
Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

*Good and Evil*, 1995

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Private Collection



Fellow balletomane Hans Christian Andersen would have applauded Kilimnik's adaptation of his fairytale *The Snow Queen* (1845) to a ballet. In *gretl in the Snow Queen's Palace* (2000), the long-lashed American Ballet Theatre principal Gelsey Kirkland, costumed as the Bavarian Giselle in a lace-up bodice, is given the title role. The character is a fusion of contemporaneous heroines, Andersen's Gerda and the French librettist Théophile Gautier's Giselle. Rudolph Nureyev plays the snow prince in the eponymous painting, a made-up character (*The Snow Queen* has no snow prince) in a made-up ballet. Only Nureyev's characteristic mascara, lipstick, and multiple rings bear any factual accuracy here, as the dancer was known for his heavy stage make-up and jewelry.

Text pieces such as *Powder Puff* by Bram Stoker (1989) seem like impatient notes for such swaps and fusions. Time-traveling prose describes a disjunctive winter's journey, variously dated from January 1779 to December 1413. A caleche hounded by wolves encounters "ballerinas in the sparkling snow," passes a castle on "a terrible precipice," and after another non sequitur about "a voluptuous weakling" who assumed an unnamed throne in 1412, ends its journey with a scenic Alpine drive in search of cheese fondue. Alternatively, the 1999 painting *Periwinkle Flower*



Installation view at Le Consortium,  
Dijon, France, 2007

Installation view at Serpentine Gallery,  
London, England, 2007

*by the Stream near the Elves at Night*, featuring a single blue iris so finely rendered that it could be a close-up from a classic Dutch still life, relies on its title to complete the setting.

Around this time, in the mid-1990s, Kilimnik also began to treat her multi-media exhibitions as allegorical or themed environments. In the 1995 exhibition *Good and Evil*, the artist paints adjoining rooms yellow and wintry blue, filling each with related seasonal displays and wall pieces representing the fall harvest and the winter solstice. This symbolic dichotomy echoes that of the scenery for the two-act story ballet *Giselle* and many others of the classical era. The paintings *Giselle's Cottage at the Bolshoi* (2001) and *Giselle* (1997) reiterate this archetypal thematic. The gold and green *Cottage* depicts a key feature of the ballet's quaint autumnal opening set, while the earlier work takes its cue from the staging of the heroine's grave enveloped by the foggy night.<sup>5</sup>

Other Kilimnik exhibitions theatricalize local culture. For her 2007 show at London's Serpentine Gallery, her paintings became part of the English manor décor in a series of rooms that included stables, a park, and a Tudor-style dining room, among other set pieces of her design. Some are more explicitly ballet-themed with lengths of













*Giselle's Cottage at the Bolshoi*, 2001  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
18 x 14 inches  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery

*Giselle*, 1997  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
12 x 16 inches oval  
Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

pink tulle crisscrossing rooms among other topical elements, as in her exhibition at Le Consortium, Dijon, in 2007. Kilimnik has also staged numerous exhibitions in historic house museums in Europe and the United States, turning period rooms into scenes of birthday parties and tarot card readings whose participants are momentarily absent.

Only the stage could outdo the realism and immediacy that Kilimnik sought by hanging her old-masterish paintings in purposely built period rooms. In defense of ballet as a high art, one Renaissance ballet master argued, “ballets too were like paintings, except that they were also animated—paintings that lived and moved surely imitated life more closely.”<sup>6</sup> Working with Tom Sapsford for a 2007 London performance of *Sleeping Beauty and friends*, Kilimnik realized a decades-long dream to choreograph a ballet. Her *Sleeping Beauty* combines altered excerpts from five nineteenth century story ballets. Each selection in her daisy chain is borrowed from Petipa and his contemporary Auguste Bournonville, the important Danish choreographer. The fifty-minute performance begins, fittingly, with the opening scene of the earliest ballet of the group, Bournonville’s *La Sylphide* (1836), whose principal’s more natural movements and soft, ankle-length tutu characterize romantic era ballets.





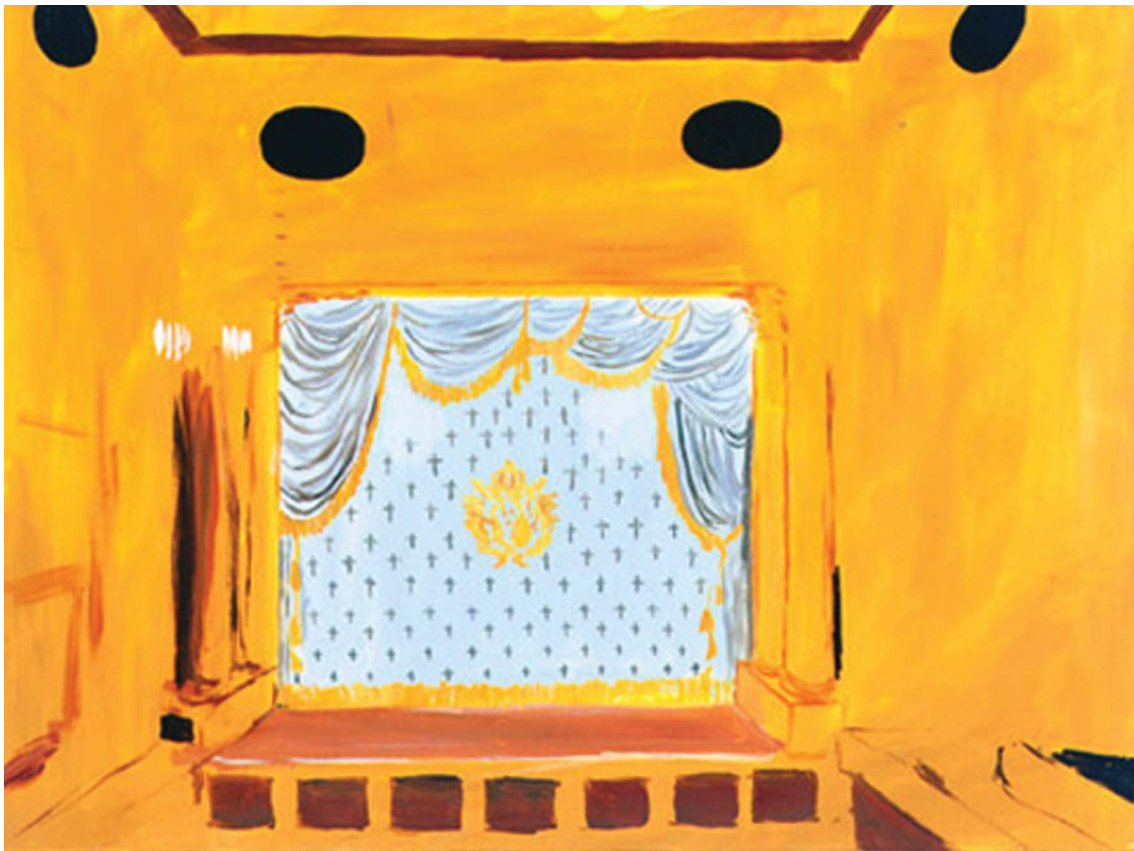
*Sleeping Beauty and friends*, 2007  
Video, theatre curtain, three chairs  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery



Wending its way through time and costume changes, the *mélange* ends with the grand finale of Petipa's *Don Quixote* (1869). *Sleeping Beauty* is cheekily absent from the offerings, yet the virtuosic variations Kilimnik chose nod towards *Beauty*'s famously difficult choreography. On the other hand, the videotape that the artist shot of the performance is delightfully idiosyncratic and amateurish. It counterpoints ballet's perfectionism while at the same time penetrating the core of its intense beauty and emotionalism. The video, made with a combination of professional and amateur footage, stumbles from moving close-ups of the dancers' faces to views of the stage seen between the looming, silhouetted heads of audience members and blurry, wandering, or otherwise wrong-footed camerawork.

Perhaps inspired by Milos Forman, who staged Mozart's Vienna performances in a Prague theatre, Kilimnik took similar poetic license when she swapped the Royal Opera at Versailles for the Tyl in her 1999 paintings *The Tyl Theater, Prague, 1801* and its more apparitional version, *Tyl theater appearing 1745, 1771*. The last in this threesome of the same saffron-colored, empty theatre interiors in shifting states of completion and décor is the real McCoy: *The Theater, Louis XIV's*. All three paintings feature the latter's signature gold-fringed, turquoise valances, Sun God plasterwork,





*Tyl theater appearing 1745, 1771, 1999*

Water-soluble oil color on canvas

12 x 16 inches

Courtesy of Sprüth Magers Berlin London

*The Theater, Louis XIV's, 1999*

Water-soluble oil color on canvas

12 x 16 inches

Collection of Dr. Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith



and fleur-de-lis stage curtain. Kilimnik flirts with facts but never lets them interfere with the meanderings of her imagination. While the dates tiptoe around the historical period in question, they miss their marks: the Tyl opened in 1783, and 1787 was the year Mozart conducted the world premier of *Don Giovanni* there. Louis XIV built the Versailles Theatre in 1770 to be inaugurated by his son's marriage to Marie Antoinette.<sup>7</sup>

As with many of Kilimnik's revolving enthusiasms, the curtains appear elsewhere in her work; a similar scalloped valance dresses the entrance to the installation *Sleeping Beauty and friends*. Inside, you can sit on a replica of a chair from St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre, where *Beauty* debuted in 1890, and watch a wall-projected video of the ballet originally recorded from an exclusive one-night engagement in London.

The proscenium stage itself takes the limelight in a number of serialized landscape paintings from the mid-1990s. In the aforementioned *La Bayadère*, for example, and its vertical iteration, *Candle Burning* (1998), floor-to-ceiling foliage flanks a frontal view of plunging skies like curtains that open onto to an empty stage. In *Dawn* and two versions of *Dusk* (all 1996), Monet-esque shifts in color and light from cornflower blue to lavender differentiate among variations of the same stark, shallow clearing



with candle chandeliers hanging in the foreground. In these works, seriality and the sense of passing time offers a painted parallel to the repetitiveness of rehearsing and performing. Kilimnik's breezy, accretive brushwork, and numerous unfinished-looking duplicates also convey movement and temporality.

Recently, several such paintings migrated to the stage when Kilimnik was commissioned to design the sets for the acclaimed Russian choreographer Alexei Ratmansky's new production of *Psyche* (2011) for the Paris Opera Ballet. *The Moonstone* (1998) and *The Sylvan Glade* (2001), at 8 x 10 inches (small even for Kilimnik's typically diminutive canvases) are among several existing works that were adapted to hand-painted backdrops. An owl, a falcon, and a fox with its bloody prey migrated to the *Moonstone* set from other paintings, filling the moonlit forest with dimensionality and outsized flora and fauna that dwarfed the dancers. The extreme scale changes and use of layered perspective in these lush sets cast an uncanny feel, familiar from paintings such as *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Grange*. Both 1997 works feature butterflies so extremely foregrounded that their giant wings seem to beat against the picture plane.

Kilimnik's penchant for variation and repetition might be compared to that of a choreographer or composer reworking a score or performers at rehearsal, little by





*Candle Burning*, 1998  
 Oil on canvas  
 18 x 14 inches  
 Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

*The Theatre World at Drury Lane*  
 —*The River Nymphs*—1674, 2000  
 Crayon and acrylic on paper  
 23 x 29 inches  
 Courtesy of 303 Gallery



*Dusk*, 1996  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
14 x 18 inches  
Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery







little perfecting every note and movement. The same sequence of movements from plies to jumps constitutes the barre exercises that begin every dancer's day. This daily discipline is so crucial that eighteenth century French noblemen—for whom ballet training was de rigueur—took their ballet masters with them on military campaigns to maintain their form. Choreography, on the other hand, involves rearranging the set lexicon of ballet steps into different patterns, rhythms, and sequences. Kilimnik reconfigures her lexicon of imagery—a blizzard, a damsel in distress, a sylvan glade, or her favorite prince, Leonardo DiCaprio—into different stories, scenes and mediums.

Simple but relentless repetition is also a feature of ballets such as *Giselle* and *La Bayadère*, which make classical ballet the autonomous, non-literary art form we know today. The so-called nocturnal *ballet blanc* scenes epitomize this quality. In this mesmerizing processional line dance, all 32 members of the corps perform as one. Identically dressed in white, the seemingly somnambulant dancers repeat a minimalist synchronized adagio until the unspooling corps fills the moonlit stage. *The Dreaded Glade at Midnight. The Wilis Throw Him Into the Waters of the Lake*, from a 1999 series of photographs shot during a dress rehearsal of *Giselle*, offers a glimpse of this scene.

*Sleeping Beauty*, 1997  
Oil on linen  
18 x 24 inches  
Collection of Tasumi Sato

*Psyche*, 2011  
Sets by Karen Kilimnik for Ballet  
de l'Opéra national de Paris/  
Palais Garnier, Paris, France  
Music by César Franck;  
Choreography by Alexei Ratmansky





*The autumn harvest, near the forest,  
the countryside, the Silesia, Giselle, 1999*

C-print, edition 1 of 5

11 x 14 inches

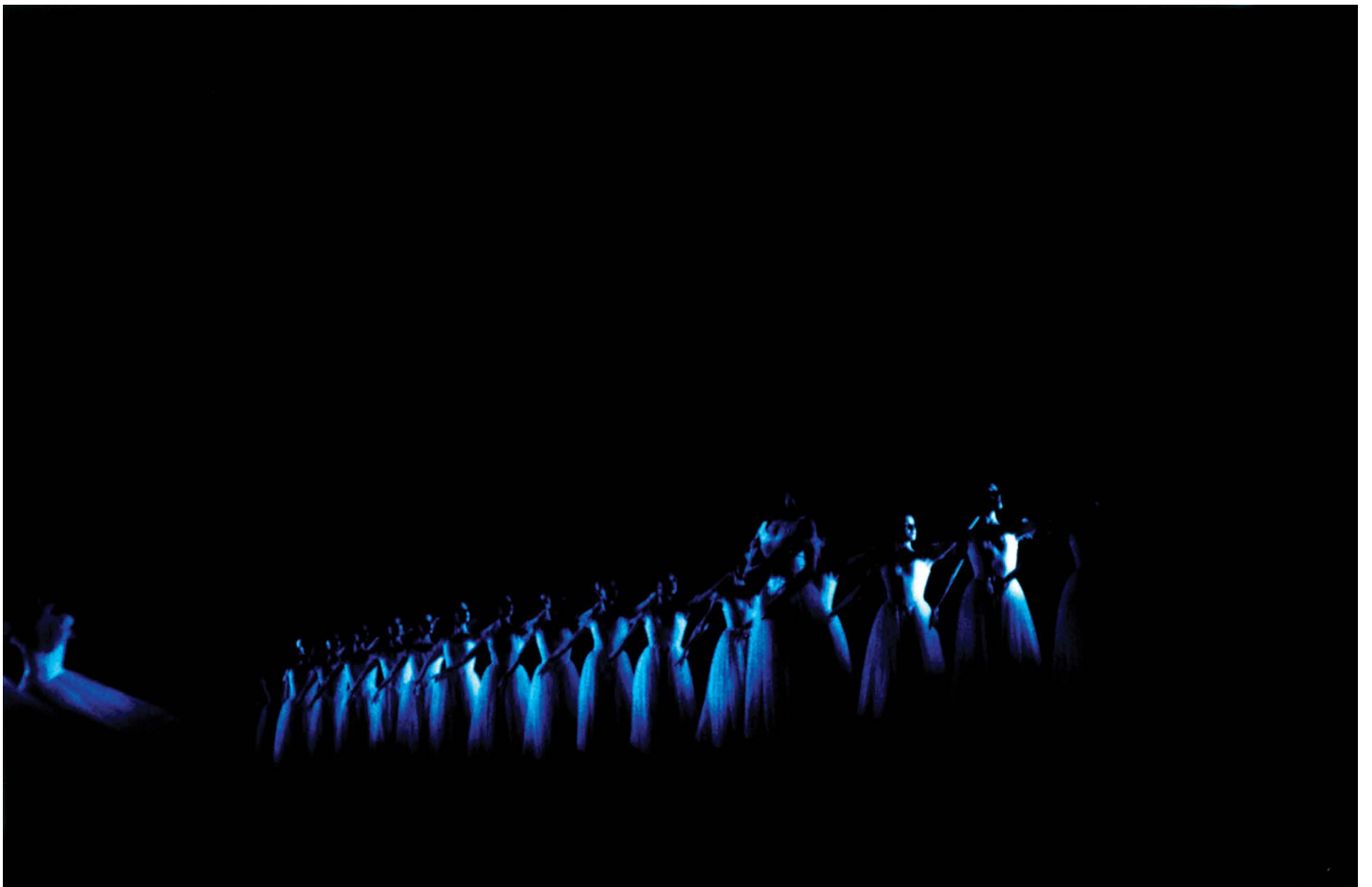
Courtesy of 303 Gallery

*The Dreaded Glade at Midnight. The Wilis  
Throw Him Into the Waters of the Lake, 1999*

C-print, edition 3 of 5

16 x 20 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery







*Excelisor, Act II, end scene I, 2000*

Water-soluble oil color, color photocopy  
and archival glue on canvas

16 x 20 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery

*Excelisor, Act III, The Queen of the Night, 2000*

Water-soluble oil color, color photocopy  
and archival glue on canvas

16 x 20 inches

Collection of Niel Frankel



In *Excelisor* and *Excelisor, Act II, end scene I* (2000), named for the late nineteenth century Italian choreographer Manzotti's ballet, *Excelsior*, Kilimnik evokes the iconic *ballet blanc* with mirrored arcs of identical, tiny cutout ballerinas aglow against the midnight background. The quiet mood of the series seems the antithesis of the original flashy, circus-like ballet until its finale, when stars light up the darkness like fireworks. In *Excelisor, Act III, The Queen of the Night*, Kilimnik has plucked an array of characters she photographed from Kirov Ballet dress rehearsals, arranging them into a lively bouquet that includes *Swan Lake*'s Odile and *La Bayadère*'s Nikita.

As in the performing arts, reinterpretation and reconstruction are the mantras of Kilimnik's oeuvre. In her formative years, the artist polished her drawing technique by going to museums as well as copying from books and magazines. The lower portraits in the drawing *Gelsey Kirkland at the Russian Tearoom* (1991), for example, are based on a photograph published in Kirkland's autobiography, *Dancing on My Grave*. Throughout her career she has reinterpreted sources ranging from movies to eighteenth century old-master paintings. A ballet company's style passes directly from the body of the ballet master or mistress to that of the dancers, one of whom will take up the mantel for the next generation. Given her intimate engagement

*Prince Siegfried Arriving Home in  
Vienna 1800's, from Versailles, 1500's, 2000*  
Water-soluble oil on canvas  
14 x 11 inches  
Collection of Melva Bucksbaum and Raymond Learsy













*The Moonstone*, 1998  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
20 x 16 inches  
Collection of Dr. Catherine Orentreich

*The Snow Prince*, 2000  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
20 x 16 inches  
Private Collection



*Rudolf appearing on stage in  
1999 for Christmas, 1999*  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
20 x 16 inches  
Collection of Adam Lindemann

with her source material, Kilimnik's artistic mimicry is akin to the body-to-body transmission of ballet. Productions themselves continually evolve as they pass from one choreographer to the next, undergoing innumerable revisions while crossing epochs and international borders in the process.

Like Kilimnik's art, ballets evolved out of other disciplines: *La Bayadère* was inspired by Gustave Doré's illustrations for Dante's *Inferno*, while the idea for *Giselle* sprung from a spooky legend "of elves in white dresses, whose hems are always damp," written by Heinrich Heine and discovered by the ballet's librettist, Gautier.<sup>8</sup> Born in Renaissance Italy, ballet was imported to France by its Florentine queen Catherine de' Medici, and ended its pre-modern life spectacularly in the last decades of Imperial Russia with the work of its Vestris-trained, French-born ballet master Marius Petipa.

Apart from ballet and opera's interdisciplinarity, Kilimnik's dialogue with nineteenth century theatre taps into the fundamental historicism of her practice. Like ballet, which mirrored its royal patronage as much as it entertained and promoted it, *Prince Siegfried Arriving Home in Vienna 1800's, from Versailles, 1500's* (2000) emblemizes its 400-year history. In it, the prince completes a *reverence* or ballet bow, his knife-sharp tendu displaying a white, thigh-high boot. Costumed as a courtier,





he takes his bow before ballet's first audience (the unseen king) on its first stage (the seventeenth century French court). General comportment and etiquette (notice Prince Siegfried's *port de bras*), ballroom dancing, and fencing all derive from ballet, which is why dance was a core subject in aristocratic education. Louis XIII and his son Louis XIV were themselves skilled dancers who performed regularly in *ballet de cour*, and it was the Sun King who established the first ballet academy, now the Paris Opera Ballet.<sup>9</sup> Like several works already considered and many others besides, there is a sketchy version of *Prince Siegfried*. *The Toy Soldier* (1999) evokes ballet's early association with the military and, later, children's stories such as *The Nutcracker* (another Petipa ballet). Military maneuvers and marches influenced the hierarchical staging, synchronized movements and uniform costuming found in the *corps de ballet*.

These images of the bowing courtier, one apparitional and the other manifest, also signify a defining construct of romantic ballet: the notion of duality reflecting the lucid and obscure sides of mortals, the natural and the supernatural. The double has likewise been a frequent trope in Kilimnik's oeuvre, galvanized by the artist's fascination with witchcraft and the occult. Many ballets of this period, including *Giselle*, *La Sylphide*, and *Swan Lake* draw on themes such as life vs. the afterlife, good vs. evil, and dual identities. The fragile shepherdess Giselle falls from grace when she

*Gelsey Kirkland*, 1988  
C-print, edition of 5  
17 x 21 inches  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery





*Heathers*, 1992-93  
Still from single-channel video  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery

falls for her new neighbor, a country lad named Loys who is really Prince Albrecht in disguise, slumming it for prenuptial fun. The supernatural night scene (featuring the more abstract *ballet blanc*) follows a jolly day in the village or at the palace where love blossoms and jealousy foment. *Giselle*'s heroine is resurrected as a Slavonic wilis hailing from the vampire legend.<sup>10</sup> Kilimnik also produces ectoplasmic versions of interiors—especially those signaling the transitory, such as anterooms and theatres like the Tyl triad mentioned earlier. They have the soft-focus, blocked-in rendering of *The Toy Soldier*. Pasty white apart from a disturbing red shadow under his chin, *Rudolf appearing on stage in 1999 for Christmas* (1999) stands as a faded double of the bronze-skinned Nureyev in *The Snow Prince* (2000). Since the dancer died in 1983, *Rudolf appearing* envisions an imagined performance played by a ghost.

One might find the psychological seedling for Kilimnik's preoccupation with dual personae in a 1988 series of seven photographs Kilimnik took of herself posing as various female stars and types. Becoming Gelsey Kirkland, Chryse Hynde, or "a model from [the] 60s who was sick" didn't even require her to change out of her usual sweatshirt.<sup>11</sup> She merely drew in what was needed—the mascara, the hoop earrings, the straighter nose—with black marker. In the "me as" series of paintings made

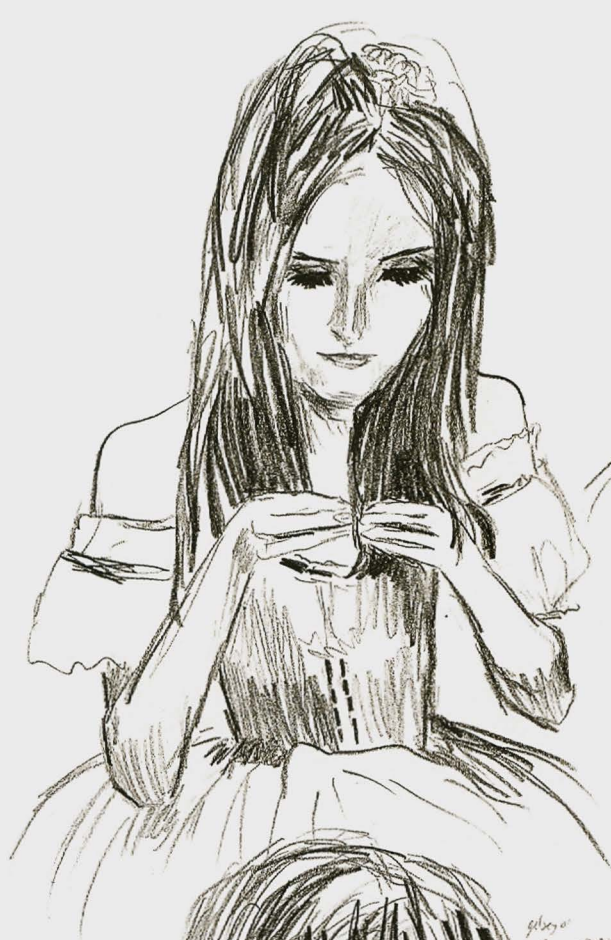


*Backdrop for the Opera: The Daughter  
of the Regiment, Time: 1815, Place:  
Switzerland, 1998*  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
18 x 14 inches  
Courtesy of Sprüth Magers Berlin London





*Gelsey Kirkland at the Russian Tearoom*, 1991  
Crayon on paper  
35 x 22 ¾ inches  
Collection of Elaine Berger



Natalie Portman  
as Gally Eklund in *Inside  
or Out*

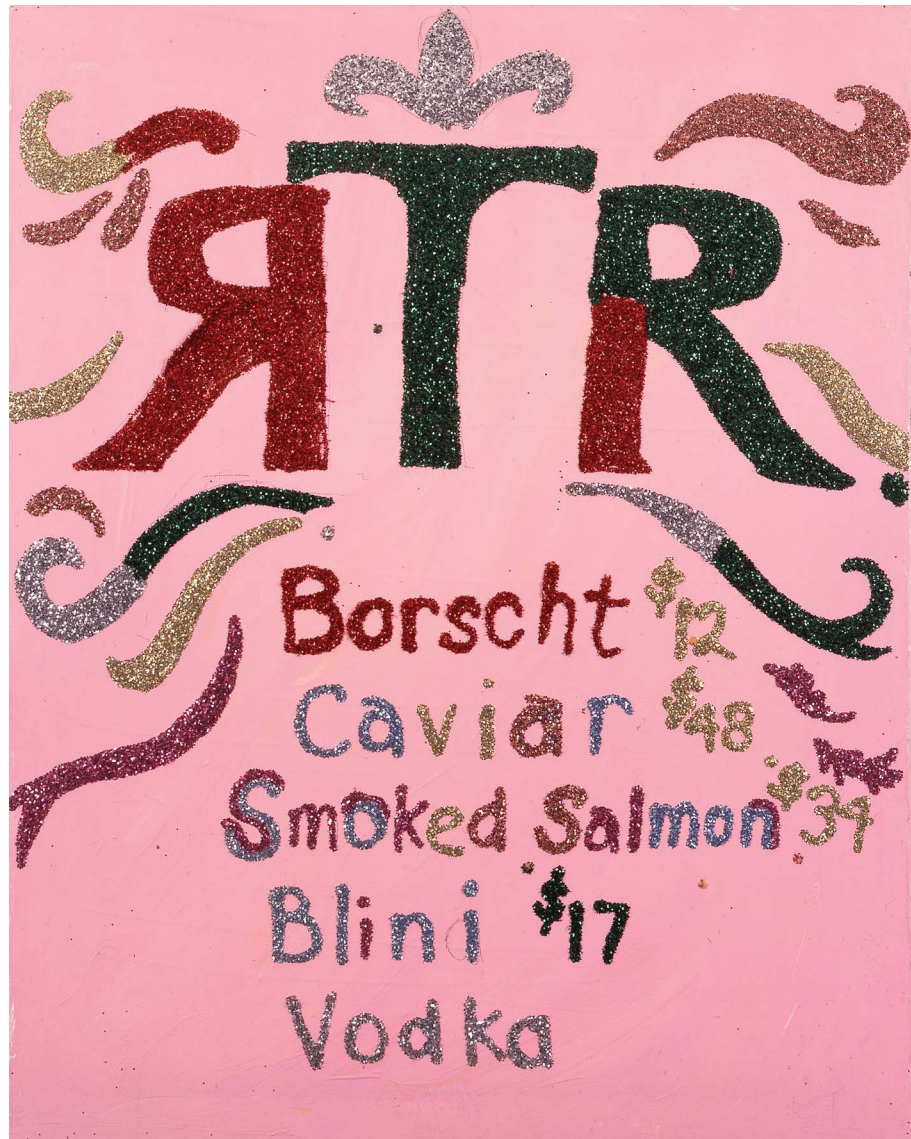


Gally Eklund  
in *Inside or Out*



Gally Eklund  
in *Inside or Out*





*RTR Menu, My Russian  
Tea Room Menu*, 1998  
Glitter, archival glue and  
acrylic on canvas  
28 x 22 inches  
Collection of Niel Frankel

*Dearest Gelsey*, 1992  
Crayon and pastel on paper  
35 x 23 inches  
Private Collection

about ten years later, the costuming and scenarios are more elaborate: she appears as a red head in a backless dress in *Me Getting Ready to Go Out to a Rock Concert with Bernadette in Moscow in 1977* (1997), or waiting for her drug dealer boyfriend in a yellowed stairwell in Greenwich Village.

The paradoxical female persona is an archetype that Kilimnik mines continually, finding doppelgängers for her work as readily in *Swan Lake* as she does in teen cult movies such as *The Craft* (1996) and *The Crush* (1993). The latter's cheerleader-type lead character (played by Alicia Silverstone) who turns out to be a bloodthirsty stalker is the subject of an eponymous 1994 portrait of the preppy girl in her candlelit shrine. The videowork *Heathers* (1994) replays jumbled scenes from the 1988 movie about a malevolent high school clique of girls all named Heather. More obscurely, the absent protagonist of *Backdrop for the Opera: The Daughter of the Regiment, Time: 1815, Place: Switzerland* (1998), based on the eighteenth century Italian opera that was the *My Fair Lady* of its time, is a rambunctious tomboy, ignorant of her noble rank because she was raised by French soldiers who found her on the battlefield.

The charcoal drawing *Gelsey Kirkland at the Russian Tearoom* (1991) (one of many references to Manhattan's plush restaurant and favorite haunt of New York City

now tell me your names

... what's your name?

she answered in a whisper. I was reminded  
how terrified I was at her age when anyone  
asked me my name - or any questions, for that matter.  
I had been afraid of my own voice.

there were 1 or 2 stubborn cases who resisted  
all of my cajolling.

I told one of the more stubborn cases  
a raw beauty who seemed to be the  
most listless in the group...



Dearest gelsey..

all my love,  
Anthony



Isn't there a rule that says  
DOGS AREN'T ALLOWED IN SCHOOL?"

I felt like an amnesia victim...  
The smell of food offered  
some hope for revival...

Dina... prevailed upon  
me to try a French  
pastry, the first  
I had eaten in years...

*Paris Opera Rats*, 1992

One foam curbstone, two plastic mice,  
three pink ballet shoes, feathers, pink  
satin, white tulle and blue glitter

13 ½ x 43 ¼ x 42 ¼ inches

Private Collection

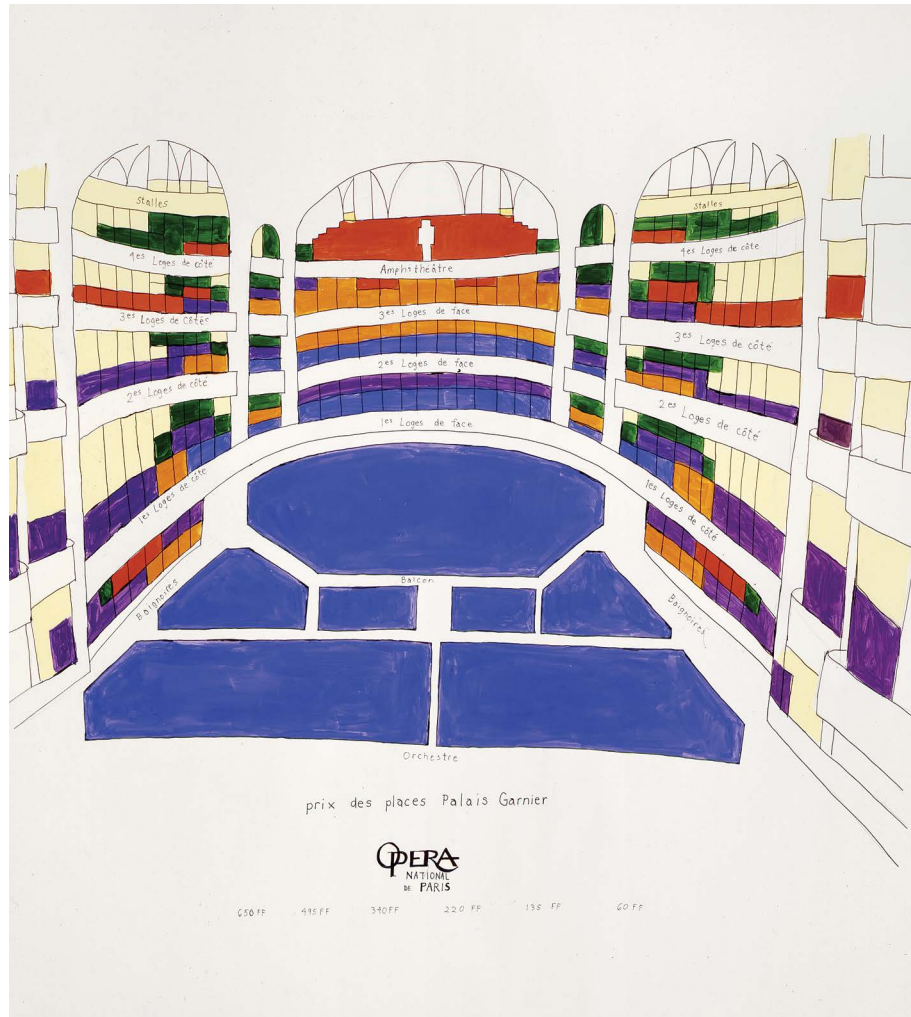
Ballet's Soviet ex-pats), is a kind of "before and after" study via doubled vignettes. The upper pair shows Natalia Makarova as Gelsey Kirkland as Giselle in the scene where the shepherdess, having discovered her lover's true identity (not a bachelor peasant but an already betrothed prince), goes mad with grief. Her long hair has fallen from its bun and hangs disheveled; she clutches an invisible daisy in a dazed reverie of an earlier and more lighthearted "he loves me, he loves me not" scene. Handwritten small print annotates Kilimnik's second try: "Natalia Makarova as Gelsey Kirkland in Giselle on drugs." It refers to Kirkland's real-life emotional fragility and drug addiction in a typical Kilimnik-esque conflation of a character's on and off stage personae. Like Giselle's madness, Kirkland's is also fueled by a bad relationship, in her case with Mikhail Baryshnikov.<sup>12</sup> Below, another set of duplicate sketches shows Kirkland off-stage, out and about in her cowl-neck sweater, in other words: as Giselle's alter ego.

Like the real Gelsey Kirkland, classical ballet's Giselle, Aurora, and Sylph did not seem as chaste and angelic as they do to contemporary viewers. These ballets were "excitingly immoral" to their nineteenth century audience, newly populated by the French bourgeoisie in the wake of the July Revolution.<sup>13</sup> Degas's countless









*Prix des Places Palais Garnier*, 1998  
Crayon on paper  
40 x 28 inches  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery

*The Sylphide Trespassing in the Castle Again, Scotland*, 2000  
Watercolor, china marker, glitter and archival glue on paper  
18 x 15 inches  
Collection of Beth Coplan and Tommy Kaufman

behind-the-scenes views of the Paris Opera Ballet (a few of which inspired Kilimnik's paintings) show its well-heeled male patrons eyeing ballerinas through their monocles. Kilimnik's color-coded, class-conscious seating chart of the Paris Opera theatre, *Prix des Places Palais Garnier* (1998), represents the social dynamics that were part of an evening's entertainment. Prima ballerinas' jewelry collections grew, while lesser dancers moonlighted as courtesans to help pay the rent. The premodern ballerina hailed from the lowest rungs of society, hence the term "rats" to describe her legions. The 1992 installation *Paris Opera Rats* of tulle and toe shoes strewn around a fake cinder block expresses the depravity that was the theatre's backstage reality.

Kilimnik's drawing *The Sylphide Trespassing in the Castle Again, Scotland* (2000) is based on François Gabriel Guillaume Lepaulle's 1832 painting featuring the famous ballerina Marie Taglioni and her brother Paul as the ill-fated lovers in the original *La Sylphide*'s opening scene.<sup>14</sup> Though faint, the drawing contains all the key information. There is the winged sylph seated beside the wing chair with the tartan throw. There is the arched window at the back, the flying girl's entry and escape route. In a later scene—and painting (*Sylph*, 1997)—she appears at the ledge, waiting to be let in. The only thing that's missing is James. He should be next to her, asleep in the





chair. No longer merely unconscious, the Scottish farmer she loves has vanished. As it happens, the male dancer did all but disappear during the romantic period in ballet, which heralded the era of the prima ballerina initiated by *La Sylphide*. Famous for pointe work that made dancers appear to be floating on clouds or walking on flowers without crushing them—as they were portrayed in countless lithographs that were so popular at the time—ballerinas such as Taglioni became international stars and Paris Opera productions were front page news. The male role, once the purview of kings, receded to little more than the physical enabler for the ballerina’s increasingly daring and demanding moves.

Kilimnik’s is not your usual skittish sylph; her expression is sophisticated and wise. She is a bit naughty according to the title, having “trespassed the castle again.” Unlike the scantily rendered stage set, she is fully realized and accessorized in a painted dress, jewelry, and glitter-dusted wings. The romantic era ballerina spent six-hour days in the studio to achieve the strength and control she needed to epitomize softness, weightlessness and grace on stage. Like these heroines, Kilimnik’s art appears as a force of nature, all instinct and innocence. Pay attention to the sylph’s self-assured look: maybe James is gone because she made him vanish. <-

1 Jennifer Homans, *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), 45.

2 Ivor Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in Paris* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 14.

3 This anecdote was relayed to me by Jenefer Johnson, a University of California, Berkeley dance historian.

4 “*Amadeus*, the Film,” the locations, accessed 5/20/12, <http://www.angelfire.com/film/theamadeus/film/locations.html>.

5 The ballet stage set is an indirect source for *Giselle’s Cottage at the Bolshoi*. It is based on a painting by the eighteenth century French artist Hubert Robert which would explain why the house is angled towards the left and not the right as it always appears on stage. See also Dr. Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith’s “No place like home” in *Karen Kilimnik* (Venice: Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, 2005) on the artist’s landscape paintings in relation to stage sets.

6 Homans paraphrasing Claude-François Ménéstrier, 44.

7 “Estates Theatre Prague Opera,” accessed 2/23/12, [http://www.estates theatre.cz/et\\_history.html](http://www.estates theatre.cz/et_history.html); “Opera of the Palace of Versailles,” accessed 2/23/12, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L’Opéra\\_of\\_the\\_Palace\\_of\\_Versailles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L’Opéra_of_the_Palace_of_Versailles).

8 Homans, 268; Cyril W. Beaumont, *The Ballet Called Giselle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Book, 1945), 18.

9 *Ballet de cours* (Fr) Court ballet.

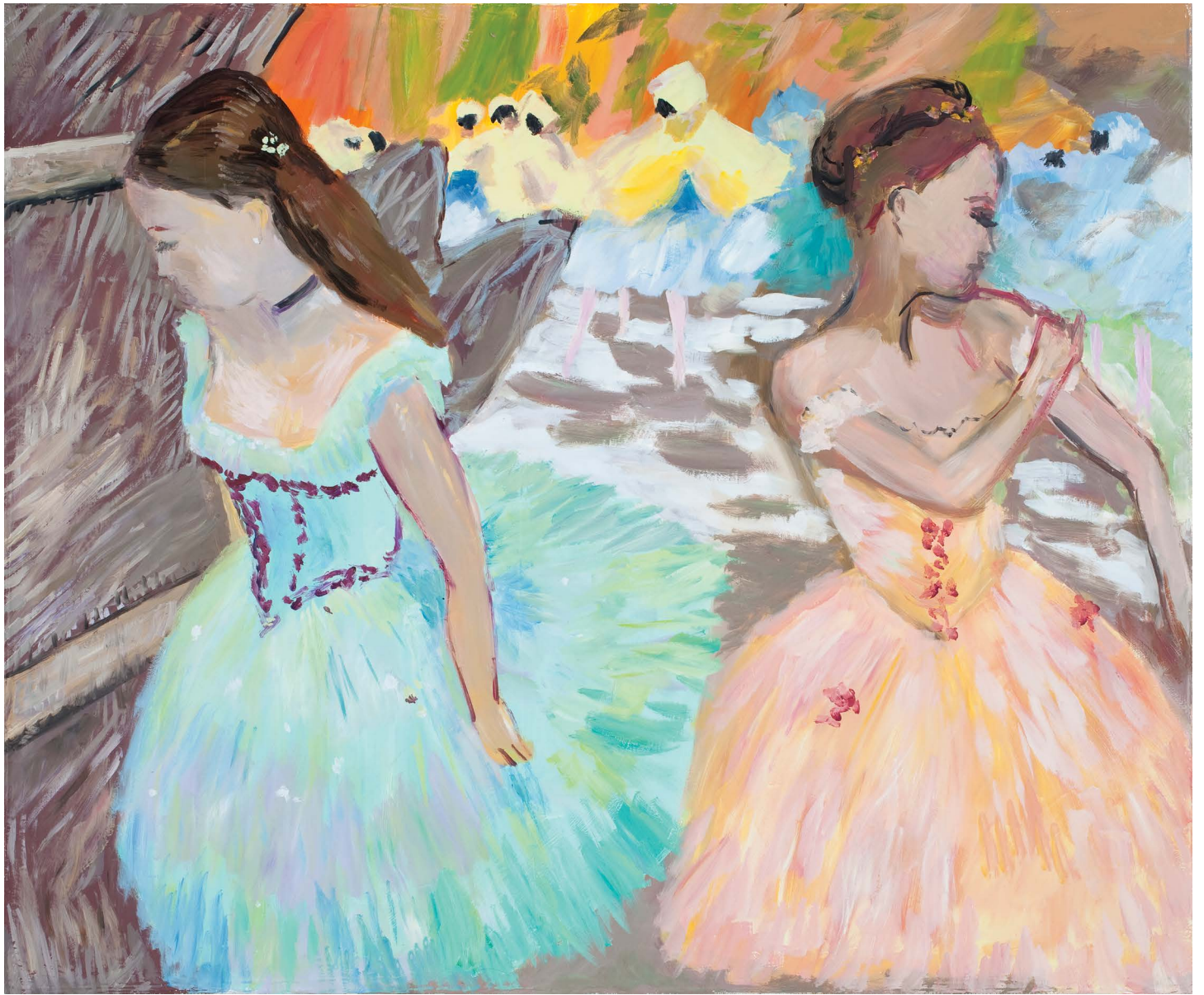
10 Beaumont, 19. Wilis: Nocturnal spirits of unwed or jilted maidens who died before their wedding day and seek revenge on men by dancing with them until they die of exhaustion.

11 Full title: *My Nose Job to Look Like Brunette Model from 60s Who Was Sick* (1990).

12 See Gelsey Kirkland. *Dancing on My Grave* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986).

13 Felicia McCarren, “The Madness of Giselle,” *Dance Pathologies: Performance, Poetics, Medicine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 53.

14 Lepaulle’s painting was hurriedly made in 1832 when the original ballet *La Sylphide*, choreographed by the ballerina’s father Filippo, debuted in Paris.



*my the Entrance of the Masked  
Dancers, c. 1889 Degas, 2011*  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
20 x 24 inches  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery





*Swan Lake*, 1997  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
15  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 20 inches  
Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

*Kate and Laura Mulleavy  
of Rodarte*

A blank page becomes more vast, more empty and endless when asked to do the unthinkable, to describe the indescribable. What words could possibly do justice to an artist that we admire so deeply and a friend deserving of the absolute best.

. . . and so to begin, we start with a naked piece of paper.

First thought: Our hearts are skipping a few beats; we're nervous that we get this right.

Then we think about bees and keeping the ocean clean.

Two weeks go by and we're late.

The ballet is always in conversation. Theatrical space seeps in and out of all experiences and mediums. The act of claiming and repurposing the stage occupies our mindscape and, at the same time, the larger platform of popular culture. Satin curtains and picture frames . . .

. . . a few notes about tv sets, avengers, movie stars. Bees again.



Art designer Harry Pottle's remarkable sets were artistically important to the success of the monochrome shows.

I was given a free rein hand when designing the sets

horses + queens -> kings

Emma... which would contrast well with Steed's panelled set with its military background.

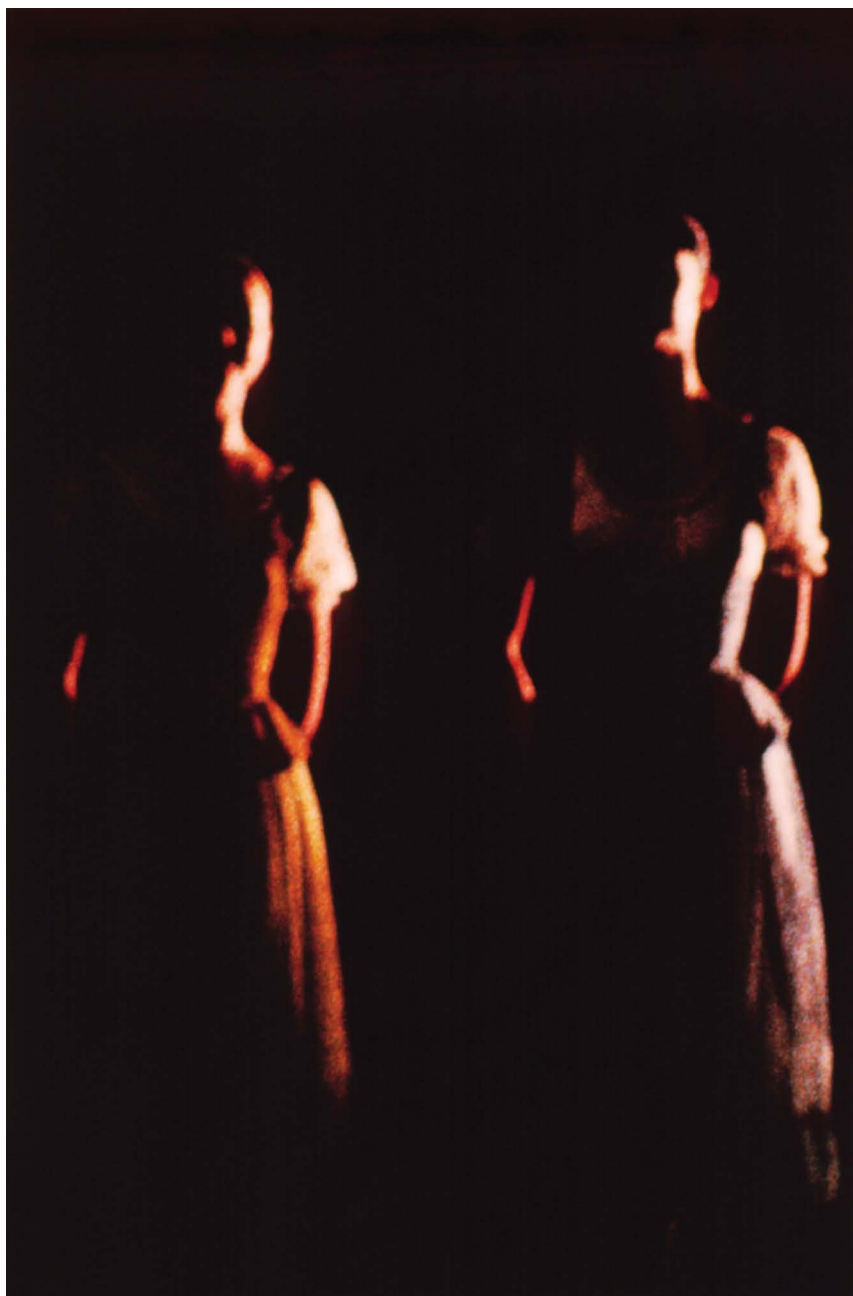
Atmosphere was created with its furnishings and military memorabilia enhancing Steed's character as the elegant, suave, ex-military gentleman and the apartment reflected 'club'-style comfort and good taste.

Patrice MacColler  
the Avengers  
& etc



love that couch!  
I want it  
olive green velvet  
brass trim  
acorn finials  
or is it  
pincapple?

Harry Pottle  
Sept 64



*Int. Steed's Apartment*, 1998

Crayon on paper

40 x 26 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery

*2 Peasant Girls, Silesia—future wilis*, 1999

C-print, edition 1 of 5

11 x 14 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery





Laura says Karen Kilimnik is an artist that redefines contemporary art paradigms and established formalisms. She breaks from what has become accepted in the art discourse and conjures moods and histories that are uniquely hers and, at the same time, shared.

I know Laura is smart so we can write that down.

A week later, while we were sitting between Blue Boy and Pinkie at the Huntington gardens, I say to Laura, “I bet Karen would have liked the Blue Boy and Pinkie stickers that our grandmother used to patch up the large crack in her bedroom wall after that one really big earthquake.”

Blue Boy and Pinkie have many stories and lives. They are related even though they are not brother and sister. They are on calendars where birthdays are marked, mugs where coffee is poured, atop umbrellas to keep out rain, in books and on public television. We had them as posters in our childhood bedrooms, replaced eventually with photographs of Leonardo DiCaprio and Kurt Cobain.

Karen allows us to recall the complex layers of familiar images and their associations. Like returning home to find your bedroom preserved the way you left it, and yet, a few items are turned around. Are you the only one that notices that your pink hairbrush is not on your bed stand anymore? But there are a few hairs. Evidence that she was there, DNA in case it is ever needed. <←

*Prince Siegfried in Swan Lake Arriving at a  
Close Friend's Birthday Party at his Friend's  
Castle after Drinks at Maxim's, 1998*  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
12 x 9 inches oval  
Collection of Frank and Nina Moore





*Psyche*, 2011  
Sets by Karen Kilimnik for Ballet  
de l'Opéra national de Paris/  
Palais Garnier, Paris, France  
Music by César Franck;  
Choreography by Alexei Ratmansky





## *Apollinaire Scherr*

When Karen Kilimnik invokes ballet, she reminds me of Alice nibbling on that magic mushroom—both sides.

The hand-painted backdrops and accessory cut-outs she created for Alexei Ratmansky's recent Paris Opera Ballet, *Psyche* (2011), loomed over the dancers. The flowers in Eros's garden were big enough to swallow the love god whole, the bottle of French perfume deep enough to drown him. When beautiful Psyche transgressed the interdiction against shining a light on her nocturnal lover, she was exiled to a forest where not only the trees but even a yapping dog towered over her. If the owl perched on a branch were to alight on the ground, it too would have dwarfed her.

These exponentially enlarged paintings—the visible brushstrokes instilling them with movement and light—do not call attention to the charming hodgepodge they make of art history: a *palace à la Versailles* for the Greco-Roman Eros; a Rottweiler among the wild beasts of the forest; Rococo cherubs on Mount Olympus. But the size of the flora and fauna leaps out at us. For “backdrops,” they are extremely forward.

Kilimnik's play with scale in her ballet-induced works reflects the ballet experience. Like a dream, ballet annuls field/ground distinctions. History, memory, and fantasy converge on the single plane of the present.



*The bluebird in the folly*, 2006  
 Wood, fabric, paint, glass, plaster,  
 projector, audio equipment, DVD,  
 CD and two collages  
 10 ½ x 9 ½ x 9 ½ feet  
 Courtesy of 303 Gallery

*The bluebird in the folly* (2006) is a walk-in installation. The cupola-like aerie to be entered is the size of a big closet. Taking up so much of the available space, a person feels large. The video this folly houses, however, shrinks you down, the camera carrying you into a forest and smack against the tree trunks. But when ballerinas materialize on the tree limbs, blinking on and off like Christmas lights, we grow again—gigantic this time. The genie-ballerinas are like a mote in the eye.

For the 2007 live show *Sleeping Beauty and friends*—now a video installation—the auditorium accommodated a modest crowd. The stage, however, could be traversed in a single leap. Reducing the steps to fit the space, six professional dancers performed select segments from canonical nineteenth century ballets: a total of six minutes from various scenes in *La Sylphide*, eight minutes for *Swan Lake*, seven for *Diana and Acteon*, less for *Don Quixote*, and a grand finale in which Acteon and Siegfried and the Sylph and Diana danced together like a scrunched version of *The Sleeping Beauty* finale for storybook characters. Shadowed by long memories, these ballets are too big for the stage, *Sleeping Beauty and friends* suggests, too endless for their allotted hour or two before us. In the mind, however, they can be as big as they are: larger than life, even the life of the theatre.



Dance history is memory writ large, collective memory. A ballet such as the Ratmansky *Psyche* trails centuries of *Psyches* that once upon a time lit up the Paris Opera stage. The myth's first balletization—in 1619 at the wedding festivities of Christine de France and Victor-Amédée de Savoie—even predated ballet's official birth, in 1669, when what was later christened the Paris Opera Ballet was established. In 1671, Louis XIV commissioned a *Psyche* from Molière, Corneille, and Lully for scads of “zephyrs and furies, dryads and naiads, buffoons, shepherds, acrobats and warriors.”<sup>1</sup> By the nineteenth century, almost every choreographer of note had fashioned a *Psyche*: Noverre, Gardel, Dauberval, Didelot—Frenchmen all. The official French dictionary of 1835 used *Psyche* as the example for its entry on “ballet.” Such rich soil and deep roots breed massive blooms as Kilimnik's *Psyche* flowers attest.

Memory and history are not the only means by which ballet becomes phantasmagorical, though. There is also fandom. Bedazzled by the dancing and the dancers' celebrity, audiences shrink the distance between dancers and their roles—and by implication between those godly creatures and our own humdrum selves in the gallery. When a young Nureyev forged an electric partnership with





*the evening rose in the field*, 2004  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
12 x 9 inches  
Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

*Psyche*, 2011  
Sets by Karen Kilimnik for Ballet  
de l'Opéra national de Paris/Palais  
Garnier, Paris, France  
Music by César Franck;  
Choreography by Alexei Ratmansky



the seasoned and married Fonteyn, speculation raged over whether the dancers were romantically involved offstage: their onstage passion seemed inconceivable otherwise. Kilimnik creates comedy from these conflation when she titles one 1998 portrait of Leonardo DiCaprio (standing in for the *danseur noble* of your choice) *Prince Charming* and another *Prince Siegfried in Swan Lake Arriving at a Close Friend's Birthday Party at his Friend's Castle After Drinks at Maxim's*, as much as when she imagines the snow prince not as a figment of storybook imagination but as Nureyev himself.

Of course, the stars have been guilty of their own elisions between life and art—most dramatically in the 1970s, when ballet was at the height of its popularity. (The personalities that preoccupy Kilimnik—Nureyev, Baryshnikov, Gelsey Kirkland—all come from this heady period.) Kirkland, American Ballet Theatre sensation, spent several drug-addled years “dancing on my grave” (as she titled her tell-all autobiography) like a latter-day Giselle. In a real-life replay of *The Red Shoes*, Nureyev performed nearly up to his death, of AIDS.

The warped looking-glass that Kilimnik has fashioned for ballet perfectly reflects it: the art, the artists, the fans, the whole dizzying scene. ↔

1 Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), 38.













It's huge wing loomed over me  
like the hand of the evil  
magician in Swan Lake.

Should I surrender... or  
should I, like the heroine  
of the ballet, defy the command + make a dangerous -  
and possibly fatal - bid for freedom?

Another person who had been my close companion  
was Clara, a beautiful chitean girl, whom I had  
asked not to come to the airport. It was with her  
that I had spent the whole of the previous night  
walking through Paris.

We had parted in the happy knowledge that  
it was not to be for long as I knew she was taking  
the next plane after mine for London.

"Rudi, you won't be coming with us now. You'll join us in

London in a couple of days."

At this my heart sank. He went on:

"we've just received a wire from  
Moscow saying that you are to dance  
in the Kremlin tomorrow."

I felt the blood drain from my face.  
Dance in the Kremlin indeed. That was a  
likely story. This, I knew, was the final  
coup of a three-year campaign against  
me. ... no foreign travel ever again

+ the position of star dancer to which I was  
entitled in a couple of years would be forever denied  
me. I would be consigned to complete  
obscurity. I felt I would rather kill myself.  
now that's someone who enjoys his ~~work~~ job.



Albrecht brings flowers  
to Giselle's grave

## Jörg Heiser

### PRECEDING PAGES

*Swan Lake*, 1992

Mixed media

Dimensions variable

Ringier Collection

### FACING PAGE

*Should I, Like the Heroine of the*

*Ballet, Defy the Command and*

*Make a Dangerous—Possibly*

*Fatal—Bid for Freedom?*, 1998

Crayon and pastel on paper

34 x 26 inches

Collection of Gregory R. Miller  
and Michael Wiener

The record wobbles and gets stuck . . . Karen Kilimnik's *Swan Lake* installation (1992) is the phantasmagoric aftermath of a dreamlike ballet performance. A rumbling fragment of Léo Delibes's music reverberates on a stage framed by black velvet curtains and a painted landscape background of water and trees. On the floor, ballerina shoes, tutus, picture frames, and glittering fake snow surround an ornate swan sleigh.

Something haunts this scene, something that can't be explained away with terms like "irony" or "postmodern pastiche." Maybe it's something to do with a passage from Rudolf Nureyev's memoir, "Its huge wing loomed over me like the hand of the evil magician in *Swan Lake*. Should I surrender and make the best of it? Or should I, like the heroine of the ballet, defy the command and make a dangerous—and possibly fatal—bid for freedom?"<sup>1</sup> The huge wing is that of a Tupolev at Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris, in 1961, about to bring Nureyev, dancer of the world-famous Kirov ballet ensemble, back to Moscow. He had been on tour with the Kirov in the West, and now the KGB, considering him too disloyal to the party line and too rebellious, was about to send him back to Moscow, supposedly to perform at the Kremlin. But Nureyev had seen through the subterfuge and, making the decision "like lightning"





*Rudy and Ballerinas*, 1997  
 Crayon and acrylic on paper  
 35 ¼ x 49 ½ inches  
 Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

(as he described it), he defected.

Kilimnik's drawing, *Should I, Like the Heroine of the Ballet, Defy the Command and Make a Dangerous—Possibly Fatal—Bid for Freedom?* (1998), is a fragmentary homage to Nureyev's boldness and charm. In handwriting, the drawing includes further, carefully chosen passages from the memoir. These passages are accompanied by a crayon portrait of the young dancer . . . or is it Leonardo DiCaprio? In 1996, two years before the drawing was made, DiCaprio had starred in a movie adaption of *Romeo & Juliet*; Romeo was one of Nureyev's signature roles. Perhaps Kilimnik's portrait is meant to convey DiCaprio in an imagined biopic about Nureyev. The drawing also includes a depiction of wild carriage horses and a dreamy-looking hero in a dark cloak, accompanied by the inscription "Albrecht brings flowers to Giselle's Grave." *Giselle*, like *Swan Lake*, was another classic of the Russian ballet repertoire—and Albrecht was another of Nureyev's famous roles.

Kilimnik made a whole series of drawings relating to *Swan Lake* and Nureyev. Although she is surely very knowledgeable about Russian ballet, Kilimnik is first and foremost an artist. Through countless drawings, paintings and installations, she purposefully reflects on what it means to show, to put on display, to reframe and to quote.

So is it all ironic? Postmodern pastiche? Not quite. Kilimnik reflects on fandom, but as an artistic observer suggesting a greater sense of scrutiny and control than the playful detachment of postmodern irony. Nevertheless, there *is* a concept of irony that does seem relevant to Kilimnik's approach, namely that of *romantic irony*. Friedrich Schlegel, the leading critical mind of German Romanticism around 1800, developed a rather complex understanding of irony in the realm of art that has little to do with the reduced postmodern understanding of it as a kind of liberal cynicism. Instead, it's based on a rereading of the Attic Old Comedy, in which the actors leave the stage and the choir performs a *parabasis*, taking off their masks and addressing the audience directly to comment on the play. Schlegel calls this, in his own neologism, the *parekbasis* (Greek *ek-basis*: stepping outside), emphasizing the movement not only aside but outside of the realm of illusion. For Schlegel, irony is a "permanent *parekbasis*." It's the artwork's awareness of its own conditions manifested as a rupture, a crack in its surface meaning. In Kilimnik's *Swan Lake* installation, the protagonists have left the stage, but no choir steps forward; instead, the remnants and reverberations themselves perform the permanent *parekbasis*, addressing the audience head-on. ↔

1 Rudolph Nureyev, *Nureyev* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1963), 13.





*Little Red Riding Hood*, 1999, Water-soluble oil color on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, Collection of Deborah Buck

## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

*Gelsey Kirkland*, 1988

C-print, edition of 5

17 x 21 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Gelsey Kirkland at the Russian Tearoom*, 1991

Crayon on paper

35 x 22  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches

Collection of Elaine Berger, Roslyn, NY

*Dearest Gelsey*, 1992

Crayon and pastel on paper

35 x 32 inches

Private Collection, Seattle, WA

*Paris Opera Rats*, 1992

One foam curbstone, two plastic mice, three pink ballet shoes, feathers, pink satin, white tulle and blue glitter

13  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 43  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 42  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches

Private Collection, New York, NY

*La Bayadère*, 1996

Oil on canvas

11 x 14 inches

Holzer Family Collection, New York, NY

*Dusk*, 1996

Oil on canvas

14 x 18 inches

Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

*Giselle*, 1997

Water-soluble oil color on canvas

12 x 16 inches oval

Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

*Swan Lake*, 1997

Water-soluble oil color on canvas

15  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 20 inches

Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

*Candle Burning*, 1998

Oil on canvas

18 x 14 inches

Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

*Backdrop for the Opera: The Daughter of the Regiment, Time: 1815, Place: Switzerland*, 1998

Water-soluble oil color on canvas

18 x 14 inches

Courtesy of Sprüth Magers Berlin London

*Int. Steed's Apartment*, 1998

Crayon on paper

40 x 26 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Prix des Places Palais Garnier*, 1998

Crayon on paper

40 x 28 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Should I, Like the Heroine of the Ballet, Defy the Command and Make  
a Dangerous—and Possibly Fatal—Bid for Freedom?*, 1998

Crayon and pastel on paper

34 x 26 inches

Collection of Gregory R. Miller and Michael Wiener, New York, NY

*Little Red Riding Hood*, 1999

Water-soluble oil color on canvas

20 x 16 inches

Collection of Deborah Buck, New York, NY

*The Theater, Louis XIV's*, 1999

Water-soluble oil color on canvas

12 x 16 inches

Collection of Dr. Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, Dublin, Ireland

*Tyl theater appearing 1745, 1771*, 1999

Water-soluble oil color on canvas

12 x 16 inches

Courtesy of Sprüth Magers Berlin London

*The autumn harvest, near the forest, the countryside, the Silesia, Giselle*, 1999

C-print, edition 1 of 5

11 x 14 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*2 Peasant Girls, Silesia—future wilis*, 1999

C-print, edition 1 of 5

14 x 11 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis, Rising From the Ground in the Forest Her Tiny Empire  
of Which She Nightly Resumes Possession*, 1999

C-print, edition 3 of 5

20 x 16 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*The Dreaded Glade at Midnight. The Wilis Throw Him Into the Waters of the Lake*, 1999

C-print, edition 3 of 5

16 x 20 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*The Rhineland Village, Silesia, Giselle*, 1999

C-print, edition 2 of 5

11 x 14 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY



*Albrecht, Duke of Silesia*, 1999  
C-print, edition 2 of 5  
8 x 10 inches  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Excelisor*, 2000  
Water-soluble oil color, color photocopy and archival glue on canvas  
16 x 20 inches  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Excelisor, Act II, end scene I*, 2000  
Water-soluble oil color, color photocopy and archival glue on canvas  
16 x 20 inches  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Paupers in Paris*, 2000  
China marker, glitter and archival glue on paper  
35 x 22 ½ inches  
Collection of Steven Johnson and Walter Sudol, New York, NY

*Prince Siegfried Arriving Home in Vienna 1800's, from Versailles, 1500's*, 2000  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
14 x 11 inches  
Collection of Melva Bucksbaum and Raymond Learsy, Sharon, CT

*The Sylphide Trespassing in the Castle Again, Scotland*, 2000  
Watercolor, china marker, glitter and archival glue on paper  
18 x 15 inches  
Collection of Beth Coplan and Tommy Kaufman, Scarsdale, NY

*The Theatre World at Drury Lane—The River Nymphs—1674*, 2000  
Crayon and acrylic on paper  
23 x 29 inches  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Giselle's Cottage at the Bolshoi*, 2001  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
18 x 14 inches  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Marie Antoinette's little theater*, 2005  
Crayon and pencil on paper  
6 x 8 inches  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*the automaton reading*, 2005  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
18 x 14 inches  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*the enchanted forest Prince Desire and the vision of Aurora*, 2005  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
14 x 11 inches  
Collection of David Chan, New York, NY

*The bluebird in the folly*, 2006

Wood, fabric, paint, glass, plaster, projector, audio equipment, DVD, CD and two collages  
10 x 9 ½ x 9 ½ feet

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*Sleeping Beauty and friends*, 2007

Video, theatre curtain, three chairs

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY

*my the Entrance of the Masked Dancers, c. 1889 Degas*, 2011

Water-soluble oil color on canvas

20 x 24 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York, NY



So it was that the sudden death of  
several paupers in the Hôtel Dieu  
subsequently gave rise to the suspicion  
that the bread which the Marquise  
distributed there weekly as evidence  
of her piety had been poisoned.







*the automaton reading*, 2005, Water-soluble oil color on canvas, 18 x 14 inches, Courtesy of 303 Gallery

## LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

303 Gallery, New York  
Elaine Berger  
Deborah Buck  
Melva Bucksbaum and Raymond Learsy  
David Chan  
Beth Coplan and Tommy Kaufman  
Holzer Family Collection  
Steven Johnson and Walter Sudol  
Dr. Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith  
Gregory R. Miller and Michael Wiener  
Private Collection  
Private Collection, New York  
Private Collection, Seattle  
Sprüth Magers Berlin London







*The Toy Soldier*, 1999  
Water-soluble oil color on canvas  
16 x 12 inches  
Collection of Carol Greene

## CONTRIBUTORS

### MELISSA E. FELDMAN

Melissa E. Feldman is an independent curator and critic who writes regularly for *Art in America* and *frieze*. Recent projects include *Afterglow: Rethinking California Light and Space Art*, a traveling exhibition, *The Life and Times of Sarah McEneaney* at Mills College Art Museum, and *Sampler: Textiles at Creative Growth*, at Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland. As a curator at Philadelphia's Institute of Contemporary Art in the 1990s, she organized one-person shows for Martin Kippenberger and Hiroshi Sugimoto, as well as Karen Kilimnik's first solo exhibition in a museum. *Dance Rehearsal* follows such exhibitions as *Mysteries* at Stephen Wirtz Gallery in San Francisco, and *Secret Victorians: Contemporary Artists and a 19th Century Vision* (co-curated with Ingrid Schaffner, a Hayward Gallery National Touring Exhibition), which reflect her interest in historical revisionism. Feldman has taught at the California College of the Arts and the San Francisco Art Institute, and Goldsmith's University in London.

### JÖRG HEISER

Jörg Heiser is co-editor of *frieze* and co-publisher of *frieze d/e*. He is a visiting professor at Kunstuniversität Linz, and teaches at Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg. Since the 1990s, he has written for *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Since 1996, he has lived in Berlin. His book, *All of a Sudden. Things that Matter in Contemporary Art*, was released by Sternberg Press in 2008. He co-edited *Sculpture Unlimited* (Sternberg Press, 2011). Heiser curated, amongst others, the exhibitions *Romantic Conceptualism* (Kunsthalle Nuremberg and Bawag Foundation, Vienna, 2007), *Fare Una Scenata/ Making a Scene* (Fondazione Morragreco, Naples, 2008) and *Trailer Park* (Teatro Magherita, Bari, 2010).

KATE AND LAURA MULLEAVY  
RODARTE

Rodarte was founded in Los Angeles, California in 2005 by Kate and Laura Mulleavy. Since then, Kate and Laura have won numerous awards and accolades, including the CFDA Womenswear Designer of the Year in 2009, the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award for Fashion, and the 2010 National Arts Award from Americans for the Arts, becoming the first fashion designers to receive the honor. In 2011, they were nominated for best costume design at the 16th Annual Critics' Choice Movie Awards for their work in *Black Swan*. In March 2011 Rodarte's first west coast exhibition, *Rodarte: States of Matter*, was on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, followed by *Rodarte: Fra Angelico Collection* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in December. Rodarte's works are featured in the permanent collections of the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Museum at FIT in New York City, and LACMA. The first Rodarte monograph, *Rodarte, Catherine Opie, Alec Soth*, was published by JRP Ringier in 2011. In May 2012, Kate and Laura designed costumes for the Los Angeles Philharmonic's *Don Giovanni* production, directed by Christopher Alden, scored by Gustavo Dudamel, with set design by Frank Gehry.

APOLLINAIRE SCHERR

Apollinaire Scherr is the New York dance critic for *The Financial Times*. She was *Newsday*'s dance critic for several years, and has written regularly on art, dance and books for the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, the *Village Voice*, and *Flash Art International*. She was a five-year Mellon Fellow in the Humanities at Cornell University and teaches arts writing at the Fashion Institute of Technology. She lives in Queens, NY.



FOLLOWING PAGES

*Sleeping Beauty and friends*, 2007

Video, theatre curtain, three chairs

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of 303 Gallery

## KAREN KILIMNIK

Emerging in the late-1980s, American artist Karen Kilimnik is a key figure in contemporary art whose work in media ranging from traditional painting to video and live performance has reinvigorated and expanded the lexicon of narrative figuration. Swept up by beauty and the emotional tides of her often tragic subjects—be they Patti Hearst or Giselle—Kilimnik’s work nonetheless retains the knowing criticality possessed by all great cultural producers. The artist has been the subject of major solo exhibitions throughout Europe and the United States, including the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia and the Consortium, Dijon, both in 2007, the Serpentine Gallery, London and ARC/Musee d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, in 2006, Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice (2005), and the Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn (2000).













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