

A Cabinet of Delights

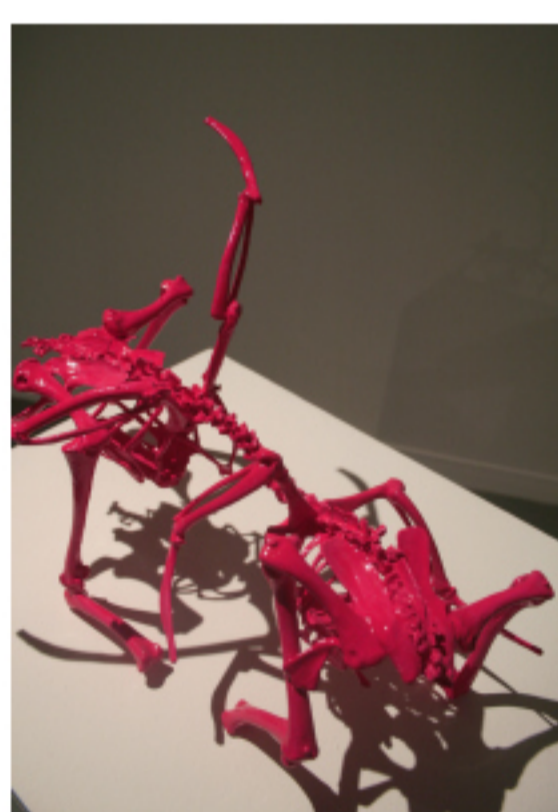
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"Deadweight" Vera Klute at the RHA Gallery.



Remember those thrilling feelings as a small child entering the slightly macabre Victorian setting of the Natural History Museum? Confronting perfectly preserved wild beasts in glass sarcophagi up close and personal, all in dimly lit marble halls. A frozen menagerie of animal kind. A visit to the latest works by the German born Irish resident artist Vera Klute evokes a similar frisson of emotions. It is thrilling, disturbing and alluring all at the same time. Nothing is quite what it seems on first viewing. It also has that childlike fascination with morbidity.

The immediate and arresting centrepiece is akin to entering a frozen scene from Hitchcock's *The Birds*. A flock of suspended taxidermy birds appear to be all crashing into an imaginary pane of invisible glass. But Batman like comic speech bubbles adorn each bird's broken impact – 'Whumf!!!' 'Crack!!!' The dead birds are in the artistic tradition of utilising found objects. They are road kill ready-mades but with a tragic quality. There are allusions here to a primitive form of animalism.



Cheekily subversive, there is humour and knowingness inherent in all the exhibits. Approaching a pedestal displaying cast bronze sets of human teeth a hidden motion sensor suddenly starts them chattering maniacally. This is a Surrealist's sense of playfulness, and disruption, a pleasure in materials reminiscent of Meret Oppenheim's 1936 fur-covered cup and saucer. Trickery, conundrums and unresolved conflicts resurface in the fused skeletal remains of two headless conjoined chickens (free range!) covered in lurid magenta enamel. They will struggle forever but never to resolution.



Visceral body-shock qualities have been present in Vera Klute's previous work but she also displays a confidence to work in a variety of media to explore her body-centric art. This time her elegantly executed drawings have the observational exactitude of an Albrecht Dürer etching. But closer examination of the subject matter reveals disturbing realities. Look and then look again. See that illustration of some clasped hands – actually it shows each hand to have six fingers in some inexplicable Escher-like manner. Wide landscapes of rolling countryside are in fact cross-sections of great haunches of dead meat but beautifully rendered. Beauty and gore can it seems be present at the same time.

The remaining two scenes of featureless grey cloudscape seem like a casual aside in comparison, lacking weight or substance. Perhaps that's the point?

All the exhibits are in a small intimate space recalling a 19th Century collector. A taxonomy of the unusual and intriguing – a cabinet of delights. This is the work of a developed and skilled practitioner. An artist with great clarity of vision and one to watch. Expect the unexpected from Vera Klute.

Deadweight continues at the RHA Gallery, Ely Place until the 23rd February.

Photos all courtesy of Vera Klute, from top:

Birds (mixed media); *Jaws* (bronze); *Deadlock* (chicken carcass, enamel paint) and *Meatscape* (pencil, ink and watercolour on paper).