

Paradise Row, London, UK

The form of nostalgia peddled by terrestrial television's continued attempts to reduce entire decades to a single fad, song or puppet is only the saccharine version of a deep-seated worry. The root of 'nostalgia' (from *nostos*, a 'return home') suggests less a retroactive whimsy than a homesick yearning for the slightly more familiar. In epic narrative it is experienced by Odysseus and the *nostoi*, the warriors travelling home after Troy; in a Postmodern sense nostalgia is simply a striving for understanding through an act of reorientation. Margarita Gluzberg's exhibition of large-scale pencil drawings 'Funk of Terror into Psychic Bricks' returns to an obsessively focused selection of 1950s-inspired iconography, never straying from a cycle of pin-up girls, record-players, lilies and, most importantly, boxing.

**Margarita Gluzberg**  
*Referee*  
2006  
Coloured pencil on paper  
240x240 cm

The Russian-born artist references fighters from Muhammad Ali to the relatively obscure Lenny Dawes, who won the British light welterweight belt in 2006 before going on to lose it in his first title defence. Although Dawes is twice identified by the name on his shorts, in *Vinylfight* (2006) and *Revolution* (2007), the boxers in the drawings are hazily indistinguishable, as are the details of specific bouts. Barring the single palimpsest of a bell in *Square-Ring 4* (2007), there is nothing outside the designated boundary of the ring. It is this restraint that elevates the exhibition from well-executed whimsy to a wide-ranging investigation of form - via the only sport enacted on a plinth.

In *On Boxing* (1987) Joyce Carol Oates claims that 'The third man in the ring makes boxing possible.' However, in Gluzberg's drawings, even *Referee* (2006), this third man, the single

spectator, is absent. Instead, a recurring image of a naked woman is overlaid, a translucent object of desire. The cute prettiness of *Ache* (2006) is almost enough for the absence of the referee to go unnoticed: the boxers continue to fight, but both conclusion and rationality have been deferred. As in the conflated title of *Fightheart* (2006), desire - the passion for what one lacks - is economically and unsettlingly linked with violence. Although the fighters and the woman seemingly merge into polymorphous Hans Bellmer accretions, they never actually meet, as union and ending are postponed.

In *Square-Ring 4*, drawn on squares of primed aluminium, absence is involved with the very act of depiction: Gluzberg creates the effect of light shining on boxing gloves by rubbing out sections of sketching. This creates an almost topographical approach to drawing, with the graphite of the densely sketched gloves physically built up from the surface, while the reflective areas (which seem to assert themselves the most) are those that are *not* there. There is no single-point perspective here, the drawings encouraging the viewer to get up close, while *Revolution* (2007), a large piece hung from the ceiling away from the wall, can be walked round and viewed from the side. At this point image ceases to exist as illusion and materializes as thick areas of graphite. This insistence on dual actuality, whereby the pieces exist as image but also as matter, is the greatest strength of Gluzberg's slippery surfaces. Boxing is the only popular western sport in which the language used to describe it is not metaphorical: attack and defence both become real in the ring. I rather get the feeling that Gluzberg is bolstered by this: there is no possibility of a failure of description here; what she continually returns to is, essentially, what it is.

This examination of surface is exactly why these 13 drawings, despite appearances, have little to do with romance or whimsy. The exhibition's obscure title, 'Funk of Terror into Psychic Bricks', paraphrases a line from John Updike's account of Ali's legendary 1974 fight, the Rumble in the Jungle. Gluzberg chooses to elide a key word, 'compressed' - the verb that describes Ali's transmutation of anxiety into ego. In *Fightheart* a heart is constructed from a cluster of shining blue-black gloves, the blows condensing and joining to become a berry-like heart. A flattened version of this shape recurs in Gluzberg's earlier work, playing with the visual and symbolic discrepancy between the decorative logo and the actual organ that it represents. The heart is preserved as a notion, but its materiality is denied - love is signified by something very superficial. Gluzberg's drawings pinpoint this very Postmodern kind of desire, striving for a liminal space in which metaphor and materiality are confused. This space is one of desire and therefore also one of absence. It is this spatial confusion, inspired by the square that is called a ring, that lies beneath the oneiric surfaces of Gluzberg's ludic drawings.

Sam Thorne



# Margarita Gluzberg