

Flash Art

REVIEWS:

Karl Haendel, Susanne Vielmetter Projects – Los Angeles

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KARL HAENDEL, Knight #8, 2011. Pencil on paper, 260 x 210 cm. Courtesy Susanne Vielmetter Projects, Los Angeles. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

functions like an obsessive feedback loop that ensnares the individual between the personal and the political, the id and the ego. In the exhibition's final room we encounter two enormous, exquisitely rendered Elizabethan knights. They act as bookends in Haendel's opera for inmates, sharpened to masochistic perfection by honor and then stripped of their souls before the devouring mob of honesty.

One enters "Informal Family Blackmail," Karl Haendel's most recent exhibition at Susanne Vielmetter, through a narrow corridor flanked by two identical portraits of J. Edgar Hoover. Between the Hoovers (whose heads have been erased) is a spare wooden tabletop furnished with four copies of a small black book called *Shame*, a compilation of anonymous confessions culled from Internet chat-boards. Ranging in subject matter from pedophilia to rape fantasies to suicide plans, *Shame* reads as an oddly meditative exposé. Installed throughout are the large-scale graphite works on paper for which Haendel is best known. Presenting scenarios such as American football players on the Monday-night field and giant military jackets, Haendel's delicate and studied brand of photorealism combines the precision of a Robert Bechtel with the mystery of a Vija Celmins.

Nearby screens the short film *Questions for My Father*, a beautifully shot series of vignettes featuring young men in their 30s and 40s who stare directly at the camera and deliver deadpan lines such as "Where do you masturbate?" "Did you ever fuck a whore?" "Did you always know that you were gay?" The questions are unnerving, yet Haendel offers nothing by way of answers, leading viewers instead into a bright Pepto-Bismol-hued gallery hung salon-style with drawings depicting everything from giant dildos to Napoleon's tomb to a young Gloria Steinem.

The installation is striking not simply for its bold contrast of black-and-white draftsmanship against pink walls, but for the manner through which it insists upon a bloated and repressive societal structure at work beneath our private psyches. This massive web, Haendel implies,