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# The Fatal Attraction of Hokusai's Dream

By Elda Oreto

In the beginning of 2020 the Metropolitan Museum in New York commissioned a huge diptych for its Great Hall to Canadian artist Kent Monkman, of Cree origins, a member of the First Nations of Canada. The commission, *mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People)* offers a captivating critique of European colonialism and its integrated hyperrealist art forms.

Despite the apparent classicism, whatever happens in Monkman's paintings is always subversive, crazy and also a bit pornographic. The artist depicts a reality in which the pre-established order of power, or as it is told "officially" in the History books, is subverted; but everything is an explanation of the ill-concealed and repressed sexual desire that is hidden in the abuses of power.



Kent Monkman - *Lost Love*

2020; acrylic on canvas; 61 x 41 cm / Courtesy of Ruttkowski;68

The idea that eroticism is a mean of subversion of power and moral and a path to liberation of the individual is expressed in the group show THE DREAM OF THE FISHERMAN'S WIFE (LE RÊVE DE LA FEMME DU PÊCHEUR), at the Ruttkowski;68 Gallery in Paris. In the show there are two paintings by Momkman, *Nation to Subject Nation* (2021) and *Lost Love* (2020) where there are graphically described the erotic – not so heroic though – deeds of a Canadian soldier and a Native American.



Kent Monkman - *Nation to Subject Nation*

2021; acrylic on canvas; 183 x 137 cm / Courtesy of Ruttkowski;68

The exhibition, curated by Steven Pollock, presents a precious as much as diverse sequence of works by Hans Bellmer, Kitty Brophy, Robert Crumb, Sante D'Orazio, Jårg Geismar, Kent Monkman, Marieli Fröhlich, Matthew Collings, Robert Hawkins, Bjarne Melgaard, Pierre Molinier, Carlos Pazos, Vilte Fuller, Philomène Amougou, Lily Lewis, Sophy Rickett, Larry Rivers, Marie Sauvage, Penny Slinger, Andy Warhol, Bruce Weber, Cicciolina Ilona Staller. The artworks on display combine the main theme in different styles and in different media.



Hokusai - *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*  
1814; paper; 19 cm x 27 cm

The starting point of the exhibition is the famous Ukiyoe illustration by Hokusai which depicts the erotic encounter between a pearl diver and a huge octopus.

From Hokusai the show move on to Surrealism with the drawings of Hans Bellmer, *L'érotomane* (19696), *Etude préparatoire au Portrait d'Unica avec l'oeil sexe*, (1961), and the photography of Pierre Molinier *Le Triomphe des tribades ou Sur le pavois* (1967); to continue with Pop Art with *America's No.1 Problem* by Larry Rivers and Andy Warhol, *Buttocks with Penis TOP 81.001*, (1977).



*Penny Slinger - Bride and*

*Groom - Blunt Instrument*

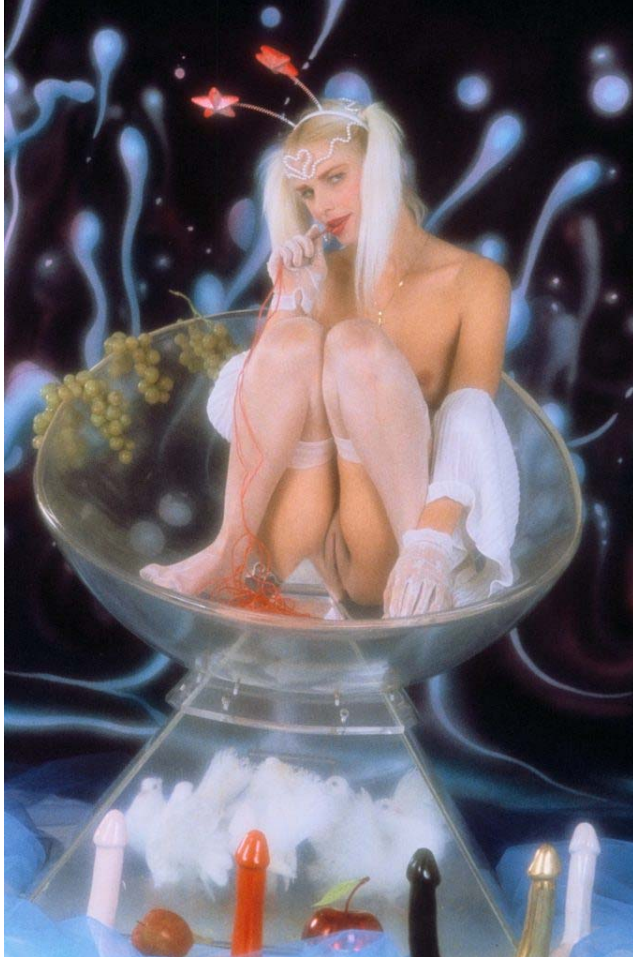
*1973; vintage black and white photograph, sepia-toned; 20.3 x 12.7 cm /*

*Courtesy of Ruttkowski;68*

The exhibition also features exponents of a feminist current such as Penny Slinger, *Bride and Groom - Blunt Instrument* (1973) and Sophy Rickett, *Old Street and Silvertown and Vauxhall*

*Bridge* (1995). There are also some remarkable photos of Jeff Koons ex-wife, the pornstar Cicciolina.

Among the works of more contemporary artists there are paintings by Vilte Fuller, *He painted a Beautiful Robot War In My Head But Frankly It's None Of My Concern*, (2019) and *Space Cows*, (2020), as well as drawings by Bjarne Melgaard, by Lili Lews alongside a series of photos by Bruce Weber.



*Cicciolina Ilona Staller - Untitled I*  
1980; c-print; 37 x 24.3 x 0.2 cm / Courtesy of Ruttkowski;68

During the opening there was a performance, streamed on Instagram, by the rope artist Marie Sauvage, of an ancient Japanese technique, the Shibari. Sauvage used to be a competitive fencer; then she studied art at Parsons in Paris and worked as a writing researcher for Anna Cohan-Solal's Mark Rothko, before traveling to Japan to study Shibari. Marie Sauvage has staged performances at Palais de Tokyo, Detroit MOCA as well as Soho House NY and LA.



*Marie Sauvage's performance at  
Ruttkowski;68 / Courtesy of Ruttkowski;68*

The artist and her muse come together to create an intense simulated power dynamic in such a controlled environment as the gallery, where they explore sensuality and vulnerability. The combination of real and fantastic elements is inextricably linked to other limiting aspects of eroticism that border on perversion such as abuse, coercion and submission; just like in Hokusai's illustration where it softly blurs the line between pleasure and pain.