

# **NWEB re-presents Franz Kafkas 'Up in the Gallery'**

## **In collaboration with Clare Longley and Elsie Preston**

### Contents:

- 1) Up in the Gallery - Franz Kafka
- 2) Clare Longley
- 3) NWEB
- 4) Elsie Preston

NWEB approached Clare and Elsie with a proposal to come together for an exhibition at the George Paton gallery. We were interested in the similarities in the practices - both artists are playing with precognitive images or structures that are innate/within opposed to learned/conceived. The artists share a tender nuance that could be defined as poetic. Poiesis - making. Both practices offer up a self-reflexive system that bears the marks of its construction. In doing so the viewer becomes a part of the construction.

Now, instead of the viewer becoming a part of the construction the artist has reconstructed the original text to form something new. The following texts are the respective artists (and our own) re-edit and interpretation of Kafka's short story 'Up in the Gallery'.

## Up in the Gallery

By Franz Kafka

If some frail tubercular lady circus rider were to be driven in circles around and around the arena for months and months without interruption in front of a tireless public on a swaying horse by a merciless whip-wielding master of ceremonies, spinning on the horse, throwing kisses and swaying at the waist, and if this performance, amid the incessant roar of the orchestra and the ventilators, were to continue into the ever-expanding, gray future, accompanied by applause, which died down and then swelled up again, from hands which were really steam hammers, perhaps then a young visitor to the gallery might rush down the long stair case through all the levels, burst into the ring, and cry “Stop!” through the fanfares of the constantly adjusting orchestra.

But since things are not like that—since a beautiful woman, in white and red, flies in through curtains which proud men in livery open in front of her, since the director, devotedly seeking her eyes, breathes in her direction, behaving like an animal, and, as a precaution, lifts her up on the dapple-gray horse, as if she were his grand daughter, the one he loved more than anything else, as she starts a dangerous journey, but he cannot decide to give the signal with his whip and finally, controlling himself, gives it a crack, runs right beside the horse with his mouth open, follows the rider’s leaps with a sharp gaze, hardly capable of comprehending her skill, tries to warn her by calling out in English, furiously castigating the grooms holding hoops, telling them to pay the most scrupulous attention, and begs the orchestra, with upraised arms, to be quiet before the great jump, finally lifts the small woman down from the trembling horse, kisses her on both cheeks, considers no public tribute adequate, while she herself, leaning on him, high on the tips of her toes, with dust swirling around her, arms outstretched and head thrown back, wants to share her luck with the entire circus—since this is how things are, the visitor to the gallery puts his face on the railing and, sinking into the final march as if into a difficult dream, weeps, without realizing it.

Throwing freak kisses like eyes fluttering leaking

Twinkling dust curls in her wake devotedly seeking centre

The circus whip cracks and her hips pop

The general feeling is like a high beam on a dog's shiny eyeball and the dog  
is heavy breathing blinded

Reaching a canter her nostrils flare

She throws her head back expelling hot morning breathe she spits then sticks her  
tongue out only to catch it like a dew drop

It doesn't take luck just confidence perhaps experience

Looking up for a reaction with a protruding vein above  
pearly whites splitting vertical then horizontal respectively consecutively

Hardly capable of comprehending her skill  
her wink like a twitch like a guillotine catches my sharp dazed gaze

My tail slides between my legs a shiver feels acutely good

All this spectacle the firmament becoming shy releases a limp little smile too  
a heaven opening

But since things are not like that but the ever expanding grey future  
a boy weeps ambiguously

A drizzle a drool like leaking twinkling

She draws over the big top sunset backdrop the crowd and I glisten in the make believe  
golden hour

A beautiful miniature snow globe contains a lithe woman astride a muscular horse poised at the centre of a circus arena. Shaking the snow globe, with the vigor of a steam hammer. I watch, completely absorbed as delicate white particles engulf her. Why is it snowing inside the circus tent?

In an impulsive fit I smash the globe, wrench her from the horse and shove her into my nostril. Her head is lodged in the space between my eyes, half way up my nasal passage. The pressure of her plastic skull is more comforting than unpleasant.

But since things are not like that - the glass shards and saline solution trickle down my face. A little blood but not too bad.

Between my shoes, I see the reflection of another behind me. She stands on four legs, a muscular neck arching over my shoulder. As the reflection clarifies I realise it is the riderless horse. With a thud she kicks me onto my back. All I see now is her soft muzzle and twitching above my eyes. Her warm breath is sweet and earthy, her nostrils vast and black. My arms go first like a baby being unborn. I'm splade in the audience like a torpedo being sucked back into the nostril from whence it came. A crowd forms, they are watching eagerly, egging her on.

A figure slowly emerges. He introduces himself as the Ringmaster, gesturing open armed to the crowd, a chewed cigar hanging from his wide smile. "Friends, do not be alarmed, this is perfectly normal" he bellows.

But since things are not like that - The ringmaster draws his riding crop high above his head and attempts to make eye contact with the entire audience at once. He strikes with a sharp crack over her rump. As she turns to bolt I feel my head shear right off my neck in one clean vicious motion. Like a guillotine, she had made me two parts.

As she gallops around the arena, my body instinctively jumps to take chase. I am a very fit man, so I was proud to see my body pursue her with such vigour. However while my body is fit, it is no genius without my head. Foolishly it chased her for 37 laps. In the last few rounds my headless body slowed to a wobbly power walk and eventually anticlimactically sat down cross legged. The crowd cheered in ecstasy, thousands of eyes glistened, as they watched what was sure to be the spectacle of the season. Without realising, the audience began to weep and the ringmaster gleamed with pride knowing full well he will never fail to fill his tent again.

*after Franz Kafka*

The circus is a camouflage  
is a camouflage device  
in which  
unexpected movement  
dis-  
lodges the pseudo lamination of this picture  
plane, picture pieces  
make up a painting  
on tired legs  
they up and reshuffle.

To give up  
one's where  
abouts,  
marks an X on the map.  
Embossed X's instead of U's  
is written by  
the circus horse.

It runs reps  
repetitive laps  
of the circuit  
circus ring  
and writes  
pages and pages of  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
and if  
each X is a letter encoded  
a horse writes novels.

Master of rings  
master of ceremonies, the ringmaster  
in the centre  
of the ring,  
standing in the centre  
of the clock face of time.  
The whip cracks  
and strikes serpentine  
where it likes, it disregards  
seconds and minutes  
and it picks up the pace,  
throws it at random,  
like a DJ plays

a vinyl record,  
that is a circle  
like the ring,  
Ringmaster.

The star a-  
ttraction  
is the Easter Bunny  
in leaps,  
bounds  
it delivers,  
silkeness of slippers slipping through the fingers  
like fire  
and clouds  
We are unable to grasp.