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From Paradise Row To A Rock & Roll Toilet

Sunday, November 20th, 2011

On Thursday (17 November 2011) I went to the opening of Margarita Gluzberg's *Avenue Des Gobelins*. She seems to do a solo exhibition with her London gallery Paradise Row more or less annually. For 2011 her focus is photography – last time around she was showing paintings and before that drawings of pugilists. In *Avenue Des Gobelins* Gluzberg projects slides and video onto graphite paper, thereby referencing drawing – which lies at the heart of her multidisciplinary practice – in the way she presents her photographic and film work.

Gluzberg is also exhibiting platinum prints – the most expensive photographic developing process – featuring similar subject matter to her projections. The images are double and sometimes triple exposures of shots of expensive department stores. This exploration of the display of luxury goods very consciously draws out parallels with various modes of museum exhibition and interpretation; it is therefore implicitly critical of both consumerism and the institution of art. Gluzberg's opening was busy and there was an after party at Chinawhite – a one time haunt of celebrities whose idea of living dangerously was to frequent a nightclub named after a specific type of heroin.

I didn't make it to Chinawhite. Instead I headed to The 12 Bar – a rock and roll dive on Denmark Street – where I heard a set of tunes that thirty plus years ago were regularly described as 'love songs for objects' (and within which heroin addiction forms the central subject matter). Former Heartbreakers' bassist Billy Rath was playing a bunch of songs mostly written by his old group's front-man Johnny Thunders. He had with him a pick-up band consisting of Chris Low on drums and Nuno Viriato on guitar. As far as I can recall, I'd last seen Rath play as part of Iggy Pop's backing group at The Lyceum in London's Strand back in 1979. Rath had disappeared from public view in 1985, only to re-emerge on the music scene a few years ago – having done both rehab and university (psychology at graduate level and post-grad in theology) in a 'lost weekend' that went on for more than two decades.

Among the select crowd present the arrival onstage of Billy Rath's Street Pirates was greeted with rapturous applause. The band started with *Pipeline*, the tune that opened Johnny Thunders' solo album *So Alone*. The Street Pirates were rough and ready but had the right chemistry to rock out. They ran through a half-a-dozen or so familiar songs – some of them twice – including *Pirate Love*, *Born To Lose*, *Chinese Rocks* and *Do You Wanna Dance*. The audience were ecstatic. A Spanish punkette in tightly fitting cropped shorts, black stockings, knee high boots, and a Sex Pistols shirt, got up on the tiny stage and spread her legs wide across the boards, before proceeding to make amateur erotic dance moves.

Billy Rath lost his left foot in a car accident some time ago and now has a prosthetic leg. It's a real effort for him to stand upright while wielding a heavy bass guitar onstage – he needs both hands to play so he can't use his walking stick. The Spanish punkette clearly didn't know this and arched over backwards with her legs spread to grab Billy's right calf with both hands – she then mimed sucking Rath's dick with her face beneath his crotch. Billy accepted the situation and treated it with good humor, but the girl didn't want to let go of him. I was amazed and impressed Rath managed to stay upright. Afterwards people were laughing about this and imagining the Euro punkette's shock if she'd grabbed Billy's other calf and discovered that like story book pirates, Rath had a false leg!

I left The 12 Bar with a grin on my face and confident that I'd made the right choice in ducking out of the Chinawhite party. That said, I was left wondering what kind of work Margarita Gluzberg might make about Billy Rath and other members of The Heartbreakers.... A series of drawings of these notorious New York degenerates would be every bit as powerful as her wonderful pugilists. And just in case you don't know, both Johnny Thunders and Heartbreakers drummer Jerry Nolan died in the early 1990s; while according to Wikipedia lead guitarist Walter Lure now works on Wall Street (presumably as a stockbroker).

And while you're at it don't forget to check – www.stuarthomesociety.org – you know it makes (no) sense!