Sabina Maria van der Linden
An Economy of Narcissistic Reward
11.9—4.10.2026

In the metadata from an audio piece uploaded twelve years ago lending the exhibition its title, the user *bohemienine* hashtags Karl Marx, Guy Debord, Lawrence Weiner, Jerry Saltz but also Joseph Nye, John Kay and Jennifer Nettles—figures from opposite ends of the cultural and political spectra. The description, an audio transcript of the piece, reads that the way marketing is "manufacturing fetishism in economies of narcissistic reward has become more sophisticated. The regulated access to undeserved self-esteem as a source of soft power is central to recent managerial strategy." The text is signed Sabina Maria van der Linden & Mark Van Proyen.

In a generously diverse body of work largely produced around the turn of the 21st century, Sabina Maria van der Linden (SMvdL) dwells on the contemporary by borrowing vernacular from consumer society where privacy, a commodified paradise, is threatened by the unglamorous. SMvdL's works often parody what is at the very origin of bourgeois individualism: social mobility, identity politics and advertising rhetoric are assimilated into experiments with video, music, drawing and printed matter.

SMvdL's at times humorous improvisations around the theory of *La Jeune-Fille* caricature the bodies and/or objects that they ventriloquise—the war waged on working people isn't just economic, social or humanitarian, it is total and impacts all aspects of contemporary life.[1] From this totality, she scavenges the mundane to manufacture personal but relatable medleys which appear almost fated to be scrapped (unless salvaged by good luck): papers are shrivelled, stained or repurposed; not only do they bear witness to a lifestyle, they are evidence of the contemporary.[2]

In what SMvdL has named "tactical misrepresentations," commissioned works, studies, doodles or objects destined for the white cube confuse one another. And because content is defined by context, their singularity manifests outside the limits of choice—it is their condition.[3] Only conventional gestures follow: naming, dating, signing, framing, hanging are all formalities which expose the bourgeois structures within which they are produced.

Meanwhile, van der Linden borrows from all corners of the western canon, herself often the subject of her own criticism. This equivocal identity is like an envelope, protection from a world that cannot stop extracting from the individual. Citation becomes a weapon against the tyranny of individualist logic and a tactic in the making of individuality.[4] In the process, paradoxes feed off one another ceaselessly until they begin to show how vulgarity and arrogance, the bourgeois and the popular, actually breathe the same air. But her work is never discouraging: even within the bounds of its own material reality, it is so rich and full of freedom that it becomes contagiously inspiring.

In the works of Sabina Maria van der Linden, the body—condition, hell and paradise—always deceives on appearance. At once commodity, standard and object of desire, it may also emerge as grotesque, for the mysterious contexts behind some of her creative gestures leave the spectator to contend with not only the convolutions of exposed foreign bodies but what happens within their own. And like the figures she depicts, SMvdL's works on paper themselves change with perspective. At closer look they reveal planning, scaffolding, failed attempts and their corrections—they come alive when in circulation and perish when isolated. "The body is not a thing, it is a situation" wrote Simone de Beauvoir. In all of her situatedness, Sabina Maria van der Linden remains defiant of conventions, all the while contributing to the commons she survives in, for any attempted escape would call for an undesired return home.

Nelson Beer

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[1] In their 2001 essay *Premiers Matériaux pour une Théorie de la Jeune-Fille*, Tiqqun portray the decay of society through a generalised deployment of what they call "la jeune fille:" seduction apparatuses, body optimisation and the commodification of the self—a hyper-individuality which comes as the epitome of consumerist society and at the detriment of a working, socialist democracy.

[2] A significant reference in SMvdL's writings, Jan Verwoert's essay *Standing on the Gates of Hell, my Services Are Found Wanting*, unwinds and liberates readers from the struggle of originality. Instead it offers a poetic reading of the importance of summoning; something so (un)contemporary that we forget it makes us who we are: emotional beings in search for connection.

[3] The term "tactical misrepresentations" is borrowed from former US army general Alexander Haig: "That's not a lie, it's a terminological inexactitude. Also, a tactical misrepresentation"

[4] After getting off the phone with Oliver Körner von Gustdorf, a close friend and colleague of SMvdL, I could remember him mentioning Guy de Cointet as one of her influences. The French-American artist, author of theatrical productions and encrypted works on paper would borrow from both the high literature of his native France and the soap operas of his adopted land (the USA). An "enigmatic" artist, as he has been defined by the press.