

Benjamin Edwin Slinger

Galerie Karin Guenther Hamburg



KARIN GUENTHER

Galerie Admiralitätstraße 71 20459 Hamburg Fon +49 40 37503450 info@galerie-karin-guenther.de www.galerie-karin-guenther.de



Benjamin Edwin Slinger
The Years Will Stretch Their Hands, 2020
2 Colour woven blanket, 1850 x 1500 mm



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A Medieval Choreography
Installation view, Galerie Karin Guenther, 2021



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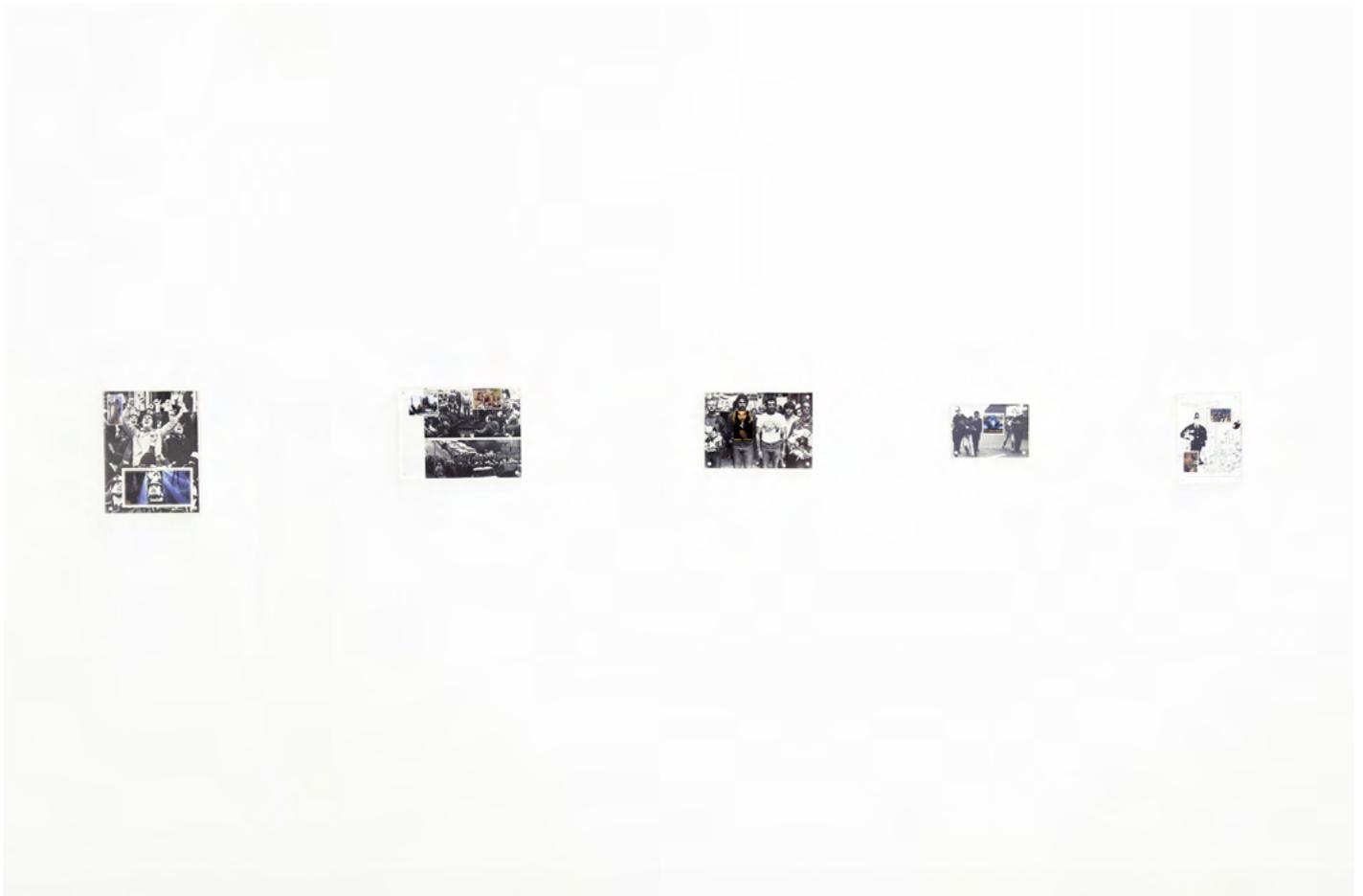


Benjamin Edwin Slinger
Know Stocks are Wearing Thin, 2021
Page from: The Miners Strike 1984-1985 in Pictures, The News Line
New Zealand postage stamp, Acrylic, Magnets, 200 x 150 mm



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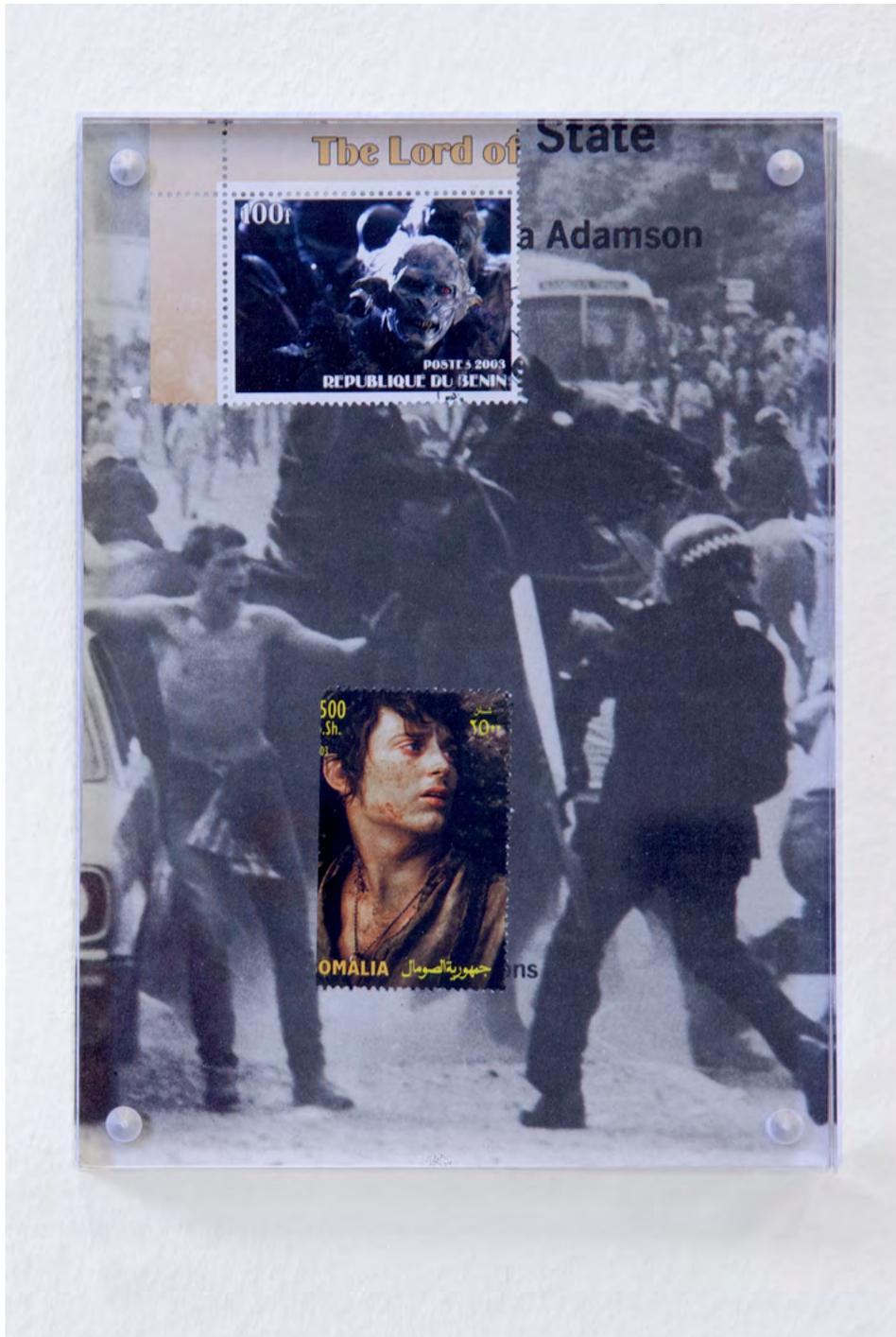


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Benjamin Edwin Slinger
Ruffians Could Not Be Cowed, 2021
Page from: The Miners Strike 1984-1985: People Versus State
Benin postage stamp, Somalia postage stamp, Acrylic, Magnets, 130 x 180 mm



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Benjamin Edwin Slinger
Jowl and Listen, 2020
4 Colour woven blanket, 1000 x 800 mm



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Behold! The Shadow Has Departed, 2021

Page from: The Miners Strike 1984-1985 in Pictures, The News Line

Isle of Man postage stamps, Kyrgyzstan postage stamps, Acrylic, Magnets, 130 x 180 mm



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Stout of Limb, Stout of Heart, 2020

Original Post Cards from: Support the Miners A set of six original postcards published by Leeds Postcards
New Zealand postage stamps, Acrylic, Magnets, 150 x 200 mm



Benjamin Edwin Slinger
Dampfphantom, 2021

Page from: The Miners Strike 1984-85 in Pictures, The News Line
Isle of Man postage stamp, Kyrgyzstan postage stamp, Acrylic, Magnets, 200 x 150 mm



Benjamin Edwin Slinger
I Listened For a Tail of Leaves, 2020
Silver Birch Bark, Watercolour, Page from: The Miners Strike 1984-85: People Versus State
New Zealand postage stamps, Acrylic, Magnets, 100 x 150 mm



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Canary in a Coal Mine

Benjamin Slinger's exhibition *A Medieval Choreography* at Karin Guenther centers around a series of collages made in the last year which juxtapose documentation of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike in northern England and Lord of the Rings merchandise. Both belong to a collective history, but also harken back to stories from the artist's childhood: J.R.R. Tolkien's tales and those which Slinger's grandfather, who left the police force at the time, told about the strikes. In pairing Lord of the Rings jigsaw puzzles, postage stamps and pins with pages torn from *The Miners' Strike 1984-85 in Pictures* and the *Support the Miners* postcards printed at the time, Slinger intervenes in the circulation of these images and considers the stakes of that flow. Inscribed in a lineage of art informed by class consciousness, these works also provide a timely reflection on division in the UK in the wake of Brexit.

The traumatic divisiveness of the Miners' Strikes continues to reverberate today in an England stratified along lines of class and geography. Slinger takes on this history as personal and national inheritance, paying close attention to how documentation of the strike and media coverage exacerbated its polarizing effect. One notable manipulation centered on the TV broadcast of *The Battle of Orgreave*—a confrontation between picketing steel workers and the South Yorkshire Police on June 18, 1984—in which both the BBC and ITV aired footage so that a police charge appeared to be prompted by picket violence, when in fact the police had initiated the escalation. Slinger's cropping and collaging evoke the impact of such strategic cuts, which also motivated artist Jeremy Deller's re-enactment of the battle in 2001. Further, images from the Lord of the Rings place the documentation of the strike within a constructed narrative: one that is often built to keep the disenfranchised down and the "other" out. Indeed, Margaret Thatcher classified the strike as "mob violence" and deemed the miners "the enemy within," creating a narrative of the miners as a menace to society and echoing language from Enoch Powell's appeal to racial hatred in his 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech that demonized black immigrants. Such a threat of the "other" is often allegorized in science fiction as well, something to which Slinger, who became more aware of their own working-class northern background only once they left their native Yorkshire for London, is closely attuned. Arthur Jafa is an apt point of reference as he positions science fiction and the Black experience as deeply intertwined, which he communicates by stitching scenes from Ridley Scott's *Alien*, for instance, together with found footage of the American experience of Blackness in his 2016 film *Love is the Message, The Message is Death*.

Slinger plays with narrative constructions of good and bad by pasting stamps of sympathetic protagonists from Lord of the Rings, like one of Aragorn, for instance, over an image of the police charge at Orgreave in *My Fire Might Show Steam-Phantoms*, 2020 and four stamps of the Elf Legolas against an image of the miners' barricades at Allerton Bywater in *The Road Goes Ever On and On*, 2020. Slinger is interested in the way in which such narratives rely on subtle societal biases, drawing this dynamic to the fore by way of more overt associations of good and evil. Slinger also lends narrative devices like framing and cropping a sculptural physicality, riffing on museological presentation as something that assigns value in *There is a Museum of My Heart*, 2021 and *Tattered Lions are Safe Places*, 2021 for example. Here, sun visors from a Jaguar and a Porsche respectively stand in for lighting atop wooden display cases; the car part's small, integrated lamp shines down on stamps and pins somewhat haphazardly displayed.

Two polyester blankets printed with iconic images of the struggle between police and picketing miners—*The Years Will Stretch Their Hands*, 2020 and *Jowl and Listen*, 2020—punctuate the exhibition. Woven into the cheap knit fabric associated with football club fan scarves or blankets, the images are enlarged and grainy. Something about them demands pause, invites the viewer to linger on the crease in a pair of jeans, the furrow in a brow. Slinger's simple gestures interrogate how art functions in relation to political or class struggle, questioning as well how images of that struggle might simultaneously elevate it and reduce it, illuminate and obscure. The blankets almost rekindle a Socialist Realist aesthetic, but far from didactic, Slinger's tone remains ambivalent. From the tension—the mass of bodies, each strained—comes a sense of stillness.

Camila McHugh

