

# Death Drag

08.11.24 - 30.11.24  
FREJA SOFIE KIRK

What is it that interests? It is not only the show of the trick rider itself, it is the show's connection to death. How the two are linked, by way of dependence on catastrophe. It is not the controlled face that tells us we are safe, we hardly get to see it, but the dangling hands that make us doubt the fact. They are soft, but acutely aware as they touch the ground. They seem to know the ground. It is the body falling, the camera so close to it, that we don't know if the fall is the catastrophe shown to us, in form of death or in form of Show.

The drag is a disguise, a means of cover that protects. Under the guise, behind a shield - it is the costume of a climatic situation, put on for purposes of survival. Traditionally, the death drag is a means of warfare by horseback. A part of Cossack military history, it was a survival trick in which soldiers slung their bodies onto the side of the trusted four legged companion in an image of death so compelling, that it would trick an enemy into believing false victory.

The rodeo-ized trick rider's version of the death drag is also rooted in Western military riding, but here the horse's function as a shield is absolved while the performance of the dangling body is laid bare as a point. No apparent violence is at risk of being inflicted, save for the one caused, potentially, by the trick itself. Although the rider dangles in surrender she is in control of everything: her body and the horse's, she possesses the gaze of onlookers in what is essentially a triumph over death. In Kirk's work the portrayal of triumph places us so close that we are unable to decode it unequivocally as such. Control and the loss of it, strength and fragility of the bodies of the woman and the horse, sparre equally in the picture, while clarity lurks just outside the frame and catastrophe hides in the enhanced sound that makes the skin react. As the tempo slows we are made to embody the camera work. Positioned almost inside the medium's own fetishizing attention towards the scene, to which we are only granted limited visual permission. We can't shake the feeling that we want more.

From the cover of the horse as a weapon in warfare the death drag then enters a position of detailed exposure. A reveal in a sense. The drag of the show is the falseness of the catastrophe which only pretends to be, to create the tension we are here to experience, the 'cowgirl's get-up' of the death defying rider herself. In the picture of this drag's disguise Western warfare meets Western pop culture. The picture is interested in the hidden violence that exists in this meeting. In her beautiful hair flowing. In the possible imminent stop to it all. The road of violence into show-making is also ridden.

Text by Klara Li Scheutz

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Death Drag, 2024  
HD video with sound, 03:04 min. loop

Trick rider: Bella da Costa  
Producer: Bjarke Due Gunslev  
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