

Nils Karsten

April 15 — July 29, 2011

Reception: Thursday, April 14, 6 to 8 pm



London Calling, 2008. Woodblock print, 66¾ x 66¾ inches (169.5 x 169.5 cm) Ed. 1/5. Signed, dated & editioned on verso



Untitled, 2003–2011. Graphite on paper, 13⁷/₁₆ x 10⁷/₈ inches (34.1 x 27.6 cm) Signed & dated on verso

Ubu Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of approximately 45 works on paper by Nils Karsten, spanning 1998 to 2011. Karsten's labor-intensive style is apparent across all of his output, from his painstakingly reproduced woodblock relief prints—measuring over 30 square feet—to his unsettling and detailed drawings and collages.

Hamburg-born Karsten probes memories of childhood and adolescence to combine iconic images from pop culture, early British and New York punk, revolution (Baader-Meinhof), war (Vietnam) and even alien invasion with surreal and fantastic utopian vistas. The artist approaches these themes in several distinct ways, each influenced by his proximate relationship with the music and social upheaval of the 1960s and 70s.

Karsten's woodblocks are tributes to rock and punk music. They capture a cultural phenomenon that is both a collective and personal experience: the transcendent power of music. His process of obliteration echoes the nihilistic vision of the punk movement—the artist scans album covers, removes the text, copies and recopies them to the point of distortion and enlarges them to the size of the actual woodblock, which is then glued to plywood as a carving template.

Karsten's finely-rendered drawings and collages derive from the traditional Northern European emphasis on remarkable beauty and exacting draftsmanship (e.g., Dürer, Cranach the Elder) filtered through 20th Century Surrealism. They depict fractured figures wielding weapons, animal skins and viscera inhabiting apocalyptic landscapes. Yet, despite these hazardous realms, the inhabitants appear to be enjoying themselves. The works evoke a dark form of escapism associated with adolescence. The characters, like some of Karsten's musical icons, are sinister and proud of it. The beautiful, melancholic and morbid images of the *Black Flower* series, while more ethereal and gothic than Karsten's other collages and drawings, present equally rich psychological spaces.

Ubu's exhibition overlaps *Nils Karsten: Can't Find My Way Home*, running through April 30th at Illuminated Metropolis, 547 West 27th Street in Chelsea.

Nils Karsten has been living in New York since 1995. He received his BFA from the School of Visual Arts in 1999, participated in the Skowhegan program in 2002, and received his MFA from Vermont College in 2003. Since then, he has been a faculty member at the School of Visual Arts. His work has been shown in galleries and museums throughout the U.S. and internationally, including Earl McGrath Gallery in Los Angeles; Marvelli Gallery and the Museum of Art & Design in New York; Contrasts Gallery in Shanghai; and the Pera Museum in Istanbul. He currently lives and works in Brooklyn.