

Mills College  
5000 MacArthur Blvd.  
Oakland, CA 94613  
[www.mills.edu](http://www.mills.edu)

# MILLS

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Contacts:**

**Maysoun Wazwaz**

**Mills College Art Museum, Program Manager**

**510.430.3340 or [mwazwaz@mills.edu](mailto:mwazwaz@mills.edu)**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**August 20, 2012**



***Mills College Art Museum Announces  
Dance Rehearsal: Karen Kilimnik's World of Ballet and Theatre  
September 12-December 9, 2012***

**Oakland, CA—August 20, 2012.** The Mills College Art Museum is pleased to present the first one-person museum exhibition on the West Coast of internationally acclaimed American artist Karen Kilimnik. *Dance Rehearsal: Karen Kilimnik's World of Ballet and Theatre* is dedicated to Kilimnik's longstanding fascination with 18th and 19th century classical and romantic story ballets and historical theatre. Curated by Melissa E. Feldman, *Dance Rehearsal* will be on view from September 12 through December 9, 2012. The opening reception will take place on Wednesday, September 12, 2012 from 6:00–8:00 pm. Free shuttle service will be provided from the MacArthur Bart station during the opening.

Featuring over 30 works from the late-1980s to the present, *Dance Rehearsal* encompasses all the diverse styles and mediums in which Kilimnik has worked—from figurative drawing and painting to mixed media *mise-en-scène* installations, collage, photography, and video, as well as more recent forays into set and costume design and choreography. Kilimnik often revisits and revises her work—historical theatres and stage sets, as well as famous dancers, pop stars and actors, make repeat appearances in her work. Kilimnik's consuming drive to re-envision certain plot lines, images and motifs relates to the ever-evolving nature of the performing arts with its endless variations, renditions and remakes. Kilimnik creates a phantasmagoric world of ballet and theatre that is all her own.

In addition to opening *Dance Rehearsal*, MCAM is excited to launch a new publication by the same name. *Dance Rehearsal: Karen Kilimnik's World of Ballet and Theatre* features over 60 large-scale, full color images of Kilimnik's work, some of which have never been reproduced before, and includes

new scholarship by independent curator Melissa E. Feldman, art critic and *frieze* co-editor Jörg Heiser, fashion designers Kate and Laura Mulleavy of Rodarte, and dance critic Apollinaire Scherr. *Dance Rehearsal* will be available for purchase beginning September 12 at the opening reception.

MCAM is also pleased to partner with the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, where *Dance Rehearsal: Karen Kilimnik's World of Ballet and Theatre* will be on view in Spring 2013.

Emerging in the late-1980s, American artist **Karen Kilimnik** is a key figure in contemporary art whose work in media ranging from traditional painting to video and live performance has reinvigorated and expanded the lexicon of narrative figuration. Swept up by beauty and the emotional tides of her often-tragic subjects—be they Patti Hearst or Giselle—Kilimnik's work nonetheless retains the knowing criticality possessed by all great cultural producers. The artist has been the subject of major solo exhibitions throughout Europe and the United States, including the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia and the Consortium, Dijon, both in 2007, the Serpentine Gallery, London and ARC/Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, in 2006, Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice (2005), and the Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn (2000).

**Melissa E. Feldman** is an independent curator and critic who writes regularly for *Art in America* and *frieze*.

*Dance Rehearsal: Karen Kilimnik's World of Ballet and Theatre* is organized by the Mills College Art Museum and supported by the Joan Danforth Art Museum Endowment.

Image: Karen Kilimnik, *Dusk*, 1996, Water-soluble oil color on canvas, 14 x 18 inches, Courtesy of the Artist and 303 Gallery

\*\*\*

## **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

(Visit [www.mcam.mills.edu](http://www.mcam.mills.edu) for full details)

### **Opening Reception**

Wednesday, September 12, 2012, 6:00-8:00 pm

Mills College Art Museum

*Free shuttle service will be provided from the MacArthur Bart station. Visit [mcam.mills.edu](http://mcam.mills.edu) for schedule.*

### **Monday Night Tights: Weekly Video Screening**

September 24-December 3, 2012, 7:00 pm

Danforth Lecture Hall, Mills College Akron Art Center

Every Monday night during the run of *Dance Rehearsal*, MCAM presents an eclectic selection of ballet movies from the 1940s to today. Visit [mcam.mills.edu](http://mcam.mills.edu) for full schedule and details.

### ***Sleeping Beauty and friends*: Talk and Video Screening**

Monday, October 29, 2012, 7:00 pm

Danforth Lecture Hall, Mills College Akron Art Center

Local dance historian and UC Berkeley faculty Jenefer Johnson provides a historical context for Kilimnik's 2007 video *Sleeping Beauty and friends*.

**Lecture by Melissa Feldman**

Wednesday, November 14, 2012, 7:00 pm  
Danforth Lecture Hall, Mills College Akron Art Center

Melissa E. Feldman, curator of Dance Rehearsal, is an independent curator, art historian, and writer who regularly contributes to Art in America and frieze.

***Sleeping Beauty and friends: Talk and Video Screening at the de Young***

Saturday, November 17, 2012, 2:00 pm  
Koret Auditorium, de Young Museum

\*\*\*

**About the Mills College Art Museum**

Founded in 1925, The Mills College Art Museum is a forum for exploring art and ideas and a laboratory for contemporary art practices. Through innovative exhibitions, programs, and collections, the museum engages and inspires the intellectual and creative life of the Mills community as well as the diverse audiences of the Bay Area and beyond. The Mills College Art Museum is located at 5000 MacArthur Boulevard, Oakland, CA 94613. Museum hours are Tuesday-Sunday 11:00–4:00 pm and Wednesday 11:00–7:30 pm. Admission is free for all exhibitions and programs unless noted. For more information, visit [mcam.mills.edu](http://mcam.mills.edu)

**About Mills College**

Nestled in the foothills of Oakland, California, Mills College is a nationally renowned, independent liberal arts college offering a dynamic progressive education that fosters leadership, social responsibility, and creativity to approximately 950 undergraduate women and 550 graduate women and men. The College ranks as one of the *Best 376 Colleges* in the country and one of the greenest colleges in the nation by The Princeton Review. *U.S. News & World Report* ranked Mills one of the top-tier regional universities in the country and second among colleges and universities in the West in its "Great Schools, Great Prices" category. For more information, visit [www.mills.edu](http://www.mills.edu).

###











OAKLAND, BERKELEY, AND EAST BAY NEWS, EVENTS, RESTAURANTS, MUSIC, &amp; ARTS

**EAST BAY EXPRESS**  
WEB SERVICES**SUBSCRIBE**

SEARCH:

ARTS &amp; CULTURE » VISUAL ART

SEPTEMBER 26, 2012

## Karen Kilimnik's World of Ballet

Classical ballet proves a fascinating entry point into the contemporary artist's multifaceted career.

By *Alex Bigman*



Email

Tweet

Log In

Print

submit

Rigid in its conventions and intimately known to a small fraction of the population, classical ballet tends to seep into the mainstream obliquely — diffracted by other art forms like film, where the disturbed ballerina remains a favorite figure — or invisibly, its narrative tropes appearing without credit.

For contemporary artist Karen Kilimnik, the world of historical theater has been a longstanding point of fascination. Since her career took off in the late 1980s, Kilimnik has run the gamut from photography to painting to scatter installation, probing questions of appropriation, identity, femininity, and celebrity. All of these themes converge, repeatedly, in her balletomane impulse. This makes *Dance Rehearsal: Karen Kilimnik's World of Ballet and Theatre*, now running at the Mills College Art Museum, a wonderful point of entry into the internationally acclaimed artist's fascinating practice.

Kilimnik approaches ballet from a staggering number of angles — testimony, no doubt, to the force and vitality of her obsession. In this exhibition, along with dozens of paintings depicting Romantic ballet sets and wistful, long-lashed dancers, there is a crayon rendering of the Paris Opera House's seating layout, a tongue-in-cheek installation literalizing the phrase "opera rats," a reprisal of a work from Edgar Degas' famous ballet series, text reproduced by



hand from legendary dancer Rudolph Nureyev's memoirs, and, finally, video of a ballet that Kilimnik herself choreographed.

Operating with the unique impunity that contemporary art provides, Kilimnik glides in and out of classical ballet's innermost parts, visually referencing specific moments in specific dances, as well as its most peripheral extremities, as with a drawing juxtaposing Nureyev and Leonardo DiCaprio, who played Romeo — one of Nureyev's most famous roles — in a 1996 film adaptation of Shakespeare's play.

It is as if Kilimnik is riddling ballet's insulating shell with the hopes of ultimately climbing inside. Indeed, one of the more intriguing works in *Dance Rehearsal* is a blurry portrait photograph that Kilimnik took of herself, then marked over in black ink to transform her own likeness into that of Gelsey Kirkland, the drug-addled, heartsick Balanchine-era ballerina.

Kilimnik has no doubt succeeded in entering the world of ballet, loosely construed. She created scenic backdrops for the Paris Opera Ballet's 2011 production of *Psyche*, while *Sleeping Beauty and Friends* — the pastiche of four 19th-century ballet excerpts that she co-choreographed with Tom Sapsford — ran a single night in London (Kilimnik's video of the event plays in the back of the MCAM gallery, behind silk curtains).

Like the Sherrie Levines and Cindy Shermans who came before her, Kilimnik has successfully harnessed the freeing potential of contemporary art. Through her sights, boundaries between artists and their respective worlds begin to dissolve.

*Dance Rehearsal* runs through December 9 at the Mills College Art Museum (5000 MacArthur Blvd., Oakland). 510-430-2164 or MCAM.Mills.edu

---

**Contact the author of this piece, send a letter to the editor, like us on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter.**

---

« The Science and Art of Partyin... Hamlet Buoyed by "Unmanly Grie... »

---

### Related Locations

Mills College Art Museum  
5000 MacArthur Blvd. **OAKLAND-EAST**  
510-430-2164  
MCAM.Mills.edu

Be the first to review this location!



**BAY AREA WORLD GUITAR SHOW**  
**MARIN CIVIC EXHIBIT HALL - SAN RAFAEL**  
**SAT. AUG. 16, 10-5 • SUN. AUG. 17, 10-4**



**LEARN MORE**

## Beyond the curtain

Karen Kilimnik challenges ballet archetypes in 'Dance Rehearsal'

09.19.12 - 11:55 am | [Rita Felciano](#) (/category/author/rita-felciano) (0)

[Log In](#)

[arts@sfbg.com](mailto:arts@sfbg.com)

(mailto:arts@sfbg.com)

### DANCE/VISUAL ART

Nineteenth century story ballets raise a lot of questions: how come Prince Siegfried can't tell the difference between the Black and the White Swans? What's the matter with *La Sylphide*'s James that he runs after the Sylph and foregoes his lovely human bride? In her first West Coast solo exhibit, Philadelphia-based visual artist Karen Kilimnik addresses

these issues and more. The works in "Dance Rehearsal: Karen Kilimnik's World of Ballet and Theatre," at Mills College Art Museum through December 9, use clever reframing to suggest why these apparently outmoded stories remain popular classics.

Kilimnik works in a variety of mediums — video, live performance, and installation included. In this show, comprised of works from 1988 to the present, she investigates ballet as a 19th century artifact, studying it with her own wary, 21st century eyes. She gives us a complex perspective on an art that aims to transcend human limitations, both physical and intellectual. The result is a kind of double vision in which she simultaneously evokes the objects within their own exquisite context even as she superimposes borders or lenses on them. "Dance Rehearsal," guest curated by Melissa E. Feldman, is a passionate tribute to this most artificial of genres looked at from a distance.

I am not sure to what extent "Dance Rehearsal" will communicate to a viewer who doesn't have at least some basic knowledge of and sympathy for ballet. Longing, the otherworldly, sylphs, swans, magicians, and fairy princesses are not everybody's cup of tea. But if you can play along with Kilimnik's conceits, the show offers intriguing insights and re-interpretations of still-popular ballets, none of which I found in the least bit questionable. Some were more serious than others, but none of these "re-viewings" were facile.

It helps, for instance, to know that *Gelsey Stuck on the Matterhorn*, which resembles calendar art, refers to dancer Gelsey Kirkland, here shown as Giselle, a role she frequently played. Kilimnik suggests consanguinity between two dancers — one real, one imagined — who suffered similar fates. The elaborately titled *Prince Siegfried Arriving Home in Vienna 1800's, from Versailles, 1500's* — painted in what looks like roughed-up 18th century French style — shows a young man bowing courteously in a plumed hat and over-the-knee boots, certainly not what *Swan Lake*'s Siegfried would ever have worn. Kilimnik is likely commenting on the fact that this most romantic of princes was a descendant of French court ballet at its most artificial.



Karen Kilimnik's *Sleeping Beauty and friends* (2007)

However, I don't think I would have understood (though I liked its warm colors) a C-print of two shadowy peasant girls from *Giselle* without Kilimnik's title: *2 Peasant Girls, Silesia-future wilis*. I had never considered that the cheerful village girls seen in *Giselle*'s first act might have ended up as haunted, ghostly women.

Some other works have an unexpected poignancy to them. The installation *Paris Opera Rats* shows three worn ballet slippers, grey tulle seemingly from a dirty tutu, and some plastic mice, all bunched up around a foam curbstone. Paris Opera Ballet's young dancers are still (affectionately) called rats, and this piece speaks eloquently about who 19th century ballerinas were — poor, working-class women, one step above living in the gutter. The longer you study Kilimnik's crayon-on-paper *Seating Chart of the Paris Opera House*, the more you see in the rigidity of its grid patterns, its ranked subdivisions, and careful color allocations a reflection of an implacable hierarchy, not just of ballet patrons, but a critique of a social system.

---

## Related articles



### [Lost at sea \(/2012/03/27/lost-sea\)](#)

Could a world-class arts festival save the foundering America's Cup?



### [Look here instead \(/2014/08/05/look-here-instead\)](#)

Bay Area Now 7 proposes other routes through dark times



### [Sm/Art car \(/2014/08/05/smart-car\)](#)

With their prototype mobile artist's workstation, Studio 1, David Szlasi and Katrina Rodabaugh are off to the races

---

## Also from this author



### [In tune \(/2014/07/29/tune\)](#)

Dancers explore fresh rhythms at the Music Moves Festival



### [Great leaps forward \(/2014/07/22/great-leaps-forward\)](#)

Emerging choreographers present new works at SAFEhouse for the Performing Arts' SPF7



### [New classics \(/2014/07/08/new-classics\)](#)

Melody Takata brings traditional Japanese dance into the 21st century, plus a benefit for SF dance vet Enrico Labayen

---