

Jesse Darling
Gravity Road
19 Sep–1 Nov 2020

Supernatural love has no contact with force, but at the same time it does not protect the soul against the coldness of force, the coldness of steel. Only an earthly attachment, if it has in it enough energy, can afford protection from the coldness of steel.

Simone Weil

Constructed in Pennsylvania in 1827, *Gravity Road* was a precursor to the modern roller coaster and one of the first railway lines in the USA; a sloping stretch of railroad used to cart coal out of mines. With passenger rides on offer soon afterwards, the rapid descent became an attraction and the technology was appropriated for thrill rides in amusement parks. With alluring names like Luna Park or Dreamland, at the start of the 20th Century these finely orchestrated dream factories were able to whip the masses into euphoric frenzy at the promise of progress. Yet with public leisure facilities such as swimming pools and amusement parks being segregated in the whole of the USA until the second half of the last century, such sites were defined as safe spaces for white consumers through the exclusion of African Americans. As the material of industrialised modernity, steel was first used to build roller coasters from the middle of the 20th Century, sparking a trend that persists to this day; increasingly daring designs that compete to be the largest, fastest and most dangerous.

Kunstverein Freiburg was founded in 1827, the same year this roller coaster prototype began operation. A coincidence, but one that points to the intertwining histories of modernity. The continued ideological and material impacts of this are thematised in Jesse Darling's exhibition: on the one hand, technological progress and economic growth, industrialisation and automation, and on the other hand, the emergence of leisure societies, the entertainment industry and the exhibition format as we know it — developments that can equally be told as stories of control, exclusion, exploitation and violence. The starting point for Darling's exhibition is the architecture of the hall, which has been used by the Kunstverein since 1997 and which dates back to the National Socialist era. The Marienbad hall, a large indoor swimming pool, was completed in 1938, the same year in which Jews, among other things, were prohibited from visiting public baths.

Darling's sculptures, images and installations engage with the vulnerability of the body. Darling understands fallibility, weakness and mortality to be fundamental characteristics of living beings, also applicable to wider cultural contexts; systems of government, ideologies and technologies — nothing is too big to fail. For their exhibition in the hall of the former Marienbad baths, built in 1938, Darling have installed a sculpture of a dysfunctional roller coaster. The steel construction, broken down to child-sized proportions, becomes a deformed monument to a modern age that celebrates progress, acceleration and mastery and produces violence — a relic of a happiness machine whose entertainment value lies in stimulating the physical effects of panic.

Like the skeleton of a machine / animal hybrid, the broken, dysfunctional track winds its way around the room, illuminated only by daylight. A journey on this rail road would likely come to an abrupt end as a sudden semi-loop shoots the cart aloft — that is, if it even makes it that far. The buckling steel feet, carefully bandaged in places, are weighed down by sandbags labelled „Deutsche Bundesbank“ (German Federal Bank). In among the

digital currents of capital and cybernetic convulsions of today's automated financial systems, money bags have lost their purpose. Darling's sculpture also reminds us that the cloud, apparently dematerialised and weightless, rests on a steel frame. The brief moment of weightlessness, the „airtime“ at the climax of a rollercoaster ride, ends with the crash. The stitched typography of the banner *To the Future!* seems to proclaim a confident message yet it remains undeciphered. A dark corner of the exhibition space houses the smaller sculpture *The Road Extinct (municipal fragment)*. This vandalised display case reduces the cultural technique of exhibiting to absurdity; the pathetic attempt to establish order and hierarchy, to create value, to keep things at a distance and to exempt them from decay. The display case presents a fragment of the steel rail — a curved body of steel, extending out a work glove that holds a plastic model tree. This could hint at the living beings that are entangled with the mighty thrill machine, who build it, ride it or fall prey to it.

Darling's exhibition is a comedy. In her study *The Odd One In: On Comedy* the philosopher Alenka Zupančič establishes a relationship between comedy, finitude and infinity. The comic hero is not funny because the boundlessness of their desires and wishes is dashed against the rocks of finitude. Rather, against all odds, human intentions and desires continually transcend finitude — that is what makes a comic character. Concludingly, Zupančič's analysis of the comic culminates in the sentence: “Not only are we not infinite, we are not even finite.”

Jesse Darling (* UK) live in Berlin, DE.

Selected solo exhibitions:

Selva Oscura, Galerie Sultana, Paris, FR, 2019; *Crevé*, Triangle France-Astérides, Marseille, FR, 2019; *The Ballad of St Jerome*, Art Now, Tate Britain, London, UK, 2018; *Support Level*, Chapter, New York, USA, 2019; *Armes Blanches*, Galerie Sultana, Paris, FR, 2017; *The Great Near*, Arcadia Missa, London, UK, 2016.

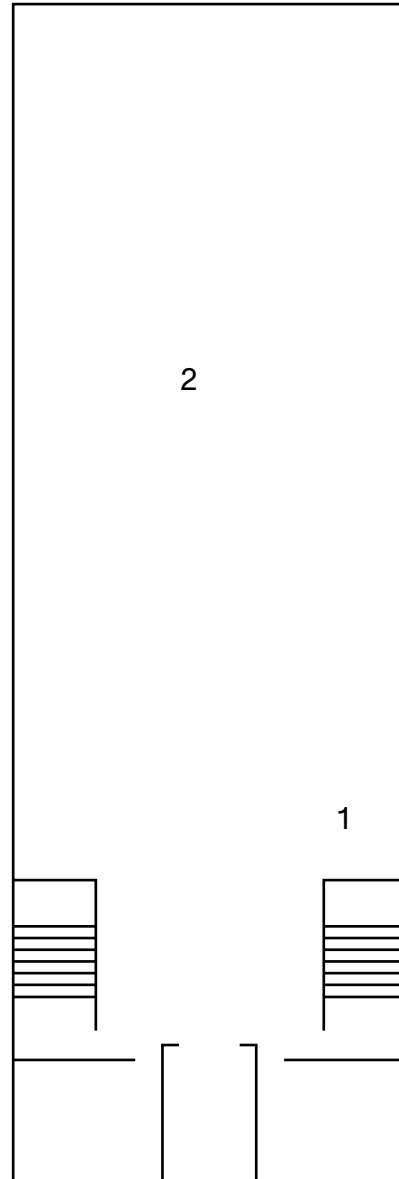
Selected group exhibitions:

Kunstpreis der Böttcherstraße, Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen, DE, 2020; *Afterglow*, Yokohama Triennale, Yokohama, JP, 2020; *The same room: Julie Becker in dialogue*, Galerie Neu, Berlin, DE, 2020; *Transcorporealities*, Museum Ludwig, Köln, DE, 2019; *May You live in Interesting Times*, Biennale di Venezia, Venedig, IT, 2019; *A cris ouvertes*, Les Ateliers de Rennes, Biennale d'Art Contemporain, Rennes, FR, 2018; *Give Up The Ghost*, Baltic Triennial 13, Tallin, ES, 2018; *Cellular World: Cyborg-Human-Avatar-Horror*, Glasgow International, Glasgow, UK, 2018.

1
The Road Extinct
(municipal fragment), 2020
Perspex, wood, steel, sand,
jute, paint
210,5×180×100,5 cm

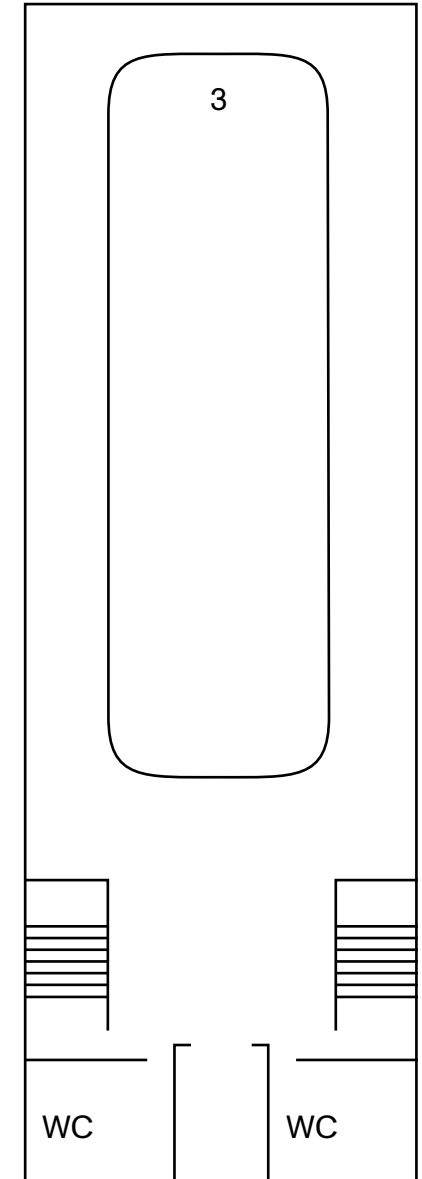
2
Gravity Road, 2020
Steel, jute, sand, soil, flowers,
elastic bandage, metal coating
470×590×1635 cm

Exhibition Hall



3
To the Future!, 2020
Synthetic fabric, thread
195×237 cm

First Floor Gallery



Programme

Thu, 15 Oct 2020, 7 pm
Guided Tour with Nelly Kuch

Thu, 29 Oct 2020, 7 pm
Curator's Tour with Heinrich Dietz

Opening Hours

Tue–Sun, 12–6 pm
Thu, 12–8 pm, free admission
Closed on Mondays,
members free

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