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LENA HENKE YES I'M PREGNANT

Interview by Lyndsy Welgos

Topical Cream went horsing around with artist [Lena Henke](#) to talk about her new comic book *Yes, I'm Pregnant* as well the Frieze Art Fair and [M/L Artspace](#).



Topical Cream: Hey Lena, tell us how you got started with this comic book *Yes, I'm Pregnant*.

Lena: Hey, I was invited by the Arts Foundation of North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany to create a piece of art for the collection of the Sculpture Museum in Marl. The museum is an amazing Brutalistic style building, designed by the Dutch architects Broekbakema built in the '70s.

Topical Cream: Is Marl a large city? I'm not familiar with it.

Lena: Marl, is not actually a city, it's more like two little villages put together because of the growing economy around coal mining in the '60s and '70s. Because of the fast growth of the city a new city center was built in greenfield strategy. They erected a new town hall, high-rise buildings and a shopping mall. Lots of people moved there at that time. Today the coal mines are still working but production is declining. Many people have already moved away as they don't see great opportunity for the next generation.

Topical Cream: So now they have an amazing museum and no people.

Lena: Yes, the city feels like a ghost town. There are no prospects for the young. They don't even have a proper bar. There is just this huge museum building left with an amazing collection of modern sculptures. As well as many free standing sculptures around the town.

Topical Cream: You were saying before that the museum had a public pool next door is that right?



Yes, I'm pregnant, 2014. Courtesy the artist and Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl

Lena: kind of, the public pool was behind the museum but it's been closed for almost ten years now.

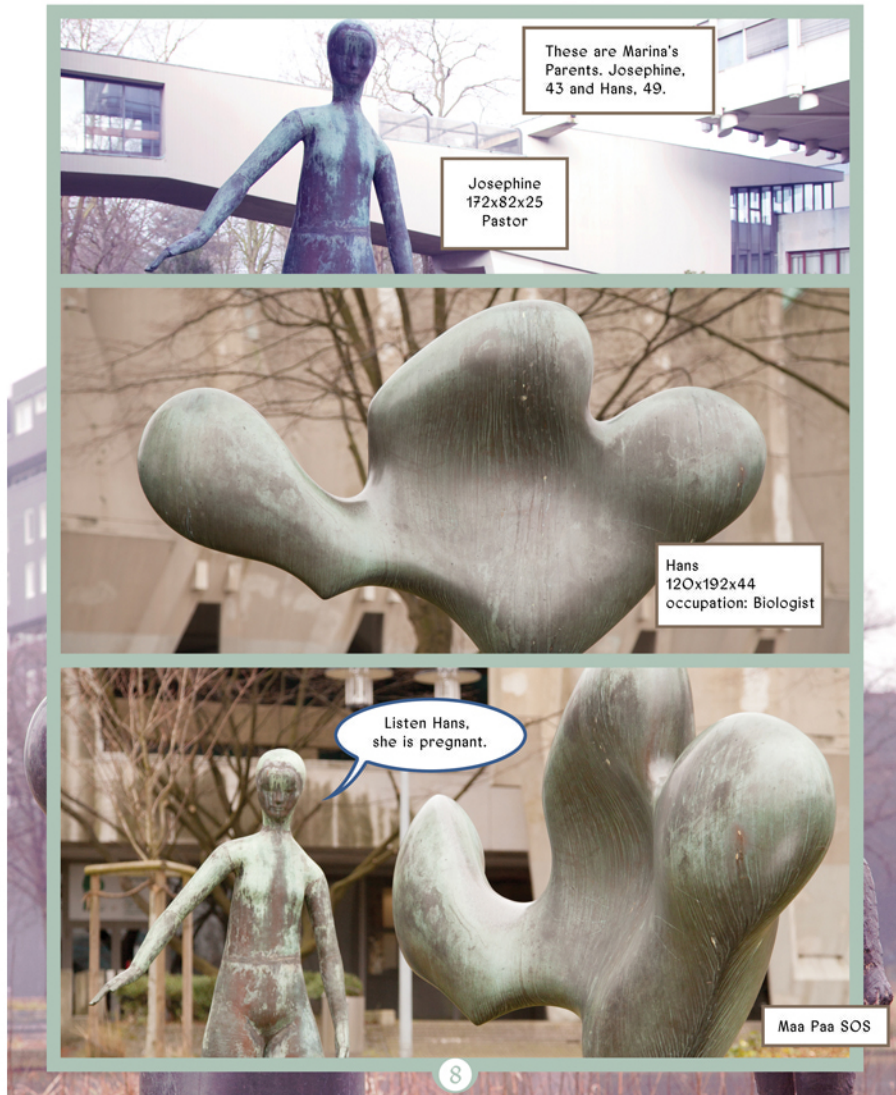
The city is a good example of one of these utopian ideas from the '70s. They were like, OK, this is going to be the next big city. But you know, great architects planning buildings on their drawing board doesn't always function IRL.

Topical Cream: The cityscape sounds already like a dystopian comic book backdrop.

Lena: Totally, instead of creating another sculpture, I decided to create *Yes, I'm Pregnant* using the city's dystopian atmosphere. The director, Georg Elben gave me access to the museum's collection which was amazing! They have excellent pieces in the collection, just to name a few: Auguste Rodin, Wilhelm Lehmbruck, Henri Matisse and Rudolf Belling. One of my favorites is a nice cow sculpture by Ewald Mataré' the teacher of Joseph Beuys, as well as an Alice Aycock, and an Isa Genzken ellipsoid.

So the main character is Marina. She's portrayed by a Mario Marini sculpture. Her boyfriend Paul is portrayed by a horse sculpture (by Paul Derkes). I chose the names of the characters after the artist's first name.

Topical Cream: So what's the plot?



Yes, I'm pregnant, 2014. Courtesy the artist and Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl

Lena: In the story Marina is in love with the hottest boy at school, a horse. They have sex, and she begins to feel very sick. So she goes to check with her gynecologist (portrayed by a weird bronze half hand/half man sculpture by Michael Schwarze). He gives her a pregnancy test right away and yes, it's positive.

Topical Cream: When you were shooting the images for the story did you see a lot of the kids hanging around with nothing to do?

Lena: Right again my friend, I noticed all these kids hanging around smoking pot at the gas stations and behind the empty swimming pool.

Topical Cream: Obviously Marina has choices these days I guess she's decided that she wants to keep the baby?

Lena: She's trying to have it all. She gets support from her mom. Of course, her dad, played by Hans Arp, freaks out, and asks her the question you never ever want to hear from your dad "How did this happen?" It's a really awkward daughter/father situation.

Topical Cream: No one wants to be asked that by their father! Is Marina getting help from her girlfriends?

Lena: Marina does tell her girlfriends, and the girlfriends react in different ways. Her best friend Emily says "Oh, my God. That's hardcore. Did you already tell Paul?" But, of course there are two fake girlfriends, one really sneaky friend says, "Maybe I can fuck him now." The other says "What a slut." She finds mixed reactions from her circle of friends.

Topical Cream: Are there any correlations to the City of Marl, and the place you grew up yourself?



Lena: I grew up in a tiny village, on a horse farm like goddamn National Velvet. My parents wanted to live in nature. And I got horse fever really quickly. I learned how to ride horses and got my own.

Topical Cream: Now you are in New York, have you thought about settling down here?

Lena: Yes, but its hard to imagine having a family in New York.

Topical Cream: I think that is a big issue for a lot of people whether to try to raise a baby in this dump of a city or to try your luck in the suburbs where kids just end up hanging out at gas stations and getting pregnant anyway. What else do you have coming up?

Lena: I actually just got back from St. Louis where I had an opening at White Flag Projects, titled, "Geburt Und Familie" which included artworks and a publication organized around the concept of a sculpture becoming pregnant. It will be continued with a forthcoming exhibition at Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl.

Topical Cream: You're also getting ready for Frieze Right?

Lena: Yes, I'm working on a new series of sculptures. Each piece is comprised of a saddle made from pigmented resin and fiberglass that is suspended in a stainless steel structure recalling skyscraper facades and sidewalk grates. The new work draws on a kind of New York street life and architecture; as well as the symbolic figure of the horse. I will also include a gridded table and bench for gallery operations, a quasi-functional design that intertwines the sculpture and pedestal, placing the dealer into a sort of scaled down hi-rise.

Topical Cream: No fucking way! Tyler and Ben (of Real Fine Arts) came to St. Louis also, right? You guys are pretty close?

Lena: Yes, I think having a good relationship with your gallerist makes so much sense. You fight, you trust, you don't trust, and then you trust again. But, once you've been through all that shit it's so much easier to work together.

Topical Cream: Real Talk



Topical Cream: You also have a collaboration with Marie Karlberg called M/L Artspace.

Lena: Marie and I don't have a gallery space, we're using the opportunities New York affords us, always only for one night. The next show we are planning on will happen the weekend before Frieze opens in New York. We are planning on a sexy show in Marie's apartment called "In the Bedroom."

Topical Cream:What do you mean by sexy show?

Lena: Everything will happen in and around her huge bed. My fantasy was to use the bed as a huge display or pedestal. Marie and I are designing bed sheets for this happening, titled "Sexy Action Under the Sheets," where we're going to body print our asses and boobs on the bed sheets...

Topical Cream: Satin sheets I hope? That's my favorite kind you know...

Lena: Of course! You should definitely get one.

Topical Cream: I sleep on satin pillows, because its good for your skin. It has all kinds of beauty benefits including keeping split ends to a minimum.

Lena: Flimsy and useful just like you! And besides that we are also going to have a performance by Bjarne Melgaard happening on Marie's bed. As well as different kinds of smaller sculptures around in the bed by Amy Granat, Raul de Nieves and many others. Colleen Rochette is doing an installation with Orchids which I'm also really excited about.

Topical Cream: Colleen is superb.

Lena: She's a professional botanist, She's working on an installation including different baskets with orchids hanging down from the ceiling but the rest is a secret....

