

DEAD HORSE BAY ANNA GRITZ ON LENA HENKE

Slowly and with purpose the head of the Empire State and the Chrysler building bob up and down, fel-lating each other in a steady rhythm. Through a panoramic window their lovemaking is witnessed by a legion of anonymous, anthropomorphized Manhattan buildings deeply entrenched in the scene unfolding in front of them. The amputated arm of the Statue of Liberty makes a Cocteauish appearance in form of the table lamp on the bedside dresser, mood-lighting a scene that is harshly interrupted by the spotlight that the Rockefeller Center casts in the bed upon entering and catching the couple in flagranti.

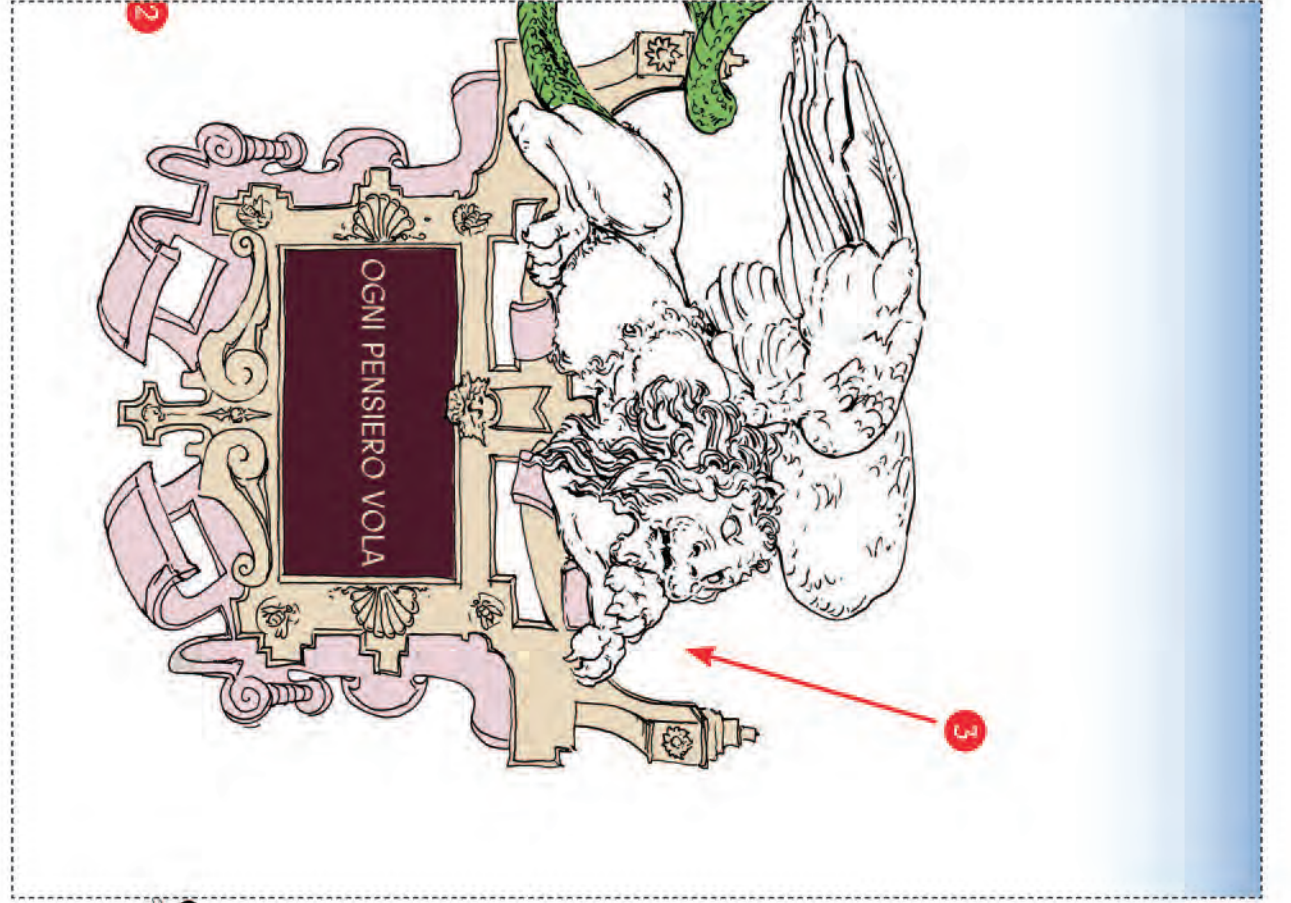
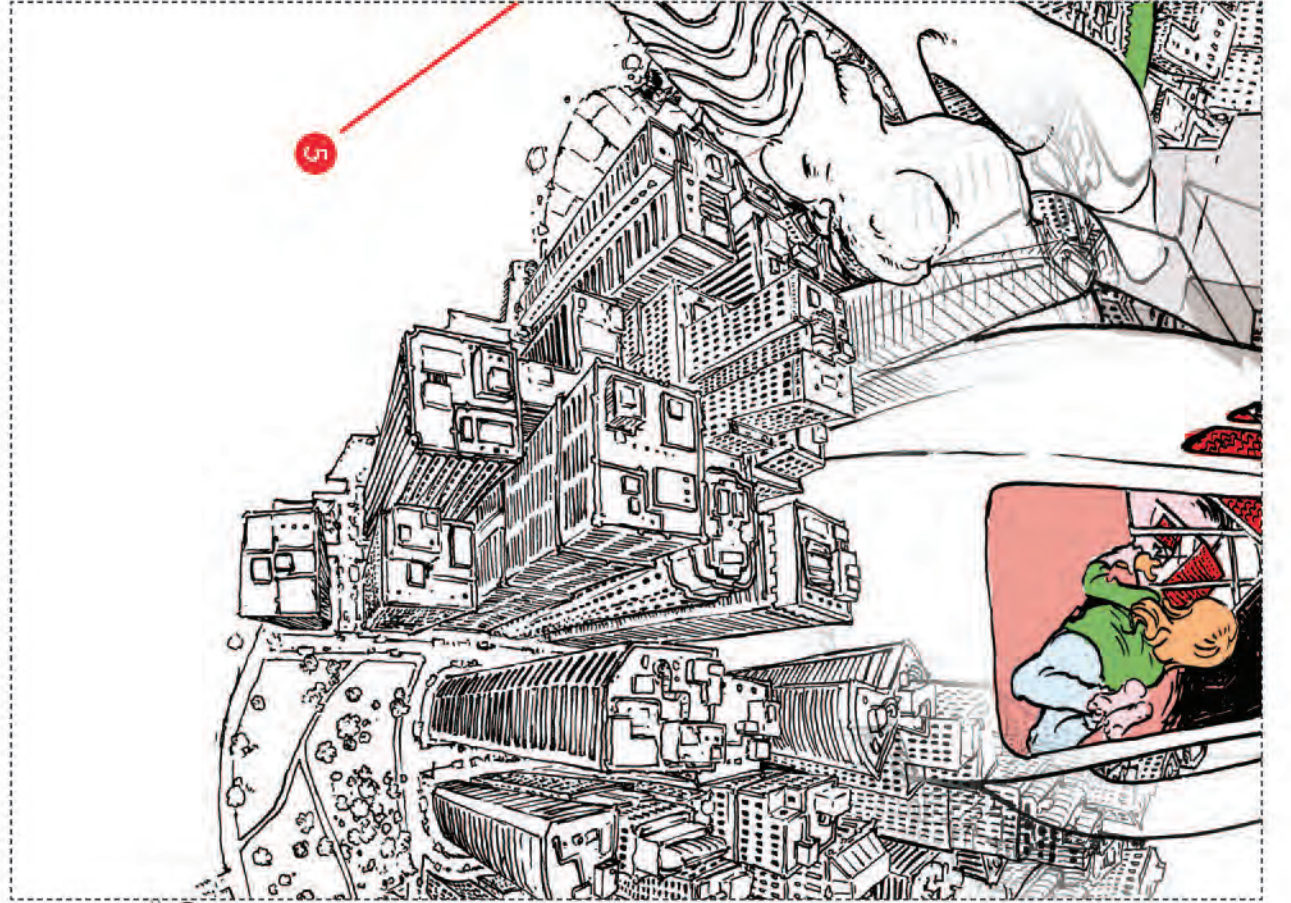
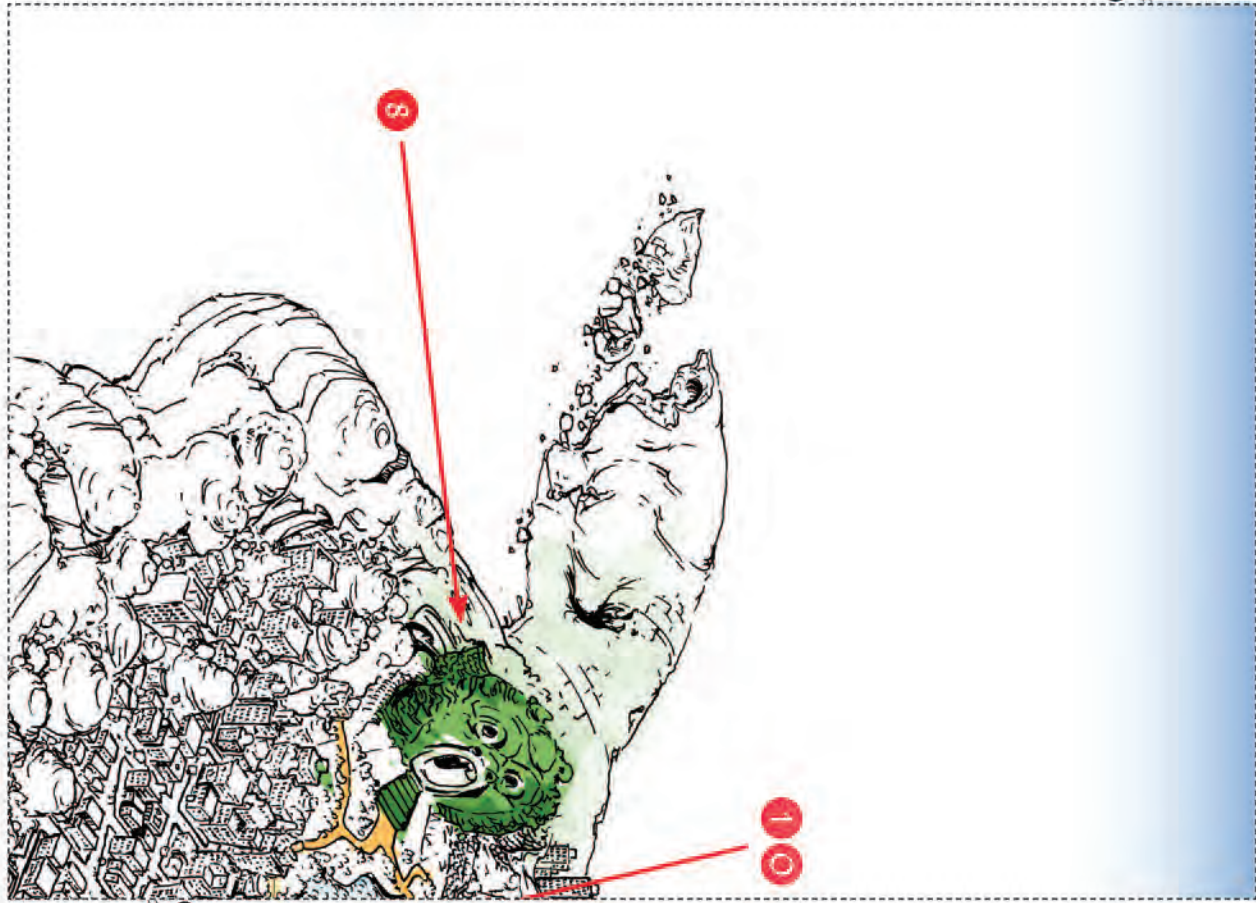
that reduces the chaos of the city to the easily navigable lines and channels of a map. Distance allows for the abstraction necessary to gain an overview, granting the order, which is so desirable when stuck amid the inner-city chaos below. The birds-eye view has long been a tool for map-making and is also in Henke's portrait employed to this end. It is a viewpoint that beckons authority and domination over the surveyed exterior world. Established in the Flemish portrait painting of the 15th Century by painters such as Jan van Eyck, the perspective signalled the reach of influence that the sitter had bestowed upon himself.

This scene is taken from a short animation storyboarded by the artist Madelon Vriesendorp with Teri Wehn-Damisch and developed from a body of work that Vriesendorp had created in the early 1970s after she moved to Ithaca, NY with her husband Rem Koolhaas.¹ Her drawings would later become part of Koolhaas's influential text *Delirious New York* from 1978. In addition to the bizarre and surreal subject matter, it is the treatment of the city of New York as a pulsating, sweating, screaming mass of buildings, that is both stage and protagonist, that is so relevant to the work of Lena Henke. For *Dead Horse Bay* Henke

The tower, or tenanted vantage point becomes an optical device, a lens or camera as Beatriz Colomina calls it, consolidating inhabitation and the view onto the exterior world.² She recounts Le Corbusier suggesting the possibility to inhabit the camera as a means of employing a system of classification.³ One might take his point further and say that the mind can mimic a technology upon experiencing it. In a similar manner the perspective of a surveillance camera or the Google Earth zoom, once seen, can be called upon at will, allowing for a double entity – we can inhabit both the instrument glancing over a cityscape

also chose the urban fabric of New York City as a matrix, clouding her intimate sensation of the city with its public façade. In both women's art work the interior and exterior becomes transposable, the city both interior setting and public domain. This strategy is epitomized in the rug in Vriesendorp's most famous drawing from this series, *Flagrant Delit*, from 1975, which shows the Manhattan city grid as a structure that runs through the inside of the apartment and is echoed in the view through the panoramic window in the geometric blocks of the urban structure. It is the aerial perspective

while being an active participant in it. It is as if, once observed, we carry this perspective within us, observing ourselves from the position of an elevated outsider, an internalized panopticon of sorts, not dissimilar from Jeremy Bentham's and certainly a perspective encouraged by much recent municipal city planning. And yet aside from suggesting an internal corrective this type of split perspective also allows for an incorporated view onto our physical location. It is this incorporated view that Henke presents in this cityscape cum map. The gaze is multiplied and while we reside in her sight down on the city of her "Wahl Hei-



mat” Manhattan, we also observe her through a window lying down on the top floor of the *Freedom Tower*, here displayed in the shape of a milk bottle that curiously resembles her own milk bottle sculptures. She is lying there playing with her sculptures as if they are dolls in a dollhouse, while surveying the ongoings of the city below through a massive window (#2). Henke is employing a similar type of scale confusion here as practiced by Vriesendorp in her drawings. While some of Henke’s sculptures appear as miniatures and others materialize in the cityscape blown up to the size of buildings, her detergent

hoof dollhouses (#5) can be found copulating not unlike Vriesendorp’s skyscrapers on the shore of the Hudson River, spewing green water in the shape of a spiral (jetty), a nod to another movement that was highly reliant on the aerial view. All the while specimens of her *Female Fatigue Series* (2015) – *New Museum, At&t Building, Chelsea Hotel, and Flat Iron Building* (all #7) – are casually spread about the lower half of the island.

There is something easy about Henke’s *Female Fatigues*, the way that the female bodies are slouching, cast from sand, on top of the sharp steel outlines of

iconic architecture, constantly threatening to collapse, not made to last but to be rebuilt when needed. They are like inflatable rubber dolls, summoned into shape and existence through a mould, once desired and easily destroyed and stored away when not. The series developed out of a show entitled DIE, after Tony Smith. Amongst other works Henke showed large industrial size sand bags, the ones’ in which sand is delivered for construction sites. The sand was kept in the industrial bags, and moulded to resemble fragmented female bodies, an ass, a torso with head, a crotch with her legs crossed as in *Lower Part*

pture in the city, a place that she experienced otherwise as desolate and without much public life, Henke decided to cast the sculptures in the public realm as the protagonists of a photo love story, a common sub genre in German teenage literature. The comic reframes and subtles shots of the sculptures in the city, tell the story of Marina and Paul, two pubescent sculptures in love, one a work by Marino Marini and the other by Paul Derkes. Their love story is told as a drama, unfolding through an unplanned pregnancy and the resulting quarrels with family and friends and illustrated through the sculptures shot

in situ alongside a cast of auxiliary sculptures by Hans Arp, Joseph Jäckel and Hans Bucher. (As a side note it is worth mentioning that impregnation was one risk Vriesendorp’s edifices did not have to fear, at least that’s what one might assume from the casually cast aside ‘Good Year’ condom lying next to the exhausted lovers). Inspired by the works in Ignazio Danti’s famous *Gallery of Maps* in the Vatican Museums, Lena Henke deploys the aerial view not simply as an attempt to map a city, but as a portrayal of her life, yet herself in the very city. Not dissimilar from Saul Steinberg’s iconic vistas of the New York

City of the 1970s, the work presents a very personal vision of the skyline of the city, stretching and shrinking buildings and avenues at her leisure, going so far to transfigure the outline of Manhattan Island to match the famous anatomical drawing of the head of a horse by Théodore Géricault (#9). The skin pulled away to reveal the underlying muscle strands evocative of highways and the infrastructure of the city grid. With the baroque-eye of an Arcimboldo the city is realized as an organism made from a set of intertwined, and highly symbolic components assembled to create something new. The reference to the horse goes

(*legs*) (2014). It is another self-portrait of sorts – Lena is assembling herself in fragments made of sand in the gallery. The shaped parts were then at times embellished with works from a series she calls *Chainmail* (2014), metallic chain nets cast in epoxy in FedEx boxes resembling medieval armour. The casual, almost sluggish body language of the sand sculptures can be seen in conversation with a type of feminist illustration common in ’70s and ’80s magazine culture with Claire Bretécher as one of the most famous protagonists. The lazy, lasziv poses appear borrowed from sources such as Bretécher’s

serial publication *Frustration* (1975-80) which presents women slouched on couches, not wearing any bra, casually carrying a bag or breastfeeding a baby, habitually not poised or composed but instead perpetually irritated about the pitfalls of modern living (generally the pains of living with the other sex).⁴

This overly human, unapologetic, unpolished attitude is present in both Henke’s sculpture and Vriesendorp’s skyscrapers. Vriesendorp speaks of the drawings as “the result of an in-depth analysis of the possibilities provided by architecture, marking a time in which the ridged corset

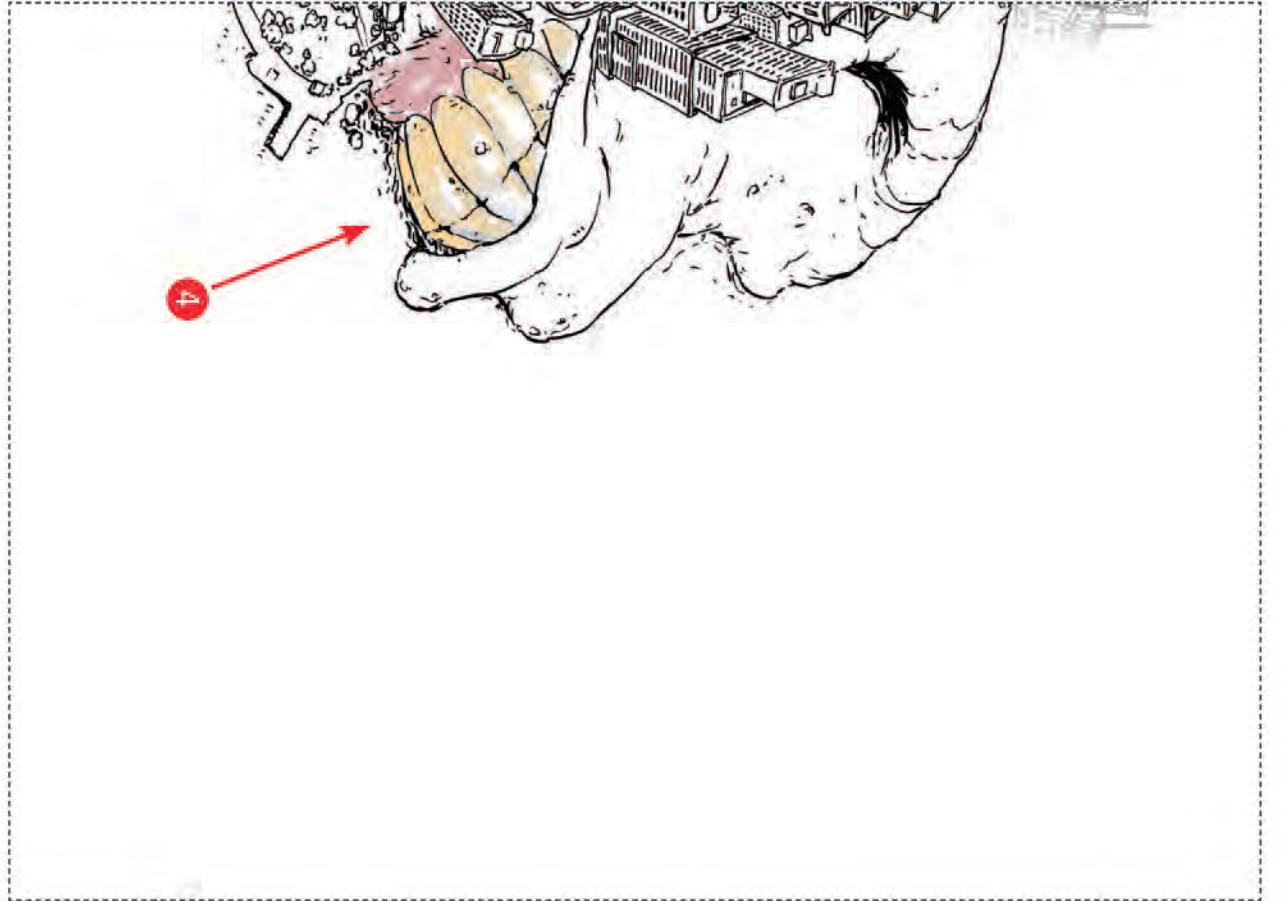
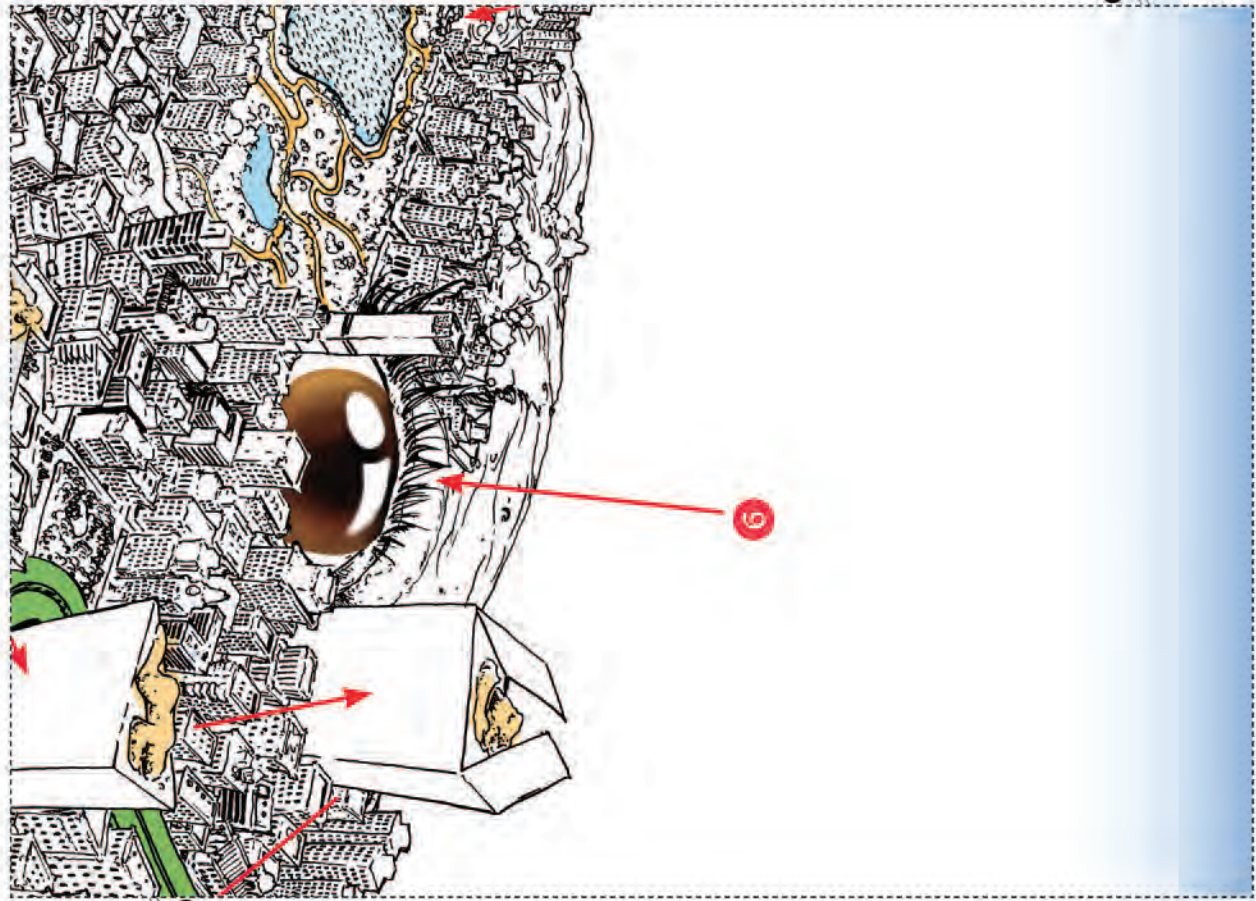
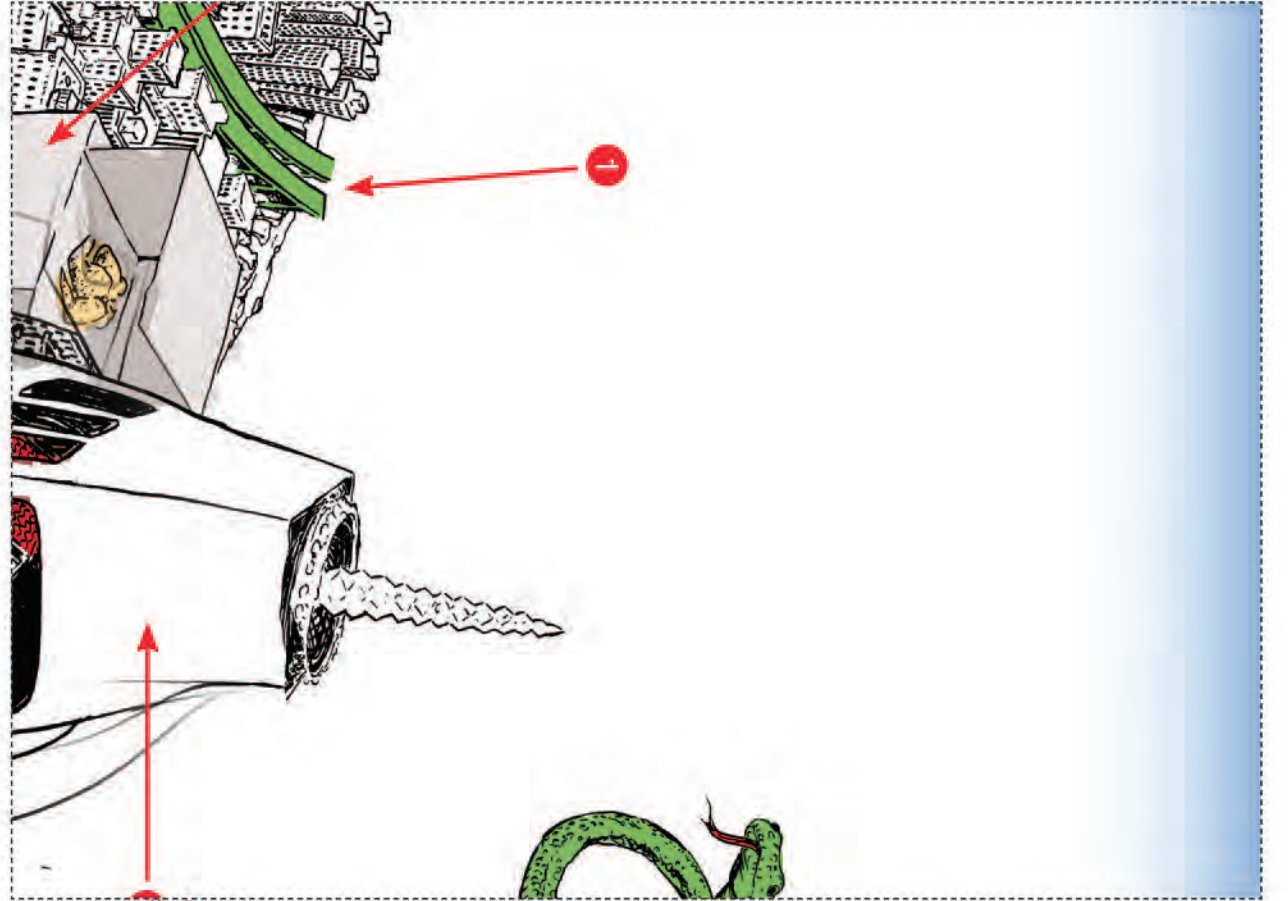
of modernism had been thoroughly exhausted.”⁵ The physical manner displayed by the buildings, flaunting arousal, strain and physical exhaustion opens up a perspective onto architecture that suggests an unconscious double life. Their constitution as erotic beings is correspondent to Lena’s treatment of architecture and sculpture as both not only hosting each other but as being emotionally and physically affecting. Her 2014 comic book, *Yes, I Am Pregnant* was produced in reaction to the invitation to create a new work for the collection of the Sculpture Museum in Marl, Germany. Inspired by the richness in public scul-

far back for Henke, recalling her upbringing next to a horse riding stable in rural Germany, blurring her pastoral origins with her new urban home. The horse motive is picked up frequently in the work, from her saddles and horse blankets in works like *Freeze Frame* (2014) to *Laundry Day* (2015), the detergent and milk bottle sculptures nestled in ceramic hoofs which are grotesquely distorted to the point that they begin to resemble vaginas, tenderly holding quarter coins between their lips – laundry money, one might assume.

The saying heralded on the emblem floating above the

island (#3) is taken from Dante Alighieri’s inscription onto the opening of a cave that bears the features of a monster with a wide-open mouth as its entrance in the *Sacro Bosco* Park in Bomarzo, in central Italy. The saying states, “Ogni pensiero vola”, meaning “Every thought flies away,” advocating a letting go of reason upon entering the park with its cast of grotesque monstrosities. The gardens, which were built in the 16th century according to the vision of Pier Francesco Orsini, lay forgotten and overgrown for centuries until they were rediscovered and treasured by amongst others Jean Cocteau and Salvador Dalí.

One of the creatures has also found its way into Henke’s map, (#8) guarding the north entrance to Frederick Law Olmsted’s Central Park, reminding us that as much as we would like to see our cities as places of communal decision-making, they were for the most part planned according to the visions and whimsies of individual men, Olmsted being just one of these, Robert Moses another. Henke makes nods to both men here, tracing the impact that the ideas of these two had for the city of New York. Frederick Law Olmsted through his concept of a central park (#10) that embedded handmade nature as a democratic and



civilizing force into the urban fabric and Robert Moses by restructuring the city's infrastructure with his curving park and expressways (#1), extensive bridges and endless rows of red brick tower blocks punctuated only by the occasional asphalt playground. It is the ability to restructure on a massive scale to build a system that will order and shape the way people navigate a place and relate to each other that draws Henke to these men. Coincidentally, it was Moses' BQE, the expressway that ruptures Brooklyn in such a severe manner, that was the site of the first manifestation of Henke's collaborative pro-

ject M/L Art Space, a spontaneous and itinerant curatorial collaboration with Marie Karlberg for which both artists assemble a group show for a one-night only appearance.

Separated from its context Henke's map floats like a massive spaceship in the air, like a model and not unlike Mike Kelley's *Educational Complex* (1995) a reconstruction of a space based on recollection alone, omitting some elements in favour of the aspects that burned themselves deep into memory over time. The table-top architectural model just like the cityscape is for both Kelley and Henke a site of

power. The artist as model master builder or mapmaker has the authority to shape space independent of municipal needs, logistics and funds. The map/model carries the potential of closeness and ownership of structures that are – because of their size and complexities – difficult to grasp in their entirety. Henke draws reference here to the models built by people who identify as objectophile – who develop strong feelings of love for, and are attracted to monuments and build structures. The affection is often based in the belief that objects have souls, feelings and are able to communicate, and the

hand made models function as stand ins, as transportable sites for their love. These maps and models are hybrids of sorts, or as Dan Graham would say, they are ways to experience architecture and the built environment without actually building it. They are intermediates that allow Henke to experience the city as an environment that is manipulatable and that can be shaped as much as it shapes us.

1. The film entitled *Flagrant Délit* was produced for French television and premiered in 1980.
2. Beatriz Colomina (ed.), *Sexuality & Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), p. 121.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Claire Bretécher, *Les frustrés* (5 albums, 1975-1980).
5. Madelon Vriesendorp in Klaus Leuschel, "Sex and the City? In architecture!", <http://www.architectonic.com/ntsht/sex-and-the-city-in-architecture/7000243>

With thanks to illustrator
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