

PRESS RELEASE

KATE HAWKINS  
**Harpies and Queens**

7 FEBRUARY - 10 MARCH 2007 OPENING RECEPTION WEDNESDAY 7 FEBRUARY 6.00 – 8.00 PM

Ritter/Zamet is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in the UK of Slade School of Art Masters graduate, Kate Hawkins.

Kate Hawkins is intrigued by social mores and graces: unspoken etiquette, unofficial codes of conduct and conventions that suffuse our daily engagements and interactions with others. Etiquette connects us on the most rudimentary of levels, yet it remains a behavioral veneer. These sacred social rules can generate a deeply disconcerting ambiguity between extremes of civilized restraint and latent savagery.

It is within this area that Kate Hawkins' artworks tread – stressing the physical and mental constraints that propriety demands through inhabiting social structures whilst simultaneously undermining them. Her performances and video pieces have pushed commonplace behavioral gestures to absurd extremes, forcing a routine physical action through an almost excruciating choreography of scrutiny and repetition. In *Eternal Peas* (2006) she eats a heaped plate of peas according to Debrett's *Guide to Etiquette and Modern Manners* (which insists on the prongs-down method of pea eating) one at a time over a period of four hours. *Pleased to Meet You* (2006) sees her turning the seemingly innocent "air-kiss" greeting into a hotbed of sexual tension and incidental intimacy as she continuously repeats the swinging cheek-to-cheek motion with a female collaborator at an ever-decreasing and then increasing momentum.

For her show at Ritter/Zamet, Hawkins is presenting the Harpies: derived in name from the mythological Greek monster – a winged bird-woman-hybrid scavenger, an angel-of-death and harbinger of misfortune – Hawkins' extensive series of paintings and drawings look to the surgically ravaged visages and carefully coded decorum of the grand dames of the beau monde. Inspired by images pulled from the social pages of glossy magazines such as *Harpers & Queen*, *Tatler* or *W*, Hawkins' Harpies represent the distance between an idealized version of beauty and luxury and the harsh realities of aging and spurious societal affectation. While the drawings detail these fragmentary faces with a fine graphite line and lightness of touch that suggests an etching-needle, the paintings quite literally explode the beauty myth, stretching and distorting the features with a barrage of brushstrokes. Acting as a visual manifestation of the multiplicity of layers that compose surface appearance, the Harpies seem to unveil the hidden facets of human nature with a clarity and directness that steers a path between horror, humour and empathy.

**RITTER/ZAMET**