

# DAMIEN & THE LOVE GURU

Jasmin Werner  
*Apparat Kleptokrat*

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There's a site specificity within Jasmin Werner's new work that operates as truth, ruse and foil. The personal and the local (the artist and the gallery) are deployed as rationales for existence and exhibition; yet seeming simplicities contain traps and mazes. The artist's familial connection to the Philippines and the gallery's location in Switzerland are a launching pad for an exploration of nonlinear history and the ongoing unsettled involvement with the massive government theft by the Marcos family from 1965 to their deposition by mass public political movement in 1986. Switzerland both stored the stolen money and initiated the family's reentry to the Philippines, perhaps indirectly supporting their rise back to the presidency today, as a requirement for releasing the stolen funds. Things that happen tend to happen again. Werner's basic setup then has a sly simplicity that echoes that of Switzerland's, a country with ingenious brand positioning contrary to reality where innocent cow farmers, neutrally and non-politically managing the world's wealth.

Werner's works complicate these connections as they extol them, rejecting dualistic comparative readings. The photographic Potemkin stages become playsets and backdrops, merging the locales of both countries and maybe entertaining ideas of Imelda's famous edifice complex. The sculptural elements are recognizable for their execution in the style of Swiss wooden souvenir figures, those usually depicting the branding mentioned above: farmers and animals. Here they're elements of a famous scene of the US airlifting the Marcos family to Hawaii in 1986: grifters, their endless suitcases full of loot and the fighter jets as escorts. That these pieces were made by traditional craftspeople in Southeast Asia, and not by the rural Swiss, is both a twist and a standard bearer. In both cases the local is created by the local, dream or reality, yet within we sense foreign interference. The Filipino-made Swiss toy, the Filipino rendered as a Swiss toy: categorically the same and different. Remember that Swiss banking secrecy laws were challenged and cracked by Filipino insistence on the return of their money. Things work both ways, back and forth and around each other. Within the work of Werner the commissioning of their creation forces shifting memory retention for the fabricator, the artist and the viewer in ways equal and diverse.

Sitting on the edge of mass production and handicraft the elements speak to the specific while being wide types. Elements and figures repeat, details change, we are toys across the spread of time. The most popular souvenirs always speak to consistency, the tchotchkes from Rome at grandma's house are nearly the same as the ones for sale now decades later. There's a dark honesty to the reminder that history repeats, but it is also crafted and created. Here, fate is recognized as make believe magic. If all of it seems specific to places and times, I'd argue instead that they're representative examples. It all looks local but looks outward into a global circle. That the Philippines and the US and Switzerland are wrapped up still isn't specific but exemplary of so much in a post-colonial, post-war situation where the individual is of almost no concern and things are sadly not abstract. What's here are souvenirs of history as much as of countries, rotating around each other as the viewer sits somewhere between backpacking tourist and resident.

— Mitchell Anderson