

## KIRAC Episode 25, Male Love

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I've been a fan of KIRAC for a long time, slightly longer than I've been doing TMAR. If they weren't a direct, conscious inspiration for my criticism, they are something of a role model in terms of their ability to analyze art in a way that's harsh, earnest, entertaining, and insightful, all qualities that the conventional outlets for criticism are apparently incapable, maybe even unconscious, of, which makes them easily my favorite contemporary critics. I often recall their [video on Jon Rafman and Anna Uddenberg](#) from 2016 for the way it precisely identified what always bothered me about those artists but from a perspective completely other from my own, which reoriented and clarified the way I thought about their art and those (now-dead) artistic trends. KIRAC's criticism is grounded in a psychoanalytic perspective, at least when they do it (they quickly grew out of straightforward criticism, except for their recent and frequently wonderful movie talks like [this one on \*The Scary of Sixty-First\*](#)), and indeed they seem more interested in the psychology of artists and the art world than art proper, using their platform to prod people with their "gonzo" style of filmmaking to see what happens. The result is often something akin to trolling, except that they're too smart and too embroiled with their subjects to warrant a comparison to aimlessly pissing people off online. Rather, the videos achieve an odd sense of realism, a reflection of the world back at itself at time when it seems almost impossible to grasp anything as it really is, and as a result these semi-performative semi-documentary intrusions into the art world become something that often feels more artistically potent and relevant, even "new", than what the vast majority of what the arts currently has to offer, whether one is in Amsterdam or New York. Anyway, this is supposed to be a review of their new episode.

I'm from Leonforte, up there, in the valley Demone, between Enna and Nicosia, I'm a landlord with three beautiful daughters, three girls, none prettier than the other, and I have a horse, on which I ride through my land and think of myself as a king, but it doesn't seem to me that there's everything there, being a king when I mount the horse, and I want to gain another consciousness, to feel different with something new in my mind, I'd give everything that I possess, the horse even, my land, to feel more at peace with the people like somebody who has nothing to reproach himself with. Not that I have anything particular to reproach me with. Not at all. And I won't talk any longer like in a church. But it's not like me, to be at peace with the people. I'd like to have a fresh conscience, one that demands me to accomplish other tasks, not those I'm used to, others, new tasks, higher tasks, towards the people, because after completing those habitual tasks there's no satisfaction, and one stays as if he hadn't done anything, displeased with himself, disappointed. I think that man is mature for another reason. Not only for not stealing, not killing, et cetera and for being a good citizen. I believe that he is mature for another thing, for other duties, new ones. It's this, that we feel, I think, the lack of other duties, other things to accomplish. Things to do for our conscience, in a new sense. - *Sicilia!*, dir. Straub-Huillet, 1999.

Watching Philip van den Hurk in this episode, the main subject of many KIRAC videos over the last three years, made me think of the speech above, except that he's apparently at ease with this existential dissatisfaction. Philip is a rich man who spends his days of retirement laying in bed, buying art. He claims that the art market is no different from other markets, but he also only buys art because he's interested in it, never as an investment, which feels like an evasion in two contradictory directions depending on the direction of questioning. He hasn't been finishing what he reads lately because it irritates him to be subjected to someone else's fantasy, it's better to write a book yourself. Most of what he says in the episode is dismissive and evasive: that art does not change one's mind, it just staves off boredom; that he's doing a legal science postdoctorate to amuse himself (a lie); that the other people at the dinner are "herd animals," unlike him, because he is rich (which is why he can dismiss everyone's inquiries, back out of a deal with his dealer, and then shrug off questions about his morality); that he lives off the backs of poor people, but at least he knows it, etc. But my point isn't to shame a rich person for being amoral, which goes without saying, and, to be fair, he's in a bad mood for most of the episode. Rather, the compelling phenomenon is the way in which he sees art as something beneath him precisely *because* he is someone with enough money that he can afford to buy (and sell) it. Like the near-commonplace that people in tech don't buy art because they see themselves as the real "avant-garde" and therefore don't appreciate art, the rich art collectors also belittle art because they see themselves as sovereign citizens that are above the petty concerns of everyone else, so they have no appreciation for what art can offer. Diederik Boomsma, bless his heart, tries to argue that KIRAC has a higher purpose of trying to reprogram Philip's brain, in the way that reading *Crime and Punishment* can reprogram your brain; but Philip isn't interested in reading. The rich don't need the world, so they don't need art.

This is where the brilliance of KIRAC comes in, because their artistic subject is the degraded state of art at the hands of the art world's middlebrow cynicism. Artists need an intellectual climate to thrive in; no great works of art or music or literature are going to arise out of an overstuffed and atomized horde of artists fighting over the scraps tossed to them by their wealthy benefactors who don't really care about any of it in the first place. Doubly so when artists try to pretend that things aren't as bad as they are, inevitably as an attempt at groveling to their masters. I mean that's how it seems to me, it's not like I know any collectors personally. From what he says it sounds like Philip wouldn't appreciate a new Joyce or a Proust, were it possible that they could emerge now, because the solipsism of wealth that disdains the fantasies of others rejects the premise that someone may have something to express that may enrich your own understanding of life. Thus the initial project that led to the current video: Philip and his dealer Paul van Esch want KIRAC to document their sale of a Paul McCarthy work to a museum; Paul is annoyed that the project is revolving around Philip, not the McCarthy. But KIRAC is exactly right to document Philip, not the artwork, which is funny but somewhat overblown and not particularly deserving of its own documentary. The subject is the deal, the flip of an ultimately inconsequential artwork to make the rich richer, and it's precisely due to the art world hubris of the dealer and collector that they don't understand KIRAC's focus. It's not "decent" to focus on the moneyed side of art, but that's only because the arts have fallen into such subservient disrepair that those with power have trouble remembering that good art isn't "decent." And really, what did they expect? They know KIRAC and have surely seen at least some of their videos. Did they really think they'd step in line to make a banal, breathless video that would dumb down the vulgarity of the McCarthy piece to the level of the museum's rhetoric, that an animatronic dog fucking a cowboy in the eye "takes on the cliché of the macho cowboy"? The members of KIRAC may be cynical but they are, crucially, not middlebrow, which comes to the point I want to make: The entire purpose of consuming art, the self-cultivation involved in grappling with great works, is to come to a place of self-consciousness that allows one to break out of the stultifying meaningless of the world from a perspective that does more than accept things as given. Blindly following trends as a bid for relevance, certainly the norm in New York, is the guarantee of irrelevance, but you can't avoid that without the development of some basic fucking intelligence to grow out of being a "herd animal" and come up with an idea or two. It's to try to find new, higher tasks, to show the world as it is and has never been, which is always a disruptive, risky, and usually impolite undertaking. And KIRAC, unlike nearly everything else these days, has the presence of mind to be disruptive, risky, and impolite.

This is only the first installment of a much longer series, and although I'm excited to see where it goes, it's barely just begun, so there's not much left for me to say about it except that I'm sure it will be good. As a reward for reading to the end, you can email "TMAR" to [kiracfilms@gmail.com](mailto:kiracfilms@gmail.com) to get a link to the film.

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