

“Comfort Me,  
Said He,”

RECENT WORK  
BY KRISTEN LOWE

SEPTEMBER 12 THROUGH NOVEMBER 6, 2011



Hillstrom Museum of Art

## Director's Notes

Kristen Lowe's drawings in this exhibition are compelling images that readily combine fascinating thematic resonances with a wide range of artistic and cultural works.

The inscrutable darks in the backgrounds of this suite of large drawings function as more than just empty space or contrasting color that sets off the animals (and, in some cases, men) in the middle ground. They add a level of intensity, of meaning, perhaps even of menace, and one is drawn to them again and again, peering through the inky darkness as if seeking answers.

Lowe's foregrounds, in contrast, appear like grids of logical space that gird the mind against the abyss to which they lead.

Between those two extremes, in the middle ground, are all those sheep, offering a rest for the eyes and the mind, in addition to their iconic meaning as a source of warm woolly comfort.

And what a loaded image that animal is! Sheep are sacrificial creatures, less harsh than the scapegoat but still pitiable, trussed up at the feet awaiting slaughter in Francesco de Zurbarán's *Agnus Dei* (c.1636-1640). Earlier, in the late Classical and early Christian era, they are carried on the shoulders of a loving shepherd, in Roman catacomb sculpture and paintings depicting Christ, or huddled with him for protection in a Byzantine mosaic in the fifth-century Byzantine mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, recalling the passage in the Gospel of Matthew about the shepherd who searches for a single lost sheep and rejoices greatly when it is recovered.

Sheep appear in Pre-Raphaelite paintings such as Ford Madox Brown's 1851-1859 *Pretty Baa Lambs* in which they are admired by an innocent babe and its governess, or as victims of the neglect of a not-so-innocent *Hireling Shepherd* in William Holman Hunt's 1851 painting, in which the young man woos a tempting woman instead of keeping his flock from eating harmful plants.

In *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), the young sheep symbolize innocence destroyed by a harsh world, and the film's protagonist is tormented by childhood memories of her inability to save lambs from slaughter. Then there is contemporary artist Damien Hirst's lamb (in his 1994 *Away From the Flock*) that was not only slaughtered but also pickled in formaldehyde and displayed as if to hold the audience as witness.

In Lowe's drawings, the ovine image connects with this symbolic and visual tradition. As she notes in her Artist Statement, she is interested in the "metaphorical and mythical potential of the relationship between the domestic flock and their keepers." She cites as an influence on these works the minimalism and austerity of the cinematography of Sven Nykvist in Ingmar Bergman's films, noting how so much feeling can be charted in a single shot. She also cites, from the history of painting, the work of Dutch master Rembrandt, noting the empathy of the artist in paintings such as his *Lucrezia* (1666) in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and praising Rembrandt's ability to balance human feeling with form and technique.

In her own works for this exhibition, Lowe wonderfully combines deep but ambiguous feeling—are the sheep comforted by each other or by their male shearers, do they experience distress or fright, what has happened and what is about to happen?—with technically impressive, compelling draftsmanship.

Lowe will discuss her work during public gallery talks in the exhibition on September 17, 2011, at 1:30 and 3:00 p.m. We thank her for sharing these beautiful, haunting works with us.

Donald Myers  
Director  
Hillstrom Museum of Art

OPPOSITE

**Comfort Me,  
Said He, No. 2,**  
(detail)

2010  
Charcoal on paper  
72 x 42 inches



Hillstrom Museum of Art



## Artist Statement

My interest in creating large-scale drawings of sheep began when I was teaching a comparative anatomy course. I took students on location to the sheep barn on the campus of the University of Minnesota. As I began to visit this location more frequently, my interest in the metaphorical and mythical potential of the relationship between the domestic flock and their keepers grew, and I've raised these questions in this suite of drawings.

I became fascinated by what happens formally and the sensation that occurs within a heightened paradoxical space of description (fact) and invention (fiction). Are these sheep coming or going? What is about to happen; what has happened? Where and when did this or will this take place? The perceived illusion of space and time in these drawings must remain negotiable and psychologically ambiguous. Much like the characteristics of a myth, the symbolic forms of the sheep and their keeper often express inner conflict and discord. In this way the images prompt questions about social and political conditions, and about philosophies of cultural values. There is no defined narrative for the viewer, but the images suggest, ever so softly, many possible outcomes.

Kristen Lowe

## Dance Performance

In conjunction with *"Comfort Me, Said He," Recent Work by Kristen Lowe*, a dance work will be presented, created collaboratively by Melissa Rolnick of the Department of Theatre and Dance, and Renee Guittar, senior dance major. Titled *Excess* and danced by Guittar, it is a site-specific, emotionally-provocative solo dance choreographed in response to Lowe's works and exhibit, set to the music of jazz bass saxophonist Colin Stetson. *Excess* will be presented in the Museum twice, September 12, 2011 at 7:30 p.m. (at the exhibition's opening reception) and October 4, 2011 at 6:30 p.m. (at a reception during the 2011 Nobel Conference of Gustavus Adolphus College).



***Alpha Male***

2009

White chalk on black tag board

40 x 30 inches



***Comfort Me, Said He, No. 3***

2010  
Charcoal on paper  
42 x 72 inches

OPPOSITE  
Detail





***Mother and Child, No. 1***

2009

White chalk on black tag board

40 x 30 inches



***Mother and Child, No. 3***  
2010  
Charcoal on paper  
42 x 72 inches

***Oh, For  
The Love  
of God***  
**No. 1**  
2009  
Charcoal  
on paper  
72 x 42  
inches





*Oh, For  
The Love  
of God  
No. 2*  
2009  
Charcoal  
on paper  
72 x 42  
inches



***Oh, For The Love Of God, No. 3***  
2010  
Charcoal on paper  
42 x 76 inches





“COMFORT ME, SAID HE,” RECENT WORK BY KRISTEN LOWE

***Praying Sheep***

2010

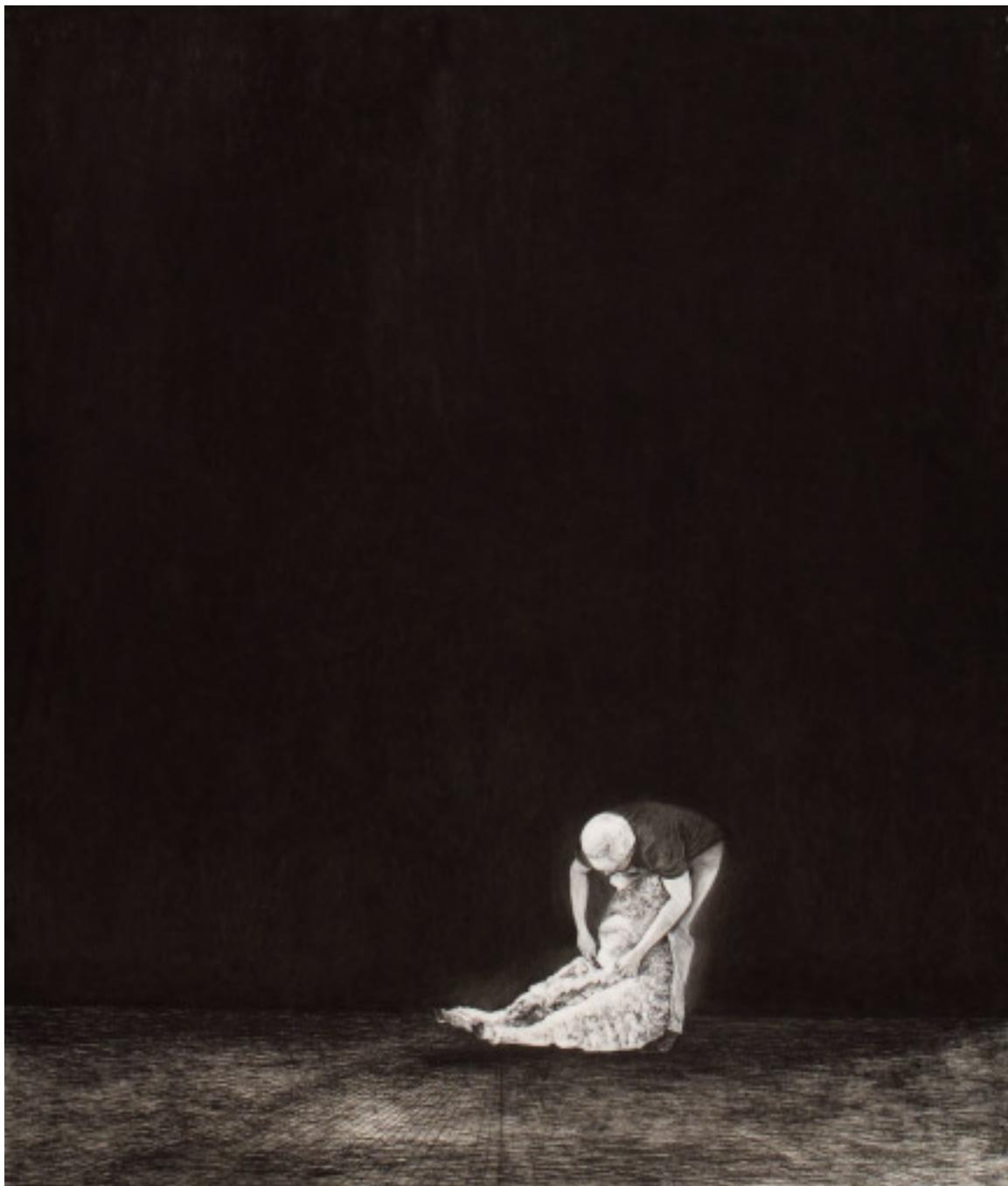
White chalk on black tag board  
30 x 40 inches



***The Results  
Were Always  
Perfect***  
2010  
Charcoal  
on paper  
72 x 42 inches

***She Was  
Happy  
To Know  
He Was  
Morally  
Flexible***  
2009  
Charcoal  
on paper  
72 x 42  
inches





***They Loved Each Other Deeply***  
2009  
Charcoal on paper  
72 x 52 inches

***They Loved  
Each Other  
Deeply***  
(detail)  
2009  
Charcoal  
on paper  
72 x 52  
inches



# Checklist

|  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| <b>Alpha Male</b> , 2009<br>White chalk on black tag board<br>40 x 30 inches                           | Page 5                       |
| <b>Comfort Me, Said He, No. 1</b> , 2010<br>Charcoal on paper<br>72 x 42 inches                        |                              |
| <b>Comfort Me, Said He, No. 2</b> , 2010<br>Charcoal on paper<br>72 x 42 inches                        | Page 3,<br>detail back cover |
| <b>Comfort Me, Said He, No. 3</b> , 2010<br>Charcoal on paper<br>42 x 72 inches                        | Page 6,<br>detail page 7     |
| <b>Mother and Child, No. 1</b> , 2009<br>White chalk on black tag board<br>40 x 30 inches              | Page 8                       |
| <b>Mother and Child, No. 3</b> , 2010<br>Charcoal on paper<br>42 x 72 inches                           | Page 9                       |
| <b>Oh, For The Love of God No. 1</b> , 2009<br>Charcoal on paper<br>72 x 42 inches                     | Page 10                      |
| <b>Oh, For The Love of God No. 2</b> , 2009<br>Charcoal on paper<br>72 x 42 inches                     | Page 11                      |
| <b>Oh, For The Love Of God, No. 3</b> , 2010<br>Charcoal on paper<br>42 x 76 inches                    | Page 12                      |
| <b>Praying Sheep</b> , 2010<br>White chalk on black tag board<br>30 x 40 inches                        | Page 14                      |
| <b>The Results Were Always Perfect</b> , 2010<br>Charcoal on paper<br>72 x 42 inches                   | Page 15                      |
| <b>She Was Happy To Know<br/>He Was Morally Flexible</b> , 2009<br>Charcoal on paper<br>72 x 42 inches | Page 16                      |
| <b>They Loved Each Other Deeply</b> , 2009<br>Charcoal on paper<br>72 x 52 inches                      | Page 17,<br>detail page 18   |

BACK COVER  
**Comfort Me,  
Said He, No. 2**  
(detail)  
2010  
Charcoal on paper  
72 x 42 inches



Hillstrom Museum of Art

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