

## BULL FEVER

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*Bull Fever* (2011) consists of two portraits drawn in pencil and graphite, each encircled by a sculpted frame. The work fuses Fowler's practices as both trained sculptor and draftsman. The resin frame extends the flat two-dimensional object into the space of the viewer stood before it. In this process, the artwork strays across the independent and related relationships between sculpture and drawing, asking how the apparently separate disciplines can meet and react.

The frames of *Bull Fever* provide a tactile and surface dimension to the work, based largely on entangled, curving figures cast in resin and polished to a high gleam. The upper surface detail reveals figures caught in agony, blindfolded and contorting, but with the lower surface giving way to a dark and rough nebulosity. One of the two drawings depicts a male staring off-centre. His bloodied cheek is wiped clean by the hands of an unknown figure. The decorative embellishment of the central figure's clothing, as well as the faces in the crowd behind him, give away its original context as a scene from a bull fight: he is the wounded matador.

Many artists and writers have been transfixed by the ceremony of bull fighting. Ernest Hemingway, for instance, spoke of the bullfight as the "only place where you could see both life and death, i.e. violent death" in a 1932 interview with the *New York Times*. As the matador stands fixed in the face of the rushing bull, he represents a rebellion against mortality, rising up against certain demise to assume a godlike omnipotence and deliver death to another being. In the stylishly excessive violence of the bullfight, this represents a form of beauty. By forcing the body into extreme postures, the matador discloses the elegance of the body at its limits.

As with *Valentino's Funeral* (2009), the focus of Fowler's work might be read as the idealisation of beauty and the extremes that are often travelled in order to achieve it. And if the surest way to present beauty is by forcing the physical form to the edge of its abilities, then the violence of the frame's interlocking figures, with their agonised and trapped vitality, contributes to its representation. Bound and blindfolded, these forms radiate the tension and poise of the bullfight itself, operating in parallel to the sudden hushed silence shared by the crowd at the crucial moment. The result here is a union of form and concept, of image and physicality.

The second portrait depicts a female figure. Her off-centre gaze and bloodied face echo the first portrait, and both are in fact images based on stills from films. The male study — subtitled *Bull (Fever)* — references archive footage acquired by the artist of wounded matadors. (*Bull*) *Fever* — the female component — depicts the actress Loretta Young in *Heroes For Sale* (William A. Wellman, 1933). There is a playfulness and spontaneity in Fowler's decision to conjoin these two images from disparate sources. The product of a wholly visual activity, their placement in the form of a diptych allows for unassuming reflection on the form and concepts of the images. Quite

apart from the echoed gaze and facial wound, the images share a representation of beauty, glamour and tragedy: recurring themes in Fowler's oeuvre. The wounded female on the ground could offer something by way of a feminist critique of the traditional notion of the matador as the epitome of masculinity. It's tempting to read the female in turn as the bull, the lost and forgotten sacrifice to the pursuit of male prowess and beauty.

Text featured in *Measuring Elvis*, 2015