

THE

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Man Holds a Car, 2009, black pencil on paper, 29" x 23". Courtesy Merry Karnowsky Gallery.

Mercedes Helnwein is a triple threat: besides making increasingly large waves with her drawings and occasional paintings of oddly disaffected young women and men, she has splashed as well with her short films of similar subjects and, especially, with her fiction/nonfiction/not-quite-fiction writing, to the point where Simon & Schuster, no less, has published her first novel. It all sounds

so lovely and smart-young-thingy, but Helnwein has the chops to produce genuinely provocative work, to do so seriously, and to keep doing so. She comes by such talent, and such sensitivity to the disquieting, genetically and geographically; daughter of Austrian hyper-realist painter-provocateur Gottfried Helnwein and sister to filmmakers and musicians, Mercedes was born in Vienna, raised in Ireland, and (with her family) now splits her time between the Emerald Isle and La-La Land. Drawing on sources and inspirations as diverse as R. Crumb, nineteenth-century Russian literature, and the Delta blues, Helnwein coaxes the ominous out of the banal — and vice versa — by finding madness and vulnerability in losers, wannabes, and twentysomething slackers whose affectless poses ill-mask their anxiety. Helnwein renders these lost souls with a technical proficiency just slightly less than elegant so that her style, like her subjects, subtly reveals its imbalances and inner tenderness — like Hopper but hipper. —PF