

SVERRE MALLING: AT THE MISTRESS' REQUEST

Art, art featured

Sverre Malling's drawings are built on the idea that history is never settled. In *At the Mistress' Request*, his new exhibition at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, the Norwegian artist presents a series of large charcoal works that treat the past as something flexible rather than fixed. Art history, in Malling's hands, becomes a space for reworking, questioning and reinterpretation.



The drawings are made with great technical skill and control, but their subjects are often disturbing. Malling shifts easily between careful portraiture and scenes of violence or unease. In *Torje*, a finely drawn male figure appears both confident and exposed, suggesting a quiet reflection on modern masculinity. Elsewhere, impaled animals and strange hybrid creatures introduce a darker mood, unsettling the calm precision of the drawing.

Much of the exhibition draws on Malling's interest in overlooked or marginal cultural histories. References to major figures such as Dürer, Vermeer and Fuseli sit alongside echoes of British Romanticism, Symbolism and folklore. Rather than quoting these sources directly, Malling layers them, allowing different visual traditions to overlap within the same image.



These collisions raise broader questions about how art history is shaped: which artists and images are celebrated, and which are pushed aside. Malling's recent engagement with English visual culture appears throughout the exhibition, from Gothic ruins reminiscent of Romantic painting to the polished surfaces of salon art. In one work, a ruined Volkswagen sits beneath a crumbling castle; in another, the intimacy of academic painting is disturbed by references to 1970s erotica.



Despite its many historical references, *At the Mistress' Request* avoids nostalgia. Malling does not try to resolve the tensions he sets up. Old and new, innocence and cruelty, beauty and discomfort exist side by side. The result is an exhibition that feels thoughtful and open-ended, inviting viewers to reflect on the instability of history and the stories images continue to tell.

At the Mistress' Request is on view at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London, from 9 January to 7 February 2026.

words Alisha Wakim

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