

SIX

JAKE: I'll have you know I am irresistible to people of both sexes and all genders. I'm always getting people on Instagram telling me I should be a model or something.

WILL: That's because they can't smell you online. You'd be a rubbish model. Unless you were the before, in a before-and-after advert for something.

JAKE (off): I would be amazing at it, actually.

JAKE starts walking an imaginary runway across the width of the room.

JAKE: Walk walk walk, bit more casual, hands in pockets—

WILL: Good job. You've obviously not bothered washing them.

JAKE: Down to the end, stop, drop the shoulder and turn, fold the arms, hold the look, give it some chiselled face—

WILL: Your face looks like someone went at it with a hammer, not a chisel.

JAKE: No, Will. I am beautiful.

WILL: If you say so, Christina Aguilera. But you couldn't cope with being a model. It'd be too much like hard work. And besides — it's painful, Jakey... Very painful. Hours at the gym. Tugging at your hair. Scrubbing at your skin. Just imagine what might happen if you came into contact with soap and water... It'd be like the Wicked Witch of the West.

JAKE: It'd all be worth it. Because I'm worth it.

WILL: Would it, Jake? Would it, really?

WILL jumps up as additional seats are brought in. A microphone is thrust into WILL's hand. Seven CONCEPTUAL ARTISTS stride in and take seats around the space, surrounding JAKE.

JAKE: Who are all these people, Will?

WILL: And so the time has almost come to name the very first winner — of this sensational new contemporary arts prize — the GESICHTvonKUNST! — hashtag #GvK!

Coloured lights swirl and a banner is revealed — perhaps digitally — which says "GESICHTvonKUNST! — The FACE of ART" on it.

JAKE: Are we allowed to say the word "Kunst"...?

WILL: The seven shortlisted artists who are all here with us tonight have created pieces which attempt to capture the ultimate image of Beauty. To do that, they have each taken exactly the same inspiration as their starting point. Allow me to introduce you all to Nuvola!

WILL directs everyone's attention to a spotlight — but there's nobody in it.

TATIANNA: She'll be here later. She's involved in my presentation.

WAYNE: Eh? Who said you could do that? Nobody said we could do anything tonight. Ah, man, this is all bollocks! It's a fix—

WILL: Each artist or collective has had time to study Nuvola and respond to her before creating and presenting their finished artworks which we will see unveiled tonight.

WAYNE: Yeah, did you all hear that? "Finished artworks."

WILL: Nuvola is their model, muse and raw material. She is their GESICHTvonKUNST. She is The FACE of ART! Let's meet the artists and hear from them what they've been up to.

More swirling coloured lights. WILL finds a spot amongst the group. Black-clad waiting staff bring in champagne.

MADMAX: Well, I'll start! Hi, everyone, I'm Madeleine Maxwell, otherwise known as MADMAX. I specialise in Steampunk, Victoriana and the Gothic. I'm really interested in exploring the idea of the liminal woman, and all these canonical tropes around femininity, abjection and the *unheimlich*.

JAKE: She what? Is she talking in art wank?

The CONCEPTUAL ARTISTS all turn to fix JAKE with a murderous look.

MADMAX: I'm also really keen to make my practice really accessible to ordinary people and teenagers on Instagram, so I like to wear lots of stripy tights and stick pictures of cogs and clock wheels onto everything.

JESSICA #1: Hi, I'm Jessica.

JESSICA #2: Hi, I'm also Jessica.

JESSICA #3: Hi, I'm Jessica as well.

JESSICA #1, #2 and #3 (together): And together we form Stable Triad.

JESSICA #3: Which is actually also part of a much larger artist collective, erm, called "Twenty Girls Called Jessica".

JESSICA #2: Which is pretty self-explanatory.

JESSICA #1: The three of us first met when we were undergoing rehab for our various addictions: tranquilisers, in my case—

JESSICA #2: Cocaine, for me! Soz, guilty!

JESSICA #3: And plain old weed for me.

JESSICA #1: But it wasn't really working for us, so we decided to leave and carry on using but just, like, look out for each other.

JESSICA #2: And we all realised we were all poly, so that was great, and realised we were all artists, which was great.

JESSICA #3: So basically now we just live together, take drugs together, sleep together, and make really important conceptual art.

WAYNE: I'm Wayne Parish. And this is my brother, Abel. We are The Artists Known As Wayne And Abel. And we don't normally do live stuff like this.

JAKE: Why not?

WAYNE: Why not?! Because I get really pissed off listening to the shit statements and shit theories that come out of this lot's mouths,

and Abel just gets overwhelmed and needs a Ribena, that's why. Ah, I'm not going through all this again — just read the press release or talk to our agent, yeah?

ABEL: Wayne... I'm a bit overwhelmed. I need a Ribena.

TATIANNA: I am Tatianna von Wienerwald, I'm originally from Austria but since five years I am working here in the UK. I trained originally as a doctor, specialising in anatomy and physiology, and now my body of work — I speak literally like this of my “body” of work — it looks at the art that takes place inside of us all, so, bodily processes, structures, and celebrating, you know, the body's strengths but also its weaknesses, is basically what I do, yes.

WILL: And with £200,000 at stake — equivalent to eight Turner Prizes — what would you do with the money if you won?

MADMAX: I would spend it on vintage things and black eyeliner.

JESSICA #1: We'd probably give some to homeless charities—

JESSICA #2: —some to Jeremy Corbyn—

JESSICA #3: —and the rest we'd swallow, smoke or snort between us.

WAYNE: It's none of your bloody business what we'd spend the money on! Do I ask you what you do with your poxy wages from your piece of shit channel nobody watches?

TATIANNA: The money... Yes... It's not so important, for me, I don't think, what is super-important is the chance to really explore this idea of the GESICHTvonKUNST, you know, like, how to literally transform Nuvola's face into the actual GESICHTvonKUNST. So for me, in these last days, I am really thinking about this a lot. The Kunst, and her Gesicht. That's the art, and her face, in German.

WILL: I think it's high time we saw the first of the art works in contention for the prize...!

MADMAX: Me! Start with me!

Stagehands bring in a very large picture draped in a sheet.

MADMAX: So because I'm so heavily into Gothic and Steampunk and Victoriana, I wear a lot of corsets, obvs. But like, usually, over the top of a nice dress, so everybody gets to see them. But then it got me thinking about all the women who *didn't* get to wear them for pleasure, who were subjected to the prison of corsets by men who essentially wanted to contextualise them as patriarchal property and subjugate their sexuality and also make

them look nice and thin. And so what I ended up making was
this—

MADMAX brandishes a frightening-looking corset.

MADMAX: Essentially, it reinforces the traditional corset design with twenty-first century titanium technology, and enabled me to shrink Nuvola's waist to a narrowness which could only have been dreamt of in Victorian times.

WILL: Dazzlingly ingenious.

JAKE: That gap looks tiny! It's only about as big as a McMuffin!

MADMAX: My artistic aim was, basically, to pull the strings so tight that her waist ended up the exact circumference of an English muffin, which was a very popular teatime food amongst the Victorians in the Victorian era.

WILL: Thrillingly authentic. So let's see how you got on!

The picture is unveiled to reveal a close-up on NUVOLA's face — pained, eyes rolled back, mascara-stained, purple through lack of oxygen, tongue protruding.

JAKE: Shiiiiiiiiit...

MADMAX: I made some big measuring callipers with different sized Victorian food products on them so we could see how we were progressing. We powered through the penny loaf, caraway seed cake and fancy jelly mould. At the marrow, we started to struggle, and very sadly, we only made it as far as the circumference of a crumpet before she passed out. Does that make me ineligible for the prize?

JESSICA #2 gets up and inspects the picture more closely.

JESSICA #2: Hold on a minute... I think that picture's a fake! Jessica ends up overdosing all the time—

JAKE (to JESSICA #3): On weed?

JESSICA #1: No! Me! On my pills!

JESSICA #2: Believe me, I know the colour of someone who's close to dying! That's not it! All that purple on her face is make-up!

MADMAX: No, it's not! That's an outrageous slander!

JESSICA #2: Look! It's the same colour as the eyeshadow she's got on now! Look at it!

JESSICA #1: We'll show you an authentic piece of art. We don't need to fake anything!

Another stagehand brings in another huge draped picture.

JESSICA #1: We asked ourselves: Who is Nuvola?

JESSICA #2: What is Nuvola?

JESSICA #3: Why is Nuvola?

JESSICA #1: Where is the art in Nuvola's face? Where is the Kunst that would make her the GESICHTvonKUNST?

JESSICA #3: We realised that the secret lies in Nuvola's beautiful cloud of hair. Basically, we wanted to show off the beauty of that face, highlight it—

JESSICA #2: —pun intended—

JESSICA #3: —by making her hair the place where art happens.

WILL: You're neutralising your competitors!

The picture is unveiled to reveal a close-up on NUVOLA's head — hair frazzled, frayed, wild, tangled, multi-coloured, her eyes delirious, manic.

JESSICA #3: So in this durational piece entitled “Hair / Dye”, we put Nuvola’s hair through a constant transformation. For over thirty hours, we continually applied over-the-counter home hair colourings which we rebranded with powerful names—

JESSICA #2: —like Stuffed Raven and Jumped-On Conker—

JESSICA #1: —and then as soon as each one was on, we bleached it out with simple supermarket house-cleaning bleach, and then we picked a new one and started again. We knew if we kept going long enough, Nuvola’s hair would literally start to die.

JESSICA #3: So there’s a play on words there, on dye, D-Y-E, and die, D-I-E. It’s all a commentary on how women in society are dyeing their hair to look beautiful but also a little bit of them is dying as they try to make themselves feel beautiful.

HOST: Genuinely un-be-weavable.

JESSICA #1: But just after thirty hours in, the fumes all got a bit too much and she passed out. Genuinely passed out.

JESSICA #2: I wanted to do one more colour on her just quickly before we called the ambulance, but Jessica said no.

WAYNE: This is all just a load of old shit! Dressing somebody up in pretty clothes? Bleaching somebody's head and ragging it out their head? Come on, man — I did all that to Abel when I was twelve and he was ten.

JESSICA #2: Yes! In your debut work, "Girl's World / Boy's World"! It's a seminal influence on us and our practice!

WAYNE: Oh, you liked it, did you? You know your art history, girls, then, eh? Well, don't come out here copying some of our best stuff and expecting me to keep my mouth shut, will you, you stuck-up bunch of crack-head smack-head pot-head piss-taking jokers!

The JESSICAS sit down, devastated that their idol has turned on them.

WAYNE: Get our picture out here. And get that sheet of it, for a start.

Another stagehand brings in an immense picture. It is a collage of images, including a huge central one of NUVOLA being revived by a medical team.

WAYNE: So — this is the end result of our live video piece, "Russet Roulette." With cameras trained on the both of them, Abel and Nuvola sat either side of a Lazy Susan with six apples on it. At the start of the piece, I injected one apple with a very big dose of potassium cyanide. One by one, they took turns to choose an apple and take a great big bite out of it. If they got a good one,

they'd be safe. If they found the bad apple... Well... We had paramedics on standby.

ABEL: I was ready.

WAYNE: I don't think she was. But it was her turn to start. She gave it a spin. And I told her to pick an apple. She bit into it. And she was fine! Five left.

ABEL: My turn! I gave it a really big spin, didn't I, Wayne? And when it stopped, I grabbed the first apple I saw and I bit it and I was fine so there were four left and it was her turn!

WAYNE: Nuvola was understandably getting more nervous now. She didn't want to spin it. So I grabbed her by the wrist and I made her spin it. And through the mist of her own tears, she reached out a trembling hand and picked up an apple and bit it... And she was fine. Three left.

ABEL: My turn! I gave it a massive spin this time, didn't I, Wayne?

WAYNE: You did! It was like you were on Wheel Of Fortune!

ABEL: And this time when it stopped, I grabbed *two* apples, not one, and I took a bite out the first one, crunch!, and a bite out of the

second one, crunch!, and Nuvola screamed, but I was absolutely fine and so now it was her turn again!

WAYNE: Just the one apple left now! Oh dear oh dear...

JAKE: And you made her eat it? The one with the poison in? You're a psycho, mate, d'you know that? The pair of you!

WAYNE: No! She got herself so worked up, she ran away from the table, tripped over the camera cables and knocked herself out. The last apple is here with us tonight!

WAYNE produces an apple and breaks it in two. WAYNE and ABEL each eat a half. Everyone panics, screams, swarms over them — all except TATIANNA.

VARIOUS: Get an ambulance! / Spit it out! / Don't swallow it! / Get them some water! / Do the Heimlich manoeuvre on them!

WILL: Is there a doctor in the house?

TATIANNA: Yes. Me. And I don't think anybody needs to call an ambulance... Do they, Wayne?

The group parts and WAYNE comes forward to confront TATIANNA.

WAYNE: Why d'you say that?

TATIANNA: Because you wouldn't eat no apple full of poison, and you wouldn't let your brother eat no poisoned apple neither! It's all a stunt! A piece of showmanship! A little magic trick!

ABEL: No! It's a metaphor! For the male gaze!

JAKE: Oh... I thought they were brothers...?

WAYNE: Everyone's gaze, Abel! Male, Female and Other! You all did that to her. Not us! You wanted to watch, didn't you? Pretty girl, dicing with danger. You couldn't resist tuning in to see what'd happen. Even now, you're gagging to come closer and see the expression on her face when she thought she was gonna die! So here it is — come and have a good look! Better still, for twenty grand, you can take it home with you! We are The Artists Known As Wayne And Abel. Now fuck off.

WILL: Sensational, boys... Sensational...

WAYNE: You, 'n' all. Fuck off.

ABEL: Wayne... I'm a bit overwhelmed. Can I have a Ribena?

WAYNE: And where's your piece, anyway, Tatianna? Bring yours out and we can all sit and pick holes in that, shall we?

TATIANNA: Yes. Alright. But keep it covered for now, please, yes?

A stagehand brings out the last of the giant pictures, draped in a sheet again.

TATIANNA: To truly understand what the GESICHTvonKUNST would look like, I have been watching like a hawk the works produced by my fellow artists. Nuvola has been squashed almost to death in a corset, she has been hairstyled almost to death with hair dye, and she has been scared almost to death by no more than a plate of apples — and! — in realising this, I realised where my competitors' work has been leading me to go. It is this “almost” that has prevented Nuvola from reaching the pinnacle of perfection in art. Because her body, her mind, the muscles of her heart and synapses of her brain have not yet been pushed beyond this place of “almost” death. Until tonight. Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of them all? It's Nuvola!

With a great flourish, TATIANNA tears the sheet from her picture. NUVOLA's face is just about to be submerged under water. She is looking directly into the camera and she is utterly consumed and crazed with despair.

WAYNE (to ABEL): Shit. We've lost this already, I'm telling you now.

TATIANNA: Take a good look at her! Naturally, so very beautiful — but I wanted her to see herself looking more beautiful than she ever

thought possible! So into a tank I placed her, and at my command, the tank began to fill with water! Even after all you had done to her, at that stage, Nuvola still believed like any sensible human being that the water would actually be turned off, just as the corset laces got cut, the hair dyeing stopped and the paramedics came. But it was only by removing all possibility of rescue that this “almost” experience could become the real thing for Nuvola.

JAKE: You did it! You actually left her in there to drown!

DOC: Indeed, yes — and this is where the mirrors came in so handy. Because it was not enough for Nuvola to feel that these were her last moments or even to somehow know this — the most important thing was for her to be able to see it for herself — for her to look in the mirrors all around and to see that the water was coming and coming and coming and not stopping and to see for herself that she was not “almost” going to die but she actually was going to! And there it is! There it is!

ABEL: Oh, Wayne... I told you we should have killed her.

MADMAX: That look, on her face! It's the—

TATIANNA: The FACE of ART! The GESICHTvonKUNST!

Applause as a giant cheque is presented to TATIANNA and flashbulbs go off.

The stage readjusts. The ARTISTS, the pictures and the furniture melt away.