

frieze

Ida Ekblad

Gaudel de Stampa, Paris, France

'Febermalerier', Ida Ekblad's first solo show in Paris, is something of a departure for the young artist. Instead of satirical appropriations of American youth and gangster cultures (an example of which, *Untitled (M)*, 2008, is in the New Museum's current 'Younger than Jesus' survey), Ekblad offers seven densely expressionistic oil paintings, three colourful welded metal sculptures and a poem. There is a whiff of northern romanticism to the exhibition: the paintings are reminiscent of Asger Jorn, and the poem Ekblad penned in place of a press release, *Feberdikt* (2009), takes its title from Knut Hamsun. And yet one registers no disjunction from her earlier practice - even though on paper one probably should.

The largest, most obviously (or apparently) heroic painting, *Hyberborea* (2009), the title of which comes from a 1983 Tangerine Dream album, is more than eight feet across and presents a range of expressionist gestures, from stains and scratches to various loops and knots, and occasional patches of thicker, built-up paint. The colour is acidic but lovely. There are a lot of blues, with browns and near-blacks punctuated by coruscating yellows, whites, oranges and greens. Ekblad has left a significant amount of the unprimed canvas showing, especially along the edges, which re-asserts the figure-ground relationship, intensifying the colour by providing a tonal background, against which it explodes.



Of particular interest is the way aspects of *Hyberborea* are reiterated, and frequently modulated, throughout the exhibition. There is, for example, a recurring linear element, a looping, twisting line that gropes or knots itself throughout the picture. This mode of drawing is repeated, in three dimensions, in each of the three sculptures, which have been

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Ida Ekblad, 'Febermalerier' (2009), exhibition view

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assembled from scraps of furniture. Note also the careful installation of the sculptures: *Sham King, King of Sham* (2009), the title of which references Jean-Paul Sartre's description of Jean Genet, rests on the gallery floor, almost like an accident, or found detritus; *Charlatan* (2009) is mounted on two wooden planks, seeming to be rather more traditional, or 'presented'; *Bring this modern classic into your home* (2009) hangs from the ceiling. Each sculptural effort, however lyrical or unique, is at the same time a grammatical unit in an exhibition-wide investigation called 'sculpture'.

The painting *When she was hit by spacejunk* (2009) again isolates this linear motif, in this case in blue against a black ground. The line here is faster and lighter. The arabesque is at once rather feminine - lunar, undersea, gliding - and also very clearly phallic. Ekblad picks up on this phallic aspect, and perhaps the macho heroics of expressionist painting more generally, in *Messthetics* (2009; this title comes from semantic poet Stefan Themerson). The unframed, unstretched canvas features only one gesture, an echo of the formal-erotic frenzies of Jackson Pollock, or Duchamp's *Paysage Fautif* (1946), or Warhol's piss- and oxidation-paintings from the '70s: splattered drops of white paint against a dark ground.

Why, though, does Ekblad's expressionism seem so much of a piece with her previous graffiti-vandal *detourné*, and in no way mannered or contrived? Maybe because, in spite of its built-in irony, Ekblad's practice is at bottom always generative, affirmative, in the full, hard sense of the word: regardless of what she touches, what mode she adopts, one feels that Ekblad aims to say yes, ultimately - to cross beyond negation. In *Feberdikt* she posits a mantra: 'décorer - poser - changer - brancher - rempalcer - assembler.' Mere criticality does not feature in Ekblad's tool-kit. Art is synonymous with superabundance. While Ekblad is not alone in this understanding, it is not every day that one comes across so expansive a talent, and so apparently unacquainted with slyness or revenge.

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