

frieze

Ida Ekblad

Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo

In one of the ground-floor galleries of Ida Ekblad's first institutional survey show in her home city, Oslo's Museum of Contemporary Art, stood a gate. A broad frame filled with twists of powder-white metal, it divided the room like some Magrittean picture-riddle made real, shut tight but porous as a fisherman's net, and topped with a gobbledygook assemblage of just-formed letters. I thought that I could make out the word 'PAST'. Or passed? The gate certainly suggested a passage of sorts, but it would have required some acrobatic contortions to reach the other side, which was not so much a somewhere else as more of the same. They say the gates to heaven are pearly; perhaps in limbo they would look like this.

Limbo is not a bad place to start when thinking about Ekblad's work. It is a not-quite place, and a restless, in-between word. It can also be a verb, to limbo, as in the dance, which comes from limber, or bendy. Ekblad's work is filled with fidgety energy, and she moves with supple ease across media – painting, sculpture, poetry – even if the results can sometimes feel flat-footed. That's part of their charm: her oeuvre is slightly akimbo, which is how your legs need to be when you are limbo-ing. Nothing, from the heaviest of scrap-metal objects to the densest of paintings, can sit still. As the gate attests, what matters in Ekblad's work is passing through. And the journey is a dance.

The museum itself is an unlikely space for dancing. A former bank, it is stern and patrician from the outside, marble-tiled and awkwardly partitioned on the inside. Through its largest hall, all domed-ceiling and gold-topped marble columns, roamed Ekblad's most recent work, produced on site over several months. *Wagons/Tracks* (2013) was a hulking, crashing collection of shopping trolleys, each laden with scraps of metal, spread out across the hall like some deranged herd out to pasture. Ekblad is a tireless pillager of scrap heaps and her welded sculptures invest the contorted debris of industrialization with a sense of used-up beauty. Trolleys are chief props in the drama of consumption, and these works can't help but comment on the voracious appetites of consumerism and the material reality of what it discards, but they are also practical things if you are an artist hauling a lot of scrap metal across town. Those vessels, with their bloated bellies, drag their stories with them, perform their own production as art works. Ekblad has used trolleys for several years in what she has called 'drifts' (after the

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Ida Ekblad, *Wagons/Tracks*, 2013, installation view

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Situationists' dérives) – long wanders through the cities where she works, gathering local detritus for new pieces.

The surrounding walls were hung with uniformly rectangular canvases whose fat slicks of colour Ekblad had garbled by running backward and forward over them with the trolleys, whose rubber wheels had been carved with lines of poetry. Poetry is key to Ekblad's work – the song indivisible from the dance. She selects words for their sounds and forms with the recklessness that comes from not writing in your mother tongue. The exhibition was accompanied by a printed poem, *Synthetic Turf* (2010), a roiling paean to sight and taste, movement and sound. Ekblad treats words roughly, clanging them together, or physically squashing or carving them into things (as in the gravestone-like *A Caged Law of the Bird, the Hand, the Land*, 2011) to fix them concretely. In the case of the *Wagons/Tracks* paintings, this technique felt heavy-handed, the problem being that you can't force poetry into your work no matter how much pressure you apply. Ekblad is great with hard or heavy things, but words are altogether more slippery.

Still, there is something fearlessly swashbuckling in her pillaging of materials and artistic styles with reckless abandon. (As well as the chance drifts of the Situationists, her work recalls the word-play of Dada, the attempted spontaneity of Paul Klee or Joan Miró; the large-scale heroics of AbEx; the scratchy, graffiti energy of Jean-Michel Basquiat's Neo-Expressionism; or the rhythms of slam poetry, and many more things besides.) In one room, she had installed a pirate ship – a beautiful ragamuffin galleon made of beach-combed debris – inside a glass vitrine. The piece is titled *The Buccaneers Trap* (2011): a warning not to run aground against any particular tradition, or stay still for too long.

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