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Kaleidoscope
Amdam, Peter J.: The alien art of Ida Ekblad
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THAT GIRL IS IDA EKBLAD.
FUELED *by* AN OUTRIGHT
MARVEL FOR THIS THING
CALLED ART, HER WORK IS
DISTINGUISHED *by* AN
EXTREME DEGREE *of*
IMPATIENCE *and* PROLIFICNESS.
HER SHIFT *and* TURNS
ARE *the* RESULT *of* A FEVERISH
ENGAGEMENT *with* PURE
MATERIALITY, SYNTHESIZED
with POPULAR CULTURE
and ANIMATED *by* ALIEN
TRANSFORMATIONS.

PORTRAIT BY
SØLVE SUNDSBØ, 2014

ESSAY BY PETER J. AMDAM

A drop of patience. A drop of paint. To the unexpecting eye the practice of Ida Ekblad will appear as an exercise in extreme impatience, restlessness and prolificness. Her permanent, overflowing overabundance extends not only to ideas, works, words, paints and materials, but also a certain set of signatures—which can be understood as imprints of a highly singular artistic sense of movement, mind, memory, becoming and intensive practice. Although still in her early thirties, Ekblad’s oeuvre is growing at such a rapid and voluminous pace that it is becoming increasingly difficult to glimpse its edges. Therefore, one should, for the sake of Mallarméan difficulty perhaps, try, with a drop of patience, to trace some of these edges and what indeed might not be edges at all. Ekblad’s work does not lend itself easily to any angular demarcations.

Some artists strategically alter and distort their “signature” to confuse the market and others do it to consciously or subconsciously as an attempt to reinvent or reinvigorate themselves or their careers. The seemingly hyperbolic twists, turns and tumults in Ekblad’s artistic signatures are of a different kind. They are fueled by a curiosity, care and an outright marvel for these things called painting and art and form at the same time a highly idiosyncratic, complex and multi-circuited system that taps into the more arcane layers of contemporary technologies of affect and inebriated architectures of the neural.

*“marble/ marble in the eye, marble in the brain
color more than I can contain”*

Thus sound the last two lines of Ekblad’s poem “While,” which also served as a press release for a 2010 group exhibition at Karma International, Zürich. Ekblad’s activity as a poet alone should warrant a longer study, but let it suffice, for now, to see Ekblad’s poetry as part and parcel of her project, as paint, as sculpted matter. The movement of the marble, stuttered, repeated, falling from the preceding line into the eye, into the brain. The marble colludes the faculty of vision, colludes the faculty of cognition, to flow into a statement of unstable chromatic emanation: “color more

than I contain.” We do not know exactly if it is the marble that actually colors [as verb] more than everything that the poet-artist sees and thinks, or if it says that more color exists in this world—in the eye, in the brain—than the I of the poem is able to contain.

Marble is usually associated with permanence, beauty, monuments, classical sculpture, memorial sites and so on. This impression is enhanced and confirmed by Ekblad’s sculptures that have the poems “written in stone,” in marble, by professional engravers (who obviously also do funerary work) and that reference both memorial stones and Modernist daybeds. These are well-balanced, poised and beautifully crafted objects that almost soothingly caress the viewer.

There do, however, exist other, admittedly more unconventional readings of “marble” here. One can, of course, “lose one’s marbles”—that is, lose one’s mind. One can turn mad. Just like Hölderlin before us. Too much of the marbled madness from dreaming of the beauty of ancient Greece, of the social imaginaries of Hesperia and the should-the-marble-come-to-life lives of the Gods. Marble in the eye, marble in the brain, more than I can contain. Violently dissected vacuum cleaner bags and the considerate cosmos of dust inside of them cast vacuum cleaners. A woman under the influence, the queen in a mineral kingdom, the loonie collecting treasures at the local junk yard, the computer princess, Mabel Gena Rowlands and Pippi Longstocking. The well-known figure of the outsider woman and the accompanying *folie* traverses every one of Ekblad’s works. This aggregate of renegade subjectivity is submitted to a tweaking that leaves said well-known figure, not liberated, but both accelerated and cared for (wilding out while embracing the nurturing caresses of universal love) beyond representational (representation also understood politically) recognition. The destruction of mimesis through an infra-red identification with the meek.

And not just infra-red: there is some kind of chromatic Stendhal syndrome at work, a ravaged permanent seizure logging, beating and clutching into the frenzied containers of the color of today: apps, Meitupics, gifs, pixels, neurons and pixelated memories in the form

IDA EKBLAD

if a collective, shared, open sourced and isolated, a never ending, ever expanding, ever imploding, absorption of a visual culture. A visual culture that is after both you and your most precious asset: your attention.

And herein lies one of the keys for entering the universe of artist Ida Ekblad. A hyperbolic attention and a rampant deficiency of attention hinges on its own overabundance and even “overproduction.” “Wheel of color,” the ball is rolling, this whole marble madness is being evoked. The iconic 1984 Atari arcade game enters one’s mind: the frenzied descent through the marble towers of an ascending computer game tower of Babel, on streets paved with fool’s gold yet lacking fences. Twisting, pulling, tweaking: the vertiginous flight of the marble as it falls and falls off the edges of the brightly embossed mazes of grainy computer graphics. As the title (given the constant poetical outpouring one is well-advised never to ignore her titles) of one of her most recent paintings suggests: *Being Sinks Into Mere Stuff* (2014). The composite velocity of her production, and that would by all possible means include the idiosyncratic itinerary of her painting, is more closely connected to the so called “playability” of computer games, playability as an athletic, almost analog virtue. Not the digital calculation of art historic reference-o-rama (an objection that from time to time gets directed at Ekblad.)

Anyone that has a remote familiarity with gaming and platform games will recognize the feeling of clearing levels and stages with the mastery that goes with—just that the mastery never so often also involves a sense of actual falling and an abandonment of the cognitive function. Hopefully, it should by now be clear that I am talking about painting both a somewhat metaphorical sense and —and this cannot be given sufficient emphasis: an extremely real and immanent sense.

Ekblad’s debut solo exhibition, “Silver Ruins” somehow anticipates all of this: the stairs and ladders, the fluttering and juvenile references to NWA and West Coast rap, t-shirts, bubble letter graffiti and the meticulously captured hang time of Michael Jordan. These are the many layers of autopoiesis, material self-organization and alien transformations, that, at least to me, mark the art of Ida Ekblad.

Let’s make a detour. Ida Ekblad’s video work *Timeisonourside* (2011) is an empathic and volatile archive of sorts. A camera slowly spans an interior sideways. Abruptly and precipitously it registers a host of objects, their internal and perspectival relations thereby set askew and adrift. Any attempts at relational mirroring is shattered by the sheer bombardment of mere things. Paintings, photographs, coffee tables, baubles, trinkets, silverware, lamps, a mirror, archive boxes filled with slides, African figures, old letters, pens. Apparently the video was shot at the artist’s grandmother’s house, but these are not images animated with sentimentality. Rather they are broken, stuttering snippets, accompanied by the artist’s coarse and raspy voice. A disembodied voice reading a poem that becomes more and more indecipherable as it ebbs away into a mélange of sounds, pieces and bits of language, accents and childlike vocal modulations. And then there is that ghostly sound, the uncanny background noise, derived from the simplistic and preset sounds on Garageband. The voice, the words and the sound all enter a energetic field of becoming-other. This is what things look like when no one is looking. Left all to themselves all our everyday things come into life and do stuff we are too scared even to imagine: holes in the ozone layer, global warming, radiation from nuclear meltdown and things we don’t see—but still someday, sooner than later—will somehow smolder us. These things persist through time, always the same, yet never the same. These things also emanate a certain power, a recalcitrant calling out to other things, to other networks and hoards of objects—human and non-human. One could possibly think of these entities that appear in Ekblad’s video in a more distinctly vitalist, Spinozan manner, as instances of what Jane Bennett terms “vibrant matter.” The unsteady, convulsant thing-gaze (gaze of things) is an *irreductive* gaze, it resists screening, selectivity, and dominion-driven hierarchization. Needless to say, this detour through the atypical, through the off-topic, has also provided an emblematic insight into what is at stake, and what forces are activated, in the everyday artistic practice of Ekblad, and especially in her paintings. Feverish waves that drag with them sorrow, loss, bereavement—looped disintegrations of near painless form—as well as a rhythmic curvature of vibrant matter.

MONO

Michel Henry writes somewhere that “sensible appearances can only be grasped in formal purity when their sound can be heard again, only when the world of objects is put out of play,” and one is tempted to say the same of Ekblad’s practice just that world of objects is fully put into play. Not that the elements depicted serve any means outside itself, as any kind of spatial reference of somewhere else, but rather that they sit at the door hinges, they sit at the thresholds, as they are porous particles that run through the real: material isometrics of sensation in a truly weird universe. For the 2011 Venice Biennale at the Arsenale Ekblad made and presented *A Caged Law of the Bird The Hand The Land* (2011): the first one of those gates, gateways, or portals that absorb both the surroundings from which they are assembled and that infuse and twist the materiality of the gaze and sensation on which they hinge—without criteria as they ask for no ticket of entry but intensely race through the matrixes of sensation. Cast metal, the shiny gloss of the parade, the transubstantiation of metallic debris into non-sensical lettering. The letters on top of the gates only resemble “real” letters, they take on the form of letters, as the construct they are placed on top of resemble the next level of entry, but there is no “beyond” the gates *in other words*. They do not reduce reality. For that matter: they do not relate, or relay, reality either. The motto of the entry gate, the portal, is itself pure material semblance: a permanent racing through. Imagine what kind of mnemotechnical lexicon these shapes and forms, resembling letters, resembling human shapes, resembling dance, would have to carry?

Interestingly enough—as the artist reveals in conversation—Ekblad isn’t really able to recall many of the works she has produced unless she revisits them through scrolling computer screens. The seemingly violent shifts and turns in Ekblad’s output are not functions of a formalist exercise program appropriating and disposing of figures and tropes from recent art history, but rather a feverish engagement with the pure materiality at hand: pure materiality understood here both in the most prosaic sense of thick slabs of oil paint in the Jorn-like “fever paintings,” but also as different and deeper layers of material, corporeal and sheer pictorial memory. From children’s books through music videos

and computer games, from break dancing and tagging, through mourning through Garageband and surfing the net... Be it thick slabs of gravitational oil paint that get centrifuged through a series of circumstances and end up as glassy washes of turped-out paint or imprinted shapes and patterns of what might just as well be the fibre-optic fossils of a life-in-becoming.

The ongoing series of track paintings are instances of losing the marbles, racing rampant with shopping trolleys, carving out liquid poetry in paint, synthesizing, modulating paralinguistic signs, debris, trophies and whited out dreams. The battle cries of the Situationists and their “beach beneath the streets” implies the beach’s metaphorical, relational, and digital aspect. Conversely, in Ekblad’s work, the beach is a univocal slush of inorganic life, life, immanence and duration roaming through paint. In *Her Day of Toil Over* (2014), a lilac, breezy monotypic palm tree is superimposed on washed out, gradient, surf colored tracks, words faded, approaching the univocity of a liquid barrel. By now it should be clear that the latest turns, or the latest bends, on the isometric curvature-signature, the little alien looking guy, the puffy ink, the aerosol and the airbrush, the cathedral like transparent washes of noise, the tags and throwups of virtual concreteness—all of these voices recently seen in “A Gentle Looking Little Alien of Sorts” at Herald St., and in “Refraction. The Image of Sense” at Blain|Southern—are one. It lives out their multiple titles; *Dawson Dial B for Being, Being Sinks Into Mere Stuff, The Startling Mystery In Such Wasting Dwindle D for Dasein*, stuttering, shivering, rustling, as it falls back into a thousand-voiced ocean of univocal information. The marble on the loose is a marble that splats into and onto this ocean. A drop of patient celerity. ☺

Peter J. Amdam is a curator, writer and critic based in Oslo. Recent exhibitions include “Emanuel Røss: SOFT JAZZ.” at Carl Kostyál, Stockholm; and “Refraction. The Image Of Sense” at Blain Southern, London.

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