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Artist of the week 170: Ida Ekblad

Spontaneity is central to this young Norwegian, whose work consists of whatever she finds, wherever she happens to be



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Metallic myth ... Ida Ekblad's *Organ Invention* consists of painted steel girders welded together into an awkward unicorn. Photograph: Image courtesy of the Saatchi Gallery

Modern life really is rubbish in Ida Ekblad's eccentric scrap metal sculptures and high-energy paintings. Using what she finds abandoned on roadsides and in skips or town dumps, this young Norwegian artist turns metal sheeting, rusting pipes and steel chair frames – not to mention whatever else she can get her hands on – into twisting, abstract constellations. Often set in coarse concrete bases, her reconfigured castoffs explore the invisible afterlife of objects and the churning cycles of the city.

One of her sculptures, *Loops*, consists of twisting strips of rusting metal, which blossom from a concrete basin like a crazed pot plant. *Organ Invention* gives us painted steel girders stripped from buildings and welded together into an awkward unicorn. Then there's the unexpected beauty of her cast concrete slabs, such as *The L*, the *LL*, the *Lapis Lazuli*. A kind of urban, grungy take on Joan Miró's surreal dancing shapes, the piece

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features snaking copper wire and metal piping set in ruffled, sky-blue painted concrete.

For Ekblad – as for the postwar Cobra artists whose paintings she references in her bold, expressionist canvasses – spontaneity is all-important. She makes work with whatever she finds, by chance, wherever she is based. Setting out on "sculpture missions", in locations ranging from New York's Rockaway Beach to London's Clapham Common, she "drifts" through cities – as Guy Debord and the Situationists did in 1960s Paris – in search of raw encounters with the hidden life of the streets.

It's no surprise that Ekblad also writes poetry, an art form that – with its repeating rhythms and rhymes, or clashing forms – guides her sculptures and paintings. Her artworks have astonishingly lyrical titles. One long oil painting – where bright red and white paint is smashed and streaked against black – is mysteriously christened Stalk Gills and Caps of Goodbye. Another, To Drink a Glass of Liquid Snow – in which blue and red bird-like shapes float against a thick, white background – speaks of humble visceral pleasures.

The throb of underground music scenes also features. In a nod to yesteryear's warehouse parties and rave parlance, a composition of aqua and pale olive, made from painted corrugated iron, plastic bags and metal piping, is simply entitled Banging.

Why we like her: For her series The Gold Bug Drift (Christiania), created in Copenhagen's Freetown Christiania. Local building debris is paired with the least hospitable of pot plants – forbidding spiky cactuses, sprouting from concrete blocks – in a wry evocation of the area's history. Once a military zone, Christiania was taken over by hippies in the 1960s. They set up the controversial "free town", an autonomous state with its own law and currency, long threatened with closure by the Danish government.

A real dive: Usually based between Berlin and Oslo, one of Ekblad's favourite places to jump the fence and scour for materials is a scrapyards right next to Oslofjord. After foraging within mountains of deadly sharp metal, she can go for a dip in the river.

Where can I see her? In Gesamtkunstwerk: New Art from Germany, Saatchi Gallery, London, until 30 April 2012.