

Ida Ekblad

THE JOURNAL GALLERY

For "Salty Sap Green Black," her first solo exhibition in the United States, Oslo-based artist Ida Ekblad took us along on a scavenger hunt of sorts. Taking her cue from Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Gold Bug," in which a man is believed to have been bitten by a mysterious golden insect that in fact helps him find buried treasure, the artist embarked on what she terms "drifts," a means of collecting objects from around New York while "deconstructing habits of experience and discovering an area or a city."

Ekblad crafted the nine sculptures that make up the ensuing series, "The Gold Bug Drift (NYC)," 2009, during these excursions, by encasing locally collected fragments of architectural fixtures, furniture, and other bits and pieces (found primarily at Rockaway Beach) within cement bases. Evocative of the archaeological remains of a ruined city, these totems of urban detritus were clustered in the center of the gallery in a tight, streetlike grid formation, coaxing the viewer to engage intimately with the sculptures. The resulting sense of one's own physicality was amplified by the close relationship to human scale of the works, the vague familiarity of the components selected by the artist, and her handling of these as they were wrangled, thrust, bent, or tied into place. The sculptures sat staggered, either on pedestals of varying heights or directly on the floor, and the uniform verticality of the grouping echoed the statuesque urban landscape of the city, creating a rhythmic visual harmony.

Ekblad's accumulation and display of discarded objects suggest a reading of the work as a critical reflection on our throwaway society. In *The Gold Bug Drift (NYC) Rockaway Beach, Plate*, one's face is literally reflected back from a strategically angled, slightly battered silver plate, and thus becomes a part of the piece. In another work, *The Gold Bug Drift (NYC) Rockaway Beach, Bottle*, a panel of kitchen tile looks like a surrogate for a discarded computer keyboard—a wry reference, perhaps, to our Internet culture and technological waste.

"The Gold Bug Drift (NYC)" seems at first glance a departure from the artist's earlier tongue-in-cheek collages, which were based on appropriated imagery from popular culture and anthropology journals. But Ekblad may here simply have taken the sampling a step further, diving below the glossy surface, transforming herself from armchair critic to ethnographer in search of underlying truths about our consumer culture. In an interview with the artist in *the journal* magazine, which functioned as a complement to the exhibition, she talks about her recent practice:

The industrial products that make up the urban landscape are the social will, bottled and canned; they speak to us of our integration into society; men address us through the silence of these products; they are injunctions, recommendations, sometimes questionings, or explanations. . . . [T]ools veil from us our forlornness. The videos and sculptures I've been making lately draw from all of this. The metal materials I rack from the state-owned trash yard and bend and weld into sculptures . . . —they're no longer part of the mineral kingdom, nor are they considered usable tools or utensils. They are rejected because there was a new fashion, or they had become too bent, too destroyed, too mashed.

Such underpinnings seemed appropriate to the Journal Gallery's show. Less so in the case of a separate group of paintings and sculptures Ekblad made at the same time for the concurrent group exhibition "*Europäisch-Amerikanische Freundschaft*," at Gavin Brown's Enterprise across town. The works here seemed more traditional: Ekblad's sculptures appeared as quiet studies of balance and geometry, which were paired with large expressionistic paintings whose dense and layered swirls of thickly applied paint exude vitality.

Whether through the appropriation of images from popular culture, sampling from music and literature, or materials culled from the trash, Ekblad has shown herself adept at reclaiming objects from our everyday culture and in the process revealing newfound significance. Throughout, it is her attempts to deconstruct and recontextualize meaning through recycling that remain key.

—Michelle Yun