

Ida Ekblad

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The white-hot Oslo art scene has gained international attention mostly through the work of a few very forward men—figures like Bjarne Melgaard, Matias Faldbakken, or Gardar Eide Einarsson, whose neo-Conceptual practices are shot through with antiestablishment swagger. But Ida Ekblad, a surefooted, almost fearless painter, sculptor, and poet, does it even better than the boys. For this early retrospective (she's only thirty-three) at her hometown contemporary art museum, Ekblad set up shop in a high-ceilinged gallery, once the main chamber of the Norwegian central bank, and produced thirty works in situ. The resulting installation, *Wagons/Tracks*, 2013, includes more than a dozen shopping carts that are stuffed with scrap metal welded together into strange, at times organic forms. Many of the carts' wheels have been replaced with rubber rollers, which Ekblad has incised with poetry detailing the collection of her materials. Around the gallery are abstract paintings, richly colored all-over compositions upon which Ekblad has repeatedly dragged the shopping carts, leaving tangles of paint and traces of verse.

You can find reflections of the Situationists in her poetry and actions, or of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg in some of her more aggressive, agglutinative paintings. But her clearest debt is to the artists of Cobra, the European postwar avant-garde movement, whose messy, churning abstractions Ekblad repeatedly cites. Several of her paintings, such as the panoramic *Dominoes*, 2010, feature areas of undifferentiated color and networks of thick lines in heavy impasto: highly visible, intense brushwork that suggests each painting is not just an improvisation but a struggle. Free of nostalgia, unfazed by worries about the relevance of painting, she goes for broke with each and every work, and her response to our posteverything condition is not the knowing detachment so common among artists today but a bold and sincere creativity.