

KENT IWEMYR

The Red House in the Woods

November 29, 2018- January 12, 2019

Opening Reception: Thursday, November 29, 6-8PM

Anna Zorina Gallery is pleased to announce new beginnings. *The Red House in the Woods*, marks the debut New York solo show of Swedish painter Kent Iwemyr. This will be the artist's first exhibition with the gallery.

Iwemyr creates his acrylic paintings at a scale that draws viewers close. From this intimate vantage point we see snapshots of Nordic life. Each image is a straightforward observation of both nature and human behavior, captured in the expressive, primitive style that Iwemyr employed in his youth when first starting to paint. He harkens back to the time when he was discovering his surroundings through tactile exploration. The artist, still living in the town in which he was born, continues to take everything in and relays without concern to refine or gloss over details. Naïve glimpses of ordinary occurrences mingle with dark, twisted, sarcastic and ironic humor to transform every day banality into poignant and extraordinary revelations.

The paintings turn a focus onto Kent's surroundings in Sweden where the landscape is dotted with an abundance of red cottages. The country with its many copper mines had an immense amount of red byproduct dust that, out of resourcefulness, became pervasive style. When mixed with oil, milk, and lime, the pigment cocktail is able to protect wooden beams from the elements and has a clever ability to make homes look more expensive, like they are made of brick. The popularity of the quaint red homes with white trim allowed for the style to spread internationally.

Kent's red house is idyllically positioned between a channel and woods in a small village. The channel is more than 200 years old as is the house in which he lives with his wife and three cats. In the dense forest next to his home live moose and a lot of other wildlife. In recent years, some wolves and a single bear have established themselves. This forest embodies unknown potential, capable of sustaining an abundance of life while also setting the stage for fierce wilderness to take its course.

Kent's paintings appear to be small windows looking out from his home. From there we catch glimpses of candid life. Like a memory, the view is from afar, figures in the distance are distilled into the basic essence of their mood. A swipe of the brush for the mouth and daubs for eyes, quick movements that are rich with raw emotion. Seen from slightly above and away casts us as witnesses, never participants. In this way, Kent Iwemyr satisfies our voyeuristic needs by allowing us to feel a part of something. We are able to relate to an unknown person's sincerity as they act without knowing they are being watched.

The works function as inside jokes that riff on the culture and folklore from the artist's home country. Just enough alluring nuances are provided as a tease. As day-to-day events unravel with peculiar details, the mundane is transformed into intriguing theatrical representations of life in Sweden. We are offered bird's eye views of regional rites:

The Northern Championship in Boot Throwing for Unmarried Women is an annual event where women from Sweden, Finland, Norway and Russia meet in a small village in the north of Sweden to have fun and compete in odd sports. In the game, women have to throw a boot as far as they can, longest throw wins, simple rules. If they hit a car on the parking lot, doesn't matter. The owners are all bachelors so they don't care! They will only be happy to meet some women for a change.

The Old Gods Still Live shows the raising of the maypole, an integral part of the important occasion of Midsommar celebrated every summer solstice. It is a Pagan tradition that we still have from the time when sacrifices were made to the old gods Odin, Thor and Freyr for blessings of fertility. In those days they would sacrifice everything from small animals to human beings. Today the holiday is celebrated mostly with a lot of beer and booze.

With *Fermented Baltic Herring*, Iwemyr introduces a sly joke regarding a polarizing Swedish delicacy. It is an old custom for Swedes to eat fermented Baltic herring at least once a year. Some people love the herring and even like the smell of it, while others hate it. The smell is so incredibly putrid that the tin is often opened and eaten outdoors. Here we see two forest men playing five-finger fillet while waiting for their serving of sour fish. By playing the dangerous knife game, they are pursuing unnecessary risk for fun. While this gamble is universally understood, the artist focuses specifically on the length Swedes will go for the glory of overcoming offbeat obstacles even if it means potentially subjecting themselves to pain or sickness.

At first, the imagery is simple and sweeping but upon further inspection, they are closer to your reality than you had anticipated. Iwemyr through instilling his own familiar approachability into each scene is able to transform absurdity into normality and normality into absurdity. His paintings shine a light on the remarkable beauty inherent to the subtle idiosyncrasies of every day life.

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