

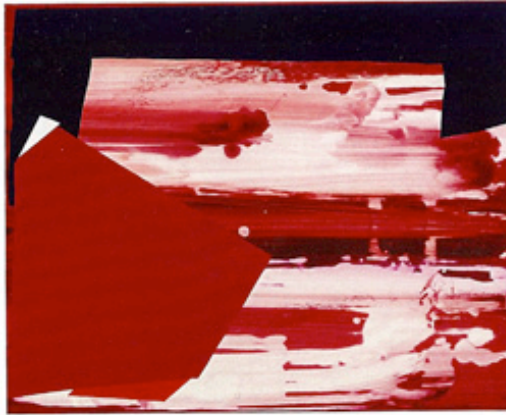
COAGULA INTERVIEW: SIGRID SANDSTRÖM

Swedish artist Sigrid Sandström had a great solo show in Los Angeles at The Company, a new gallery in Chinatown. It was the rare painting show that attracted the cognoscenti who are ordinarily put off by the vulgarities that pass for painterly practice on display in the Southland. But this artist delivered mature and exacting forays into the disciplined rendering of the impossible experience of landscape as it is represented by process. Internationally acclaimed, the Yale MFA graduate recently returned to her homeland after 19 years of exhibiting in the States and picking up awards and honors along the way, including a Guggenheim Grant, a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters Grant and the Eliza Randall Prize twice. If you are at the Moderna Museet, in Stockholm, the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, or Yale University's Art Gallery, you may see her work on display as part of the permanent collections of these institutions.

I interviewed the artist via email prior to the opening of her L.A. debut. She was in Sweden, too pregnant to attend her exhibit, but excited to be showing on the west coast.

COAGULA: *Your work has a naturalism that seems to be in a lineage with much of art history, and yet you have defied the very naturalism in these paintings with rendered abstract shapes. Are you being intentionally subversive or experimenting with possibilities?*

S: Looking back, I have throughout the years been fascinated by movements and periods that dealt with the visions of, and faith in, the possibilities in painting as a transcending medium. The visions of early abstract modernist paintings seem related touchingly to the pathos and emotional



space as plastic or flat. In this sense I experiment with plastic and flat components, trying to make them col-

focus one finds in the Scandinavian symbolist paintings. Coming from a skeptic post-modern tradition, I find these earlier traditions' faith wonderfully romantic, endearing and enviable. My goal has been to try to merge abstraction with representation and rather than appropriate different elements instead combining them into a new painted entity in which the primary discourse in the end revolves around painted

Images courtesy of The Company, Inc. Los Angeles

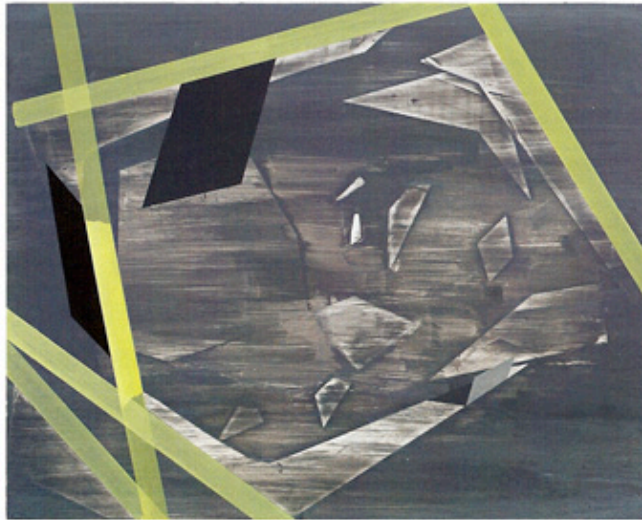
laborate enough to create a sense of place in the painting. After all, the second dimension and its relationship to an invented third dimension still remains a painter's dilemma or grace.

C: *Your rendering of collage materials (tape, torn paper, etc.) in your more recent work has the undertone, to my eye, of commentary. Are these meditations on the state of painting or paintings about larger conditions?*

S: Maybe they could be seen as meditations on the construction of painting. Gradually, I have become more and more interested in the painting process itself as a source for imagery, and there through it has become the actual subject matter of the painting. Through the studio process the painted space slowly evolves through additions, reconsiderations and erasures. I use tape and pieces of paper to plan and lay out a proposed space, and when they seem to correlate to my idea of desired space, I paint them back in using an almost trompe l'oeil strategy. It's an oddly controlled way of re-examining one's initial proposal.

C: *When Gerhard Richter first premiered his abstractions 20 years ago, many then saw it as a dead end for abstraction, a tombstone on the whole movement. You and a few other painters seem to be working to find possibilities from a sort of abstract foundation Richter has established. Is my critical approach here close to where you see your work originating from?*

S: Gerhard Richter is an influence of course, and I think his attitude of allowing himself to explore any



territory related to painting is liberating, but I think it is Richter's overall approach that I find inspiring, not specifically his decision to go back to abstraction at a given time. I think there will always be an ongoing pendulum; once representation is explored to death we rediscover the fresh novelty of abstraction and vice versa. It is inevitable.

C: *In your 2006 GREY HOPE project you aim to see the state of MELANCHOLY as an active part of the psyche, without the negative baggage associated with it. There is a stereotype of the brooding Nordic personality, especially when juxtaposed to the seemingly endless optimism of the American character. Does your work have a conscious or unconscious melancholy underlying it?*

S: If Melancholy is to be associated with longing, I think my work used to contain conscious melancholy,

[continued on next page](#)

continued from previous page

whereas my current work would have more of unconscious melancholy imbedded in it. Now, having encountered my first winter in compact darkness for the first time in 15 years, I realize that melancholy of waiting is a palpable aspect of everyday life.

C: *Have you any observations to share about the differences between the art audiences in Europe and America?*

S: Well, I've only been back in Europe for a few months and made shorter trips to different countries, so I am not sure I can make a fair judgment. Stockholm (where I now live) is a small city in the periphery of the world, but for a city this scale the audience is surprisingly internationally savvy. ♦

