

Vancouver

Lise Birke at Bau-Xi Gallery

Twenty-three-year-old Lisa Birke has been hailed as the brightest new talent on the Vancouver art scene. Less than two years after completing her studies at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, and still awaiting her first solo exhibition in Vancouver (scheduled for Spring 2001), Birke's eclectic paintings are already avidly being picked up by collectors who discovered her talent in Bau-Xi Gallery's group show, *Looking to the Future*, at the beginning of the year.

Each of her large canvases is a complex narrative incorporating, for instance, a traditional landscape which unexpectedly tilts into a flat, two-dimensional cartoon which in turn morphs into a *trompe l'oeil* still life before de-



Lisa Birke, *The camel made fun of the dead, dehydrated man lying in the desert*, 1999, oil on canvas, 60 x 84".

scending into graffitied stick figures. In *When a bugle blew and back he looked the hunter knew his goose was cooked* (1999), Birke overlays a Hudson River School scenic view of mountains and valleys with a white-outlined dead goose hung upside down to ripen, which, in turn, is overpainted with a surrealistically depicted gutted salmon and a storybook red fox draped over a miniature view of the same mountains and valley that form the background of the picture. In the lower third of the painting, Birke shows a horn-of-plenty feast. Here, realistically rendered fruits, flowers, a bottle of wine, and wine goblets compete for attention with the goose's limp neck and head and two cartoon rabbits.

Like Hieronymus Bosch's allegories (which she remembers seeing during her childhood in Germany), Birke's paintings are peppered with symbolic details, some of which are darkly disturbing, others entirely whimsical. Elaborate, imaginative stories, invented as she paints, are embedded in each canvas.

The camel made fun of the dead, dehydrated man lying in the desert (1999), painted during a six-month sojourn in Australia, shows a curved skyline, suggesting the figures might slip off the edge of the earth. Some animals have already become airborne and float like leaves in the wind. Shimmering mirages of polar bears and ice-cream cones dot the dusty terrain, lending a note of optimism to the ominous X

of sticks marking the prostrate man's body.

Unquestionably, Birke's canvases display her appreciation of historical art, especially its heroic, mythological dramas, as well as an enthusiasm for optical trickery. Her disregard for painting's conventions is entirely appropriate for an artist coming of age in the midst of excessive electronic consumerist imagery. Yet, for all their illustrative charm—and there is no doubt Birke's paintings are visually captivating—they remain as unresolved as daydreams and as confusing as nightmares.

Paula Gustafson

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