

*The Eskimos have two hundred ways to say snow. I have three million ways to say no.* — Matias Faldbakken

Ikon presents the first major UK exhibition by Norwegian artist and writer Matias Faldbakken. In works covering a wide range of media, the languages of underground and youth cultures, vandalism and extremism are fused with those of fine art, tracing common ground between them.

At Ikon, the artist leaves a trail of destruction across both floors of the gallery, splashing paint on the walls, writing semi-legible messages with packing tape, confronting us with an assortment of detritus. His seemingly throwaway gestures are transgressive, deliberately eschewing conventional display methods of art exhibitions.

Faldbakken's work revolves around negation, often taking diametrically opposed positions such as freedom and control or language and visuality, collapsing them into each other to establish new content through the destruction of the old. *Cultural Department* (2006), a reconstruction of vandalism of the Palestinian Cultural Department by Israeli soldiers in 2002 is rendered with paint directly onto the gallery walls and so resembles a Pollock-esque 'drip and splash' painting. His conflation of references to an epitome of modernism and an act of political aggression has the effect of cancelling both out. It suggests also the nullifying effect of cultural institutions on extreme actions. Destruction is similarly turned into abstraction in *Abstracted Car* (2009) which consists only of a vehicle's burnt remains. Such transformations are central to the artist's practice.

Language features heavily within Faldbakken's work, though it is often erased or distressed, its forms again rendered abstract. Words are sprayed onto walls over and over until an entire spray can is exhausted, the multiple layers of paint obscuring any meaning. In *The Name of a Person I want Dead Written in Xs* (2006), the wish to see an individual literally erased is self-censored, thus raising questions about the tension between freedom of speech and freedom of thought.

*Untitled (Pedal Pumping)* (2009, with Lars Brekke), one of a number of video pieces in the exhibition, shows a girl's flip-flop-clad foot repeatedly depressing the accelerator pedal of a car. Having uploaded it to YouTube, the video was quickly viewed thousands of times, appealing particularly to the car-pedal-fetishist underground. Faldbakken's interest lies in transforming definitions of what is normative and what is marginal, subcultural or rebellious, reducing the distance between them.

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