

*The group of paintings I made for New York indeed came very much from the time and place I painted them. Starting off slowly with thoughts about jokes and about who gets to laugh in the end, as always in the awareness that being a painter is ridiculous, I then breathed in some fresh air in my new studio in the barns at Ileden.*

–Sophie von Hellermann, December 2018

For two decades, painter Sophie von Hellermann has conjured large-scale, imaginative scenes with exuberant immediacy and diaristic regularity. Depicting literature, history, idioms and scenes of pure invention, von Hellermann animates complex narratives with a coiling, energetic hand and rich palette. For her fifth solo exhibition at Greene Naftali, von Hellermann presents a suite of paintings unfolding from the strange history of the place in which she made them: Ileden.

Among *Ileden's* scenes are a World War II plane crash near the coast of Kent, from which the lone Polish pilot improbably survived and permanently settled nearby; images of revelry following the victory of World War II, which in 1945 burnt down the historical Ileden Manor; and various birds in flight, which were always overhead as the artist worked. While in Ileden, von Hellermann heard in the news the story of a young girl uncovering a three-thousand-year-old Viking Sword in a Scandinavian lake – portrayed in *Viking Spirit* (all works 2018). A metaphor for the act of painting, the image describes the moment of discovering something concrete and meaningful amidst a fluid, formless ambiguity; as well as the power of the painter to awaken the past. The large-scale painting *Fun House* connects Ileden to New York, depicting a legendary '80s dance club where Madonna performed, and which was located in the same building as the gallery. The work extends the theme of revelry and dance coursing throughout the exhibition, yet its shadowy background is also a redemptive space for those who did not survive.

von Hellermann punctuates these historical and factual narratives—spanning millennia—with allegorical visions, in which scale and time shift across the space of the canvas to illustrate the intangible. von Hellermann paints all of this with signature vibrancy, underlining the transience and instability woven through her images of flight and fire; migration and exile; celebration and redemption.

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