

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Bjarne Melgaard

GALERIE GUIDO W. BAUDACH

Oudenarder Strasse 16-20

November 1–January 31

Following in the footsteps of Laura Albert's J. T. LeRoy persona, the forty-one-year-old Norwegian-born and New York-based artist Bjarne Melgaard creates wild, woolly, and gritty work that narrates a saga of exploited boys, romanticized madness, and shamanic sexual bonds between feral youths and anthropomorphized animals. In "A Kidwhore in Manhattan: A Novel" [*sic*], Melgaard presents an elaborate array of cartoonlike drawings, bright, texture-rich oil paintings with text, mutilated photographs of boys, videos, neon poems, and Frederick Kiesler seating with fabric customized by the artist. Together, this diverse array functions as an installation depicting the troubling erotic misadventures of a young male prostitute. A few of the paintings are crammed with rampant energy-popping color, divergent lines, and pornographic doodles, reminiscent of 1980s canvases by graffiti-inspired artists such as Kenny Scharf. Several large canvases feature graphic messages written in monochromatic pastel oil paint. While Melgaard's works coat their acid core of meaning in candy-sweet colors, the most powerful piece simply declares its cynical stance clearly. On a freestanding wall, the tart mantra THE WORLD IS FULL OF RICH CORRUPTED CUNTS glows with sharply lit, dim, or blacked-out violet neon lettering. The message is straightforward but still provokes a few questions: Is Melgaard staying in character and envisioning an exploited child's bitter worldview? Or is he disclosing his feelings about viewers and potential collectors who might salaciously consume his sensationalist subject matter? Or both?



View of Bjarne Melgaard, "A Kidwhore in Manhattan, 2008."

— Ana Finel Honigman