

CRITICS' PICKS

Oslo

Bjarne Melgaard

ASTRUP FEARNLEY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Dronningstgt. 4 pb 1158 Sentrum

January 21–April 25

Rarely does an artist have two separate but identically named museum exhibitions on view in the same country at the same time. This winter, Bjarne Melgaard's opening of "Jealous" at Oslo's Astrup Fearnley was swiftly followed by a seemingly improvised show with the same title at the Bergen Kunstmuseum. The Oslo exhibition is Melgaard's first retrospective, an extensive presentation spinning backward in time around a centrally placed axis of new large-scale paintings.



Bjarne Melgaard, *Untitled*, 2000, oil and collage on canvas, 6' 6" x 20'.

Melgaard, a Brooklyn-based Norwegian artist who has become notorious for explicit, homoerotic, and violent imagery, as well as his fascination with extremes including Norwegian black metal, steroids, and man-boy love, has always worked with autobiographical references. Yet with the inclusion of photographic self-portraits, his works from the past fifteen months explore his identity in even more explicit ways: Large photorealistic paintings that faithfully reproduce personal—and quite average—snapshots taken by Melgaard have been treated with the artist's characteristically sketchy, loose drawings and dark, diaristic jottings.

The installation *Greenland. A novel*, 2008/2010, is a condensed museum of the history of his personal and artistic paths, combining details from his older work, like sculptures of black-metal scenesters, with more of the intimate imagery. Though the piece has previously been on view at Greene Naftali Gallery in New York, its newest incarnation comes across as radically different, taking on site-specificity through its successful juxtaposition and play with a nearby sculpture: a permanently placed Anselm Kiefer that could otherwise easily have proved obtrusive.

— Johanne Nordby Wernø