



SOPHIE VON HELLERMANN AND GREENE NAFTALI

Above, an installation view of “Ileden,” a show of Sophie von Hellermann’s works at Greene Naftali.

SOPHIE VON HELLERMANN

Through Feb. 2. Greene Naftali, 508 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-463-7770, greenenaftaligallery.com.

History and place are treated like fantasies in Sophie von Hellermann’s group of new paintings at Greene Naftali, “Ileden,” which takes its title from a bucolic hamlet in Kent, England. Working in a new studio there, Ms. von Hellermann was motivated by Ileden’s natural surroundings as well as by stories that reached her ears while she was there.

“Ileden Woods” (all works are from 2018), “Buzzard,” “Pheasant” and “Moonrise” seem painted from life experience — albeit in bright acid colors and in a flat, illustrative style. “Viking Sword” relates the story, which Ms. von Hellermann heard while working in Ileden, about a girl finding a 3,000-year-old pre-Viking sword in a Swedish lake. Other works were inspired by a local World War II plane crash in which the Polish pilot miraculously survived, a fire that burned

down Ileden Manor, or people dancing the night away in discos somewhere in the world.

Ms. von Hellermann’s quick, immediate-looking approach has the breathlessness and dynamism of an old Disney animation film, but she draws from a panoply of historical painting styles, from old masters to Marc Chagall. (Similarly, Tyrus Wong, who helped create Disney’s recognizable style in the 1940s, based his work partly on Song dynasty landscape

paintings.)

Ms. von Hellermann, who is based in London, remains self-deprecating about her process, saying in an accompanying gallery release that she is always aware “that being a painter is ridiculous.” That sense of play, of unserious-seriousness, translates into joyous, ecstatic compositions, and turns painting into a fantasy space, supported by stories that sound like modern fairy tales.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER