

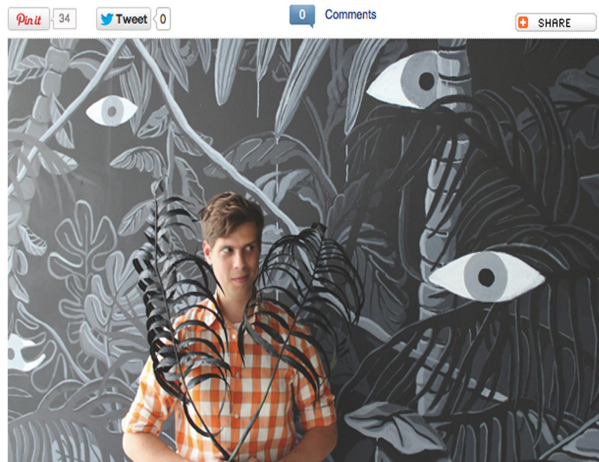
BERLIN ART BRIEF

Alexander Forbes' take on Berlin beyond the hype



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Entering the realm of the Lions: Edouard Baribeaud makes a sandbox of imagination out of a white cube



When the Romans mapped out the world, unknown lands were simply marked, "Hic sunt leones," here are the Lions. Such a loaded title may seem absurd for an exhibition of figurative, gouache on paper illustrations of wooded and mountainous landscapes, seamen and their boats, gorillas, and, indeed, lions. But, where **Edouard Baribeaud** — in his debut solo show at **Nolan Judin** — creates an initial sense of *terra cognita*, it's more often than not an invitation into something much more important: an investigation of contemporary notions of home, a beautifully fantastical tale of a swashbuckling white knight, and comical contemplations of Hegelian philosophy. The works have an *erlebnis*-inducing quality.

The 27-year-old French-German artist eschews the playfulness that is present in his work. Unhardened by an art school background, Baribeaud initially sought to illustrate children's books, attending Paris' **École Nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs**. But, after graduating, he found the work to be rather unfulfilling. "I don't really like the illustrative part of illustration, that you have to tell another's story," he says, "I prefer visually narrating evocative things, so I started to make my own images and drawings, without any dictated stories behind them." The largest series from his exhibition reflects this background to a tee. Cartoonish animals and exotic landscapes seemingly plucked from the sandbox imagination of a child are rendered in bright pastels that accentuate their inherent *joie de vivre*. In "Where the Wild Things Are" (2012), an angry gorilla with playground slides for nipples, interrupts kitschy palm fond inscribed wallpaper. "You travel with your wallpaper, but you travel without going anywhere," Baribeaud says of the work, "It's something I find really charming in a way; it's quite funny."

Indeed, one could imagine Baribeaud himself in such a constant imaginative trance. "I work in series. It's like cutting a film a little bit," he says, explaining the narratives brought forth by his works, "Sometimes, I hear the sound and I feel the time pass within each frame." While not present in the exhibition, this



interest in film has also jumped from paper to celluloid, with the knight from "Des héros qui douillent vides" (2010), coming to life in a film he shot recently in Brazil.

Not all the work is so cartoony but in fact rather surrealist in imagination. His series, "Abyme," features as its centerpiece "Fait lux!" (2012), a large scale, black and white maritime scene reminiscent of a **Gustave Doré** illustration with a neon-blue lightning bolt superimposed over the top. It's biblical character is no accident, Baribeaud suggesting that it not only could be an abstract, "confrontation between the Old and the New Testament," but also a confrontation of new (neon) and old (woodcut) modes of representation. In a further work, "Zeitspirale" (2011), Baribeaud sends a troupe of Moby Dick's whale fishermen cascading into a time warp rendered in spray paint. The juxtapositions of technique in both lend a collaged quality to the works, yet it's complete integration into the same plane avoids ugly pastiche.



In a more intimate and dimly lit section of the gallery, the final series of much smaller *Grisaille* works — originally produced for a book on Hegelian philosophy ("Les larmes de Hegel") — hangs salon style. "My purpose [with the series] was to bring something sexy to Hegel. Because at the beginning I would have preferred **Nietzsche**: he's more rock 'n' roll, he's sexier. But at the end of the day, Hegel

also had some rock 'n' roll ideas," he says of the often humorous but incredibly covetable works; "The writing was abstract poetry to me. But it was good, because in a way I could project my own fantasies or my own images." For example, "La solitude du valet de chambre hors de France" (2011), depicts the classic master/slave dialectic, but through a rotund aristocrat, face covered in a spray painted African mask, surrounded by the nude bodies of his help, which are tangled into a

When leaving the exhibition, a sense overwhelms of having just traveled somewhere. It's refreshing: cerebrally, visually, soulfully. That all the works may not grab you, doesn't seem to matter to Baribeaud, only that you find a story, a refuge, or something compelling in a few. "I hope I don't tell too much, because that's always my problem maybe," he says, "but I hope that I just tell enough so that you can interpret it in your own way."

Edouard Baribeaud's "Hic sunt leones" is on view at Nolan Judin Gallery until April 14