

UK



## EVREN TEKINOKTAY

### The Approach, London

A man goes walking in a ghoulish, haunted wood. His soul walks with him. It is October – ‘the lonesome October/ Of my most immemorial year’, says the man in the poem – and the night is lit by a bright star, Astarte. He follows the star through the dark woods. Psyche, the soul, doesn’t like where this is going: ‘Her pallor I strangely mistrust!’ Their wandering leads them to the door of a tomb, which the man recognizes as that of his dead love, his ‘lost Ulalume’.

Published by Edgar Allan Poe in 1847, ‘Ulalume’ lent its name to Evren Tekinoktay’s third solo show at The Approach. That Poe wrote the poem as an elocution exercise adds to Tekinoktay’s reading of it, which acts as a soundtrack to the show’s eponymous piece, a video work. The reading is rough, rushed, distractingly physical: we hear the artist draw breath, gulp, sniff and stumble over certain words (‘Sybilic’, ‘senescent’). Her body has not been edited out. Charm is in the halting singsong, the vagaries of an unplaceable accent. A clipped, perfectly rhythmic recital would have made little sense. It is in this gap – between exacting norms and recalcitrant bodies – that the show finds fertile ground.

Eight neon reliefs and two near-static films glowed in the dim room. Like Astarte, they are luminous emblems of a faintly troubling sexuality. The films – or, rather, projected animations assembled by hand – are what Tekinoktay calls ‘collages with a respiratory tract’. In *ULALUME* (2014), a model of taut femininity in black lace, garters and stilettos smiles into a shiny red telephone. After a moment, I recognized it as drag (the show was full of such double takes). Behind her is a dreamscape in rapid flux: swatches of fabric, lynx eyes, skulls, painted nails, legs both Barbie-smooth and hairily gnarled, childish scribbles, feathers, glitter, cacti and a noose. And was that a raven?

If *ULALUME* is a lone star, *BAZOOKA* (2014) is a constellation of her sisters. Six figures cut from magazines – a pin-up, a queen, a few in between – form an unruly frieze on the screen. One wears an afro, another a cross. None has her natural hair. A hole has been cut where each mouth should be and, behind these, silver flashes – as though they were breathing, or blowing bubblegum. The soundtrack here is not a

poem but something faint and indeterminate: clicks, a shuffle, a scrape. Behind the glassy images we hear the heave and rasp of effort, though whether its origin is human or mechanical is hard to say. This sound and the holes’ rough edges are traces of a hand at work. Here, again, the artist’s body is present.

*CRYSTAL*, *BUNNY*, *TWIZ* could be the names of these hybrid creatures – instead they are the titles of the neon reliefs on the opposite wall (all 2014). *PAROLE* (2014) is a pastel mouth from which three blazing rods shoot: one pink, two baby-blue. In *EGG* (2014) an ovoid, blood-red loop connects two identical wheels in neutral tones, black and teal. What bodies are these? The pieces churn in the gallery, radiating heat. Mobile and visceral, they seem more palpably alive than the human figures they face.

Down a walkway, a dark room held – barely contained – the show’s third film and standout piece, *CLOSET* (2014). On a screen that covered an entire wall in the small space, another cut-out figure loomed – rouged, hennaed, plucked, bangled and unmistakably androgynous. The eyes have been scissored out, widened to saucers and, through the holes, a slow procession of images is revealed, by turns erotic, cartoonish, folksy and glam – a grab-bag of archetypes and anxieties. We are being dragged through an archive, the messy hinterland of a polished facade. The sound – the same unnerving rustle as in *BAZOOKA* – is that of a patient machine moving its slow gears, a reminder that the persona on show is at the cost of some invisible labour, some constant and strenuous effort of iron will.

YASMINE SEALE



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UK

## TOREY THORNTON

### Modern Art, London

The paintings in Torey Thornton’s first UK solo show wanted to play: 17 ambitiously scaled works on paper and wood panel jostled for centre stage across Modern Art’s three gallery spaces. Even the exhibition’s cryptic title had playful overtones: ‘Knead a Sea Ware Groin’ conjures two bawdy sea creatures wrestling in a cartoon embrace. Thornton’s large-format works depict bold, confident forms that oscillate between figuration and abstraction. A nod to the cartoon-like renderings of painters such as Philip Guston is palpable – intentional childlike naiveté offset by witty titles. In *First Cynthia* (2014), a frenetic fly buzzes towards a pristine platter of grapes – still life humorously interrupted – while in *As Troll No Mic Call, Ring* (2015) the sun reaches out to stroke the earth, its golden beams like long limbs. Elsewhere, less obviously identifiable shapes also recall bodily organs, or are they landscapes? In *First, After I saw Elvis Looking At Me and Imagined Him Looking To Andy* (2014–15) a canary-yellow cellular mass is streaked with veins of electric lemon like a cartoon lung or, perhaps, a lake seen from above.

Bright colours pop throughout: bubblegum-pink offset by turquoise-blue and apple-green, accompanied by great swathes of silver and gold. Images and shapes are repeated across paintings and found objects are playfully integrated into their compositions: rectangular strips, bulbous round forms, a sign saying ‘Do Not Litter’, a My Little Pony hung upside down, its purple tail pointing up. The cadmium lines of *First Cynthia* recur enlarged in *Once You Become a Real Yorker Are You Still Southern (Second Broken Rule)* (2015), like road markings dancing on black asphalt and beginning to dissolve in a magic mushroom-laced haze. Repetition also featured within works, for example in the form of stacked wooden beams or gridded sheets of paper, lending the whole exhibition a certain rhythm.

Contemporary painting often brings to mind the virtual realities of our internet-mediated world (think, for example, of the work of Ida Ekblad, Mary Ramsden or Michael Staniak). Thornton’s paintings are rooted in physical matter, yet his characterful objects sit on the surface against monotone

1  
Evren Tekinoktay  
*BAZOOKA*, 2014, film still

2  
Evren Tekinoktay  
*BUNNY*, 2014, neon relief,  
172 × 60 × 16 cm

3  
Torey Thornton, *First, After I saw Elvis Look At Me And Imagined Him Looking To Andy*, 2014–15, aluminium enamel paint, oil, wood, spray paint and collage on wood panel, 1.8 × 2.2 m

4  
Beatrice Marchi  
*Gelato e Tristezza con Panna (Ice Cream and Sadness with Cream)*, 2015, pencil on paper, 29 × 21 cm