

## Iva Gueorguieva at Carl Berg

There is a lot to like about the expansive, turbulent canvases of Iva Gueorguieva, from their varied and inventive brushwork to their radiant, Romantic palette to the stealthy presence of ghostly, humanoid creatures she picks out of the morass. In her second solo show at this space, the Bulgarian-born artist, who studied with Dona Nelson at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, structures the more successful of her landscape-like spaces around large, readily legible subdivisions of the picture plane, grounding her churning, overwrought vistas in familiar compositional conventions.

At roughly 8 by 18 feet, *Gyre* (all paintings acrylic on canvas, 2007) devours the viewer by virtue not only of its size but its colors, wildly divergent in both value and hue, and its skittish but purposeful touch. A swath of blue and green splinters the painting, pushing hot colors to the edges. It is a spiraling torrent that might represent wind or water, and it sucks the viewer into a vortex of fire and ice. The exhibition's title, "Gyre Carling," refers to a supernatural being in Celtic lore, the Queen of the Witches, who controls the weather and is prone to shape-shifting. Let's say that Gueorguieva does not shy away from melodrama.

The nature of the ground varies. In *Thick as Thieves*, a clamoring, heaving heaven looms above the limpidly glowing horizon, set low in the frame; mediating between the two is a charred-looking, demonic head sprouting antlers or branches. The paint's crisp delivery, on a plain gesso ground, differs greatly in effect from *The Blue Rider*, which is painted on raw canvas into which the initial application of paint soaks. The soft-focus glowing stain of pale blue and yellow-green implies an orb of distant, heavenly light that frames and contains the mad flurry of strokes whirling through the foreground. An absorbent gesso ground lends a pallid, watery look to another painting, *These are Places where nothing is wrong but there is Something wrong*; lacking a strong structure, however, its 6-by-9-foot expanse is claustrophobically dense and chromatically flat.

In a selection of works on paper, *Sleepy Genes* is a standout. At 3 feet across, it is intimate com-

pared to the canvases, but it is similarly full to bursting and also relies on the contrast of broad, sweeping application and finer drawing. Sprightly hues of rose, violet and green gouache dominate; blackish ink provides ballast. The interplay of line and shape animating the paintings is here further complicated by the tactility of a collaged surface and by creeping figurative references.

Gueorguieva's work recalls the swirling, elastic space and dissolving forms of Futurism, the bombast of the high Baroque and the grand scale of Hudson River School painters like Bierstadt and Church. Julie Mehretu and Cecily Brown are compositional cousins. But Gueorguieva is no *pasticheuse*; she is well on her way to making this canny blend of sources and enthusiasms her own.

—Stephen Maine

Iva Gueorguieva: *The Blue Rider*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 90 inches square; at Carl Berg.

