

Christen Sveaas Art Foundation: This is the Night Mail, Selected by Ida Ekblad
27 August 2021 – 2 January 2022
Gallery 7, Free Entry
#ChristenSveaasArt

An artist night train travels from Norway to Whitechapel Gallery this autumn.

The dreams, nightmares and twilight landscapes of 34 international artists are brought together in *This is the Night Mail*, an artist-curated display by Ida Ekblad (b. 1980, Norway). Drawing from the personal collections of Christen Sveaas and that of the Christen Sveaas Art Foundation, the exhibition creates a densely-packed mise-en-scène featuring painting, photography, sculpture and drawings.

This is the Night Mail is the first line of W.H. Auden's 1936 poem describing a train journey across a sleeping Britain as it carries the nation's mail. It accompanied a documentary film commissioned by the General Post Office with a propulsive soundtrack by a young Benjamin Britten. The slumbering mystery of Auden's verse inspired Ekblad's selection of works in the Collection, which the artist arranges across three imagined train compartments.

Ekblad is renowned for her polychromatic, gestural paintings that often expand into immersive environments. Coming from the land of both the longest and the shortest night, she shares a preoccupation with many artists featured in the exhibition, using the nocturne as subject.

The exhibition explores how moonlit interiors, land and seascapes form the backdrop for scenes of dream or nightmare, drama and transgression. Ekblad's selection includes late 19th and 20th century Norwegian artists whose shimmering and mysterious canvases will be new to British audiences. These include abstract planetary compositions by Anna Eva Bergman (1909-1987), the fables and fantasies of Theodor Kittelsen (1857-1914), psychologically-charged portraits and nightscapes by Edvard Munch (1863-1944) and dreamy nocturnes by Harald Sohlberg (1869-1935). Ekblad also selects postwar and contemporary artists such as Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), Sophie Calle (b. 1953, France), Edward Ruscha (b. 1937, USA) and Rosemarie Trockel (b. 1952, Germany), whose works explore nighttime encounters, escapism and terrors. Their work features alongside beautifully-crafted antique silver and glass objects which Norwegian collector Christen Sveaas has been acquiring for over 40 years.

This is the Night Mail is the first in a series of four artist-curated displays borrowing from the Christen Sveaas Art Foundation. Taking place over the course of a year, the exhibitions function as a platform for creative and curatorial experimentation and invite the public to engage with works rarely on public view. Each display in the series is also accompanied by a new collectible publication devised by the guest selector and co-published by the Foundation and Whitechapel Gallery.

Ekblad's display features 34 artists including: Nikolai Astrup (1880-1928), Lynda Benglis (b. 1941), Anna-Eva Bergman (1909-1987), Andreas Bloch (1860-1917), Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), Sophie Calle (b. 1953), Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978), Johan Christian Dahl (1788-1857), Gardar Eide Einarsson (b. 1976), Arne Ekeland (1908-1994), Theaster Gates (b. 1973), Isa Genzken (b. 1948), Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1969), Thorvald Helleesen (1888-1937), Howard Hodgkin (1932-2017), Rebecca Horn (b. 1944), Ilya Kabakov (b. 1933), Ludvig Karsten (1876-1926), Martin Kippenberger (1953-1997), Theodor Kittelsen (1857-1914), Edvarda Klaudiva Lie (1910-1983), Christian Krohg (1852-1925), Per Krogh (1889-1965),

Press Release

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Edvard Munch (1863-1944), Albert Oehlen (b. 1954), Paulina Ołowska (b. 1976), Steven Parrino (1958-2005), Sigmar Polke (1941-2010), Edward Ruscha (b. 1937), Christian Schad (1894-1982), Harald Sohlberg (1869-1935), Adolph Tidemand (1814-1876), Rosemarie Trockel (b. 1952) and Francesca Woodman (1958-1981).

Notes to Editors

- The exhibition is curated in consultation with Ida Ekblad by Iwona Blazwick, Director, Whitechapel Gallery and Candy Stobbs, Assistant Curator, Whitechapel Gallery.
- The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated publication, designed by Mark El-Khatib, including introductions by Iwona Blazwick, Christen Sveaas and William Flatmo, Director of Christen Sveaas Art Collection, as well as contributions from Ida Ekblad.

About Whitechapel Gallery

For over a century the Whitechapel Gallery has premiered world-class artists from modern masters such as Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Frida Kahlo and Hannah Höch to contemporaries such as Zarina Bhimji, Sophie Calle, William Kentridge, Eduardo Paolozzi and Michael Rakowitz. Its historic campus houses exhibitions, artist commissions, collection displays, historic archives, education resources, inspiring art courses, talks and film screenings, the Townsend dining room and the Koenig Bookshop. It is a touchstone for contemporary art internationally, plays a central role in London's cultural landscape and is pivotal to the continued growth of the world's most vibrant contemporary art quarter.

About Christen Sveaas

Christen Sveaas is a Norwegian businessman, collector and philanthropist who has collected art and antique silver for more than 40 years. He began his art collection with late 19th century and early 20th century Norwegian artists including Johan Christian Dahl, Edvard Munch and Harald Sohlberg. In the early 1990s he was introduced to the work of Howard Hodgkin which inspired him to start collecting international contemporary artists. The collection's focus is primarily painting with some sculpture and photography and is made up of more than 2000 works of art by over 300 artists. In 1996 Christen Sveaas founded the Kistefos Museum on the grounds of his grandfather Anders Sveaas' old wood pulp mill at Jevnaker, north of Oslo. The wood pulp mill was active from 1889 until 1955 but is still intact. The museum has one of the most important sculpture parks in Europe, an industrial museum and two exhibition spaces for contemporary art. The museum building, The Twist, which straddles the river that divides the park was designed by BIG – Bjarke Ingels Group architects, opened in 2019. The same year, Christen Sveaas established the Christen Sveaas Art Foundation which the following year received some 800 works of art from his personal collection to be made available to Kistefos as well as other Norwegian and international museums.

About Ida Ekblad

Ida Ekblad (b. 1980, Norway) lives and works in Oslo, Norway. Her artistic practice incorporates painting, sculpture, performance, filmmaking and poetry and transmits a distinct vibrancy and spontaneity, created through the energetic movement of her compositions, the bold application of colour and the attentive use of found materials. The forms and gestures found in her work derive from a wide variety of inspirations and art historical references such as CoBrA, Situationism and Abstract Expressionism, as well as pop cultural aesthetics like graffiti or cartoons, indicating Ekblad's genre-crossing approach. Ekblad participated in the Venice Biennale (2011, 2017) alongside numerous solo and group exhibitions, including a recent exhibition at Kunstnerens Hus, Oslo, Norway (2021). Further solo presentations have been held at Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland (2019); Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico (2019); Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braunschweig, Germany (2018); Kunsthaus Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany (2017); National Museum of Art, Design and Architecture, Oslo, Norway (2013); Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, Norway (2010); Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden (2010). In August her most important sculpture to date will be unveiled as part of the expanding sculpture park at the Kistefos Museum, Norway.

Visitor Information

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm; First Thursdays, 11am – 9pm
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