

NIGHT GALLERY

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Ara Osterweil, "Wanda Koop and Oli Epp: BLOUIN | DIVISION," *Artforum*, Summer 2021, p. 229.

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became bunched up, got stuck midway—tended to replicate our most frustrating struggles with them in everyday life and thus lent an absurdist tone to the proceedings while simultaneously encouraging a sort of estranged introspection.

Courtesy of back-mounted LED bulbs, the blinds were bathed in a rich range of hues, alternately evoking rose-tinged mornings, electric-blue afternoons, and purple sunsets, while also calling to mind the nocturnal neon-lit landscapes of cities. Amid this conflation of the painterly sublime with a luridly stylized sexuality reminiscent of early rock-music videos—think "Private Eyes" (1981) by Hall & Oates—the viewer assumed the role of a kind of transcendental voyeur. This staging was clinched by the surprise appearance of a peephole in the center of *I can tie a trucker hitch in my sleep*, 2021. The opening, as though it had been pried apart by two ghostly fingers, was at once vaginal and ocular and sent out a lascivious wink. But beyond that it conjured up the whole dialectic of surveillance and exhibitionism—in all of its manic alternations between excitement and exhaustion—that dominates virtually every aspect of our lives today.

These works, with their visible mechanisms, make one think of industrial production—that is, of the once heroic (and frequently masculinist) realm of the foundry and metal shop, of mechanics and engineering. Yet Neidich's sculptures are designed to malfunction and are forced to do so by a whole other order of machinery secretly operating behind them with maximal efficiency. Every moving part that grinds and locks is commanded by the relatively friction-free operations of a computer, the situation perhaps adding a touch of pathos to the slapstick proceedings. Related to this is the striking realization that, even while one waits for something to happen, something is already, *constantly*, happening. If the failure of kinetic art in general can be the intermittency of its starting and stopping—and to the fact that, like any gadget or gizmo, it does not move itself—then this problem undergoes an auspicious twist here. Neidich bears down on the nondynamic side of kinetic art as its potentially saving grace. Now that perpetuum mobile is all around us, the simple act of making things move might be less compelling than dramatizing their inertia.

—Jan Tumlir

MONTREAL

Wanda Koop and Oli Epp BLOUIN | DIVISION

It's hard to tell if Wanda Koop's paintings are deceptively—or disturbingly—simple. Rectilinear portals, Xs, and bar codes float on watery horizons limned with light. These symbols don't so much beckon us into the gloaming but get in the way, reminding us that the enigmatic shorelines over which they hover are too flat for us to enter. Captured between dusk and eventide, Koop's lakeshores duet between graphic figures and idyllic grounds. Waves lap silently along placid embankments in these images, yet the artist incorporates subtle reminders of our destruction of them. But how to object to such intrusions when the ornaments that deface them are so pretty? In *Dreamland* (all works cited, 2021), a sharply receding plane, ranging in tone from palest turquoise to apricot flesh, glimmers gemlike over an ombré-gray marshland edged with trees. In spite of the layered washes in Koop's spectral vista and the angular rhombus that cuts an idea of space into this otherwise shallow pond, these pictures stage an interplay of fetishized veneers rather than a dialectic between surface and depth.

However, in the series of vertical, uniformly sized paintings that illuminated the main gallery, Koop created a chapel of color and light. Not quite monochromatic canvases in sapphire, aqua, and carnelian

consecrated the central wall, each possessing its own magic: Suspended over a clouded cobalt sky that dissolves into a lapis-colored lake, a moonlit monolith falsely promises entrance into another dimension in *Deep Blue See*. Like the shard of driftwood that floats above the water without actually penetrating its surface, our ability to plumb the depths is illusory. In the adjacent *Terminal Lake*, a large black X partially blocks an exquisite aqueous fade, but is it a tropical swimming pool or a poisonous basin that is fenced off by this bit of chain link?

In the show's most striking image, *Barcode Face*, a crimson bar code stamps a viscous red sky that melts into an equivalently sanguine lake. Recalling the surreal skies of last year's West Coast forest fires, Koop's painting makes our trauma-weary eyes pop. Yet through her optical wonders the artist knowingly demonstrates how even the most apocalyptic sights are rebranded as commodities. One wouldn't suspect from the image's Instagram glow that the Canadian painter had been musing on the relation between perception and technology long before doing so became commonplace. Yet in spite of their suggestions of environmental toxicity, Koop's bejeweled landscapes felt a little too crepe thin and ready-to-wear.

Hanging in the gallery's antechamber was a suite of darkly comic paintings by Koop's second cousin, Oli Epp, who is based in the UK. His ironic burlesques of jet-setters, muscle bros, and techies—although a world away from Koop's mystical tableaux—are kindred in some regards. Sharing a fascination with the pleasures and hazards of the Anthropocene and an obsession with achieving a perfectly smooth finish, Epp parodies tourist culture and its implicit destruction of nature. In his large-scale canvases, eggheaded, candy-colored human monsters rejoice while on the brink of disaster. In *Resort*, a girl smiles wide as she mauls a dolphin in captivity; in *Accelerator* a man with over-size muscles and a tiny dick grills himself red on a tanning bed. It's no surprise that Epp's serpentine creatures are lavishly plugged in and accessorized: Earbuds, sunglasses, curly drinking straws, and, yes, even medical masks become the stylish paraphernalia of our doomed existence. In such a context, what difference does it make that a glowing-green poacher hangs a blowfish from the lining of his overcoat in place of the more typical stolen watch in *Do you want this?* Seen from Epp's hideous perspective, humanity deserves to go down in flames; graciously, *En Route* supplies the burning airplane nose-diving in the next room. But what of the poor dolphin, or the wounded killer whale trapped in Epp's trash-littered *Tank*? In spite of their uncannily humanoid tongues, these mammals cannot speak in their own defense. Designed to dazzle, Epp's cartoonish characters mute any real critique.

There's no doubt that Epp's paintings are clever and well-executed, but I've seen too many grotesque people doing horrible things to want to spend too much time with his repugnant caricatures. Somehow, I suspect that the very types that Epp mocks in his paintings will be the same ones lining up to acquire the works as more souvenirs of their affluent lifestyles.

—Ara Osterweil



Wanda Koop, *Barcode Face*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 84 × 60".