

Inga Meldere

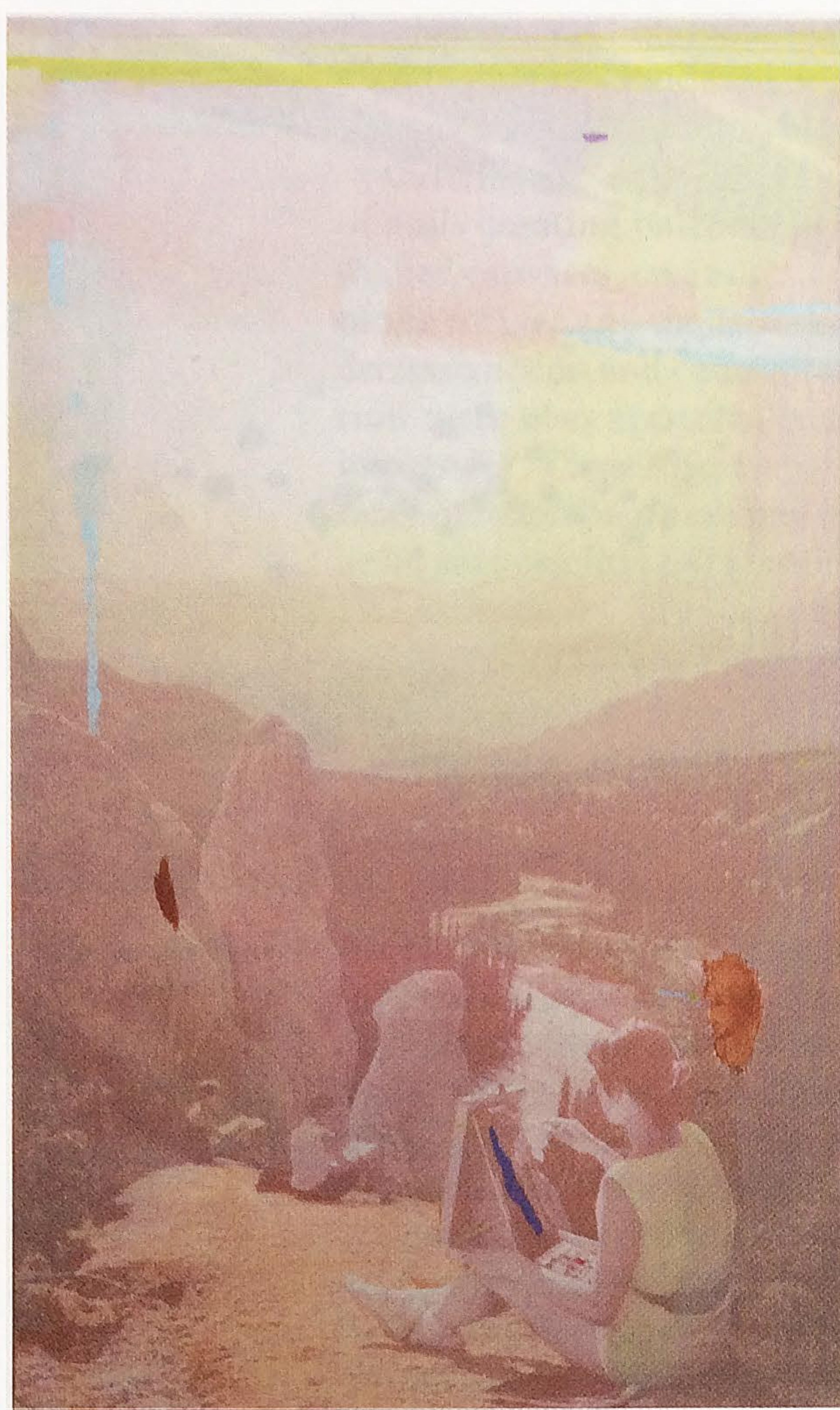
TEMNIKOVA & KASELA GALLERY

Coloring books for adults have gained surprising popularity in recent years. They promise “relaxation” and “creativity,” and perhaps an escape from the digital hum that has come to dominate modern life in favor of something done by hand. Besides ever-popular floral motifs, the books often incorporate graphically vibrant imagery from mandalas, Japanese woodblock prints, and ancient Egyptian and Greek visual history.

In “House by the Waterfall or Colouring Books for Adults,” Helsinki-based Latvian artist Inga Meldere harnessed this burgeoning hobby both as a method for creating her new paintings and as a commentary on the state of the image today. Meldere selects ready-made images and motifs from a variety of sources, including books, the internet, and private and public visual archives, then transfers them to canvas via silk screen or digital printing. The resulting transparent overlays of graphic motifs combine personal and collective, past and present, into

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REVIEWS



Inga Meldere,
*Students Painting
Some of the
Remarkable Scenery
in the Park, 2016*,
ink-jet print, acrylic,
and oil on canvas,
43 ¾ × 25 ½".

paintings, a similar treatment was applied to familiar religious motifs from art history—thus *Rug. Dream of Pope Gregory* referred to Giotto—but woven into unexpected, often demystified and quotidian narratives.

Several smaller works were more enigmatic, poetic, and intimate. In *An Act* and *Bouquet*, different forms of draperies seemed to suggest yet veil some true inner narrative. This dynamic of displaying and concealing was at play in several frescoes painted on concrete. Fragments of fake wall paintings—a ruse that Meldere has used before—were accompanied by the only three-dimensional piece in the show: a lamp sculpture, *Untitled*, made of concrete and laser-cut brass with a pattern composed of ancient-Greek architectural decorative elements.

Meldere’s use of coloring books as a paradigm suggests the paradoxes of our digitalized environment. They seem to promise an escape from the screen and from hyperconnectivity and an outlet for creativity. Yet the way themes and motifs are selected for coloring books repeats the patterns of digital culture. The images become sourceless, domesticated, recontextualized, and transformed—like memes. The user is always already trapped in a preset framework. The promised freedom is illusory. But hey—you can always color outside the lines! Or at least that’s what Meldere’s own flouting of convention seemed to suggest.

—Neringa Černiauskaitė

one fictional visual narrative. Having graduated from the restoration department at the Art Academy of Latvia, the artist possesses a specific sensitivity to how images and histories exist in overlapping strata.

The visual stories displayed in the exhibition were not without a healthy dose of irony. In *Dolphin Trainers* (all works 2016) and *Yoga*, for instance, we saw athletic male bodies depicted in ancient-Greek style framed by columns that seemed to be constructed of slabs of meat, while a repeating pattern across the bottom was made from images of desk fans. Clichés of beauty were deconstructed in *Students Painting Some of the Remarkable Scenery in the Park* and *House by the Waterfall*, in which figures taken from archival photographs evoking the romantic contemplation of nature and nude female statuary were layered with abstract fields of color or filled with details that become impossible to distinguish in their density. The paintings replicated the tendency of coloring books to transform nature, cultures, and bodies into abstract patterns of lines and colors. In another group of