

"Studio Visit: Hanna Liden"

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# Interview

ART

## *Studio Visit: Hanna Liden*

By CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN 04/14/2010 12:46 PM



PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLIN DODGSON

Up a flight of attic steps and behind a door marked with a single white card that reads "Hanna," lies Hanna Liden's studio. It's a slanted garret with white walls and a tin ceiling off the Lower East Side's Chatham Square. Liden, the 33-year-old Swedish artist who's lived in New York for the last decade and quickly made a name for herself as a young pioneer of urban alienation and romance at the long-closed but not forgotten Rivington Arms Gallery, is finalizing her latest series of photographs. Eight of them will go on view at the [Half Gallery this Friday](#) for an exhibition entitled "As Black as Your Hat."

The pictures consist of brooding gothic still-lives of candles, crowded arrangements melted down to various lengths, a few recently snuffed with smoke wafting upward. Liden has spray-painted the candles black and shot them against a matte black background, their original white or red wax smoldering forward to offer the pictures' only glimpses of color. The candles look almost like night shots of a distant metropolis, as the distorted forms pack together and poke up like spires. But the photographs also operate as heirs to the Dutch still-life painting tradition; there's a disquieting fetishistic attention to the objects that links Liden's candles to the murky beauty of the 17th Century *vanitas* painter [Willem Kalf](#). Of course, to anyone familiar with Liden's earlier work, these candles are all about ritual. "I was always fascinated by religion and religious rites," Liden explains. "Probably because I grew up in such an atheist environment." The artist was raised in the suburbs of Stockholm, the environs of which occupied much of Liden's previous photographs, as she shot nude young women with macabre handmade masks in the Scandinavian countryside. Those ambitious nature studies, by the very presence of their wild, masked subjects caught in some esoteric ceremony, carried a sense of an unfamiliar mythology or a dark magic, while this new series has a much quieter, more meditative sense. Capturing candles just after they've been blown out even suggests a kind of visual elegy to the lost or the dead. What this series certainly does provide is an indication of how Liden has moved recently from landscapes and portraits to a fixation on actual objects as sculpture. Her studio is strewn with such experiments as a stuffed bird dipped in black paint and a dollar bill stuck in its beak. "I always made the masks myself for those earlier photographs," she explains. "But started becoming interested in the objects themselves, not as disposable props but as works in their own right."



LEFT: BLOWN OUT CANDLES (BLACK), 2010. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND HALF GALLERY

Liden hasn't entirely left landscape photography behind. In a book published to accompany the show ([OHWOV](#)), Liden included Xeroxed black-and-white shots of woods, photographed last summer in a wild snatch of remaining Manhattan forestry underneath the George Washington Bridge. When she returned to that same spot recently she found that much of the natural wildlife had been cleared away. While there is potent room for metaphor here—the last rawness of the city finally destroyed—Liden doesn't seem disdainful of the way things go in her adopted town. "I've always thought America has a lot to do with my work," she says. "Particularly its obsession with horror movies. I probably wouldn't be doing the same kind of things if I were still living in Sweden."



