

"Art in Review; Hanna Liden"

By Holland Cotter

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Rivington Arms

102 Rivington Street, near Essex Street, Lower East Side

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There are 13 photographs in the first New York solo show of this young artist, who was born in Sweden in 1976. And the number seems significant given the work's spooky, supernatural content. Each picture is a panoramic shot of a desolate landscape -- a mist-filled swamp, a snow-shrouded forest, a bleakly unpicturesque lake -- populated by a few demonic-looking figures engaged in what could be esoteric rites.

Two young women, one of them pregnant, stand nude and knee-deep in gray water; a third woman swims toward the camera. All three wear death's-head masks. Women in goat masks stand over a figure lying half-hidden in undergrowth. A skull-headed figure on horseback appears on a distant horizon. A pentangle, a symbol of supernatural power, formed from sticks smolders on a woodland path, as if its makers had just departed.

The Goth factor, a kind of pretty-poison version of Romanticism prevalent in new art, is in effect here. In an exhibition statement, Ms. Liden refers to horror movies and quotes from Revelation. The Halloweenish mood of her pictures brings to mind the medievalizing effects of Ingmar Bergman's "Seventh Seal," along with that film's stalking camera angles.

But Ms. Liden's witches and devils are contemporary figures. They wear jeans and hooded sweatshirts. They are covenlike counterparts to the campers in Justine Kurland's staged photographs of 1960's-style utopian communities. They might even represent a new countercultural ideal, absurdist but scary. In her strange, beautiful photographs, Ms. Liden makes their world, fictional though it may be, feel very real. HOLLAND COTTER