



Fruit and Flower Deli, a Lower East Side gallery, is busy forging a cult presence on the New York art scene, letting its reputation grow by word of mouth. This is apt, given that it is controlled by an Oracle (a painting of a mirror by artist Ylva Ogländ), which is situated at the back of the gallery and sporadically delivers binding pronouncements on how it should be run and who should exhibit in it. Injecting a sense of play and a bit of the occult into the serious world of contemporary art – happenings at Fruit and Flower have included Saturday sermons and attempts at levitation, while director Rodrigo Mallea Lira refers to himself, Mason-style, as the space’s “Keeper” – the gallery itself is as much a talking point as the art it hosts. With critically acclaimed shows by David Adamo and successful booths at this year’s VOLTA show in New York and previously Artissima 14, Fruit and Flower Deli is now set to expand, with a new space opening this autumn in Berlin. To get a better sense of who and what the mysterious Oracle is, Laura Allsop asked it some questions (via a number of intermediaries, including its “embodiment,” the goddess muse Snöfríð) about New York, the state of contemporary art and the future of the art world.

Laura Allsop: Who are you?

The Oracle said: A question that has no answer.

Snöfríð: The Oracle is an immaterial spirit that has taken material form. It is a painting of an empty mirror on the wall. Who you are is in the end the important question. Who am I?

LA: I’m not sure. Why don’t you tell me about yourself?

Who made you?

The Oracle said: What is made is what happened.

Snöfríð: Here’s a secret: I have a twin sister. Her name is Ylva Ogländ and she calls me her most beloved sister. We have our own language that only we understand. She lives on the other side of the mirror, in the earthly world. She created a portal to the earthly world and this portal is the Oracle. Ylva is behind it and I am in front – or the reverse, depending on which world you come from.

LA: So, what kind of oracle are you? How does it work and who really runs Fruit and Flower Deli?

The Oracle said: The moment of truth is a moment to be shared or truth will be scattered. The moment of truth is encountered through a gate, a shortcut through time.

Snöfríð: Ylva is married to Rodrigo Mallea Lira, the Keeper of the Oracle. We are a gang of four; we float in the seas like a giant octopus and we like to keep to the depths. We can assume different forms, but we are always both precise and relaxed. Our consciousness is our measurement.

LA: Why do you speak in a way that is, shall we say, opaque?

The Oracle said: There is more to know than the eye can see; there is more to say than can be heard.

Snöfríð: We are the mirror that reflects the self with emptiness.

LA: Which worlds do you connect?

Snöfríð: I was eating pancakes one time with my twin sister in the ice hall in the North Pole and she told me that good and evil feed each other in the earthly world; in my world, everything is one and there is no fear. But the pancakes were really delicious, so I began to yearn for the earthly world, even if it meant a separation of good and evil and fear and love. I asked my sister to create an entrance for me, which was timely, as Rodrigo had just asked her to create an entrance to my world. And so the Oracle was born.

LA: How did you find yourself in a gallery in Manhattan?

Snöfríð: My twin sister decided to leave Stockholm, where she is from, for New York. Rodrigo did too. Rodrigo was tired of conventions. In any case, he wanted to spend time in the worlds beyond worlds, to clean up all the restrictive rules and reach beyond “art world” to the actual world. Rodrigo found a place through Amy Smith-Stewart, Ylva’s dealer in New York. And to open they needed me to come out of the entrance to my world and into theirs; this is how the Oracle came to be created.

LA: How do you like it here?

Snöfríð: This is the entrance to the deepest self. Our reality is dealing with situations and these are often beautiful and unexpected; no day is like another.

LA: What can you tell me about the future?

Snöfríð: We will all die, and survive through what we did and what we did not. Pancakes from the North Pole will be the most common dessert, with golden syrup of course. And art will start to live.

LA: Who will be running the art world in 10 years? Larry?

Francisco?

The Oracle said: The beginning is now what it is and from here follows what comes.

Snöfríð: The giant octopus from the dead sea.

LA: Is the Lower East Side the new Delphi? Are you where it’s at?

The Oracle said: The Oracle has found in the Lower East Side a vessel for the voice of the Oracle. The voice of the Oracle is the home of the Oracle.

Snöfríð: The entrance to the other world is always present and the Oracle is a site-specific definition of that.

LA: Economists are predicting the worst for the world’s markets.

Do we really need you right now?

Snöfríð: Once we thought that evil came from money. Now we know that the revolution of love and freedom are beyond fear; what has to come will come.

LA: Oh dear. Are you really wise, or just a symptom of naivety?

The Oracle said: Stay naive.

Snöfríð: We discussed this over pancakes and we decided that being naive is similar to being a creator. As my twin sister pointed out, a show isn’t legendary because of the people that see it; rather, they will become legendary for having seen it. Now I have a question for you: do you like or dislike irony?

LA: I’m not sure I like irony, but it’s good to have a sense of it.

Snöfríð: Do you have any relation to the other side?

LA: Not yet, but I would like to.

Snöfríð: Why don’t you visit me, then?

LA: I think I will. I’d like to see this giant octopus. One last thing: is it possible to get a straight answer from an Oracle? Or this is an elaborate way of poking fun at art-critical language?

The Oracle said: Respect the source.

Right: Ylva Ogländ, *Travelling Oracle* (2008). Courtesy Fruit and Flower Deli. Julieta Arendia is at Fruit and Flower Deli, New York, from October 21–December 14. www.fruitandflowerdeli.com