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Weighty skies above uncertain ground: Jesper Blader at Dolby Chadwick Gallery June 2019

by Charles Desmarais
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San Francisco loves its artists, with good reason, and the Bay Area exhibition schedule is always full of work by people who have strong connections here, amply supplemented by shows of big-name contemporary artists from other regions. Leave some room, though, for the offerings of art galleries willing to go farther afield to find fresh voices. Dolby Chadwick Gallery takes such a gamble with new work by Jesper Blader, a Swedish artist whose resume is filled with Scandinavian shows but who seems virtually invisible in the rest of the world. The exhibition, *Beyond the Edge*, is on view through July 6.

Looking at the work, there are a couple of humps to get over. Overwrought titles (*Can Hear It, Far, Far Away, Just a Thought*) might be forgiven as, perhaps, poor English translations. Contrived narratives starring dusky-eyed girls and women are a bit more of an impediment. Occasional verbal and visual clichés aside, however, there's an alluring indeterminacy in most of these paintings that haunts me, days after viewing the exhibition. Landscapes seem to go no farther than what is pictured, with nothing but a hollowness beyond.

Blader's audacious use of unlikable color is just as potent a presence as his casually referenced helicopters, dish antennas and watchtowers. To call them - the colors or the guard towers - symbols of alienation is to suggest mere passive observation. They are, of course, tools he has selected, and which he uses to heighten our awareness of estrangement. Skies are arbitrary, often filled with alternate colors and moods. They are scrimms that might shift or fall at some unpredictable whim. The ground offers no security, either. Nothing stands on it securely, as it spontaneously replots and revises itself. A shout in Blader's world would have no echo, with nothing to reflect the sound.