

To research her latest paintings, **Lisa Ruyter** shadowed the people whose job it is to prevent nuclear apocalypse. **By Christopher Turner**

RADIOACTIVE

Lisa Ruyter's new paintings, the result of her privileged access to the sealed world of nuclear diplomacy, are like cells from a graphic novel about the arms race. Working alongside print and news journalists at the International Atomic Energy Agency's headquarters at the UN site in Vienna, Ruyter—who is American but is based in Austria—was allowed to take photographs of the IAEA Board of Governors meetings, where it is decided whether countries will be referred to the UN Security Council for noncompliance with safeguards obligations. Ruyter used these photographs as the basis for toxic-colored canvases that convey a sense of the tension and high political stakes that surround such secret discussions.

Though the meetings are closed sessions, Ruyter was allowed to observe, from a room that overlooked the political conference, the urgent debate about the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program. "This made me a little nervous," she told *Modern Painters*. "I was worried that I might hear something that I did not want to have responsibility for." The resulting paintings are essentially boardroom portraits of bureaucrats, diplomats, and scientists, but Ruyter's radioactive palette serves as a garish reminder of the destructive forces in question. It is almost as though the very topic under discussion pervades the room, contaminating the scene and its occupants.

Ruyter projects the photographs she takes onto canvases and draws around the main forms. Abandoning her source material, she then adds patches of color as if painting by numbers. A painting is finished when she reinforces her initial drawing with a black line that creates self-contained islands of saturated fluorescence. These strong outlines hark back to French cloisonnism (think Gauguin on acid), while her political theme, and the combination of text and image, also echoes Italian artist Valerio Adami's vivid and highly stylized paintings.

In 2005, Ruyter documented the Parisian fashion shows in paint for *Interview* magazine. She has also portrayed panel discussions featuring art professionals. But Ruyter's latest series takes her beyond the self-referential worlds of art and fashion, and she is keen to pursue this new political direction. She would like to follow the debate about Iran's nuclear program to New York, where the Security Council has so far responded with three rounds of economic sanctions. And she is contemplating a series about OPEC, also located in Vienna. In fact, she's already got an exhibition title in mind: "Oil Paintings." ♦

"ATOMS FOR PEACE" WILL BE ON VIEW AT GALERIE GEORG KARGL FINE ARTS, VIENNA, FROM NOV. 13 THROUGH JAN. 11.

OPPOSITE: *Flower in the Pocket*, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 71 x 59 in.
NEXT TWO PAGES: *The Double Garden*, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 59 x 98 in.

PHOTOS: TANIA MARCADELLA, VIENNA. ARTWORK COURTESY GALERIE GEORG KARGL FINE ARTS, VIENNA.





