

January 2022

Jens Fröberg's interview with Angelika Seebacher for Wien Museum Magazin on 10 Jan 2022 on occasion of his recent solo exhibition at MUSA Startgalerie in Vienna.

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Hi Jens, how do you feel today?

I'm ok.

What do you present at the Wien Museum MUSA Startgalerie?

Paintings whose content move between figuration, abstraction and concept.

What are your intentions, ideas and how do you choose your motives and subjects?

I read that an artist once said that the best way to feel inspired when you paint is to paint what feels most close to you. To me that means that it doesn't really matter what that is, but only that you need to stay true to the thing that moves you whatever that is. I have realised that most of my ideas comes from thinking, reading and seeing art. An example would be the painting Light on Monochrome painting which is simultaneously abstract and representational as it depicts light falling on a monochrome painting. This puts it in a very different context than that of the pure abstract monochrome painting, which has long been the subject historically when artists have tried to make the "last painting". I don't think of it as a very theoretical painting but the idea fascinates me and therefore I wanted to make a painting of it. I often feel the need to find a reason for doing something, otherwise I simply don't know what to do. I work with one series that leans towards experimentation where I paint while bands rehearse, most recently with Libramar and a few years ago with Afuma.

What interests you in painting?

The endless ways to paint the same motive. A tree can be painted in very different ways over the course of several hundred years, still it's the same tree. I find that fascinating. Same could be said about geometric abstractions. Even though art of today look very different than that made 100 years ago, there is still a bridge. Both the likeness and the difference interests me. If comparing painting to writing, words to me seem so concrete while painting feels much more abstract, and there is the aspect that seeing a painting is fast as you see it in a instant, but if you stay and look longer there is really no end. You could spend all eternity looking at one painting, the painting outlives the tree.

How has your style changed and developed over time?

I struggled a long time with not knowing what I want to paint. I think the mood and colours have stayed with me throughout time with some alterations of course and that i wanted to do something that was in between representational and abstract painting, but I have had long periods when I didn't know what to paint. There is a theory by David Galenson that there are two types of artists Conceptual innovators and Experimental innovators, the first type basically work by trial and error taking years to develop while the second type creates with ease and develop quickly. I would definitely place myself in the second category.

What are your influences both historically and contemporary?

I don't know exactly what influences my work, but I often feel a kinship to other Swedish painters. I believe that Torsten Andersson, Åke Göransson and Evert Lundquist to name a few have made a lasting impression that still influences new artists both directly and indirectly. Some contemporary Swedish painters whose work I find inspiring are Viktor Kopp, Felix Gmelin, Katarina Andersson and some friends of mine like Lucas Rahn and Nicklas Randau. Just by going to Denmark the art is already very different from that in Sweden and much more influenced by German expressionism. So I believe the local tradition is at least for some including myself the most impactful influence. But then again there are non Swedish influences also. Some of the painters I love the most are Frank Auerbach, Giorgio Morandi, Balthus, James Bishop, Cézanne, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Piero della Francesca. I often think of Helmut Federle, Suzan Frecon and Robert Ryman - the list could go on but basically art that leans towards the minimal without being minimalism. I recently looked at RJ Messineo and thought it was very interesting. I also like recent work from Tim Stoner, I've seen in his work and other younger painters a tendency to let the influence of modernism be more apparent and down to earth than it has been in the past, I feel connected to that.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years? Is there any dream in your artistic career that you would like to see happening in your life?

I try to stay in the present. I do have hopes of course but I keep them to myself.

'Jens Fröberg's paintings seem remote from the world and mysterious – as if they had survived the passage of time, although they were created only recently. The brushwork is intense, and the subtle shifts in colour and texture are brought out through many individual layers of paint. With their rough surfaces and worn edges, they reveal their vulnerable bodies.'

In his exhibition at the Startgalerie, Fröberg shows a series of works whose content move between figuration, abstraction and concept. The motif is so reduced so that shapes, colours, brushstrokes and light come to the fore. Ideas come to him while seeing, reading and thinking about art. At first glance simple and straightforward, the often small-format, intimate paintings contain an additional investigative quality, which deals with art movements such as Minimalism and Colour Field Painting and occasionally refer to more specific works. He plays with these concepts and sees the appeal in breaking down existing ideas to create new situations. Each painting's own language nevertheless remains intact.'

(Wien Museum Magazin, January 2022)