

# Visions of Katarina amid Jansson and Munch

**Katarina Lofström**

*Visioner*

May 25 - October 20, 2024 Thielska Galleriet, Stockholm



I begin writing a fair portion of this review only moments after leaving the exhibition one full week ago per today's date, but finish it only just now in a quiet room of my own. Sometimes a text dawns before your eyes in real-time, and *all* you have to do after is to find a moment to sit down and put pen to paper e.g. (applying piano fingers on to a keyboard). However, sometimes letting some time pass is a set up for rendering the most honest account of something seen, sanitizing biases out of the pot. Think only of how every film is always a little better and magnified in quality before the big screen that is so optimized for transmitting *cinemagic*. An analogy could sometimes be made with

exhibitions that are marked by visual wealth, or glaring *allure* that allows you to be altogether more lenient about the display(s), sometimes temporarily suspending your scrutiny with how a space has *actually* been used, or the installing choices made and the interconnections between the art. Before I go on, I will recognize and stress that Katarina Löffström's collection-intervening exhibition *Visioner* at Thielska Galleriet, to my understanding, is among the critically more praised local exhibitions this year, and I agree with other critics, and can join in on that chorus line. The art year 2024 hardly has been one for the history books, but as whole, *Visioner*, makes for one of the strongest art experiences I too have had in the last ten months or so.



I've been increasingly "longing" for more abstraction, in light of an image culture in today's art that heavily has favored figuration since the mid 2010's. Merely from the outset of the exhibition framing, Katarina Löffström's layered abstract patterning would appear a very head-on collision with the often natural and romantic landscapes and portraits held on the walls inside Thielska Galleriet. *But* no. Activations of a permanent collection per interventions of "new" art is an art "trope" that easily falls flat and can appear redundant; and haul forward a big *WHY?*, at times appearing a question of form over substance, and only really works when neither the permanent or visiting art becomes an accessory to the other. In this case Katarina Löffström's exhibition manages to enhance and shape the gaze on the permanent collection for me, and it's not just an

abstract thought or concept; but a reality. I usually have a set choreography of how I move inside Thielska Galleriet and take to what I already know interests me, and her interventions are actually bending that and making me look at exactly such artworks that would per usual protocol interest me less. That's not saying little. It might even be called a feat.



Löfström's sculptural objects which have cleverly been installed in the main open rooms first probe your thought at what they even are; they allude on the one hand to ready-made functional objects that belong in a photographic studio or a science lab, and on the other some allude rather to obsolete objects of the past like sundials that you could expect to find in the garden of a site like Thielska Galleriet. They reek of an elegance, but more so they appear designed to activate, set off and put your gaze on total alert mode. I think of Richard Bergh's, from today's lens, *sketchy* painting *The Knight and the Maiden* (1897). It's always struck me as sappy and romantically banal, and my gaze has always been more interested in representations of the beauty of my own gender, of which there is plenty, also in clothed and very demure scenarios. However, I suddenly react at the maiden, and think of the power, and possible undue dynamics found in the painting.

In another room where quintessential landscapes of Bruno Liljefors are on view, one of Löfström's paintings seamlessly and deceptively blends in, in a way that makes me question whether it is hers or a painting from decades and decades before that bear uncanny resemblances to artistic outputs of



the present. In the "Munch room", a group of three sculptural objects that erect from the floor like studio lights, direct the "spotlight" towards portraits in such way that you cannot not think of Narcissus and the personas or egos of people like August Strindberg whose presence is marked inside. In parts, the exhibition is quietly funny, and not so precious as to be a literal mirror of the collection, which is a necessity of the exhibition to work, I think.

It's compelling with a seasoned artist like Katarina who's worked over two decades with evident "brand consistency", with her departing from the same visual core, without neither repeating the same material "formula" nor tortured by the same visual image over and over, like a one trick pony. It's with such artists that the idea of a retrospective, where Point A: *History*, clearly connects to Point C: *Present*, that you're intrigued to backtrack exactly how they (in)formed the Point B: *Midterm*, and everything there in between. I had the same feeling with another Katarina who too champions abstraction recently; Katarina Andersson in Gothenburg last weekend. Unlike some of her contemporaries from the time of her breakout, there's a trajectory here that keeps pointing forward, with continuous shifts, shifts, shifts happening to the effect of progression, rather than stagnant "artistic virtue signaling" per old merits. *Visioner* is not a retrospective per se but it manages to be a solid *amuse bouche*, claim and proposition for the need of that to happen.



But *lastly*, here's where I take to task Thielska Galleriet, a curator (not that it's evident who that would be) or if perhaps the artist was the curator herself (most likely). In a small narrow corridor space outside Söderberggrummet in Thielska is where the largest, consistent group of works by Löfström are found together in a stretch, without evident juxtaposition with the collection. The UV-print works on birch plywood read visually like a cute John Hughes *Sixteen Candles* kind-of-a-situation. It's a little harsh to say, the works are beautiful individually and as a group. But it is a little on gooey side given the crammed space, and here's where I'm reminded after a while that a museum like Thielska Galleriet will always ultimately be a museum like Thielska Galleriet, while yet

generously in the instance, bestowing space upon contemporary art. "You can have the basement, we have some space there where you can shoehorn in the novelties". *That* sort of approach, if you know what I mean? These works should have found themselves as a connective tissue throughout the premises, or perhaps some walls could have temporarily been cleansed in the main rooms?

It's easy to say that this sort of thing "is on" the museum, not the artist who'll take what they get, but certain artists have agency enough to make claims with space and make demands, and Löffström I imagine is one such artist, so it's *not just* on the museum.

Well, that was the more constructive side of things that I might not have arrived at as easily had this text been finished on the spot, on site, a week ago. *But* don't let it derail you or cloud your visit. *Visioner* is mostly glorious; and a sight to behold.

**Ashik Zaman**

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