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- Nättidskrift om samtidskonst -

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Milliken Gallery, Stockholm: Kristina Jansson (23/3- 5/5)

[This text was translated from Swedish to English]

The first of the exhibition's two series of paintings hangs in the gallery's inner room. Deserted rooms, only a gaze seems to exist in them. Not mine. They are not rooms you would want to be in. You have ended up in the wrong place. Everything seems to be about withdrawing from it. As images, the vast majority of them are also far too clear. You get the strange feeling that they are almost enigmatically clear, as if they were pointing out the nothing special in the image. At the same time, there is a sense of urgency in the painting that gives the image itself an air of inevitability or necessity. It is a bit uncomfortable, you feel uneasy and want to leave. You stand and stare.

For many artists today, the problem lies in how to make images in a time of general overconsumption of images; Kristina Jansson talks instead about what to do when an image starts to consume you - a forerunner in this situation would perhaps be Francis Bacon. It is the afterimages of such images rather than memories of the images that she has painted. The first painting you encounter straight ahead if you walk quickly through the exhibition has probably been placed there because it



strikes the afterimage theme. It is called 'Echo' and depicts two spotlights, one blue and one red, directed at the viewer. It is the temporal scheme of the afterimage - if you stare at one colour and then move your gaze, you see the other in the same shape - that has been translated here into a spatial representation: one after the other has become simultaneously next to each other. In the gallery's main room, there are pictures of empty rooms. They are not taken directly from Kubrick's 'The Shining', but show Kristina Jansson's afterimages and reconstructions of them. The characters have disappeared from the images, but the rooms remain on the retina with the same charge.

In 'The Birth of Tragedy', Nietzsche makes afterimages the key to understanding what art is and does. According to him, the actors on the stage only portray afterimages produced on the playwright's retinas after a vision of existence that shines too brightly. The images of art are

therefore not reproductions of what is, but signs of essences. But signs are not understood by bringing them back to the thing that sent them out, any more than someone's love is understood by meeting the object of it. Instead, it is the signs themselves that contain the essence in relation to a sensibility - a content that is refined and concentrated in the artworks. For Nietzsche, the afterimage (rather than the model or original) is the key to art, since it is the artistic processing of them as signs that can make the spectator realize the essences.

Jansson works her way out of the violence of afterimages. First, she paints a smaller afterimage, but the colours are transformed to what they should be in a negative image. Then she paints the positive image in large format. Finally, she can turn the painting - she has even been known to paint it upside down and then hang it upright. This feels like a very contemporary strategy, a preoccupation with the translation or recoding of images, treated as an assemblage of signs, from one format to another. If Kelley Walker comes to mind, it is not because of any visual similarity, but because he is an artist who not only works with translations from one format to another, but also sometimes gets it into his head to turn the images around. But at this point, one has to let go of the similarities with others, because Jansson's art squeezes its themes together in such a way that it hardly makes sense to relate them to anything but each other: the space, the translation, the encounter with something foreign (the image), the afterimage and the transition from viewer to artist - it's all there.

It is clear that images of space are suitable for working with this problem of transfer. It is a question of transferring the coordinates and signs that give the space its character in a particular situation and as a location in a film, to operate in the same way in another context, in another format and without drama. A certain ethic creeps in there, in the mediation of the activity and effect of an image, but also in relation to the passivity and capacity of the spectator to be affected. Not to appropriate the image and make it one's own, but to leave it intact despite its removal - not to paint as an artist, but as a spectator, passively. A Spinozist ethic that aims to let things have the effects they can have if they are not denatured. The difficulty is enormous, precisely because the afterimage from which she starts inscribes the viewer's sensibility in the image itself. The artist who wants to stop being a viewer of it, the artist who wants to get out of the afterimage without perverting it, must therefore leave behind the viewer position itself.



This is why the image must be worked and twisted: on the one hand to prevent the artist's private temperament and character from getting stuck in it (appropriation and expression), on the other to preserve the position of the viewer in its specific and universal passivity. It is the one experienced through the gaze that does not feel like one's own: it is a subjectivity that is not linked to freedom and action, but to passivity. To consider an action as an expression of a

subjectivity is almost inevitable; to consider a passivity in the same way is almost impossible. That is why one's gaze feels alien. You are there in the picture, but as the one who is missing, the one who is not in a drama. You are the only one who sees that the image or the room is abandoned, and you do so with the feeling that 'this is not happening'. You leave them to their fate.

From this defencelessness, it is unpleasant to enter the series 'Echo Chamber' - pictures painted with Jean-Luc Godard's documentary about the Rolling Stones in mind. Music studio, people standing behind the soundproof glass wall, looking into the room. Inevitably, you find yourself standing between two such images of people watching and waiting. You feel a bit like an afterimage, as if the viewers behind the glass could guess your experience from the previous room. There is enormous pressure; it is difficult to show your passivity in front of an audience. Godard's film was shot during the Vietnam War, people felt compelled to publicly do something about the images they had seen of the war. The Rolling Stones sang about it. If the exhibition imprints anything on your mind, it is probably a question mark: what can I do to let an image have its full effect? But it also provides something of a methodology for choosing among all the images to respond to - ignore the immediately compelling messages, do something about those that leave an afterimage.

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