

In the Light of the Miracle

I recently tripped on a thousand-page tome laying on the carpet, the sixth part of Knausgård's My Struggle -series. The bookmark in the autofictional work flew under my bed. I feel like leaving it be.

As I set about painting the works of the present exhibition I noticed that my reflections on artistic practice were revolving more around the concept of fiction than the vocabulary of painting. And finally, when I started coming to grips with the work at hand, the questions concerning the formalistic and material characteristics of painting resurfaced: what happens when I paint?

I want to paint below par. Why make a fuss about oils, it's just self expression, the same as tweeting. On the other hand I am attracted to the tangibility of handcraft and the opportunity to observe the materiality of painting: painting is a surface with characteristics and limits, it posits itself in relation to the body, it feels like something.

Summing up the paintings in my exhibition I can't write off the my works as being just colour and surface, because their references reach outside of their medium. My paintings are born of gazes, moments, conversations – sociability. But if life in autofictional literature appears as a bottomless mine of material, and everything is interpretation performed by an accentuated "I", does the interpretation of the "I" in "autofictional painting", then, reside in the gaze and the choice?

The choice concerns what is shown whereas the gaze concerns how it is shown. I used to carry around a cheap digital camera should I in social situations stumble upon delicious compositions for my paintings. This utilitarian point of view started to bother me. In the end I gave up the camera to a lottery at a christmas party. My friend who picked up the camera from the lottery basket later started a photography blog. Of course I couldn't resist "borrowing" some of the pictures in the blog, since the homogenizing flash of the camera was very familiar to me (as were the people in the pictures). But the motifs and meaning don't come from me, I can only guess their origin.

Not all the works in my exhibition are based on these pictures. Rather I wanted to specify my attitude towards a photograph as a readymade, which not only reproduces but also produces reality. Painting is in itself an activity with attitude. It is good if the attitude in my reference pictures is foreign to my own attitude. Thus the presence of the final work can be called at least partly shared.

Most of my new paintings have a black background. Black is a colour against which the ones bathing in light stand out. Black is also a base, like a cardboard on which you place the cut off pieces. All in all black has been an important tool for me, a stabilizer of sorts, that has brought me back to the basic inner characteristics of painting. Now I only have to figure out how to get rid of it.

I didn't come up with the name of my exhibition, "In the Light of the Miracle", myself, it is borrowed from the song of the same name by Arthur Russell. The light of my paintings does not promise, only suggests small miracles, shining like a lone emoji on a black screen.

*Kaarlo Stauffer, 6.10.2016, Helsinki
The English translation by Ville Hopponen*

The exhibition is supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation.