

VISUALLY IMPRESSIONABLE

By Trine Ross, May 2006.

This text is written to Anders W. Ø. Larsen's solo show: White Emperor at Gallery Tom Christoffersen.

Translated by Christina Mumm.

In the beginning, it is all pure chance. Or something that looks like chance. When Anders W. Ø. Larsen begins a new painting, he lies the canvas on the floor and pours paint onto it from above – in keeping with the Jackson Pollock tradition. But in that instant, chance transforms itself into figuration. Images emerge from the apparently accidental form, fantasy takes shape, and the image breaks through.

Anders W. Ø. Larsen describes himself as visually impressionable – easily distracted even. His immediate surroundings, what he has seen and experienced during his travels, a particular state of mind, etc., all get transformed into picture elements. The constant alternation of abstraction and figuration is maintained in the finished painting too. In *Warrior*, the eye immediately accepts the figurative elements, it recognizes the snow-clad massif and the two grazing mountain goats. Perhaps that is why you so readily accept that the crossing wires seem to be suspended between holes in the sky, and that the contours of the picture are breaking up like melting snow.

Abstraction and figuration, fantasy and fact, form an unprecedented alliance in Anders W. Ø. Larsen's work. He sees the abstract as a lyrical point of departure, which at the same time is firmly anchored in a sense of abstract thought. In certain situations at least. Probably a very human way of thinking.

Fundamental to the artist's work, is his occupation with existential questions, the larger than life, something beyond a discussion of the purely religious. It is an attempt at creating order out of the confusion surrounding us, tidying things up, creating a whole. In his paintings, this whole very often takes the form of a mountain, a recurrent motif in Anders W. Ø. Larsen's work, representing the intangible, the unfathomable, that which is greater than us.

And just like the painting as a whole contains an ongoing dynamic between the abstract and the recognizable, the mountains are both powerful, three-dimensional forms as well as symbolic expressions. In several of his paintings, Anders W. Ø. Larsen further stresses this duplicity by enclosing the contours of the mountain with vertical, bristly lines which in their regularity have a calming, familiar effect, but which at the same time are completely obscure – from a naturalistic point of view at least.

In the painting *Zeitgeist*, the lines become a golden halo around the massif, making its monumental nature stand out even more clearly. The same dynamic can be found in the painting as a whole when Anders W. Ø. Larsen allows a frame of pure abstraction to encircle his figurative elements. Oddly enough, this in no way disrupts the entirety of the painting – on the contrary. The border which in several paintings is present at the bottom of the picture plane serves to stabilize the whole, like gravity, providing a view to what lies beneath the surface.

Having thus laid out the scene, Anders W. Ø. Larsen begins to play with the immediate figurative elements. His trees are inspired by artists such as Da Vinci, Van Gogh and

Bonnard, while animals and humans are cut out, arranged and played into the painting. He could easily paint these figures, but by employing the collage technique, he achieves a different kind of freedom to experiment. And these experiments, where figures are moved around on the canvas, are an extension of the games he played in his childhood. Often games he played alone, since he always insisted on being the one to decide what should happen and when.

The visual games that Anders W. Ø. Larsen play are about Man and Nature, about colonisation, socialisation and the relationship between the individual and the group. But they also take off from many private issues; both picture elements from the artist's immediate surroundings as well as personal reflections on the sublime mystery of life can be found in his work.

The driving force for Anders W. Ø. Larsen is to create something new while at the same time remaining acutely aware of the history of art. This is clearly seen in the painting *Message*, which both in its colour scheme and in the presentation of the mountains suggests an inspiration from the Japanese tradition – converted to the 21st century of course. The enormous influence Japan has had on 20th century art is well worth remembering in an age that still tends to believe by default that everything new and good originates in the West.