

Sokol Blosser

PRESS RELEASE

Knud Odde

Opening: Thursday 12.10. 2017 5-7 pm

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Text by Håkan Sandell, September 2017

Anyone who has followed Knud Odde's art for some time will notice a further departure from the literary narrative in his new pictures at Galleri Tom Christoffersen. A more integrated colour scheme and more harmonious forms are beginning to take over the surfaces of the canvasses. Beyond the earlier world of motifs taken from the tragic legends of film and rockstars, a calmer life is found in these pictures, a resting moment's own glittering aura. The impersonally rounded forms of a Matisse meet a refined eroticism of a more poisonous sort in details and subtly captured facial features. We recognise the florid decorative patterns from previous work, perhaps borrowed from Bindebøll or another *fin de siècle* figure; they essentially constitute a nod to Baudelaire's flowers of evil, dark like opened sexual organs. Nor are the monochrome backgrounds an innovation in Odde's painting. But more than ever before, where the pictures to an increasing degree have become colour compositions, foreground and background have blended into a new harmony — which seems almost happy. They are self-contained like signs or colour poems. All art is abstract, as the Norwegian, classically figurative painter Odd Nerdrum once said with regard to composition.

Knud Odde has always looked away from the Danish canon in art and culture, at least across the borders to Germany and Sweden. In addition to the dominant early impressions from German Expressionism (Ernst Ludwig Kirchner) and Neo-expressionism, which were so marked in Odde, the Swedish eye detects evident parallels with, for example, the sunlit colours once seen in the Swedish artist Ivan Aguéli's pioneering efforts as an ultra-early, Cézanne-influenced Cubist in the North African deserts in the 1910s. If nothing else, they share the soft, sandy light and simplified forms. Perhaps I simply make the association because Odde also used an apparently Arabic male model for the full figures in some of the motifs, as well as for the full face portraits. A more obvious and relevant comparison is to be

found in the change which the Swede Lena Cronqvist underwent, beginning with her stays in New York in the mid-1990s. Similarly to Odde, her familiar motifs (young women, girls with dolls) increasingly came to be painted into the overall composition of the backgrounds, while the geometric elements of her palette began to carry the pictures.

In Knud Odde's works male as well as female models are portrayed in a state of fluctuation between subject and object, between penetrating portrait studies and the body's subordination as a compositional element. In the context of art, it is surprising more than anything else how respectfully this occurs in Odde's work; perhaps the secret lies in the artist's unique combination of tenderness and humour. A disrobed, masculine-feminine gender game has spread to most of the motifs, finely executed with the help of suggestion and sketching, merely little reverberations from the brush, like ink wash paintings or calligraphy. The pictures are often small — albeit not miniatures, as though the artist is still restless in his image-seeing conquest of the world, and on his way through the world. Dramatically and sensually inclined panoptic views of people and landscapes, in almost pastel-clear colours, and well-considered contrasts: ultramarine against titanium white, ochre yellow against greyish pink. A colourist is not something one would call Odde, but the instinctive use of colours has always been one of the strongest elements, with often surprisingly personal transitions between light and dark scales, unspoiled by art school lessons. The black contour lines continue to be art nouveau.

The nowadays, in terms of the colour scale, increasingly light pictures may remind one of the summer palette of an Edvard Munch. Munch was known for 'punishing' his *en plein air* paintings by letting them stand outdoors in all weathers if they didn't live up to his intentions. Less well known is how Munch's outdoor painting at the primitive Åsgårdstrand atelier was part of a physical training programme, combined with a healing nudist cult within and without the pictures, as well as skinny dipping directly below the slope of the garden, down towards the fjord. All of this was a result of Munch's hypochondria, and desire to have a vigorous body. As recently as this summer, during a visit to the atelier a couple of hours' drive south of Oslo, I myself came for the first time to understand Munch's pictures, and thus also something more general about art, in a particular regard: in their function as exorcisms. The artist who paints out of libidinous compulsion neurosis, in the attempt to totemise and pin down his fixation with nameless dreams and spectres that pursue him. A ritual returning to the exercise of the atelier, which is not unlike Knud Odde's own in the various backyard studios of Nørrebro. As with Odde, the art consists not in finishing a painting, but in doing it again, and again, in a process that stretches over many years. As for the madman, the magic lies in the repetition.

Life goes on, forms are overrun. As seen previously in Knud Odde's frequent use of different media —

posters and book illustrations (Søren Ulrik Thomsen, Lene Henningsen), woodcuts, linocuts, and beautifully coloured lithographs — for a number of years now Odde has also spread his images to ceramics, to dishes and vases. All with an overall impression of unstoppable creativity and compulsion to express himself. That which could in the beginning have been seen as purely experimental, has over the years imparted great elegance to the glazed surfaces; the technique has been mastered and the artist has learned to contrast light and dark surfaces in the ceramics to a maximum of expressivity. The homage to and imagined portrait of the 16th century Christian anarchist 'Johan van Leyden' (John of Leiden) captures him on a painted dish in all his youthful lust for life, when he marched under the white pennants and flags of John the Baptist (towards his martyrdom on the torturer's table and the restoration of the old social order). Nowadays, in his new work, Knud Odde is rarely so literary, neither in ceramics nor in painting. In these compositions, which to an increasing degree make use of the entire picture plane, and which increasingly make a direct impression on the viewer's vision, and also in his excitement about the world's wealth of colours and forms, he seems to have begun to leave narration behind.

Translation by Christopher Sand-Iversen

Knud Odde (1955) debuted in 1983 with his first exhibition. Over the years Knud Odde has received the Oluf Hartmans Grant, The Heerup Grant and the Danish Arts Foundation 3 year work grant i.e. Knud Odde has exhibited his work at Esbjerg Kunstmuseum, Trapholt, HEART – Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsebro Kunstmuseum and Randers Kunstmuseum etc.

Håkan Sandell is a Swedish poet and art critic living in Oslo. He has published twenty books including his latest release: a selection of his poetry translated to English under the title "Dog Star Notations" (Carcanet, 2016)