

C F H I L L



S K O C S
P R O M
E N A D

October 8
— November 3,
2021

Forest Walk, 2017

Forest Walk, 2017, by Jeff Olsson

Forest Walk, 2017, by Per Kirkeby

Forest Walk, 2017, by Paloma Varga Weisz

Forest Walk, 2017, by Per Bak Jensen

Forest Walk — ”Hearken to the sougning of that spruce to which your own adobe is rooted” 1

Forest Walk, 2017

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Forest Walk, 2017

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Forest Walk, 2017

I’ve always been fascinated by the spruce, whether it be the endless, monotonous rows of them that lull travellers into trances through car windows all over Sweden, or their appearances as subjects or motifs in some unique oeuvre or other. **Ann Böttcher**’s sensitive portraits of spruces, meticulously drawn in the minutest detail, were the first works I came across, and I was equally moved when I subsequently encountered **Carl Fredrik Hill**’s (1849–1911) allegorical self-portraits. A broken tree or a solitary, black spruce would symbolise spiritual distress, despair, and loneliness. Few before him had depicted mental illness and existential anguish so honestly and starkly. He made the trees endure his pains along with him.

Forest Walk, 2017

I’d like for this exhibition to highlight how we relate to the forest as the biological, alluring, frightening, and mythical environment it is. Spruces, mosses, decay, and fungi. What’s the appeal? Why is it that nothing else alive has the same powerful impact on our human sensibilities that a tree does?

Forest Walk, 2017

Trees, and spruces in particular, have always been important aspects of Swedish culture. Until the 16th century, when we began to enjoy the comforts of highways and national postal services, the forest was regarded as an entirely wild, unfamiliar, and terrifying place. However, during the Romantic era, which coincided with the emergence of industrialism and large-scale forestry, it came instead to be appreciated as a valuable resource, both spiritualized and attractive. In Rococo art, deciduous trees were favoured as a result of the pastoral natural ideals of the time, but as the 18th century drew to a close, interest in the spruce increased, and subsequently peaked as Romantic Nationalism made its entrance on the scene towards the end of the 19th century. As artist **Ann Böttcher** put it:

Forest Walk, 2017

“Tall and straight, strong and indomitable, it became the very image of the Swede and the Swedish. In a nation as rich in forests as Sweden, it’s only natural that trees have always been very important. The spruce has held a special, ritual role for a long time. It’s only been a century or so since the old tradition of lining a coffin’s path to the graveyard with spruces was abandoned. The tips of the trees would be bent towards the church, to keep the spirits of the deceased from turning back. Twigs from spruces would be placed by the corner of the house, to keep evil spirits away.”

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We’ve lived in and on our forests, and the spruce has always invoked powerful emotions. This interest peaked during the pre-romantic era, as exemplified by artists such as **Elias Martin** (1739–1818), and later on in romantic nationalism, by the likes of **Gustaf Fæjstad** (1868–1948). Nature and the forest took on a leading role, and the spruce was celebrated as a natural column within the Scandinavian flora. In the 20th century, apart from continuing in its role as a symbol of Scandinavia, the spruce was also used in Second World War propaganda, as a symbol of the Aryan.

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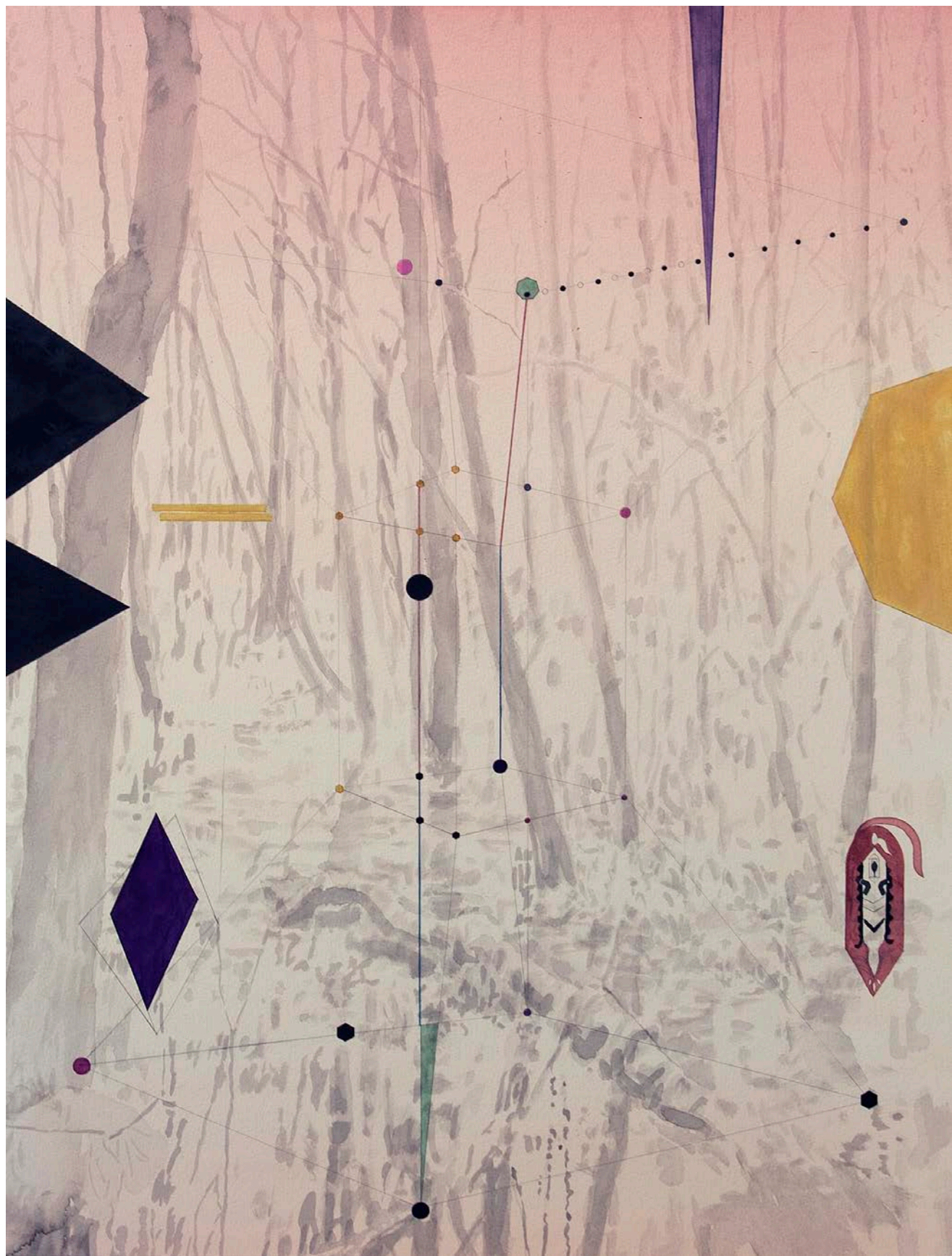
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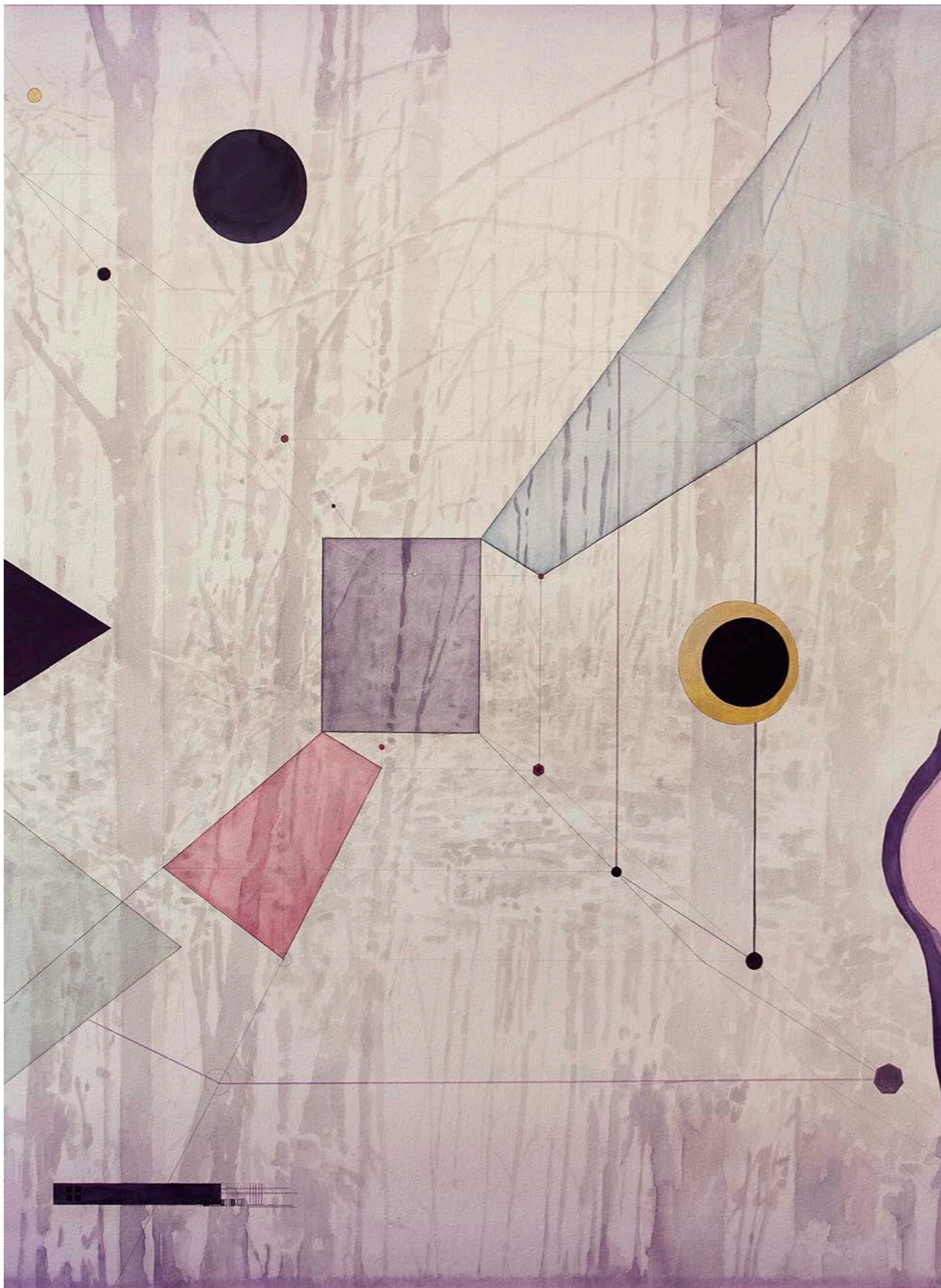
Christine Ödlund
Fyra dimensioner av ett träsk / Swamp in four dimensions I
2021
Watercolour, plant pigment, pen and pencil on paper
73,5 x 54,5 cm

Christine Ödlund

A swamp can be defined as a larger area of rough wetlands that includes areas with unfirm ground, and others that are actually covered by water. Standing before this painting by Christine Ödlund is to come face to face with a swamp, not merely in the sense that it is a to-scale depiction of a section of these foggy wetlands that somehow mark the boundary between the land and the water. The biological elements that make up these environments are incredibly varied and diverse, and exist in a constant state of flux. The scents that surround a swamp often contain hints of decomposition, moisture, and the processes of life. This place is anything but peaceful! Christine Ödlund trained as both a visual artist and a composer. Are both of these disciplines relevant to her oeuvre? Certainly! Through the use of electrodes, studies of photosynthesis, and her own observations, she has documented sound waves and extracted the innate electronic music of various plants. Even the paint itself was extracted from plants, so her paintings can be interpreted as more than depictions: they are nature every bit as much as they are portraits of it. Christine Ödlund works with painting, animations, composition, and installations, and her work is represented in the collections of Moderna Museet and Magasin 3 in Stockholm. She has shown at CHFILL several times before, including a solo exhibition (*Systema Naturae*) in 2020.

Previous page:

Christine Ödlund
Träsket
2021
Plant pigment, oil and pencil on canvas
204 x 345 cm



Christine Ödlund
Fyra dimensioner av ett träsk / Swamp in four dimensions II
2021
Watercolour, plant pigment, pen and pencil on paper
73,5 x 54,5 cm



Christine Ödlund
Fyra dimensioner av ett träsk / Swamp in four dimensions III
2021
Watercolour, plant pigment, pen and pencil on paper
73,5 x 54,5 cm

Ann Böttcher

This small, carefully executed drawing is typical of Ann Böttcher in many ways. Her studies of spruces and other Scandinavian coniferous trees are never straight-up depictions or landscapes, but rather fragmented sections of something—often, as in this case, depictions of older artworks. Elias Martin was an 18th century painter who became famous for his animated landscapes. This particular piece revolves around a view of a place in Sweden that underwent enormous change over the last century. Today, the Forsmark nuclear power plant stands just a few miles away from the little town of Forsmarks bruk. When the foundry was built in 1570, Sweden was responsible for one third of Europe’s iron production. The terms of the trade changed over time, and the iron industry died down in the 1890s. The English Park, where these trees once stood, was constructed in the late 18th century, and displays all the expected attributes of an English park: statuary, temples, buildings, winding pathways, romantic bodies of water, and a garden swing that looks just about right for some flirtatious play. Her recent exhibition at Bonniers Konsthall in Stockholm offered the audience a look at the fruits of Böttcher’s many years of research into the significance of the spruce in Scandinavian culture, and the various things it reveals and/or conceals. Also addressed is the question of how the spruce can sometimes symbolise the inexplicable, subconscious, and occasionally—depending on the zeitgeist and ideology of the age—the national characteristics, or distinguishing features. One of her most famous works is a long-pile rug titled *Sverige (Brevkort, NSB: God Helg, 1930-tal)* [Sweden (Postcard, NSB: Season's Greetings, 1930s)], in which the different strands have grown wild on top, while their hidden roots form the shape of a swastika. Böttcher’s drawing in this exhibition reveals an anything but orderly nature. The trees are sparsely clustered, untamed, like a dour, mistreated set of siblings. Ann Böttcher’s works are represented in the collections of Moderna Museet in Stockholm, among other places.



Ann Böttcher

Trädgårdsgungan, Forsmarks bruk

(Drawn from natural originals by E. Martin, etching by M. Heland, interpreted by A. Böttcher)

2003/2021

pencil on paper

29 x 42 cm

Jeff Olsson

Jeff Olsson's detailed charcoal drawings possess a strong, narrative quality. Each one of his pictures, with all its inexplicable tension and enchanting characters, can stand alone, and each tells its own full, beginning-to-end story. However, they could just as well be comic book frames, dislocated from their context within a longer narrative. His world is completely grey, but it isn't colourless. It seems as though the colours disappeared along the way, or perhaps we simply can't see them. Or, well, perhaps we can see them inside our minds, like we do when we see black-and-white photographs, in full awareness that they were taken in the same full-colour world we inhabit. It's just that we can't see it. Just like when you browse an old photo album and get the feeling that you're looking at mementos from a time long gone by. Forgotten tales and legends about doves, eagles, secret messages, and strange bearded men who carry themselves like prophets. Almost always with a dramatic, almost ominous, sky overhead. All of this is drawn with great skill, a musical performance of shades of black and varied densities, but always with an underlying good-natured and humorous tone. Jeff Olsson once referred to himself as a night-time painter in an interview. That explains a great deal of the dreamy expression. In the same interview, he was asked about his relationship to nature, and gave the following response:

"I feel vulnerable when I'm in nature. Nature frightens me, and I'm processing my fears while I draw. I go through periods when I spend a lot of time in the woods, but it's not because I feel somehow harmonious or in balance there. I find inspiration in the incomprehensible chaos that sustains what many people seem to perceive as 'a quiet place.' When I examine nature up close, it seems brutal to me, although, of course, landscapes can be beautiful. I've not witnessed the cookie cutter phenomenon yet, but maybe I ought to."

Jeff Olsson graduated from Valand in 2008, and has had many exhibitions since then, in galleries and museums in Sweden and abroad.

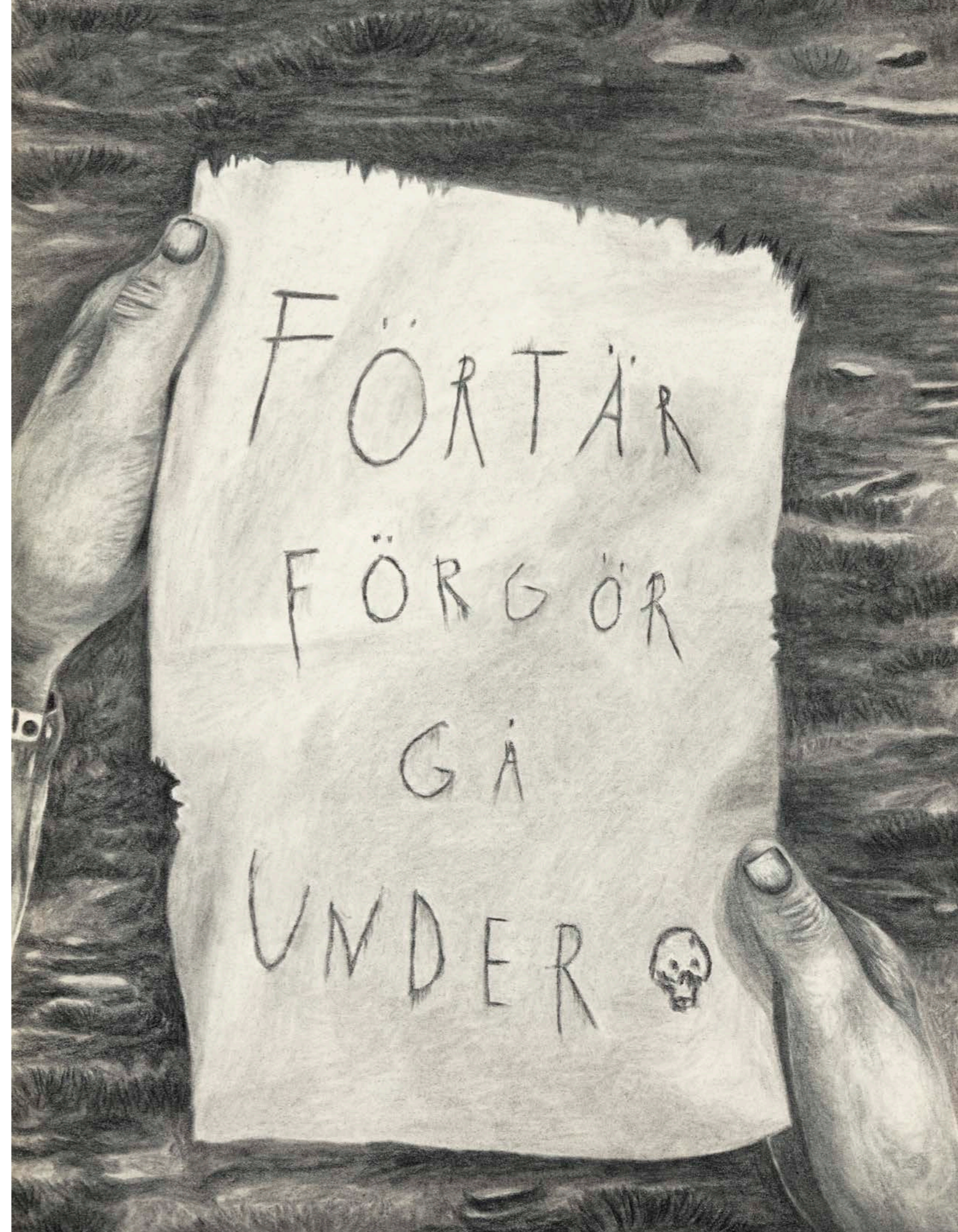
Jeff Olsson

Promemoria / Memorandum

2020

Charcoal on paper

42,8 x 33 cm







Jeff Olsson
Fågeln och havet / The Bird and the Ocean
2020
Charcoal on paper
153 x 119 cm

Previous page:
Jeff Olsson
Anarkisterna / The Anarchists
2020
Charcoal on paper
32 x 42,8 cm

Martina Müntzing

The little fox's red body rests in a graceful posture, with its black paws extended in an almost flirtatious gesture and its thick, bushy tail rolled up into an elegant curl. Is it asleep, or is it dead? If we peek in underneath its furry bangs, we'll soon spot the keen, yellow eyes, but the obviously lifeless bird right next to it still causes doubt. In this painting, Martina Müntzing has blended two classics to create a third. This could either be a still life—more specifically, *a nature morte*, a genre of painting that originated in central European Renaissance, in which subjects like household implements, foodstuffs, and dead animals are used as allegories of the impermanence of things and the shortness of life. There might also be another, rather Swedish, art-historical reference here, to Bruno Liljefors and his famous paintings of a fox in the woods. In his many portraits of foxes, this remarkably small predator, which enjoys a spot near the top of the Scandinavian food chain, represents the brutal force of life, and the Darwinian principle of “survival of the fittest.”

Martina Müntzing's painting expresses a deep obsession with time. This subject first enters the works through the slow, meticulous approach she permits herself to take. Never is there a visible brushstroke to be found. A brushstroke is, after all, an account of time, in a way. By letting the work take time, and letting each single square millimetre gradually emerge and constitute its own separate microcosm, she seems somehow to freeze time. The melting snowmen in one of her most recent paintings thus become paradoxical. Caught, as they are, in a moment between existences, between solid form and the translucency of melted water, they too represent frozen time. Beyond the image, they would soon fall apart. Throughout her oeuvre, Martina Müntzing has painted children, both her own and others, most likely their friends. Martina Müntzing's art marks out its own territory within the history of Swedish painting. There is a kinship here with Fra Angelico of the Early Renaissance, Caspar David Friedrich of the Romantic Era, the family painter Carl Larsson, and the decorative mystique of folklore. It is this band of faithful proponents of the possibilities of painting she has joined with in taking her place as one of the most prominent of her generation. Martina Müntzing is represented at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Göteborgs konstmuseum and other institutions.



Martina Müntzing

Sova räva

Oil on panel

75 x 75 cm



Erik Steffensen

What is painting, potentially and essentially? Oil on canvas, various pigments, extracted natural substances, like lapis lazuli, indigo, or umber, mixed with water (watercolours) or egg (tempera). Throughout human history, art has been in a state of constant evolution, like a body of water making its way through a winding landscape. Painting has, nonetheless, remained essentially the same in terms of its foundational aspects: the application of paint to a surface. When photography was introduced in the mid-19th century, it looked like painting might change forever as a result at first. Because of this, artists like Kandinsky and Hilma af Klint began to paint things that no camera could ever capture. All these things come to mind when viewing these photo paintings by Erik Steffensen. Tree canopies, silhouetted against an atmospheric, moist space. Erik Steffensen, former professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, doesn't do nature photography in the conventional sense. There is no connection to science here; the pictures refer, rather, to Scandinavian art history, mythology, and literature. After all, photography is more or less the same phenomenon as painting (pigments applied to a surface), but the craft itself differs a lot in terms of its processes. Subjective choice and chance are equally important aspects of both techniques. Erik Steffensen has also curated many exhibitions, including one featuring Per Kirkeby. His works are represented in several prestigious institution's collections, as well as many private ones.

Erik Steffensen

Pastel southern trees

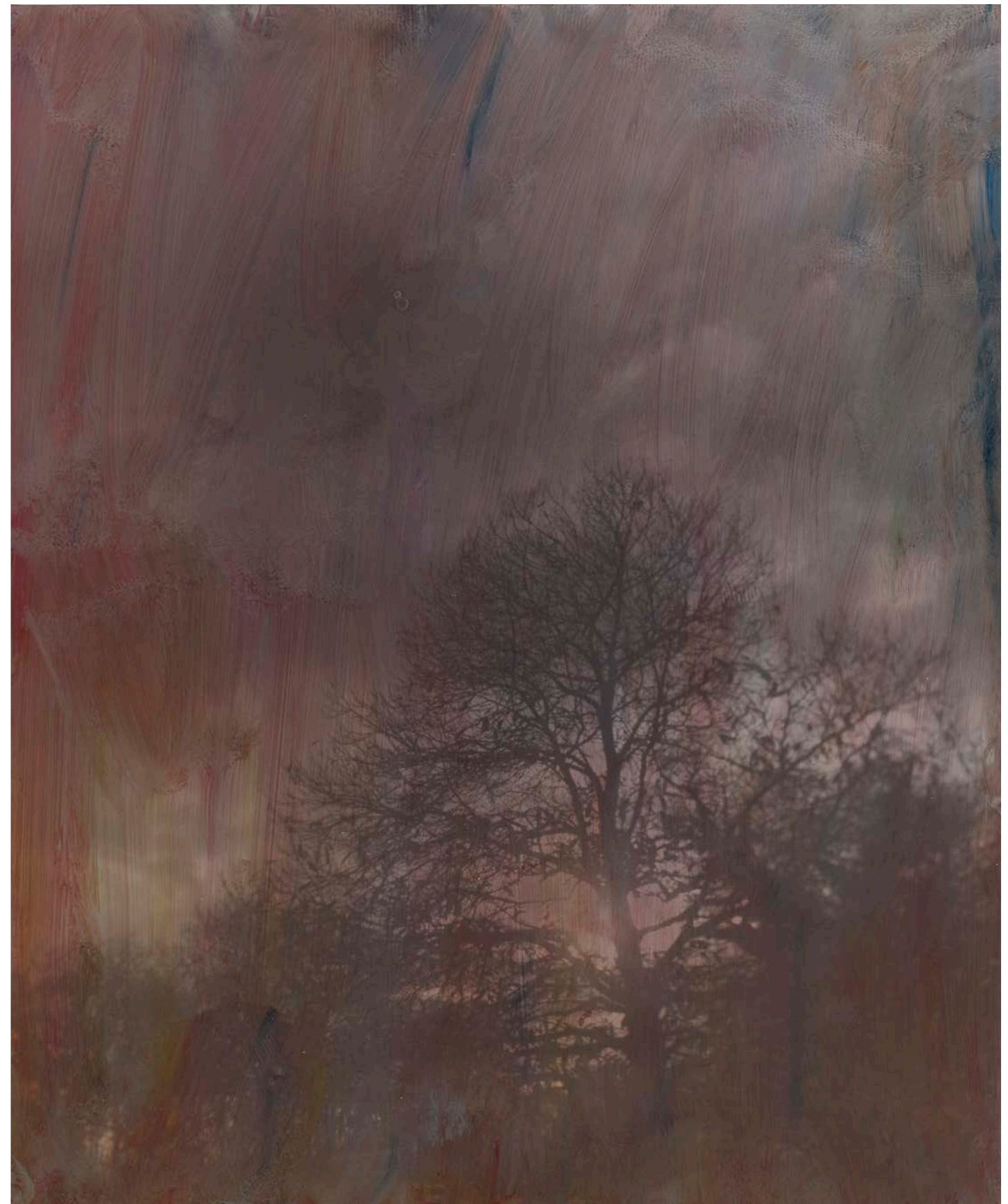
2021

Oil gelatine silver print

73,3 x 62,3 x 3 cm



Erik Steffensen
Dark sky
2021
Oil on gelatine silver print
62,3 x 73,3 x 3 cm



Erik Steffensen
Oldfashioned
2021
Oil on gelatine silver print
73,3 x 62,3 x 3 cm



Johan Thurfjell

Regardless of material—and Johan Thurfjell is a stranger to none—there is always a touch of low-key, melancholy poetry in anything he does. The title of the exhibition that many of these works were first shown in was *Den första skulpturen* [The First Sculpture]. For him, the objective was to look closer at one of the most defining characteristics of a human being: the ability to discern human symbols within the chaos of nature. Two sticks in the forest are just that: two sticks in the forest. If human hands were to bring them together and attach them to one another at the centre with some twine: a cross. Regardless of the particular meaning they ascribe this symbol, any human being, regardless of background and religion, would be able to identify it as the work of a member of their own species. The same is true of cairns; those sudden accumulations of boulders of more or less the same shapes and sizes into neat, sometimes overgrown and halfway collapsed structures that are usually located in the vicinity of settled areas. Again: traces of life, and remnants of deliberately applied muscle force. In his drawings, Johan Thurfjell has first depicted the irregularities, indentations, and protrusions on the rocks' surfaces, then cut them out and attempted to arrange them in accordance with the principle of balance. Constructing in two dimensions, while envisioning the material before his mind's eye. It's almost as though starting out with the very simplest things, like boulders and sticks, were Thurfjell's way to seek and identify the initial seed of our drive to communicate using symbols, or symbolise using communication—it works just as well either way. With his feelers constantly extended towards the most genuinely universal abilities that humans possess, Johan Thurfjell has spent almost thirty years on his ongoing quest for new avenues towards a visual, timeless poetry. His works are represented at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, as well as in other collections.

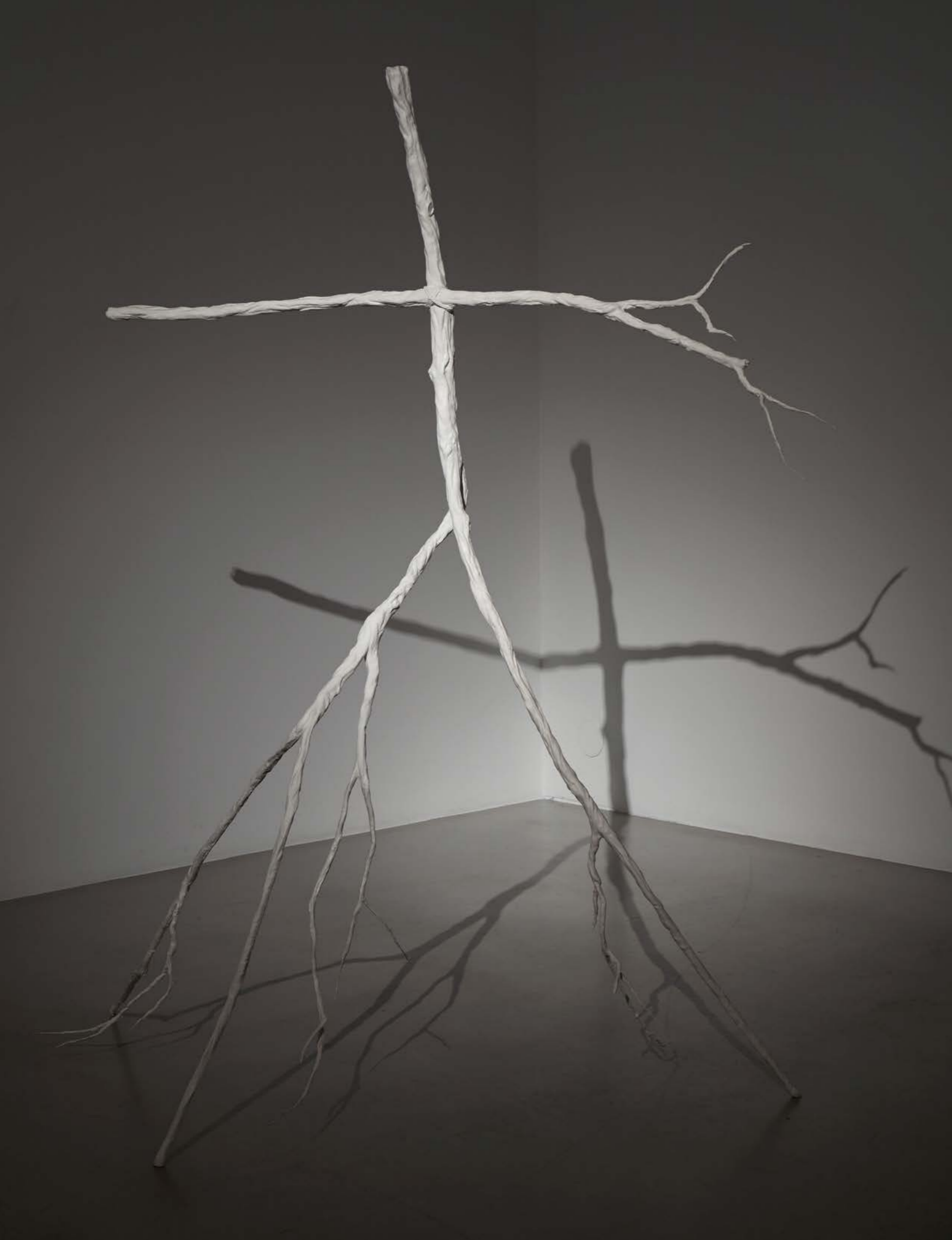
Johan Thurfjell

Tower 3

2017

Chalk on paper

39 x 29,8 cm



Johan Thurfjell
Stick Man
2018
Clay
178,5 x 152 x 83 cm

Johan Thurfjell
Tassemarken / The Wilderness
2015
Video
HD video (13,37 min)

The Forest, Nature, and History

By **Mikael Ahlund**, Director of Gustavianum, Uppsala University Museum, Keeper of the Art Collection, and Associate Professor at the Department of Art History.

When did nature become a thing of beauty? It's been claimed that the Italian Renaissance poet Petrarca was the first to climb a mountain just to enjoy the view, when he scaled the peak of Mont Ventoux in the southern French district of Provence in the mid-14th century. In describing this event, he did something unprecedented: he put into words a new sensibility towards visually experiencing the landscape, and towards the view of nature as a source of both beauty and reflection. Seeing nature was also an activity that involved pondering the meaning of being human.

Petrarca saw all this with new eyes, and the main point that this anecdote hammers home is that humankind's relationship to nature has varied throughout history. The view of nature is a cultural artefact that has been subject to constant reshaping throughout the ages, and which will certainly continue to change in the future. This is, perhaps, particularly true of our relationship to the forest. That's what this exhibition is all about. Being an art historian who may have spent a little too much time exploring early landscape paintings, I have developed a tendency to view the world I find around me today through these paintings—and this applies both to nature and the forest as such and to the contemporary art scene. And what is brought into view by this kind of historical filter is just that: the fact that our relationships to the forest and to nature are in a state of constant flux. Walking through the exhibition, you find yourself feeling that nothing can be taken for granted—our secure, and seemingly timeless relationship to nature undergoes an unending succession of new metamorphoses.

Assuming our views of nature and of the forest are cultural artefacts, and thus subject to change—what, then, would the milestones of this history be? The rise of agriculture, in the distant past, and industrialisation, in the less distant past, are without doubt the two most earth-shattering events in human history. They both altered our relationship to nature, and thus, our own place within it, on a fundamental level. Industrialisation, which has been underway since the 18th century, has been particularly closely tied to a process of gradual distancing from nature, and the distance thus achieved is the one we've lived with for the last two centuries or so. However, we are currently—as we face climate crisis, melting polar icecaps and forest fires—heading towards a third milestone, in which it seems that our view of nature will be undergoing yet another radical process of change.

Let's back up a bit and reflect on how we have utilised nature—not just in the purely physical sense, but mentally, as well.

What are the different roles that nature and the forest have played in our history. In the 17th century, Swedish forests made their first proper appearances in visual art. In the hundred or so small, painted views that appear in the margins of Carl Gripenhielm's *Mälarkarta* [Map of Lake Mälaren] from 1688, you can see dense walls of spruces that surround the fields and buildings that dot the landscapes of central Sweden. For anybody travelling through Sweden, the ever-presence of the forests must have been the single thing in the country that made the strongest impression. But while the forest could seem overwhelming, or even frightening, it was also viewed as something to be conquered, forced to submit, and put to use. The relationship to the forest activated different aspects of human nature. At that time, taming nature was conceptualised as a dutiful response to a moral imperative, and activities like blasting rocks, clearing forest, and breaking new ground were often viewed as inherently heroic. Nature was there to be conquered and made useful.



Fig. 1. Erik Dahlberg, *Drottningholm*, engravings taken from *Suecia antiqua et hodierna*, Stockholm, 1715. Uppsala University Library. Photograph: Uppsala University Library.

The same ever-present forest is depicted in Erik Dahlberg's *Suecia antiqua et hodierna*, a collection of engravings that was published in the late 17th century. However, in his depictions of the chateaus and manors of the Era of Great Power, we can also see this longing to master nature manifest itself in the tamed, straight angles of the baroque gardens. In this context, however, the wilderness could be given an aesthetic role, too. This is obvious in Dahlberg's pictures from Drottningholm (Fig. 1).

Viewing these engravings, I'm struck by the fact that any visitor who arrived at the palace in the late 17th century would already have spent hours travelling through the wild, Lake-Mälaren landscape, with all its crags and wiry spruces. When they finally arrived, the civilised gardens must have been quite a magnificent sight to behold. However, the memory of the forest around them would also have served an important role, by contrasting with the meticulously controlled nature of the garden. In these images from Drottningholm, Dahlberg captures the tension between the various forms that nature takes, and in his engravings, the rustic scenery with its jagged rocks and wobbly pine trees is seen right next to the palace and its tightly pruned baroque garden. There is another dimension, though, which further complicates the period's relationship to the forest. When our 17th century visitor, who has been admiring the view of the park from the windows of Drottningholm, turns away from the gardens, the Swedish wilderness will again return into view—only this time, it will have entered the hallways of the palace, which have been hung with woven tapestries depicting woodland scenes, or with David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl's monumental paintings of black grouse courting or capercaillie hunts. The forest even invaded the very heart of Drottningholm. The views of nature of the day were indeed both complex and contradictory.



Fig. 2. David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl, *Black Grouse Courting*, 1675, oil on canvas. Nationalmuseum. Photograph: Nationalmuseum.

The forest and the wilderness, it seems, had important roles to play in the visual and intellectual culture of the 17th century. They continued to play these roles, too, although nature also began to be viewed in new and different ways in the century that followed. One of the most dramatic shifts in our relationship to nature occurred in the 18th century, which is the century that definitively shaped us into the modern people we believe ourselves to be. During the 18th century, new attitudes to nature began to emerge and references to nature and to things being “natural” saw frequent use as arguments in a wide range of contexts, whether they be related to politics, economics, philosophy, or human wellbeing in general. The philosophers of the Enlightenment and the Romantic authors all played their part in this transformation of nature from an antagonist to an ideal and a reflection of human ideas and emotions. However, all of this was essentially a paradox — just as humankind was beginning to distance itself from nature through urbanisation and early industrialisation, it took on a more important mental role as an idea.

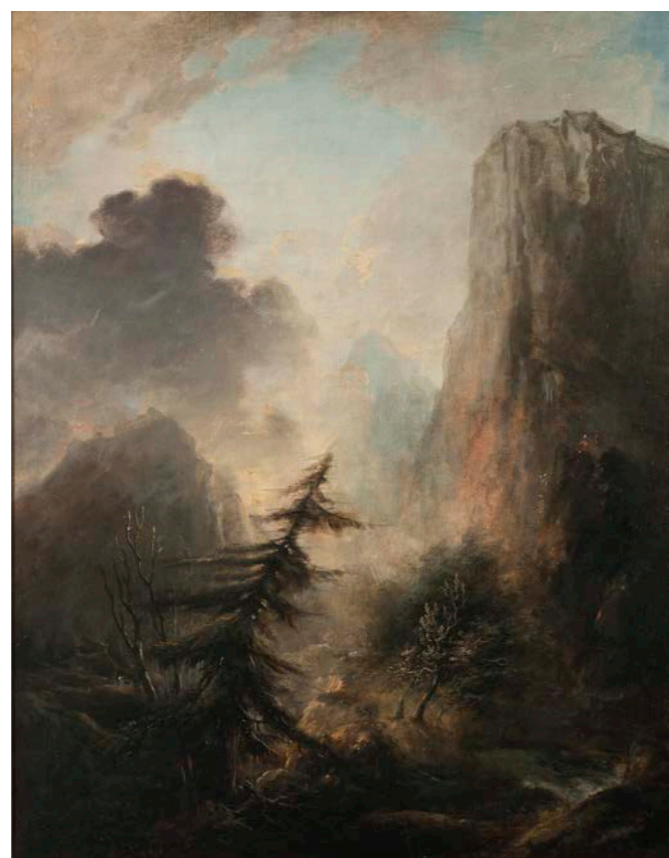


Fig. 3. Elias Martin, *Landscape with Leaning Spruce*, appr. 1780, oil on canvas. Nationalmuseum. Photograph: Nationalmuseum.

In Elias Martin's pictures, the 18th century's new-found interest in the forest is on full display. His painting in which a large, leaning spruce is framed by a dramatic cliff-side landscape has become iconic of the new, Romantic appreciation for the wilderness, and for the emotional response that the experience of untouched nature could produce (Fig. 3). Martin's curiosity over the Swedish forest is also evident from the series of watercolours he made in the forests of Roslagen in 1791. In these, he provided detailed depictions of the very simplest and humblest aspects of Swedish woodland terrain; behind meticulously studied overturned roots or fallen trees, or by huge boulders, we see the outlines of scruffy spruces and a jumble of branches and twigs. On one of the watercolours, there is a note from the artist written in ink: “On 8 May 1791, the forests in Roslagen looked like this”. These are not well-adjusted, picturesque subjects; they are snapshots of the wild, made for the very sake of making them.



Fig. 4 & 5. Elias Martin, *Studies of trees and terrain from Roslagen*, 1791, watercolours. Nationalmuseum. Photograph: Nationalmuseum.

The 18th century approach to nature had its own inconsistencies, though, and Martin's imagery also expresses different qualities of the experience of the forest. This obvious ambivalence comes to expression in his many depictions of the English gardens that were constructed at countless estates and manors towards the close of the 18th century. The staged nature of the gardens's ostensibly natural landscapes made them into a transitional space of sorts, softening the contrast between the estate, the foundry, and the surrounding wilderness—in which the line between the artificial nature and the actual forest was clearly defined. In Forsmark's English garden, behind clusters of trees and lush foliage, we can glimpse the roundpole fence that delimited the “natural” landscape of the park from both the foundry's noisy smithies and the wilderness of the surrounding terrain (Fig. 6). The English gardens veiled the manors and foundries in an air of seeming naturalness. But the real forest was kept at a distance.



Fig. 6. Elias Martin, *The English Park at Forsmarks bruk*, 1795, etching by Martin Rudolf Heland. Private owner.

The 18th century's ambivalent desire to both admire and tame the forest comes to expression in a variety of contexts. Many of Martin's grandiose woodland landscapes might perhaps best be associated to the time's new-found interest in wilderness. In the light of one of the most debated issues of that century, however, another dimension of these paintings comes into view: the anxiety over an imminent, extensive forest shortage. Discussions on the forest and on the national financial and social consequences that would follow from a lack of firewood and building materials were energetically held in all kinds of circles and contexts, and the 18th century obsession with this issue might be compared to our own time's concern with climate change and greenhouse effects. Export industries, like iron production, were dependent on access to forests as an energy source, and unrestrained deforestation was thought to pose one of the most serious threats to the financial wellbeing of the nation. Excessive clearing near the major foundries caused the most problematic forest shortages that were actually experienced. In travel accounts from the time, like those of Linnaeus or Jonas Carl Linnerhielm, concern for the forests is a constant theme. Against that backdrop, Martin's depictions of the period's rustic iron-producing manor estates and forest landscapes appear in a new light. To a contemporary eye, the paintings didn't just depict picturesque views, but also essential natural resources. Objects of great concern — and something to worry about.

The Romantic view of the forest that took hold in the 18th century—in which nature could serve as a surface on which to project both deep emotions and a nationalistic symbol of the fatherland—prevailed throughout the 19th century and on into our own time. This development was caused by a conflux of factors, notably including industrialisation and the changing relationships between rural and urban areas. As more and more people left the countryside and relocated to the cities, new ideas about nature came about as idealised counterweights to the filth and decadence of the cities. One phase of this process involved nature being experienced increasingly through pictures, as opposed to in reality. The distant wilderness or the pastoral splendour of the countryside were given space inside the cities—in paintings, art print collections, and illustrated publications, and, eventually, on museum walls.

19th century landscape painters, including artists like Carl Johan Fahlcrantz, Marcus Larson, or Gustaf Fjæstad, played a variety of roles in this development—they produced idealised landscapes, or tried to capture a national-romantic vision of typical Swedish nature, as a component of a redefined national identity. Standing in front of their paintings, one can sense this inherent contradiction. As industrialisation really began to pick up steam, artists were depicting nature as a timeless Arcadian realm, or as untouched wilds.



Fig. 7. Bruno Liljefors, *forest Lake Landscape in Uppland with Pond*, 1888, oil on canvas. Gustavianum, Uppsala University Museum.

It has been pointed out that 18th and 19th century European landscape painting sometimes tended to present nature not as it *looked*, but rather as it once had looked. Viewed generously, this practice might be regarded as an expression of nostalgia as an essential part of the landscape genre. Viewed less generously, it could be taken to be a deliberate covering-up of the changes that the scenery was undergoing as a result of industrialisation and the recent innovations in farming. Landscape art was delivering ‘*fake news*’ long before fake news was a thing, by conjuring up illusions of pristine nature.

There was a diversity of approaches, however, in 19th century landscape art. Bruno Liljefors was, without a doubt, one of the century’s most radical portrayers of nature (Fig. 7). Although his imagery was consistent with the general national-romantic ideals of the time, he was quite different from most of his fellow artists. Liljefors had unusually deep knowledge of Biology and Ecology, and a solid awareness of how human activity affected nature and animal habitats. Liljefors sounded the alarm about the mass extinctions we’re currently experiencing a century ago. The urgent issues of climate change and the environment have made Liljefors surprisingly topical in our time. He also set himself apart from his contemporaries because of his ability to view nature through fresh eyes. Instead of seeking out what would generally be considered beautiful vistas, he tended rather to gaze straight down, into the thickets and clumps of reeds that littered the mid-Swedish wetlands paying no heed to the many conventions that belaboured the notion of natural beauty at the time.

One theme that fascinates me particularly, both in older landscape painting and in contemporary art, has to do with not simply viewing nature in itself, but also deliberately relating to the very act of viewing nature. When we stand before a work by the German early 19th century landscape painter Caspar David Friedrich, we’ll often notice the back of a proxy viewer or *rückenfigur* in the foreground, who gazes out over the same misty mountains as us, only from inside the image. Friedrich doesn’t simply depict nature as it is; he also includes somebody to look at it, just like we are doing. This almost postmodern dimension in Friedrich—viewing the viewer who views the landscape—is a concept that recurs in art produced in our own times. Here, there will often be an expression of the insight that nature in itself is not enough for landscape art; the viewer is also a necessary component. A deserted landscape requires a human eye to become fully realised. By choosing the viewpoint and the subject, and by manipulating the subject, the artist sets the stage for an experience of nature, in which we as the viewer are expected to play along.

The history of landscape art is full of these constructs and conventions and contracts. Historically, visual art has played a vital role in the formation of attitudes to and ideas about nature—about what is beautiful, how to interpret the landscapes, or how to behave when contemplating nature—or its depictions.

However, several of the contemporary works in this exhibition expose these constructs, and the filters that have been applied to nature in the past. These works aren’t simply about nature; they also address the conventions, complications, and expectations that we bring with us to our encounters with nature—or its depictions.

Now, we live in a time in which our whole relationship to nature is once more undergoing a total renegotiation. And now, our encounters with the forces of nature seem to trigger other emotions than the sublime experiences of dark forests, mountain peaks, and majestic waterfalls that the Romantics were so preoccupied with. Instead, our minds turn to images of icebergs crumbling in the Arctic, or of the forest wildfires in California, sparking feelings that are far removed from what a romantically inclined individual might seek from an encounter with mighty nature back in the 19th century. Climate change has altered some of the fundamental terms of our experiences of nature. The powers that are in motion here can’t be blamed on some divine creator, or on nature itself—the finger of blame points right back at us. Before nature, climate change has made us both viewer and actor. Both victim and victimiser.

Here, different possibilities emerge for our future relationship with nature, and the forest—and how it will be depicted and experienced. Will future landscape images be less romantic, and more inspired by ominous doomsday scenarios? Or, will nature once again become a source of energy and reflection—will we, like Petrarca on Mont Ventoux, not simply rediscover the beauty of nature, but perhaps also come up with a new, more responsible way to relate to our surroundings? Now as then, to view nature is to contemplate what it means to be human. Time will tell. What we can say with certainty already, and find evidence of in this exhibition, is that everything is in motion, and that nothing is permanent—neither the forest itself nor the way we relate to it.

Per Kirkeby

After Per Kirkeby's passing in 2018, obituaries celebrating his life's work were published in major newspapers all over the world. "Per Kirkeby, Painter Inspired by Nature, Is Dead at 79" was the succinct headline used for esteemed art critic Roberta Smith's piece in the New York Times. The phrase is particularly accurate because he, like Carsten Höller, entered the field of art via nature studies—geology in Kirkeby's case. During his many travels, which took him to Greenland, among other places, he took advantage of the opportunities to study the wild by drawing what he saw, as if to better understand it. It was almost as though he entered into dialogue with it, learning its language. After he encountered the German Fluxus movement (fluxus= "flowing") and Joseph Beuys, his nascent oeuvre moved into the unique borderlands between the conceptual-performative and pure, neo-expressionist painting. Another art critic, Olivier Basciano, in his obituary for the Guardian, described his work as "oscillating between outright abstraction and landscape painting, often within a single composition." The same can be said of his sculptures, into which he has encapsulated the presence of moments in nature for all eternity. The gouaches in the exhibition seem simple and restrained, but they also testify to a whole lifetime of experiences of the cycles of nature, in which the law of death as a prerequisite for life is exposed in its most unfiltered form. Kirkeby's paintings are represented in major private and public collections in all parts of the world. In 2009, he had a large retrospective show at the Tate Modern in London, and he showed at the Venice biennale no less than four times. Another kind of sculptures Kirkeby worked on was what he called "buildings without purpose", a series of brick buildings of varying shapes. One of these can be visited down by the shore at Moderna Museet in Stockholm.



Per Kirkeby

Untitled

2001

Gouache

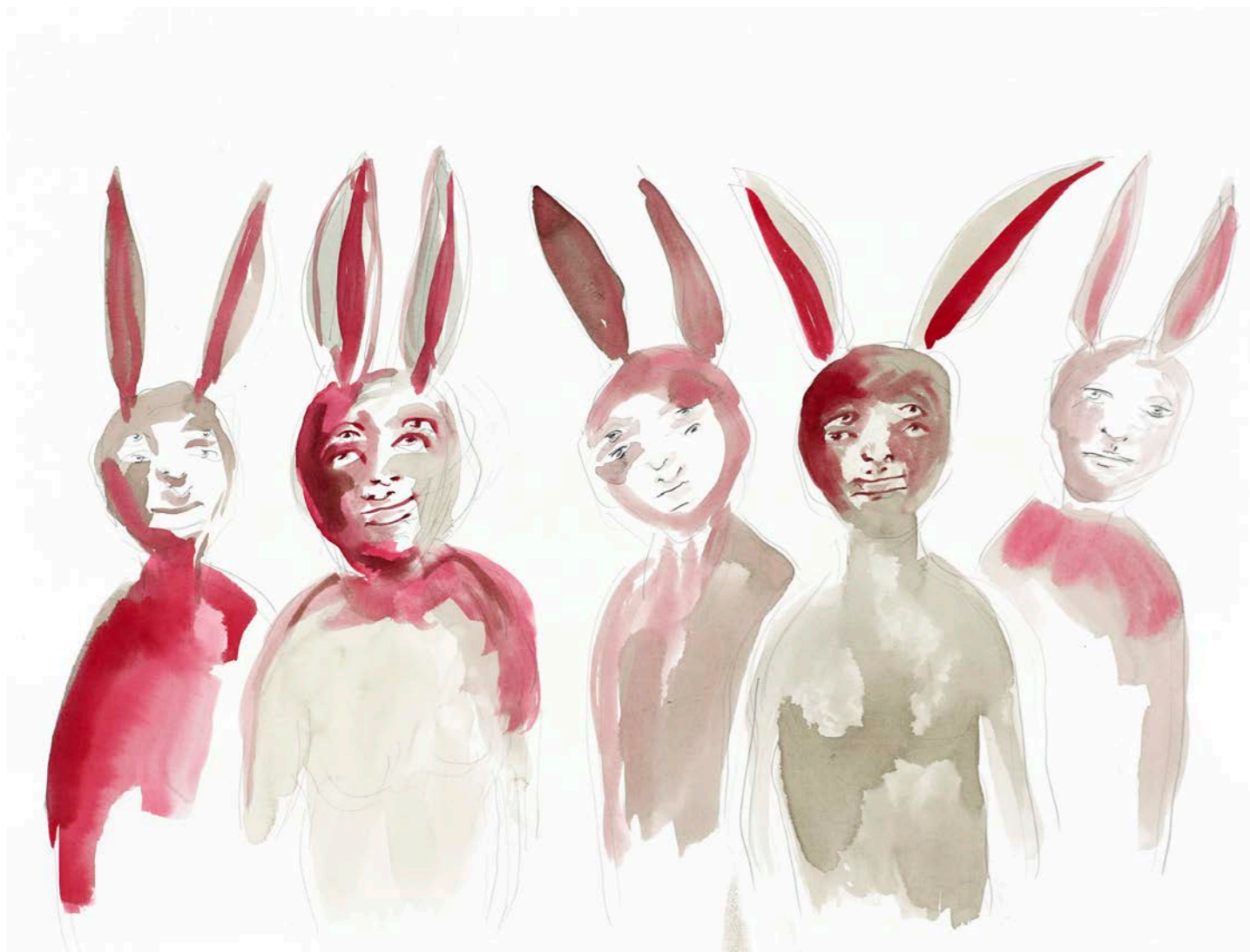
78,7 x 112,8 x 2,8 cm





Per Kirkeby
Inventory XIV
2002
Bronze
Edition of 4
114 x 31 x 61 cm

Previous page:
Per Kirkeby
Untitled
1989
Gouache
76,2 x 110,8 x 2,8 cm



Paloma Varga Weisz

Seeing one of these bizarre, yet somehow always friendly, figures, whether it be carved from wood or painted with watercolours, can easily cause you to wonder whether the artist might have actually encountered them in real life—how else could they be so alive and natural? The dog man, the two-headed boy, the rabbit children, the girl with six breasts, and the lumpy figure sitting on a log—they all seem to be waiting for something, as though they had important information to pass on, or were looking for lost souls to guide through the woods. Their appearance isn't meant to be intimidating, just different. Paloma Varga Weisz began studying at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf. A city famous for its many churches and vital art scene. However, she didn't begin her path to a career in art by immersing herself in theory-heavy contemporary art at the highly esteemed art academy. Instead, she enrolled at a Bavarian woodcarving school in Garmisch Partenkirchen. The woodcarving tradition she belongs to goes back at least to the early Middle Ages, where it was used for the vivid and lavish decorations given to church interiors, as well as the altarpieces that depict scenes from the life of the Christ, the apostles, kings, or wise men. Carving and bringing life to limewood is something masters have been doing for centuries, and Varga Weisz is one of the more recent additions to this long lineage of practitioners. After her rather unusual student years, she broke through in a big way in the early 2000s, and has since earned a place among the most unique and innovative sculptors of her generation, with countless prestigious international exhibitions to her name, the most recent of which was shown at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds. Paloma is represented by Gladstone Gallery and Sadie Coles Gallery.

Paloma Varga Weisz

Untitled # 5

2020

Watercolour and pencil on paper

46 x 61 cm



Paloma Varga Weisz
Bumpman on a tree trunk
2020
Bronze
47 x 30 x 97 cm



Paloma Varga Weisz
Untitled #4
1999
Pencil on Paper
31 x 21 cm

Goldin+Senneby

Abstract formations, a bit like feathers, on crumpled paper. The same pattern, in a monumental format, only made from resin. What's this all about? Artist duo Goldin+Senneby (Simon Goldin and Jakob Senneby) have dedicated their long-time collaboration to exploring and tunnelling the depths of the abstract world—that is, the global, mercurial world of finance, with all its intangible currencies and final destinations on remote islands. In more recent years, these explorations have brought them into contact with artificial intelligence and big data as used by companies to covertly collect our health data through the breadcrumbs we leave behind, found connections from there to the world of pharma, medical history, and the frailties and illnesses of the human body. What we're seeing on these crumpled bits of paper is what is known as frottages (a technique in which a crayon is rubbed against paper held over an irregular surface) of pine tree trunks that have been tapped for resin. Here, a special technique has been used to extract the resin, which is the raw material for making tar, a good that was once a significant Swedish export. Tar was used to plug leaks in ships during Sweden's involvement in the European wars of conquest. Their work *Multiple Scars* (2021) seems to draw a line between the forest as a place of healing, its pecuniary role in the global economy, and the resin itself, the actual purpose of which is to protect the external, living parts of a tree trunk. Goldin+Senneby are represented in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and Moderna Museet in Stockholm. They have exhibited at CFHILL on several previous occasions, including a solo exhibition (*Pool of Life*) in 2020.

Goldin+Senneby

Multiple scars

59°33'49.8"N 26°05'18.7"E

Frottage

98,5 x 64,5 cm





Goldin+Senneby
Multiple scars
59°33'49.8"N 26°05'18.7"E
Frottage
98,5 x 64,5 cm



Goldin+Senneby
Multiple scars
59°33'51.7"N 26°05'18.3"E
Frottage
98,5 x 64,5 cm





Per Bak Jensen

Realism, only taken to its fullest extreme, as though you could turn some gauge up to the very limit of absolute depiction, and then crank it some more. Where would that take you? Perhaps you'd be standing before a work by Per Bak Jensen, an artist who has taken photography as his practice and nature as his subject. The paradox of the unmanipulated image, in which some areas reach such a vertigo-inducing degree sharpness that you begin to feel like you're dreaming. "Metaphysical realism", a term used by Poul Erik Tøjner, director of the Louisiana Museum of Art in Copenhagen, to describe Bak Jensen's works, is another good way of putting it. Our gaze is no machine that simply reflects and registers surfaces and colours. The brain actually does most of the work, and if there's anything the human brain does well, it's rationalising. As we take in so many impressions and confront so many problems each day, we end up unconsciously disregarding the details and unique characteristics of things. A copse of trees becomes simply "a copse of trees," as opposed to a group of individual, scraggy, moss-infested trunks, from which jagged branches extend, seeming to reach for one another like arms and hands. Landscape painting was once held to be one of the most exalted genres of painting. It represented everything from the eye of God, gazing watchfully over the world, to profane demonstrations of power, territory, and the military reigning supreme. Later, landscape painting would come to represent genuineness and simplicity. Modernism followed, paying less interest to natural surroundings, but the interest was later reborn as a result of photography being made accessible to the public. Per Bak Jensen's "pure" photography, in which the moment is more important than the post-processing, lends itself readily to being framed within this context.

Per Bak Jensen
Afterland/ Evning Land
2018
C- print/ Mat Diasec
Edition of 6
125 x 173 x 4 cm

Previous page:
Per Bak Jensen
Erindring/ Memory
2018
C- print/ Mat Diasec
Edition of 6
125 x 173 x 4 cm



Carsten Höller
Double Mushroom Vitrine (Twenty-fourfold),
2021
Unique
Cast polyurethane mushroom replicas in various
sizes, acrylic paint, glass discs, metal pins, vitrine
glass, powder-coated metal framework
145 x 175 x 25 cm

Carsten Höller

In Northern and Eastern Europe, fungi play a vital role. All the experts are saying that this will be a great year for mushrooms, and our friends' feeds are already filling our screens with snaps of baskets filled to the brim with golden yellow and brown treasures. Mushroom eating was never a given in Sweden, and it took a long time for this upper-class habit to reach and be embraced by ordinary households and their members. Even during the famine at the close of the 19th century, mushrooms were left unpicked. It was during the years of record-breaking growth, after the war, that leisure time suddenly became sufficiently abundant when mushroom-picking with family in the woods became an appealing (and wholesome) option. In Carsten Höller's sculpture, the point of view is that of naturalist Carl von Linné rather than that of a cookery book. We are presented with 24 samples, meticulously arranged into a mystical order of sorts, in which different species have been spliced together, so that three different ones are represented in each constellation within the large vitrine cabinet. It's as though the whole thing were an experiment, the purpose of which remains obscure to outsiders. Edible mushroom species are present, as are obviously toxic ones. What would happen if one actually went ahead and grafted them together like this? Would that produce new varieties, with interesting properties, like delicious flavours combined with powerful hallucinatory effects? Or might it perhaps produce a miracle drug that the whole world has been waiting for? When the time came for Carsten Höller to choose a career, he wanted to be a scientist, in the field of biology, at first. His research into the behaviour (and minds?) of insects took him further and further away from what was generally thought of as respectable research in the field, and in order to continue his path in science, he found it necessary to step outside of the lab and become an artist. Subjects from biology, the unexplored vistas of the mind, the intoxicating properties of certain fungi, and the relationships between animals and human beings are all subjects that Carsten Höller has been exploring for decades. His efforts in this regard have made him one of the most esteemed and in-demand artists on the international scene, and he has shown at the Gagosian in New York (2017), and the Tate Modern in London (2007), where he installed a 30-foot slide. Carsten Höller has exhibited at CFHILL on many previous occasions.

Carsten Höller
Double Mushroom Vitrine (Forty-eightfold),
2021
Unique
Cast polyurethane mushroom replicas in various
sizes, acrylic paint, glass discs, metal pins, vitrine
glass, powder-coated metal framework
205 x 146 x 26 cm



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Lisa Borg

Texts:
Mikael Ahlund
Michael Storåkers
Paulina Sokolow

Photos:
Sarali Borg
Björn Petré
Sofia Johansson

CFHILL
Västra Trädgårdsgatan 9
111 53 Stockholm
www.cfhill.com

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