

Kirsty Bell, "I Have to be Curious, Otherwise I Get Bored": An Interview with Swedish Artist Cecilia Edefalk," *Frieze*, June 22, 2018

FRIEZE

'I Have to be Curious, Otherwise I Get Bored': An Interview with Swedish Artist Cecilia Edefalk

With a series of paintings, 20 years in the making, recently shown for the first time in Berlin, the artist discusses her processes and inspiration



Swedish artist Cecilia Edefalk's first solo exhibition in Berlin, 'the eight White Within angel' at carlier gebauer, was 20 years in the making. A series of paintings depicting an angel forms the core of the show and is emblematic of the artist's richly experimental, materially driven working process. For Edefalk, repetition becomes a primary means of investigation, through which a series develops slowly over time. During the last days of the show, Edefalk talked to Kirsty Bell about the genesis of this body of work.

CE The works in the exhibition began roughly 20 years ago while I was living in Bremerhaven, Germany. They became a series of seven large paintings, 'White Within (1-7)' (1998–2008), though we are only showing three of them here (each titled *the eight*, 2018). The two smaller paintings I made in Stockholm last autumn, the mid-sized yellow ones I did in the spring. The slide projection in which the silhouettes of all seven angels are put together, finalizes the series. At first I installed the works in a really pedagogical way— big ones, small ones, drawings and all — so you could understand how they were made. But then Ulrich Gebauer came in and turned the whole thing into poetry.



Cecilia Edefalk,
White Within (4),
1998 / 2008, acrylic
and oil, 2.6 x 1.9 m.
Courtesy: the artist
and carlier |
gebauer, Berlin

KB *Is it about the circulation of an idea?*

CE There are so many decisions, it's almost impossible to describe. The idea I had from the very beginning was to make one painting and then another that is similar and paint many, many layers, and paint it backwards by doing the last layer first ... It's very weird – I know exactly what I mean, but it's impossible to explain to someone else. My inspiration was a Renaissance angel in a painting of the Annunciation that I saw in Tuscany, in San Gimignano. It was so beautiful I thought I could never do something like that. Usually I would paint something I see, copy something, but in this case I did it free. I said, 'OK, I'll try to do a contemporary angel.' So I made seven of these angel silhouettes ('Blueprint for White Within (1-7)', 1997).

KB *Why did you chose this colour scheme?*

CE I wanted them to be earthbound: it's raw sienna from the area around San Gimignano, and ochre. It was a conceptual decision, it's not that I loved these colours, I just said it has to come from the earth and the place I saw the angel in.

KB *The works seem to ask how you can give form to something that is real but not visible.*

CE When I was in San Gimignano and I saw that angel, it was like an epiphany, as if it was pointing at me. It was a very strange, very strong, spiritual feeling. I was a little shocked. It just came to me, so to speak.



Cecilia Edefalk, "the eight White Within angel", 2018, installation view, carlier | gebauer, Berlin. Courtesy: the artist and carlier | gebauer, Berlin; photograph: Trevor Good

KB *This series has been going on since the late 1990s. Was it something you kept returning to amongst the other works you were making?*

CE Now and then. I showed the first paintings in different places and in different ways. At one point I had them standing on the floor on top of each other, lifted up a little bit. And I also hung them from the ceiling because the backs of the stretcher frames are really exquisite. I worked with them as a material more or less. I see them as a net that you can catch ideas in, each time they became different and I added things.

KB *You changed them after you showed them?*

CE Yes, I changed them every time. I thought they were so strange that I could work with them in an ongoing way.

KB *The idea of a subject or a question finding you, and that becoming the material you work with, seems very physical here. It's like an analysis of an idea through the medium of painting.*

CE I think you put it very well. I had this experience and I wanted to do something about it, but I didn't know at all how it would end.

KB *Is your studio like a laboratory?*

CE [Laughs] The studio is very important to me, because its space comes into the painting. It is very important that it has daylight, and I don't work with music, I never did. I want it to be silent and to have nice light. And the space itself is important.



Cecilia Edefalk, 'the eight White Within angel', 2018, installation view, carlier | gebauer, Berlin. Courtesy: the artist and carlier | gebauer; photograph: Trevor Good

KB *You can sense that here because the room with this overhead light feels like the perfect space for these works.*

CE It's fantastic. The gallery had asked me to show many times, but it was always a difficult space for me. I would have liked to do new paintings, but I'm not very productive right now. So I thought about it and we decided to show this. It was so nice to bring the works back to Germany, because that is where they started, and to do this with Ulrich. It couldn't have been better, also because I made a conclusion.

KB *Is this really the end of the series?*

CE I think so, I feel like I have 'tied up the sack', but I don't really trust myself. I am very happy that I closed the circle, but then maybe another circle will come along that overlaps it.

KB *Is that a habitual way of working? To make something and then feel out if the idea can go any further?*

CE If you look at my work it seems like that, yes, because I continue. For instance, the new work here, *a boat*(2017), is a bit like a painting and a sculpture at the same time. I originally had the idea for it in 1998. It has taken so much time already, there is so much thought behind it, that I want to enjoy the idea a little bit more, not just leave it.



Cecilia Edefalk,
White Within (6),
1998/2008, acrylic
on canvas, 2.6 x 2
m. Courtesy: the
artist and carlier |
gebauer, Berlin

KB *Are you someone who goes to their studio every day?*

CE I used to say that because I thought that is what you should do, but the truth is I don't. I work very strongly in periods, when I know what I want to do. Some artists paint layers and layers and that's how it develops, but I have an idea and then through meditation it grows in my mind, and then I know how to perform it. In a way it's like a performance. I know what to do, and then actually it doesn't take so long. That's the way it is. Deadlines are not bad either. Occasionally things develop on the side, then I realize all of a sudden that it is a work. But mostly it's a deadline.

KB *That's also a realistic part of the working practice, a way to keep the motor running. It's just as important as an idea that comes to you as a sudden inspiration, and all part of a process, in a longer-term sense.*

CE It is about process, which is very evident, but it is also about the process of understanding life or whatever. I approach different topics and things I would like to understand a bit more. I think that's why I have to be a little bit in love with the topic, I have to be curious, like a lover, otherwise I get bored.