The sea within

Ann Frössén paints the sea. Consistent and uncompromising, and almost always on monumental canvases. Like history paintings of the 19th century but without the grandiose ambition that drove the artists of that time, whose purpose with the scale was to conquer a place in some public gallery. Ann paints large, so that the movements of the water and the brushstrokes become close to inseparable. So that material and motif merge in a way that comes remarkably close to reality. As if to avoid as much as possible that the paintings become pictorial. That they stagnate into pictures that ultimately will be regarded as art historical specimens.

That is probably why, in front of Ann's paintings, I find myself forgetting that I am looking at images. I understand, of course, that it is not real sea, but the closeness to reality is overwhelming in a way that makes the beholding immediate rather than reflective. It brings up personal memories and associations so immediately that my understanding becomes existential rather than intellectual.

How is an artist is able to achieve this? What the romantics of the 19th Century aimed for in theory, but only exceptionally succeeded in putting into practice. I think of how they in many respects wanted to put the viewer first by avoiding image content that was linked to a certain meaning and how, with their realistic representation of the outside world's nature, cities and interiors, they made the distance between the viewer's own sphere and that of art as short as they could. Romantics such as Caspar David Friedrich and Johan Christian Dahl wanted to make art accessible to their audience via the individual experience. To succeed in this, they made reality their means of expression by tirelessly drawing and painting studies after it, thus integrating nature into mind and vision. But no matter how close to reality the representations are, they are characterized by more or less prominent conventions and pictorial concepts that nevertheless remind us that they are calculated compositions, thus encouraging analysis.

A similar approach is difficult to take on Ann Frössén's paintings. In them, I don't see compositions emerging in a corresponding way and rather than pictorial concepts, this is about a choice and a will that has liberated creation from compelling structures. This probably has a lot to do with how Ann works. How she has chosen to work and how she masters her process. She does not use studies or photographs, but paints freely from her inner self. On large canvases, she paints without initially knowing how the image will turn out. Without being able to overview it, the work becomes unpredictable in a way that reminds of the sea's own capriciousness. A method that depends on a deep familiarity with the subject and an intuitive understanding of it.

Ann describes her relationship with the sea as carrying it within. Sea and mind are mirrored in each other, intertwined to formulate what will materialize on the canvases. With Ann, the sea becomes a deeply personal expression, but without the images closing themselves before the beholder. Instead, they are open, because that is how water works. And because the opposite would go against Ann's fundamental principles. These characteristics of water are explained in the following lines by Gaston Bachelard from *The Water and the Dreams*:

"But our native country is less an expanse of territory than a substance; it is a rock or a soil or an aridity or a water or a light. It is the place where our dreams materialize; it is through that place that our dreams take on their proper form …. Dreaming beside the river, I gave my imagination to the water, the green, clear water, the water that makes the meadows green. I can not sit beside a brook without falling into a deep reverie, without seeing once again my happiness …. The stream does not have to be ours. The anonymous water knows all my secrets. And the same memory issues from every spring."

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curator 19th Century Art