

Erik Jeor interviewed by Karsten Thurfjell, journalist at the Swedish Radio

*Perhaps we should start with the work that VinUnic, who is also tonight's benefactor, has bought. It's a large watercolor painting on paper, 174 x 124 cm, the title is "Liv Methnal" and there is a rather special technique behind it. What kind of image is this?*

It could be described as some sort of a picture of the mind, but I have put a nail in it and attached a steel wire to it. I discovered that these paintings came to look like satellite pictures of the surface of the earth, or the inside of the body filmed with a camera.

So where are we? It's that kind of almost impossible question we have to ask ourselves. And what it's about varies from one day to the next.

It's an open project.

*So how do you do it?*

I start with a table that I can slope in every direction, so that the water can run, and then I work with or against that flow and around the spots that the water creates.

The image is an implosion, with a lot of water gathered in the middle.

Then I implement a structure by adding sticks, reed or straws.

*When the color has dried up the pigment forms itself in a landscape consisting of what almost looks like lakes, and the paper is dissolved by the water which makes it sort of an illustration of the process. Has that some sort of meaning?*

Yes, these works are framed as some sort of an object in a box; there is a distance between the glass and the image. Since I've used the thickest paper it almost looks like a parchment.

There is another aspect as well. I'm attracted by the esthetic which is mostly referred to as outsider art, or art under the influence of various substances; like Henri Michaux engaged himself in when he took mescaline. You can use that form without taking drugs, it's the formal qualities that interest me.

Then we also have the question that still interests me, the relation between the concept of quality and some sort of presence in painting. I have been over this many times and I am continually fascinated and eager to discuss this topic.

*So, when looking at your body of work one can see that you have done quite a lot of different things before you developed your way of painting. How did it all start?*

It all started in Örebro, where I was born in 1974, in the middle of the Swedish middle milk country. I was into art early on and went to a liberal arts college. My art teacher Olle Grafström said "Travel a lot! Don't enroll yourself in an art school". And I guess I was pretty influenced by what he said. I didn't apply until much later.

*So what did you do instead?*

I took various jobs, played music and engaged myself in a non-conformist church. My family moved to Stockholm so I spent my last year in high school in Lidingö. We were a part of the Örebro mission and my parents wanted to start a new branch with influences from the American vineyard movement. I dedicated myself entirely to my parents work. We started a Vineyard congregation (appropriate in relation to this scholarship) and went to the American west coast for a few months to learn more. I was eighteen at the time. Vineyard is part of the Jesus movement that evolved from the hippie culture. You keep your hands in your pockets and the supernatural is normal.

*Is this something you want to relate to in your art?*

Sure I can do that, I don't have any problem talking about it, but there is a strong temptation in making something spectacular out of such an experience. I did some works about it at the Royal College of Fine Arts in Stockholm. The last one is called "Living water", where I have some sort of a charismatic encounter on my own in front of the camera using music from the church. This was shortly after I had defected, so I could still simulate the typical charismatic behaviors.

*So what is a charismatic behavior then?*

Roughly you can say it is a way of bringing forth the Holy Ghost through prayer and singing. It can be in small groups at home or during mass.

What I wanted to capture followed two different tracks. First I wanted to see what happens when you take away the context. How is the behavior of the charismatic leader perceived in an empty room? To me it seemed that what was left had a lot to do with sexuality, just like Dan Graham's work "Rock my religion", where he makes a direct connection between the Shaker movement and Elvis way of sexualizing a physical schedule. This I recreated at home, on my own in my video and perhaps in a more outrageous way, inspired by Peter Land's famous video where he is dancing naked in front of the camera.

The other thing I wanted to investigate, which was often written off as hocus pocus during the most intense Vineyard period, was what in Sweden was known as the "laughter movement". We called it The Toronto Blessing after the Holy Ghost made a touchdown in Toronto and people there started laughing hysterically, sounding like animals, roaring like lions, running on the same spot without moving forward. I was attracted to this. It was during the beginning of the 90's, a dark time in Sweden where extremists shot down immigrants in the streets and populist parties made great progress. It was a time of extremes.

*How did you move on after that work?*

What I explore in my artistic practice today are the phenomenon of mass-psychosis and mass-psychology. Social group phenomenon can, within some given frames, suddenly be OK. Ten ordinary people behind closed doors can behave completely differently; it's even recommended. It becomes some sort of baroque aesthetic which reminds you of role-play, where you deliberately and consciously enter into those kinds of processes. But here you are less aware. I'm inspired by the philosopher Arne Naess' thoughts on how different environments influence you to behave and think differently. A multitude of internal voice changes or multiplies. In that sense a group phenomenon can be seen as an image or as a text.

*Did you make any more works based on these experiences?*

I did a piece that's called "Aretha Franklin's double message in reverse". It was in the Katarina Church in Stockholm which burned down some years ago. It looks as though it belongs in a museum now, perfect and newly renovated.

Aretha Franklin's vocals in "Amazing Grace" have so much energy that it could either come from heaven or from hell. I played a reversed loop with her exclamations. You went up to the pulpit, put on the head phones and listened to Aretha Franklin's ecstatic wailing as you looked out over the empty Swedish church. There were three different kinds of references. The Swedish church, Aretha Franklin's Negro spirituals, and then the part that condemns hard rock; parents who search for hidden messages in the songs which have been banned from kids.

*Have you always been into music?*

Yes, it has always come naturally to me. If you are not interested in music then I guess it is quite difficult to grow up within a non-conformist congregation. There's **bandy** and then there's gospel. But I liked it, because I enjoyed playing and singing, and you get a lot of stage training, which gets rid of your stage fright. Today music is an important source in my life that I have to maintain.

*Does the CD that you have released have a connection to your other works?*

Yes I like to mix my music into my art. But art and music are not two parts of the same field, they are rather like two kinds of sports observed by two different kinds of journalists, with two different ways of talking about their field of expertise. I find pleasure in stepping into both worlds, having one foot in each field. I don't want to let go of the music instead I want to work actively with it, even if it's something I *shouldn't* be doing now.

I recorded the album with Vincent Bullat and Elvire Soyez, two French visual artists. Vincent wrote the lyrics in English and I wrote the music which the three of us then recorded together.

*Was this during your studies in Paris?*

Yes, during my exchange term at Beaux-Arts. We found each other through the music, but we were close musically, visually and intellectually.

*What did you do after you had defected from the Vineyard movement?*

I spent three years at art schools. The most classical way: one year at Basis and then two years at Idun Lovén. I dragged my way through the 19-th century practices with stillborn and model drawing. I think I broke with that quite firmly after the third year. But the main reason which led me into art is that state of mind you can get into when you are painting – which I think most artist have experienced – when you get into some sort of flow of images and emotions. Provided you've managed to get out of the worst achievement anxiety. It was like a new opening for me, something I had never experienced before. It's a bit too spaced out and mystic for me to be able to describe it in words.

*But did you have to defect from the church?*

Yes.

*And you were forced to leave?*

No, I guess you don't absolutely have to leave. I tried not to close any doors.

*You can do it in many different ways?*

The main reason why I had to get out was a sensation of “The Emperor’s new clothes” which I experienced when the emphasis was put on the difference between us and *them*, that we would be more **special** or virtuous within the movement. I met people from the art world whom I could identify myself with and openly discuss within a different frame of mind. But it happened quite late, when I was 25. Before that I was a devoted and adamant Christian, even though I was rather critical as to the context. My theme then was passion, but most of all through music. It is still the passionate music that interests me, and there is a lot of passion in religious music.

*And then you got in to Mejan, Royal University College of Fine Arts in Stockholm.*

Yes, that was in 2001, straight after Idun Lovén. There was a whole bunch of us that got in at the same time, at least 15 students. I guess we had good work ethics at Idun.

*Some of your works from Mejan still seem to be central to you.*

The Feedee is without a doubt important, not least as a working process. It took a long time to do it and it was the first sculpture I ever made. And it is gigantic; it's an attempt to build the fattest human being that ever existed in full scale. A Feeder is an immobile person who wants to be fed and looked after by a feeder.

*How did you come up with the idea?*

It came from a strong feeling of identification that I got in 2004 when I took a course on monumentality in Berlin. A person told me the story about the Feedee and I wanted to make a sketch in my mind from that moment. It was absolutely the most monumental thing I could think of after the course.

I found an American contact ad on the Internet which gave you clear instructions on what kind of qualities a feeder-lover should have.

At the yearly spring exhibition at Mejan in 2005 I showed my Feedee sculpture next to the classical Greek sculptures in plaster down in the entrance hall. It consisted of a hollow plaster shell and portrayed in full scale a man standing on all four with his mouth wide open, waiting to be fed into physical proportions of immobility.

It's a spectacular phenomenon, but there is something challenging in that position, a dog like position. But I wanted to make a rather dry and academic informative sculpture about the phenomenon, something contradicting the spectacular, about the feeding and preparing financially to become completely dependent on somebody else for the rest of their lives.

I also exhibited contact ads where it said how a partner should be, and what they should pay for. It was a lot about showing tenderness, going back into some sort of grotesque fetus stage.

You could enter the sculpture. There was a hole for the mouth and one for the anus through which you could look out on the other visitors, and by moving you could determine the size of things on the outside, so it had a lot to do with proportions...

What happened to the sculpture?

I'm afraid it has been destroyed – by mistake. It's a bit of a shame really, I would have liked to do it in bronze. It was probably the most important work I did at Mejan, because it was opposite to my personality to be working like that, with one object for four months; it was as inefficient as it ever could be. After that it was much easier to embrace the things I'm more comfortable with. (Laughter)

*And what are they?*

Imagemaking. The series "Monstrum" was the beginning of what I'm still doing. From a huge colossus of plaster came watercolors that were pale, unsure and searching in character.

*And how has that evolved?*

Monstrum was my graduation exhibition, it was in pink and blue, pale colors. It was the first time I locked myself in my studio just to paint. It took one and a half years to get these twelve images, and when I was finished I had a huge pile of rejected material. I called the series Monstrum because the figures looked like some sort of baroque mutated angels, both harmless and harboring a repressed and hidden feeling of anxiety. As a life time achievement of someone who has never received any acknowledgement or appreciation. Like a grandmother who's been crocheting all her life and finally shows all the things she has made that have been used by no one.

The watercolor has by definition an element of randomness in it. Technically the richness of variety is endless, and it feels as if I could go on doing this for as long as I want. I both work with or against the chance, it's a bit romantic, like when you are watching animals and start to fantasize, or look at a wallpaper and suddenly you see faces in it.

*Is this the kind of process that led you to the "Jenna and Barbra Bush"?*

Yes, but here I have stalked the president's daughters from images you find on the Internet. Low resolution pictures which I have painted at home like some fifteen year old alone with his fantasies, like role-playing. I was interested in that aesthetic. All the pictures were taken from underneath. In general I have wanted to put myself in precarious situations in my work, and here I entered into a taboo area in several ways. One was that I was using persons who are famous inspite of the fact that they haven't done anything, **that their looks are so charged**, and also how they dress and behave as normal people, being bad examples, and how their dad, the president, indulged their behavior, miles away from how he acts on the international scene.

Since I'm calling the series Jenna and Barbra and use this portrait form, it becomes some kind of landscape. Some people think it's good that there are clear poles and distances between, that you create the meaning in the gaps.

*Which lead you to your large paper works which brings us up to date.*

After doing rather small watercolor paintings I wanted to embrace painting without any preconceptions; to go up in scale and enter deeply into the technique was the natural thing for me. I noticed that a lot of things happened then. The colors became much more vivid and full of movement. It felt natural to start working with the contrasts between... if you think of a Jackson Pollock-like painting, expressive and emotional macho painting technique, versus subversive elements that took a long time to do and were carefully planned.

*What are your plans for the future?*

I am working along two defined lines right now. One comes from this series, where I allow myself to be inspired by impressionism and Seurat's pointillism. This is purely a painting project for a future exhibition. Then I am working with an album where I'm writing all the lyrics myself for the first time, it's a new boundary to cross over. My first album was a collaboration between three visual artists, where I

interpreted a colleague's lyrics into a common vision. It could be described as a French literary project in an American independent genre, if you want to label the music. It was through our common interest in American indie rock with influences from folk music that we met. One could ask oneself whether this is art or not but to me that is completely uninteresting. The important thing is that the right kind of people get to hear it, those who are interested in that kind of music. But to me it's art. Definitely.