

From picture to event

Your first impression is a black area, like Malevich's black square, then light touches the canvas and a play begins. You realize that the black square is alive with the surrounding light and the whole thing changes in accordance with the conditions of light. The picture becomes an event in which you participate with your own movements. The image is often a face, but can also be a group of people or a landscape.

Anne-Karin Furunes has been developing her special perforation technique since she was studying at the Art Academy of Trondheim 1993-94. Her years of study lasted for a decade consisting both of art studies in Oslo and Trondheim and architecture studies in Trondheim, Oslo, London and Copenhagen. She first became an architect but then chose to dedicate herself to art.

Anne-Karin Furunes is totally enchanted by faces. She has told me that in big cities she can walk along streets for hours just looking at the faces of the passers-by. It is an inexhaustible area that fascinates and intrigues her.

She has portrayed groups of people whose fate the society rather forgot like the Jews deported from Norway as well as those who were subjected to the hideous practices of eugenics but also humans as fighting for something like the German soldiers during the Nazi occupation of Norway. Another group that she has focused on is the women soldiers who took part in the Finnish civil war in 1918.

Her aim with these pictures is not political in any narrow sense of the term, instead it is a plea to remind us of the beauty and vulnerability of all people. It seems that we should rather see these pictures in the light of the humanistic traditions but also the teaching of the Old Testament. The message reminds us of Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy. According to Levinas:

The face of the Other- under all the particular forms of expression where the Other, already in a character's skin, plays a role – is just as much pure expression, an extradition without defense or cover, precisely the extreme rectitude of a facing, which in this nudity is an exposure unto death: nudity, destitution, passivity, and pure vulnerability. Such is the face as the very mortality of the other person. (Emmanuel Levinas: "Time and the Other", p. 107)

Faces make an open mystery creating the crucial moment of encounter with any other people. In the pictures we see women looking like any of us, dreamy eyes, slightly cautious of the situation of being photographed, mostly totally devoid of any posing, blank faces, eyes full of sorrow or wonder, the origin of which is not outright revealed. One ponders who these persons were and what they knew about their fate? Sometimes the face just conveys a feeling that we all recognize from moments of being 'officially' photographed: do I look serious, trustworthy and respectable in this picture.

In the new series of works shown in her exhibition in Galleri K she has chosen many pictures of young people. Today's young seem to be also a vulnerable group in society: What can they expect from the future at the time of the enormous greed that prevails in our societies and the ways we still exploit nature. Do the young people just try to forget it or do they feel that their future is threatened?

A recognizable characteristic of Anne-Karin Furunes' work is the way she crops the images. The eyes always interest her and in some pictures she has chosen just to show the eyes in a narrow horizontal panel. She also uses double portraits, en face and in profile, which as a method remind us of the way criminals, or suspected criminals, are documented by police.

In this exhibition she has also returned to one of her old themes portraying a person in movement which as

such has been one of the ambitions of modern art. How to represent movement in a static picture. This was something that the Futurists during the first decades of the 20th century were occupied with. In her work it further heightens the feeling of continuous change created by the movements of light on the image.

The role of the perforation in the images seems to be twofold. As a physical mark it can be considered to be an index that refers to time. The perforation resembles photographic pixels and in this way the images seem to be brought into the public sphere in the same spirit that we understand the role of the media as public space or sphere today. The publishing process in this case takes place in two steps; first by the selection of the photograph to be the subject of the painting and secondly by its reference to picture technique used in mass media. The pictures become contemporary and simultaneously part of our common consciousness, something that touches us with their beauty and humanity as well as with the fact that the pictures change according to our movements; in the spirit of today's art we can decide what and how we see.

When we study the hole punching technique during the ca. 18 years' period that she has used it, we become aware how much it has gained in expression. It has changed into an abstract element, something like the modernist grid that lives its own life along with the visual images chosen for the works. It seems to breathe with the pictures. The hole structure has two functions in the overall pictorial space: to bring time into the image and to create a dialogue with light and the surrounding situation. This has become more and more nuanced, refined and expressive along with Furunes' need to better control the viewing situations.

As an introduction to the world of pictures of Anne-Karin Furunes, there is a poem by the Swedish poet Gunnar Ekelöf (1907-68) which seems to paraphrase the intentions of the artist not only when in what concerns the force sterilization of these women but more generally her search for elucidation of how these things have been possible. Here we are also facing the young people of today and their worries. Basically, the question is about shared responsibility and the eternal one of whether we have learnt something from these tragedies.

To see yourself in others

To see yourself in others/your condition/your need/your weakness/your humanity:/To be social in your heart /you others, all social in the head!/And the heart is not an impulse of the moment/but lasting/The heart is not a business cycle.

(Translated from the Swedish by Muriel Rukeyser, published in *Modern Scandinavian Poetry 1900-1975*, Italy 1982)

There is a beautiful and solemn feeling surrounding these images. They emanate the beauty of humanness, in its fragility and plead us to recognize it in ourselves. They are icons both in the generic meaning of the word, but also in the spiritual, meditative sense. Light pierces these images making them momentarily alive sharing the space and time with us.

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