

Exhibition Introduction by Peter Clothier

YESTERDAYS

There's a literary term that comes to mind when I think of Trine Churchill's paintings. It's "magical realism." These paintings have a moody, atmospheric, nostalgic quality that enchants the viewer. Each one of them invites us into its own particular mystery. At its center, typically, is a figure or a group of figures that beckon us slyly into a story, offering us clues that never quite resolve into an answer but leave us beguiled and speculative as we engage in their sensual and emotional intensity. Typically, too—though not exclusively—those figures are female: little girls, adolescents, women who seem at once familiar and strange, lost in their own worlds, always seemingly in search of their identity. In each one, we sense, is a projection of the artist herself as she recalls different stages of her life. The work is autobiographical, yes, but not in any literal sense. I see in these figures a search for the essence of femininity.

Time, too, is of the essence. There is a preoccupation with the past, with early days in a mystical, mythologized land. (The artist grew up in Denmark). But chronology is irrelevant in these narratives. Everything pulls the eye into the present, even as it is drawn into a dream-like past. Consider "The Summer of a Thousand Years." The title itself speaks of time out of time. There is a landscape, lush and green, evoked without clear detail. In the foreground, a girl, a teenager surely, squats seductively cross-legged on the hood of a timeless car. In the distance, a man stands on the porch of a rustic cabin, an inscrutable watching presence. The smoke from the girl's (illicit?) cigarette wisps upward into oblivion. And anchoring the painting, at the bottom left, in a stark, eye-drawing contrast of bright yellow, the artist reminds us with trickling drips of paint that, even as she dreams of a never-quite forgotten past, it is the present that counts. She asks us to join her in the moment of creation. Everything coalesces into present time.

Even if this is not explicit, we recognize many of the artist's figures as family and close friends. The father figure, the mother, the children, girls mostly, some of them approaching puberty and beginning to be curious about their sexuality. The clothes in which she lovingly depicts them tell us much about their individuality, their obsessions, their insecurities. Speak with the artist and she will readily tell you, yes, among these figures are family members, parents, siblings, and that she is fascinated by the shifting, sometimes challenging relationships common to all families. She explores the intimacy, but also the daunting, bewildering distances between us human beings and those who love us, those we love.

There is nature, too. Not only landscapes, skillfully evoked, but charming animals everywhere, surprising us with their random appearance. She captures it all somewhere between dream and memory. It is never quite “real”, sometimes indeed surreal, mythical, as in those strange moments where, looking closely, we are caught off-guard by the appearance of a human figure with an animal head. So strange, and yet so.. right. In her dark forests, we are enchanted, as in a fairy tale.

Spend time with these paintings and their narratives coalesce into a kind of personal archive of yesterdays, a peek into a life lived with open eyes and an ever-curious mind, one that reminds us in important ways of our own humanity—the most compelling purpose, I always think, of all art, everywhere.