

INTRODUCING: HENNI ALFTAN

by Julie Crenn

Translated by Chloe Baker

Since her training at National Schools of Fine Arts at the Villa Arson in Nice and in Paris, Henni Alftan has been developing photographic painting, structured by an imagination guided by fragmentation that of the image, bodies, objects and narration.

Born in Helsinki, Henni Alftan chose to settle in France to study and work. For some years she has been developing a form of painting that puts perception to the test. "I paint pictures," she says. Nothing is ever given to us in its totality. The narrative and temporal dimension of painting escapes us. Hot air, chit chat is excluded. Alftan works on questions of frame and framing from her dally observations. In her notebooks she draws details as well as the main outlines of the images she retains. From a specific scene she captures a look, a hand, an object, a silhouette, a shadow, the detail of a garment, a gesture, a pattern, a color. By endeavoring to reproduce in painting the almost invisible elements of the everyday, the common, Alftan invites us to reflect on what we see, the visible world and its modes of representation. In this sense, her works lead us to think about the image through the painting as an object its history, its timeliness, its legitimacy, its materiality and its conceptual dimension.

Alftan explores the issues inherent in two intersecting histories, that of painting and that of photography. The works on canvas are part of a traditional pictorial research: surface, depth, flatness, color object, gaze, line, composition, motif, framing, narrative (or rather the rejection of the latter), the image in the image, the mirror or montage. If her painting is figurative, it is no way part of an illusionist approach; on the contrary, synthetic, it goes right to the essential of the form, line and color. Still, photography plays an important role in the construction of her works and her way of looking at reality. It is particularly present in her choices of framing, which are often out of step with those usually used in painting. She says, "I'd like to see the moment when painting begins to refer to, to look like something other than itself. That's why I try to give only the necessary number of elements, clues. What you think is often hidden from view. Indeed, the notion of the gaze connects the issues of painting and photography. In an almost systematic way, the artist avoids direct visual contact between the figured subject and viewer. The face-to-face is avoided in favor of strange, poetic situation. The question of the gaze is recurrent: a woman in front of a mirror puts a lens to her eye, another looks at her reflection in the blade of a knife, the eyes of a man are obstructed by dark shadows, a sleeping couple is lying in grass in the shade of a tree, a swimmer turns her back. Eyes are absent, hindered, obstructed, diverted, placed or duplicated. Thus the part of subjectivity, interpretation or projection is voluntarily reduced so that the viewer can focus their attention on the details, the clues, and the beginnings of a story rendered impossible.

MIRROR GAMES

Alfan is currently working on a new series of paintings that works by diptychs. If the paintings are separated into two different spaces, they nevertheless interact by their treatment and their subject, being conceived in the manner of a deforming mirror, since the same scene is considered according to a different point of view, an addition, a displacement. One painting shows a man in profile, while the other shows him from the front. On a brick wall appears a word written in blue spray paint, "Run," the other painting displays the word "Now." The artist introduces a visual, memorial game by proposing two series where the same subject differs slightly. By a subtle interplay of movement, the artist opens a space where narration becomes possible. Her paintings are part of a reflection on the representation of the real subject and the onlooker. Alfan parsimoniously distills an atmosphere nourished by a disturbing strangeness. The works are permeated by a troubling silence, a muted violence: a gloved hand of a surgeon, bruises, the broken lens of a pair of glasses, a fire, a body immersed in a bathtub, a long scar around an ear. Added to this is the recurrence of knives, masks, shadows, missing faces and split bodies. Thus Alfan manipulates and disturbs the meaning of the images she gives us to see. With simple, effective style she questions our relationship to the images she gives us to see. With a simple, effective style she questions our relationship to the construction of the image by scrambling registers, references, clues of space and time.

Depuis sa formation à la Villa Arson, puis à l'École nationale des beaux-arts de Paris, Henni Alftan construit une peinture photographique, son imaginaire étant guidé par la fragmentation – celle de l'image, des corps, des objets et de la narration.

■ Née à Helsinki, Henni Alftan a choisi de s'installer en France pour y étudier et y travailler. Depuis quelques années, elle développe une peinture qui met la perception à l'épreuve. « Je peins des images », précise-t-elle. Rien ne nous est jamais donné dans sa totalité. La dimension narrative et temporelle de la peinture nous échappe. Le bavardage est exclu. Henni Alftan travaille la question du cadre et du cadrage à partir de ses observations quotidiennes. Dans ses carnets, elle dessine des détails, ainsi que les grandes lignes des images qu'elle retient. D'une scène spécifique, elle fixe un regard, une main, un objet, une silhouette, une ombre, le détail d'un vêtement, un geste, un motif, une couleur. En s'attachant à reproduire en peinture les éléments presque invisibles du quotidien, du commun, Henni Alftan nous invite à réfléchir à ce que nous voyons, au monde visible et à ses modes de représentations. En ce sens, ses œuvres nous amènent à penser l'image à travers l'objet peinture : son histoire, son actualité, sa légitimité, sa matérialité et sa dimension conceptuelle.

À gauche/à l'art: « Saint-Thomas », 2011, 35 x 27 cm.
(Kunsti Museum of Modern Art, Vaasa, Finlande)
Ci-dessous/below: « Kitchen », 2016. Huile sur toile.
81 x 65 cm. (P.H. Alftan). Oil on canvas



HENNI ALFTAN

Julie Crenn

DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

Henni Alftan explore les problématiques inhérentes à deux histoires croisées, celle de la peinture et celle de la photographie. Les œuvres sur toile s'inscrivent dans une recherche picturale traditionnelle : la surface, la profondeur, l'aplât, la couleur, l'objet, le regard, la ligne, la composition, le motif, le cadrage, le récit (ou plutôt le refus de ce dernier), l'image dans l'image, le miroir ou encore le montage. Si sa peinture est figurative, elle ne s'inscrit en aucun cas dans une approche illusionniste ; au contraire, synthétique, elle va à l'essentiel de la forme, de la ligne et de la couleur. Pourtant, la photographie joue un rôle important dans la construction de ses œuvres et dans sa manière d'envisager le réel. Elle est notamment présente dans ses choix de cadrages qui, souvent, sont en décalage avec ceux habituellement employés en peinture. Elle précise : « J'aimerais voir l'instant où la peinture commence à faire référence, à ressembler à autre chose qu'à elle-même. C'est pourquoi je cherche à donner seulement la quantité nécessaire d'éléments, d'indices. Ce que vous pensez voir est souvent à l'abri des regards. » Effectivement, la notion de regard relie les problématiques de la peinture et de la photographie. De manière quasi systéma-

tique, l'artiste esquisse le contact visuel direct entre le sujet figuré et le regardeur. Le face-à-face est évité au profit de situations étranges et poétiques. La question du regard est récurrente : une femme devant un miroir pose une lentille sur son œil, une autre se regarde dans la lame d'un couteau, les yeux d'un homme sont obstrués par des ombres noires, un couple endormi est allongé dans l'herbe sous l'ombre d'un arbre, une nageuse nous tourne le dos. Les regards sont absents, empêchés, obstrués, détournés, mis en abîme ou dupliqués. Ainsi la part de subjectivité, d'interprétation ou de projection est volontairement réduite afin que le regardeur puisse focaliser son attention sur les détails, les indices et les amorces d'un récit rendu impossible.

JEUX DE MIROIRS

Henni Alftan travaille actuellement à une nouvelle série de peintures qui fonctionne par diptyques. Si les tableaux sont séparés dans deux espaces différents, ils interagissent néanmoins par leur traitement et leur sujet, étant pensés à la manière d'un miroir déformant puisqu'une même scène est envisagée selon un point de vue différent, un ajout, un déplacement. Une peinture présente un homme de profil, tandis que l'autre le montre de face. Sur un mur de brique apparaît un mot inscrit à la bombe de peinture bleue, « Run », l'autre tableau affiche le mot « Now ». L'artiste instaure un jeu visuel et mémoriel en proposant deux séries où un même sujet diffère légèrement. Par un subtil jeu de mouvement, l'artiste entrouvre un espace où la narration devient possible. Ses tableaux participent d'une réflexion sur la représentation du réel, du sujet et de celui qui regarde. Henni Alftan y distille parcimonieusement une atmosphère nourrie d'une inquiétante étrangeté. Les œuvres sont traversées d'un silence troublant, d'une violence sourde : la main gantée d'un chirurgien, des ecchymoses, le verre brisé d'une paire de lunettes, un incendie, un corps plongé dans une baignoire, une longue cicatrice autour d'une oreille. À cela s'ajoute la récurrence des couteaux, des masques, des ombres, des visages absents et des corps dédoublés. Ainsi, Henni Alftan manipule et perturbe le sens des images qu'elle nous donne à voir. Avec un style simple et efficace, elle questionne notre rapport à la construction de l'image en brouillant les registres, les références, les indices d'espace et de temps. ■

INTRODUCING

Since her training at National Schools of Fine Arts at the Villa Arson in Nice and in Paris, Henni Alftan has been developing photographic painting, structured by an imagination guided by fragmentation – that of the image, bodies, objects and narration.

Born in Helsinki, Henni Alftan chose to settle in France to study and work. For some years she has been developing a form of painting that puts perception to the test. "I paint pictures," she says. Nothing is ever given to us in its totality. The narrative and temporal dimension of painting escapes us. Hot air, chit chat is excluded. Alftan works on questions of frame and framing from her daily observations. In her notebooks she draws details as well as the main outlines of the images she retains. From a specific scene she captures a look, a hand, an object, a silhouette, a shadow, the detail of a garment, a gesture, a pattern, a colour. By endeavouring to reproduce in painting the almost invisible elements of the everyday, the common, Alftan invites us to reflect on what we see, the visible world and its modes of representation. In this sense, her works lead us to think about the image through the painting as an object: its history, its timeliness, its legitimacy, its materiality and its conceptual dimension.

Alftan explores the issues inherent in two intersecting histories, that of painting and that of photography. The works on canvas are part of a traditional pictorial research: surface, depth, flatness, colour, object, gaze, line, composition, motif, framing, narrative (or rather the rejection of the latter), the image in the image, the mirror or montage. If her painting is figurative, it is in no way part of an illusionist approach; on the contrary, synthetic, it goes right to the essential of the form, line and colour. Still, photography plays an important role in the construction of her works and her way of looking at reality. It is particularly present in her choices of framing, which are often out of step with those usually used in painting. She says, "I'd like to see the moment when painting begins to refer to, to look like something other than itself. That's why I try to give only the necessary number of elements, clues. What you think is often hidden from view. Indeed, the notion of the gaze connects the issues of painting and photography. In an almost systematic way, the artist avoids direct visual contact between the figured subject and viewer. The face-to-face is avoided in favour of strange, poetic situations. The question of the gaze is recurrent: a woman in front of a mirror puts a lens to her eye, another looks at her reflection in the blade of a knife, the eyes of a man are obstructed by dark sha-



«Fur x», 2014. Huile sur toile. 54 x 65 cm.

(Ph. H. Alftan). Oil on canvas

dows, a sleeping couple is lying in grass in the shade of a tree, a swimmer turns her back. Eyes are absent, hindered, obstructed, diverted, placed in *mise en abyme* or duplicated. Thus the part of subjectivity, interpretation or projection is voluntarily reduced so that the viewer can focus their attention on the details, the clues and the beginnings of a story rendered impossible.

MIRROR GAMES

Alftan is currently working on a new series of paintings that works by diptychs. If the paintings are separated into two different spaces, they nevertheless interact by their treatment and their subject, being conceived in the manner of a deforming mirror, since the same scene is considered according to a different point of view, an addition, a displacement. One painting shows a man in profile, while the other shows him from the front. On a brick wall appears a word written in blue spray paint, "Run," the other painting displays the word "Now". The artist introduces a visual, memorial game by proposing two series where the same subject differs slightly. By a subtle interplay of movement, the artist opens a space where narration becomes possible. Her paintings are part of a reflection on the representation of the real, the subject and the onlooker. Alftan parsimoniously distills an atmosphere nourished by a disturbing strangeness. The works are per-

meated by a troubling silence, a muted violence: the gloved hand of a surgeon, bruises, the broken lens of a pair of glasses, a fire, a body immersed in a bathtub, a long scar around an ear. Added to this is the recurrence of knives, masks, shadows, missing faces and split bodies. Thus Alftan manipulates and disturbs the meaning of the images she gives us to see. With a simple, effective style she questions our relationship to the construction of the image by scrambling registers, references, clues of space and time. ■

Translation: Chloé Baker

Henni Alftan

Née en /born 1979 à /in Helsinki, Finlande

Vit et travaille à /lives in Paris

Expositions solo /Solo shows:

2015 Enlighten, Forum Box Monttu, Helsinki

2016 *Entrevue*, Iconoscope, Montpellier

2017 *One Sweet Moment*, Galerie Claire Gastaud, Clermont-Ferrand

2018 *Horizon*, TM-Galleria, Helsinki

2019 *Studiolo*, Milan

Expositions de groupe /Group shows:

2014 *Voyageurs*, Bourse Révélation Emerige, Villa Emerige, Paris

2015 *Cinematic Senses*, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki

2016 *J'ai des doutes, est-ce que vous en avez ?*, Galerie Claire Gastaud, Clermont-Ferrand

2017 *Color and Form. Works from the Vexi Salmi Collection*, Hämeenlinna Art Museum, Finlande

Peindre, dit-elle, Chap. 2, musée des beaux-arts de Dole

2018 *A Desired World. Contemporary Drawings*, Galerie Claire Gastaud, Clermont-Ferrand

