

A forward to Bibi Katholm's *Ghost Hunting in Broad Daylight*

"Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars."ⁱ

Walter Benjamin

It is an awesome privilege to write early on an artist of rare talent and originality. The words one puts into circulation gain amplitude—often all too much—as they follow a young artist into a new world. There is much I would like to say about my experience of Bibi Katholm's art and working methods that will remain unsaid here and for now. This is not to concoct a sense of mystery or aura to hang on her practice. Bibi is in many respects a painter through and through. Painting is, however, in her handling not a static and self-legitimizing object but rather a restless pursuit and something of a ghostly apparition in itself.

I have often found Bibi Katholm's work in film and video to be amongst the clearest statements of her interest in and handling of painting as a practice. The object of painting may be expressed and found in the folds of a fabric that hangs as a remnant from a performance in her cave-like den of a studio. Fugitive, transitory and still pursued relentlessly as if the chase is itself the better part of capture, a viewer is offered an experience that is at once tangible and a totality and world of its own. What one engages with in such an installation are mainly traces left in the wake of a process that is intensely chaotic though rhythmically structured by repetition and internal quotation. Her art is a passionate questioning expressed as a restless quest for that which remains outside of language and standard logic and yet can be seen and felt with a gaze altered and located not solely in the eye but also in the head and heart.

Movement is crucial, though so too is color. Kaleidoscopic refractions of time, place and action abound. I would like to suggest a space that is suspended in non-identity: neither the everyday world of experience, nor that delineated as "the gallery"; not a wholly interior space that is a projection emanating from inside the head of the artist, nor an imaginatively construed parallel and fictitious reality given to whimsy which creatively turns the external world on its head. The process reveals itself at full speed: binaries collapse and points of entry and exit open onto a multi-dimensional story that

communicates its own raw materiality and vibrant visuality through an accretion of layered fragments. That is how I would describe my encounter with and in an installation of Katholm's art – as an experience other than experience and therefore profound. At its best, it is not unlike what one feels when one sees the northern lights float fleetingly across the sky. Not all stars come out only at night. It is Bibi Katholm's great gift to trace such constellations across the sky in the broad daylight of her art.

John Slyce

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John Slyce is an American writer and critic based in London, U.K.. He has contributed articles, reviews and interviews to many of the major art magazines and has written numerous catalogue essays on the work of artists such as Sarah Sze, Jemima Stehli, Adam Chodzko, Gillian Wearing, Sarah Jones, David Shrigley, Darren Almond, Michael Landy, Muntean/Rosenblum, and Artlab (Charlotte Cullinan and Jeanine Richards). He writes regularly in *Portfolio*, *Camera Austria*, *Art Monthly*, and *Flash Art* and has written monographs on the work of *Jemima Stehli* (Article Press 2002), *Parallel Lines: a primer on ARTLAB* (Praline 2003), and *Patrick Hughes: Perverspective* (momentum 1998/updated edition 2005). He teaches and lectures widely and is employed as a visiting and part-time lecturer at Middlesex University in the department of Art, philosophy and Visual Culture, Christie's in their programme in contemporary art, and at the Royal College of Art in the departments of painting and photography.

ⁱ Walter Benjamin, from epistemo-critical prologue to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, London: NLB (Verso), 1977, p 34.