

## The Painter's Gambit

Essay on works by painter Bibi Katholm

By curator, **Iben Bach Elmstrøm**



In chess, the 'gambit' is an opening move in which a player makes a sacrifice, typically of a pawn, for the sake of a compensating advantage.

Bibi Katholm is a painter. The film-like flow in her work is created in a highly contradictory tension between a gut-feel improvisation and a structured cut-up montage technique. It's not about painting out of pure spontaneity, but about artistic choices and creating an inner visual rhetoric. There is a durational aspect in Katholm's painting, as the different layers have their own independent process. She explores painting as a kind of moving image, in a process similar to montage film-editing, where a series of shots are sequenced into a condensed time frame to create a certain feeling. This approach creates an overall impression of complexity.

Transformation is a process rather than a measurement or a constant, and it continuously happens in nature as well as and in our bodies. Katholm explores this perceptual space in her paintings as she visualizes the struggle between still image and moving image through layers of brushstrokes and collage elements. Her paintings are like a temporal experience that, like montage, resists the modern standardization and restraints of time. On the way to the perfect lasting complexity, the painting repeatedly closes in seductive and irresistible 'beauty stills'. It takes an almost violent sacrifice to obstruct the beauty, destroy the dead balance and set the painting free. To make it move again. The closer to the complexity limit, the greater the risk. The greater the risk, the greater the reward. The painter's gambit is the necessary gamble.

Katholm's works are about connections, transformation, hybrids of forms, movement and coactivity. These themes materialize through her abstract and partly figurative works. The pieces are large-scale and balanced in a compositional completion that awakens your mind as you explore the works. The temperament of colours and the different layers create a depth and intensity that draws you into the painting's logic and rhythmic force. The combination of bold brushstrokes, figuration, geometry and painted fabric parts, acts as if a collective force or several minds are at play in creating the pieces. Yet it all balances in a calm harmony, which only one artist can master. Katholm forms her own language within painting, a language based on correspondence between forms, colours and added parts. She works within the frame and outside of it. Sometimes even adding lace from an old dress or a found fabric where tears and threads become a part of the composition. She contrasts colors from bright and soft, to dark and blocked out. This plays intelligently with the intensity of brushstrokes ranging from thin washes to thick bold strokes.

Despite their improvisational outset, Katholm's paintings are formed by the experience of art. Her works are in a clear dialogue with artists of the past and art movements in the history of painting. Katholm's pieces relate to artists like Helen Frankenthaler, Franz Kline, Amy Sillman, Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston and Prunella Clough. Her artistic methods seem connected to forces found in artist movements like dynamic suprematism, neo-plasticism, The New York School, abstract expressionism and geometric abstraction. Yet her artistic choices are fully formed by her contemporary outset. Where it's less about establishing a discourse for the sake of driving forward the progression of art, and more about connecting things that flow together in unrestrained ways. Katholm's approach is inclusive and improvisational, rather than medium specific and classified. Abstraction is the core stand in Katholm's works, although figuration sometimes forms and appears to underline how the abstract is also connected to the representational regime.

Katholm's works are both a seductive tangible surface and an open perceptual space. She rhythmically moves around with bold steps on the canvases and gives the works their own energies and flows. To experience Katholm's paintings, one has to unlearn the modern discourse of critical art and be accepting of our present and its softening and re-rendering of separation, representation and classification.

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