



## That which is not Hell

by artist Bibi Katholm (DK)

*“Twelfth-century Christian mystic Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) understood the universe as an entity and saw a radiance in creation – in the greening of the Earth, the sprouting of seeds and blossoming of plants – that had both spiritual and healing potential; a verdant fecundity that she called Viridatas. She understood the power of images and music to connect to the archaic past, to the spiritual sense of who we are, and she amalgamated science, mysticism and art in a medieval cosmology that she believed had the potential to awaken humanity to mysterious truths of the universe.”* - Quote from ‘The Botanical Mind’ p. 11 (Essay by Gina Buenfeld)

## Biophilia

It's the strangest kind of responsibility you feel when you're in the process of creating something new. It involves everyone and everything around you – it's universal or cosmic... and it's REAL. You suddenly experience an overwhelming urge to give something back... to your community, to life or Nature or...?

The **biophilia hypothesis** suggests that there is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems. American biologist Edward O. Wilson introduced the hypothesis in his book, *Biophilia* (1984), and he defines biophilia as "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life". Originally, the term "biophilia" means "love of life or living systems." It was first used by the German social psychologist and philosopher Erich Fromm to describe the psychological orientation of being "attracted to all that is alive and vital". Wilson uses the term in the same sense when he suggests that "biophilia" describes "the connections that human beings subconsciously seek with

the rest of life”, and he proposes the possibility that the strong affiliation humans have with other life forms and nature as a whole, is rooted in our biology.

### **Nature gives... the painter gives back.**

When I'm alone in nature and I experience the rupture of inspiration or just catch a glimpse of something that is in the process of transformation right in front of my eyes, I always feel this immediate urge to grab it and hold on to it with everything I've got... Remember it for just long enough so I can take the raw, unshaped experience of it and turn it into an image. It must become an image – if it exists and if I cannot understand it any other way, I simply have to turn it into a painting. And then, I'll give it back... in a new form and with added ingredients, but in a cosmic or microscopic way, it's basically the same thing. Nature's gift is at the same time generously open and demanding. In order to understand something, the answer to a question you've constructed in your mind, you have to first ask the next question and throw that into the wind as your contribution to evolution, and then Nature will answer.

Everything is in the grips of being transformed or dissolved; things emerge only to fall apart again. The world is out of joint... And this is only the beginning.

How transitory, fleeting and unstable the nature of painting... You experience how the creative process gains a power of its own that seems to be equivalent to the degree of control you surrender. In this way the process mirrors the way we have to approach technology as the information age unfolds and overwhelms us. If we don't have any filters that can protect us from overdosing on this world of possibilities, we will drown in a sea of anxiety, chaos, uncertainty, and doubt created by a subjective consciousness that has met its own absolute limitations.

Slippage, cracks, and instability... Nature shows us how to create perfect structure and perfect chaos. In between is creativity.

*“Today, there is a greater urgency than ever to reconsider our relationship with the natural world as the climate crisis accelerates and habitats are being destroyed at an unprecedented rate. At the same time, new discoveries in quantum biology, ‘new botany’ and plant physiology are forcing us to rethink long-held beliefs around consciousness and matter, as well as urging an expanded philosophical and ethical engagement with non-human entities.”*

– Quote from ‘The Botanical Mind’ p. 5 by Martin Clark, Director, Camden Art Centre.

### **To make a world**

Sometimes painting feels like being in a boat on the water, sensing the movements all around, but not being able to determine which part is actually moving; you, the boat, the landscape, or everything all at once. You become one with the landscape.

There is a rhythm that flows through me as I am applying brushstrokes and paint onto these surfaces. A greater movement than the one my body is creating surrounds me and sweeps me away like waves of energy. It's about moving closer to Nature, and in order to do so you need an *open* or *inclusive* approach to painting.

A painting contains so many layers of meaning, space, colours and movement, and it doesn't just exist on a single 'level' or 'plane'. It's complicated, mystical, expanded in time and it wants to remain open. We must concentrate on seeing.

If we concentrate on seeing and being present in our senses, another creative dimension opens up and allows us to experience layers of existence, both inside and outside of ourselves that tend to remain hidden in contemporary societies. With the ever-increasing pace and intensity of the information flow that surrounds us, it has become a rare gift and privilege to be able to focus and be present for long enough to reach a deeper level of the creative process. We forget our bodies and their instinctive knowledge about nature and in doing so, we make a fatal mistake. We forget, or perhaps we've never understood that the only kind of attention, care, seeing... or love that holds enough power to create real change - to invent a future or make a world – is the absolute kind. There can be no distractions in the moment of creation, just as there can be no distractions in love.

"No American artist before Pollock had quite so audaciously realized the aspiration 'to make a world' – not to copy one, but to invent one. In place of trees and streets and people and painting's often-pale imitation of the real force of the world – it's actors and environments – painting would itself be a reality, as vibrant as life itself. As Pollock is reputed to have said in 1950, "I don't paint nature; I am nature." Helen took this in."

- Quote from 'Fierce Poise – Helen Frankenthaler and 1950's New York' p. 29 by Alexander Nemerov.

What is Hell? If you ask me, as an artist... as a painter. My answer is this: Hell is the loss of our instinctive, archaic connection to nature and thereby our inherent creativity.