

THE INVENTORY

Mireille Blanc, Jim Holyoak and Eva Nielsen, Babel, Trondheim, 16 – 25 March 2012

“Not so fast, not so fast!” Jim Holyoak’s Chinese ink painting master used to remind him. At the exhibition at Babel he seems to have done exactly the opposite: in addition to 100 drawings, he here presents a video that shows the entire inventory of his artistic output – every notebook drawing, every painting, every print or installation he ever made – in the course of five minutes. It’s noisy, confusing and overwhelming – and it’s meant to be. As Holyoak sees it, such a sensuous overdose is a parallel to the experience of traveling.

The two other exhibitors, Eva Nielsen and Mireille Blanc, usually work with painting. They both grew up in France and studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Paris (ENSBA), graduating in 2009. A few years after they had finished their studies, they both wanted to sum up what had happened since their graduation and where they were now. They applied for a residency at LKV in Trondheim with a project called The Inventory.

Even if they are both painters, they were determined to leave oil paint and canvases alone and explore other possibilities during their residency, for instance charcoal, printing and installations.

Mireille Blanc (born 1985) lives and works in Paris. She has already exhibited her work in many contexts, mainly in France but also in England and Brazil.

The paintings Blanc shows at Babel, brought along from home, are in subdued colours. Sometimes we recognize simple everyday shapes – a house, a flight of stairs – at other times we are not sure of what we see. This takes us to the core themes of her work: the ambiguous, the vague, reminiscences and memories. She is interested in the limits between abstraction and figuration and her influences are Manet, Chardin, and Morandi, among others.

Opposite the large windows we find a piece of canvas, the size of a male handkerchief, stuck directly onto the wall, ‘RN 74’ – an almost monochrome field of colour in a luminous, light yellowish brown. In this case, the fact that she has mounted the source image on the same canvas, partly covering the painted surface, makes it easier for the spectator to recognize the motif: a barely discernable building. Blanc’s painting may be seen as one of many possible interpretations of the source image.

Eva Nielsen, (born in 1983) of French/Danish origin, shows, among other works, a large image, ‘Lademøen’ (160 x 240 cm), consisting of A4 size prints. When one looks at the individual print, it appears to be non-figurative, but when you look at the complete picture, you get a distinct impression of architectural structures, urban space. The conspicuous absence of people in her works brings to mind a statement of hers: “The human being is banned from my paintings. Only his absence remains.” To define what a painting is to her, Nielsen quotes Maurice Denis: “a canvas covered with organized traces of painting”.

As the exhibition started to take shape, Blanc and Nielsen were surprised to discover numerous correspondences and links between their respective works. In Blanc’s series of charcoal drawings on tracing paper we find, for instance, a drawing depicting a tiny house built of children’s wooden building blocks. It may illustrate some of the duo’s themes: the unstable construction, the Fake and the Real, the idea of constellations - groupings of points, rather than a single central point.

Another of Blanc's works, based on a portrait by Rogier Van der Weyden, shows a woman with a white headdress – with her face erased. In Blanc's version, what used to be a portrait has become an abstract "pliage", an artfully folded piece of cloth. Nielsen found a visual parallel among her own works: a photo of an anonymous stone grave – with no letters, no dates – in the same tones of white and grey. There is plenty of space between the women's works – they had decided they wanted to "keep a lot of silence in between the works".

Holyoak was also pleasantly surprised to note how well his ideas fitted in with those of Blanc and Nielsen. Like them, he has made use of grayish, subdued colours, paper, fragments and the idea of an inventory.

Holyoak is presently making a book, a fairytale set in a phantasmagorical world without sunrise, in which the characters are wandering monsters. Visitors may read seven of the 19 chapters already – they're stuck on the walls in between a myriad of drawings.

To the list of themes Holyoak adds: Black and white, Real and Imaginary, Alive and Extinct, Human and non-human.

The curious spectator will no doubt find plenty of additional common themes in this rich and playful exhibition.