

Unfolding Landscapes
Eva Nielsen

Eva Nielsen's paintings are a true invitation to the eye to wander over it. By the variety of strokes, contrasts and textures, there is much to experience on a pictorial level. This is not just a painter for whom the painting process is important, but also someone who takes risk in it. The eye is leading. As soon as the attention of the eye weakens, it is time to apply another painting technique or paint type. Nielsen's paintings often consist of three or four layers. The bottom one is simply a layer with white gesso. The same gesso, sometimes also in black, is now and then used in a top layer as well, to give depth. That it is not meant for this purpose doesn't bother this inventive painter. Parts resemble watercolour but turn out to be endlessly diluted acrylic, in some sections like the cloud formations the painter applies photorealism, oil paint turns up only summarily and is mainly used in order to give relief to the whole.

Already since art academy, Eva Nielsen practices silk screen print in order to stick out a central object of the painted landscape or background. A contrast that is enhanced by the fact that the silk screen is executed in black and white. Another find is the use of the printer. The print comprises always the last or top layer of the painting. It remains a startling idea that a painting is 'validated' by running it in its totality through the printer. The paintings from the series *Lucite* and *Aphakie* have undergone this treatment. These techniques probably work so well for her because it allows even more space for risk taking. After all, the result is uncertain and it remains to be seen whether the print or silk screen is in harmony with the previous layers. Analysing her paintings, it is noticeable that Nielsen has let go of the control during the last two years and has welcomed flaws and inaccuracies. This reflects not only a greater self-confidence; it has led to freer paintings too.

To paintings that admit life. Possibly this is a consequence of the uncertain times many countries, among which France are in. The various attacks have strengthened the instability. That idea of instability and imperfection has sneaked into her working method. For example, paint is growing mouldy which produces stunning colours, pictures that will be used as a print, are weathering away in the garden, and Indian ink is mixed with acrylic and causes a chemical reaction. Her paintings are contaminated by current events. Eva Nielsen regards painting as a skin that allows things to pass and to convey. Her work offers not a direct imagination of political problems but an abstract reflection on the current times. Painting as a permeable membrane onto which the 'zeitgeist' is condensed. By relying on her intuition both pictorially and with respect to content, aspects seem to transcend her. As Nielsen says: "My painting is often more intelligent than I."

Let's return to the eye. There where the eye comes to a halt, deserves to be highlighted in her paintings. For many years now this concerns the landscape, more specifically, the place where the city burst its banks: the suburbs. The borderline between city and suburb is sharply drawn and felt in France. They have even a particular word for it: the 'banlieue'. Eva Nielsen, born, raised and still living in the Paris *banlieue*, knows the phenomenon like no other. She even went to visit it in the United States, in cities like Boston, Pittsburgh and Chicago and established that the American dream, owning your own free-standing house with garden and barbecue, is eagerly copied in other countries. For example, in France from the mid-1960s onwards rapidly appeared new towns which according to that model are the so-called 'villes nouvelles'.

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The suburb has always drawn the attention of artists. Most notably Dan Graham who examined the architecture, subculture and communication modes in the American suburb in the seventies. Nielsen's interest lies elsewhere. In the series *Ascien* the leading role is given to the 'couriers' of the advancing urbanisation: the sewage pipes and water-basins that are often waiting motionless for months and months on wasteland. The painter has transformed them into majestic modern beacons or even minimalist sculptures. On painterly level, these objects act as a 'repoussoir' that guides the eye from the foreground to the backdrop. Remarkably, the object is in all its silk screened flatness astonishingly voluminous and the notion of transience is never far away. Something that seems at some point unassailable and indisputable, whether it concerns an architectural concept or a sculpture, appears to be relative after all. Take for example the new series *Krak*, which features sculptures in a recently closed sculpture park near her hometown. In the sixties, these sculptures formed the pinnacle of sculpture, today people couldn't care less. Or look at the series *Lucite* and *Aphakie* which focus on the American suburbs: once the American dream, decades later one of the causes of the financial crisis. It appears that these landscape paintings are a modern interpretation of the vanitas theme or Memento mori. The 1960s sculpture, the basin and the bungalow are emblems of our surrounding and constantly changing world.

The series *Lucite* and *Aphakie* play a refined game with perception and illusion as well. Trompe l'oeil throws perception off the scent. At first glance, one does not immediately realise that not only the depiction of the landscape but also the 'crumpled sheet of paper' (*Aphakie*) or the 'curtain' (*Lucite*) is merely suggestion, or paint on canvas. The eye registers these as two different realities in which a higher reality value is attributed to the one than to the other while they are both equally fake. By stacking these various realities, the painter constantly disrupts the suspension of disbelief. You are incessantly stepping in and out of the illusion. It reminds of a trick that Northern European painters often pulled in the seventeenth century. They depicted a scenery and framed it by a painted window-still. This artifice increased the illusion and the painting literally offered a window on the world. Eva Nielsen who replaced their window-still by a curtain or sheet of paper, is astonished that for centuries people are interested to look at 'four corners and some paint' and like to go along with the illusion. Her paintings respond to this willingly deception.

Text by Nanda Janssen