

Agneta Ekholm

The painterly language of Agneta Ekholm is uttered in a whisper, audible only to those who spend time quietly and contemplatively. Sheer, serene swathes of paint deliver silent monologues pronouncing the very-human personality of paint. Tranquility, empathy and certitude coalesce into harmonious compositions that feel antidotal to our fraught and frenzied times.

Primed with subdued emotion, Ekholm's works are built intuitively from deep imaginings as well as a formalist engagement with a technical process honed over more than two decades. Each painting evolves organically on the canvas, the very first mark like a seed dropped from the artist's mind. Working with fast-drying acrylic and water, Ekholm uses a sponge to meticulously apply layers of solid pigment and transparent washes to create moments that are ephemeral yet resolute. She rubs sections away in a reductive process that leaves shadows, echoes, memories. These spectral presences haunt the canvas in undulating veils and cascading contours, their elegant opacity suggesting the existence of some deep cognitive space. Beneath the translucent ivory veils, in the swirling pools and inky voids, there is the promise of insight through contemplation. The viewer can rest in the cool, dark and sensual spaces of shape, shadow and movement, unfettered by perplexing conceptual webs. Solitude, here, is restorative. The mesmeric verticality of many of the works feels sobering, somehow, as if we are being grounded quite literally by the painterly motion.

Modernist legacies inform Ekholm's gestural aesthetic, her clean monochrome masses suggesting hard-edged abstraction and the spontaneity of her process calling to mind action painting. Though entirely non-representational, her amorphous forms conjure an endless constellation of imagery, as is only natural when filtered through the human lens. Textiles undulating in the breeze, sweeping landscapes, radiological imaging, figurative movement, microscopic organisms; the pictorial potential pivots entirely on the viewer's imagination. There are, however, certain associations with nature spun from Ekholm's childhood memories of snowy Helsinki, where she grew up. Also referenced are the sand dunes, surf and wetlands surrounding her current home in the seaside town of Ocean Grove, on Victoria's Bellarine Peninsula. Snow and ice collide, gently, with whitewash and waves in a tidal movement that ripples softly across the canvas. Some works feel mountainous and monumental, while others resound quietly with the elemental – sand, shells, petals, insect wings. Vignettes of golden saffron, ultramarine and vibrant lime sing loudly amidst the cool hum of wintry whites and brooding greys.

Ekholm's approach is obsessive and fastidious, a cumulative journey that sees the artist often spending days on a single section of the composition, and months on individual works. It is paradoxical, then, that the paintings should appear so immediate, as if the forms have

floated into the picture plane and landed, gracefully, into position. As if by gravitational pull, we hover before these tranquil works, never quite ready to leave their orbit. It is as though there is always forever more to be discovered within the eternal footprints of a journey that can never be repeated.

'Holding Space' – Essay by Eli Walsh, 2022