

The paintings in the Ditte Ejlerskov's (b. 1982) hybrid manual, *An Open Door is Closing*, appear as film stills or photo documentations of scenes from a life lived, while the pictographs are guidelines that bind the narrative in chapters. Strangely enough, the book's dry and pragmatic appearance works in favor of the books content which - like a docu-soap - explores the relationship between man and woman. Is it a manual that gives advice on tackling a complicated love affair, we wonder in our encounter with this atypical book. The paintings run indexically, since they seem to refer to a photographic source, that is, to a now which existed when it was immortalised on the light-sensitive paper and then painted. Therefore the book is also about representation - about how we construct our images of reality. "The photo imparts to the instant a posthumous shock" as Roland Barthes wrote in his renowned book of photography *Camera Lucida* - by which he means that it both celebrates and seals a moment (an act, an instant) that is already in the past.

Ditte Ejlerskov's mode of expression belongs to the great, representational painting tradition of the 20th century and evokes North American painters such as Edward Hopper and Mark Tansey and, indeed, the Swedish painter Ola Billgren, with whom she also shares a definite kinship. Her paintings are just as virtuoso and demonstrate how she masters the figurativeness and the entire cinematic setting. In each painting - here filtered through an implicit, female narrator - a kind of riddle is embedded which points beyond the tale. Thus, the reproduced paintings can, on the one hand, be seen as part of a longer story of the highs and lows of love but on the other hand stand alone because each of them is multi-layered and enigmatic - like a dream with high-density images which are in principle inexhaustible.

Let us digress to the Danish author Lone Hørslev's (b. 1974) new novel *Grief and Camping* (2011), which examines the 1980s. The protagonist is Marianne, a city girl who has relocated to rural western Jutland where she lives a monotonous, provincial family life, helping out in her husband's grocery store. But a sense of alienation caused by the fact that she feels neither seen nor understood by her husband starts to creep in on her. One day she reads a collection of poetry by Søren Ulrik Thomsen, *City Slang* (1981), which is a congenial depiction of the 1980s as a disillusioned decade in crisis. Particularly the lines "Death is not to love and everything is as usual", makes an impression on her. Her pseudo life thus articulated, she realizes that she is "like a volcano inside, but the only thing the husband sees is the insignificant flame of a candle", their relationship begins to fall apart in earnest, and at the same time, the fact that the grocery store is threatened with closure due to the general development towards larger-scale economies and supermarkets. Thus, a breakdown is occurring internally as well as externally. In her novel, Hørslev exposes the loneliness in the relationship and the slow draining of desire in the stifling everyday routines which, we understand, depletes love. The lovers are swirling downwards like in a motordrome, and in the end they both expire, metaphorically speaking.

In Ditte Ejlerskov's book there are very few everyday routines, and it is worth noting that the plot is a construction added after the production of the main part of the imagery in the book. The paintings have previously been exhibited. For instance in the show *A Tale of Plans, Told by Misgiving* - a story about our plans and dreams but told through their impact, through doubt, grief and unresolved problems. The paintings precede her innovative book, which is therefore to be seen neither as a catalogue nor as a picture book. But if we start by immersing ourselves in the plot in the knowledge that it goes back and forth, and is an after-rationalization, then it also deals with an unfulfilled love affair, since the female protagonist feels betrayed and abandoned by her partner. It describes a long-distance relationship where he, like a nomad in the age of globalization, travels the world. "He exists because he has an audience" it says in the list of content on the left cover page. Here we can read the titles of the works, which in turn refer to the pictographs on the 14 tabs, dividing the story into 14 chapters. Apparently, the husband has difficulty handling closeness, at least with the female protagonist. Instead, he thrives on applause and recognition from an audience, which seems to endow him with a certain self-esteem. We see how the woman sinks into an inward dwelling when she sits on the bed staring at the wall. Her efforts to lure the man into her space, into the treacherous ambiguous sphere of desire and love, are in vain.

But neither of them seems to be happy, because also the man spends his free time in hotel rooms in horizontal contemplation: "He sleeps in hotel beds. A constant ritual in purple. Absence" which is depicted in several paintings where the man lies on the bed with his eyes fixed on the ceiling lamp. The woman becomes increasingly desperate and decides to follow him to the modern desert city under construction, but when they are tentatively in the same bed, he is not turned on by her, and he keeps his door closed. Now she opens it, but only to use it as an exit - into freedom, as she senses other ways of finding romance. The time of passively waiting is over. We are reminded of the old Danish ballad "It was a Saturday night, I sat and awaited you". Here, the woman is betrayed by her beloved for another. But Ejlerskov's woman, who along the way is inspired by the glamour of glossy magazines, chooses, like Nora in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, to take the bull by its horns and start over with a new agenda. Ditte Ejlerskov unfolds therefore a modern tale in archetypical robes, but it is worth noting that the story is her excuse to explore the form and colors of painting. The tale is subject to the image in continuation of the Danish painter Asger Jorn's credo: "In the beginning was the image".

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