

Encyclopedic Art Practice
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Painting is the focal point in Ditte Ejlerskov's art. Her art confronts us with the classical perception of painting as still life, portrait and the nude model. Her figurative motives are painted with skilful technique and great attention to detail. But at the same time there is a certain distance to the classical and representational tradition. Ejlerskov's paintings do not fit so easily into these art history categories. She unsettles the genres by simultaneously surrendering to them and challenging their predictability. Her formal approach breaks down the illusion about definite genres and she reveals that painting is ambiguous. Her motives and technique are therefore a part of the theme she is always exploring: the practice of painting. Her interest in painting does not only concern the ability to master the tradition and to experiment with the painting on the canvas. She also wants to explore painting as a genre, as a practice and as a theoretical and historical field. Ditte Ejlerskov's ambition is to enhance the painting activity as a creative and reflective process and to make it a part of the painting itself. Even with political or romantic subjects she transforms the contents of the motif into painterly form and expression. The content of her work evolves through an indexical cooperation between the various elements of the paintings. Issues such as pride, hope, anxiety and the collapse of traditional structures are all present in her work. Ejlerskov does not only treat these subjects as a part of the content; she also explores what the paint and the canvas can do to the subjects.

As a painter, Ejlerskov cannot de-contextualise herself. On the contrary she has had the opportunity to gain experience from different academies such as Cooper Union School of Art in New York, The Funen Art Academy in Denmark and Malmö Art Academy in Sweden. This experience has made her realize how the academies train and institutionalize their artists in various ways. It has also sharpened her awareness of how art and artists are being shaped and how she herself is affected by certain expectations and unwritten rules when it comes to producing art and being an artist. In a continuous process since 2006 Ejlerskov has reflected on all these experiences with painting. Thoughts, ideas, artistic discoveries and theoretical insights have made up an installation of sketches and notes containing 358 files filled with artistic experience. These files mirror her own artistic journey and have branched into a complete encyclopedia. The files are connected in a large network that branches in many directions with references back and forth and titles such as *Al Prima Painting and Appropriatedness*, *Green and Gut feeling*, *Incomprehensive theorizing and Intention*. As the titles indicate, the notes contain personal notes as well as familiar concepts from art history. By choosing the encyclopedic format Ditte Ejlerskov reveals her ambitious intention to complete and survey her own experiences. On one hand stands the need to archive, organize and make her knowledge real and accessible to herself and the beholder. And on the other hand it seems paradoxical to expose and theorize about the creation of creativity. Paradoxes are characteristic of Ejlerskov's way of working. An encyclopedic work connotes scientific and academic production. This association contradicts the understanding of art as a dynamic, intuitive and affective practice. Those qualities do not necessarily have to be opposites, but what Ejlerskov does is to make us aware of this potential paradox.

An encyclopedia is a piece of work with a lot of weight. It is ambitious, thorough, richly faceted and comprehensive. And so is the term itself. Just try to google the word encyclopedia. The first result is Wikipedia's definition: Encyclopedia is a comprehensive written compendium that contains information on either all branches of knowledge or a particular branch of knowledge. Encyclopedias are divided into articles with one article on each subject covered. The articles on subjects in an encyclopedia are usually accessed alphabetically by article name and can be contained in one volume or many volumes, depending on the amount of material included. But there are also 408.000 other results to choose from, and they will offer other explanations, links and directions. The same dynamics are present in Ejlerskov's installation. The viewer must choose the way in and around the encyclopedia. The possibilities are many and it is up to the individual to navigate through the root system. The rhizomatic structure demands a certain involvement. The viewer must have the courage to engage in the encyclopedia and to absorb the overflow of information. The exchange will only be activated if the audience interacts with the books. From being a stationary installation containing 358 compendium-like files in an elevated white sculpture, Ejlerskov's *Unbreak my heart say you'll love me again* becomes a dynamic installation that occupies the space and encourages the viewer to make an entrance into the many possibilities of the encyclopedia. However, the artist does not leave us completely without guidelines.

The books are organized in alphabetical order. The installation is provided with a control panel from which the viewer can get an overview over the books. Ejlerskov has made two graphic maps, each with their own system of logic. The viewer can either navigate by The Chapter Map or The Field Map. The Chapter Map is a chronological review over seven chapters, that will lead the way to becoming an artist. Step by step we are being introduced to diverse problems and challenges artists might be confronted with in their artistic development. With this map the encyclopedic content can be transformed into an educational guideline made by an artist, Ditte Ejlerskov herself. But even though the map seems serious and graphically convincing in the white and stylish control panel, there is a certain ironic tone in the confident recipe on how to become an artist. It seems as if Ejlerskov questions the role of the map as an authoritative resource.

The second map is entitled The Field Map. The beholder is being introduced to six fields. These six fields are for example Ideal Field or Drama Field. They describe the conditions an artist can be left in during his/her artistic experiments. The two maps propose two different approaches to the encyclopedia. With these approaches Ditte Ejlerskov offers both personal and professional experience of the artistic process of formation. The extensive encyclopedia is the result of more than two years of collecting, archiving and communicating raw material from the final years of her studies. With Ejlerskov's interest in her own learning process and position as an academy student *Unbreak my heart say you'll love me again* turns into an authentic piece of apprentice work. Ejlerskov's installation becomes a materialization of her scholarship and characterizes her curiosity and her ambitious encyclopedic art practice.