

We Found Love in a Hopeless Place

An exhibition by Ditte Ejlerskov

At ELASTIC Gallery, Malmö, SE
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6 texts by Marie Egger

Ditte Ejlerskov found love in Rihanna's wardrobe.

The Rihanna Paintings (2013), a series of oil paintings, can be described as colorful, abstract, joyful patterns, sometimes figurative, sometimes not. One of them is a pineapple pattern, two other ones look like posters, saying "BOY" or "SHE DIED OF PERFECTION".

The range of the colors appears to be familiar: a rich pink, shiny gold, deep black and clear white, screaming yellow, a fruity green and ocean-blue. The large-scale canvases are reminiscent of textile designs; they reflect current trends and fashion by adapting a palette of stylized color tones. All shapes and colors are based on outfits of pop singer Rihanna.

The series of paintings Danish artist Ditte Ejlerskov has been working on for over a year, is complemented by another group of small oil paintings: They are representational portraits of Rihanna, dancing around, posing, smiling, screaming, hiding behind shades, enjoying the sun, living her life.

The Sexy Bikini Dance Painting (2013) is a partner of The Sexy Painting (2013). In the first one, Rihanna is performing on stage, holding a microphone, shaking her curly hair, showing off her fashionable bikini made of an orange, pink and blue stripe patterned fabric. The huge painting is an abstract, geometric composition of these exact colors, forming a triangle that eventually points at the bottom of the canvas. A few color drops cover the piece, making it seem like an ironic statement. It appears as if the canvas were painted very hurriedly or some attention to detail was ignored. In fact, the artist documents, fixes a connection of imagery and carefully decides about these drops.

A parallel project to the The Rihanna Paintings (2013) is The Rihanna Rapports (2013). Here every step of the painting series is neatly archived. These reports reveal the depth of the relation between Ejlerskov and Rihanna: All of the singer's outfits are documented for each day, location and the occasion she wore it. Each piece of clothing is identified. Every box contains information about the fashion label and facts about the captured situation and clothing. In addition to that the binder contains the source image, a palette, used for its reproduction as a painting, a photographic documentation of the content including a view of the final small oil painting and the large abstract canvas within the working situation of the studio.

In fact, the project We Found Love in a Hopeless Place (2013) is a meticulous archive of numerous images of Rihanna, found online, reproduced and digested by the artist.

I wished I could hit a reset button and go back to my default settings.

Since 2007, Ditte Ejlerskov has been working with the representation of cultural themes and problems through projects such as My African Letters (2011), where representational and somewhat abstract paintings accompanied an email-conversation with a lawyer in Benin, Africa. After working with projects like this in the past, the artist began searching for a new method. We Found Love in a Hopeless Place (2013) opened a channel for her: Ejlerskov uses found imagery and the language of painting to reproduce an image, zoom into it, obsess with the subject and document the process. For her it is a transformation of sticky and coarse paint from a tube into something that represents reality. The Rihanna Paintings cannot be untied from their context or from the way how they were created, from the fact that they are representations of Rihanna's wardrobe.

By zooming in, Ejlerskov is getting closer to dissolving the reference of the image. A zoom on Rihanna's clothing in so far represents the wardrobe, even if it gets close enough to "become abstract". Some of the abstract canvases are stylized versions of the original picture, others try to capture the flow of the situation, while others again are merely zooms of a part of a dress. Through the system she created, Ejlerskov figures out "what to paint" and "why" as she decides to use something given as a starting point. For her, this even led to an understanding of the language and possible interpretations of abstract modernistic painting. "The May 19 Stylisation", "The Givenchy Diptych" and some of the other paintings on show refer loosely to the modern color field painters. Others wink at Gary Hume, Frank Stella and Morris Louis. The viewer who remembers the work of Kenneth Noland would see the link between Ejlerskov's "The Sexy Painting" and Noland's "The bridge". "The Striped Painting" gestures Barnett Newman and "The Zebra Zoom Painting" cite the aggressive hand of Willem de Kooning. "The Marc Jacobs Painting" and "The Lesson Painting" have more quiet tones à la Agnes Martin. Ditte Ejlerskov's very first pre-academic paintings were abstract. After that her body of work changed towards more representative and conceptual projects that employed political themes and aspects based on cultural theory. These new paintings are a step forward (and back) to a language of pure painting.

**Who did that again?
- Rihanna.**

Ah right. Badgalriri - That sex woman who's always taking her clothes off...

We Found Love in a Hopeless Place (2013) revolves around Rihanna. The inspiration for the individual pieces was found in an imagery catalogue created online where posts on social media networks such as Instagram, Facebook, Youtube and the Google image search provide Ditte Ejlerskov with a daily update on Rihanna's outfits, latest location and goings-on.

The images that are the most appealing to the artist are sexy, well composed, have outstanding patterns of clothing or even refer to other known artworks – for example when a fabric corresponds to Keith Haring's work as in The Graphic Jacket Painting (2013). This way, Ejlerskov's collection incorporates Rihanna's wardrobe and mirrors the pop-star's visual representation.

Although the actual artistic act performed by Rihanna is singing, for the most part pictures of her paint an image of the pop-icon. As of now, Rihanna is one of the top three Instagram users with more than nine million followers. The Rihanna Rapports is a trial to collect this footage and work through it. Focusing on the singer's wardrobe, Ejlerskov is gathering as much information about the image's content as possible (date, location, piece of clothing, designer & brand history) What she reveals is the repeated advertisement for fashion brands such as Givenchy, Boy, Alexander McQueen and Stella McCartney, among others.

The machinery of marketing is only a fraction of the structures rolling behind the brand that is Rihanna. But the conversion of current taste, style and fashion are reactions to desires of a certain target group. This sartorial concept is supposed to feed the demands of the so-called "pop-taste" (Boris Groys, 2004) and to create new longings, depicting a contemporary, commercial taste in Ejlerskov's abstract paintings.

The Pineapple Painting (2013) for example, is one of the most trendy patterns of the painting series. It's vivid green, yellow and brown tones and especially the fruity pineapple pattern are reminiscent of the latest collections by Stella McCartney, Prada, Moschino and Just Cavalli. That canvas is the evolution of the Vita Coco Pineapple Painting (2013) which is a reproduction of the Vita Coco advertisement Rihanna shot in 2012. "Vita-Coco's an all-natural, super-hydrating, fat-free, cholesterol-free, nutrient-packed, potassium-stacked, mega-electrolyte coconut water!".

Are you a fan?

- Yes. - However, I am not so sure I can really answer that question any longer.

Danish artist Ditte Ejlerskov follows Rihanna on Instagram. She watches video of her life performances. She collects daily paparazzi shots of Rihanna's outfits and prints out the nicest ones to make new paintings from them. As she follows up on designers, Ejlerskov organizes and categorizes each picture into a folder for each outfit Rihanna wears and includes a color scale for each painting.

The process of searching for these images used to be a pleasurable experience motivated by a curious interest for the artist. Now it has become a hunt for ideas. A certain "paradigm of deciding for (or against) an image has become part of Ejlerskov's daily routine. She lets herself get swept away in an ocean of pleasing photos, videos and myths about the pop icon. What Ejlerskov wanted to consume, was also consuming her. This is how the artist is trying to reach a 100% engagement with pop-culture. In this manner, her passionate relationship with Rihanna became a routine, a fetish, an obsession.

In the paintings, it is possible to recognize Rihanna every time - although the hair color, hairstyles, outfits, patterns and poses are changing back and forth. What Ejlerskov is reproducing here is a Rihanna-symbolism more than the actual image. The small oil paintings are reminiscent of typical fan art, but those drawings or paintings usually copy a famous poster, a favorite pose or a popular image of a star. Fan art characteristically focuses on the actual image rather than the person in it, however The Rihanna Paintings reproduce a brand / an icon. As Ejlerskov formulates it herself: "to cultivate the junk".

I have not been able to stop. That has been the problem. And is still.

This project by Ditte Ejlerskov is an exercise. It's a mission to work through a complex conglomerate of photos, brands, styles and other information. That method is routed by a repetition of procedures and has not ended yet. What's on show at ELASTIC Gallery is a stage of an ongoing practice. We found love in a hopeless place (2013) is the beginning of a long-term relationship between Rihanna and the artist.

Ejlerskov finds an image online. If she likes it, she downloads it, prints it out and leaves it in her studio for a while. Then she sketches or works directly on the canvas, throws attempts away until she finalizes a painting with just the right degree of abstraction.

What emerges is the artist's way of consuming the photos by translating them into paintings. Peter Weibel recently described this as "the mixing and crossing of media" - as a next level of how to cope with the paradigmatic media shift of the 21st century: the global web. In his view, the post-media condition is divided into two stages: 1) the equivalence of all media, 2) the mixing of media. Since he expects the first phase to be more or less completed, what is happening now, is a cross-referencing to other media. Paintings, for example, can link to and use photography or employ digital graphics programs. With her project, Ejlerskov overcomes the obstacle of redefining her own practice. She is leaving the decision about her palette and motive to a digital apparatus of imagery. "My mind needed a clean up." she says.

The work is a trial to collect digital images of the famous pop-star Rihanna and mirror her marketed appearance. By confronting herself with the excessive demand of over-viewing the whole (digital) archive, Ejlerskov is facing an unsolvable task. This inherits the starting point and final stage of her exercise. She copes with the influx of newly discovered knowledge and the effects it has on prior choices and solutions. A thorough research on the internet, the decisions for or against certain images – the procedure of production. From the beginning on (How to engage with the object?) she is making the process transparent and visible for us viewers. The small oil paintings, as partners of the abstracts, provoke our thoughts and are the "step in between" that for her is necessary to dive through the photography and emerge with the large-scale canvas.

Time

Someone had an idea.
 He or she designed a pattern for a fabric on a computer.
 Someone has woven it in China.
 Someone in a purchasing department found it in a sample book and loved it.
 This person convinced the designer that the pattern is cool.
 (Perhaps even the design team created the pattern for the fabric themselves.)
 Someone designed a dress pattern.
 Someone else cut it
 sowed it
 and some other people put it on a model.
 The model walked on a catwalk in Paris.
 Rihanna saw it there.
 (Or the dress just arrived at the doorstep of her wardrobe assistant, who presented it to Rihanna.)
 Rihanna loved it
 and wore it outside one day in Miami.
 A paparazzi photographer took many pictures that day,
 but sold the picture of the dress-walk to a magazine online.
 I found it on a website
 or on Rihanna's Instagram account.
 I loved it.
 And printed the picture on my cheap printer at home.
 I brought it to my studio
 where it hung for several months.
 One day a painting inspired by the photo was ready for exhibition.