

Nathalie Djurberg's work cannot be confused with that of any other artist, and a usual reference in speaking of her art is of a story-tale aesthetic. But despite this, it would be erroneous to believe that it is a private, introspective or fictionally surrealistic world she creates. I wouldn't say "on the contrary" – but almost. For although her method allows room for improvisation and suggestive things happen in her films – such as an Eskimo girl killing a walrus, entering its hide and swimming away, or a dark-skinned ballerina dancing over a huge table full of delicacies – Djurberg's work is full of acute social criticism and the processing of collective social trauma. Power, violence, sexuality, dissidence and fear of the unknown return over and over in works that often are troublesome and repelling at the same time as they lure and fascinate.

My first impression of Djurberg's films is that they often are gross exaggerations. Thus it is equally strange to experience that they, in comparison to the real world, upon reflection prove to be understatements. Every day articles are published about violence, terror and bizarre acts which are far more grotesque and strange than anything her clay figures can come up with. Why is it then that her work seems overstated? A tempting conclusion would be that the format of media such as newspapers, internet and TV has turned me into a passive consumer of the daily newsflow. Catastrophe is routine and I take note of the information with due distance without actually seeing or being moved by what I've read. In Djurberg's fictive portrayal, form does not control content in the same simplistic manner. One stands before something not previously seen, and there is an unsureness involved in seeing existence in a strange form. An insecurity that makes us more clearly regard ourselves. It seems to me that Berthold Brecht (1898-1956), an oft-cited source in the art world in recent years, was right in his persistent belief that the theater and fiction are the best places in reality to examine reality.

An unusually concrete example of Djurberg's relationship to contemporaneous events can be found in one of her more recent films, *Greed*, in which three Catholic priests take turns in hiding a naked girl under their robes. The piece was made before the recent wave of disclosures against the church in Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Italy and other countries. *Greed* was also part of a series made specifically for the Venice Biennale in 2009, and against the backdrop of Italian (cultural) politics of recent years obtained an added explosiveness. At the Venice exhibition, the film was shown together with two others that make up the core of this exhibition: *Cave*, in which a naked girl mutifies her own body, and *Forest* in which two figures fight their way through a threatening wood. Djurberg also created a large sculptural installation of giant plants long past the phase of sensual, fragile beauty and instead vulgarly swollen in a way signifying Eden as pornography instead of eroticism. This four-part installation also underscored how essential and integrated Hans Berg's musical score is to the work. It sets the tempo, contributes to the intensity and is in large part the putty that holds the films together to the concentrated energy we experience.

Considering the form of the work, it is not strange that one's thoughts are lead towards the theater. Besides Brecht, it is not far to the politically grotesque and absurd drama of Alfred Jarry (1873-1907), in which he championed the "science of imaginary solutions" (pataphysics). Djurberg's work, however, takes place within the art world and even if she has her own language, it is worth noting that she is not an eccentric in art history. The strategies and aesthetics she uses can be traced as far back as Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516). Closer to our own day, it is interesting to place her in relationship to, for example, Paul McCarthy (f. 1945) and Niki de Saint Phalle (1930-2002). Within Sweden, Djurberg is not far from Marie-Louise Ekman's (f. 1944) treatment of daily life, identity, sex and sexuality, or Lena Svedberg's (1946-1972) biting satire of politics and capitalistic tendencies of the times.

Questions concerning life, existence and politics are passed on from generation to generation in the history of art. Though similar questions are raised, each time has its own reasons for asking and its own way of presenting them. The above-named artists have all instigated discussions of their time, and that has made them milestones. I would like to maintain that even now it is already clear that Nathalie Djurberg's art is an irreplaceable contribution to a discussion on our, in many ways, absurd world. Together her works form a unique window onto our western civilisation of 2010.

- Fredrik Liew