

At battle with himself

About Jacob Juhl

The launch pad for the art career of Jacob Juhl is studies in Information Science, multimediadesign and communication. With all these eggs in the same basket a painter was hatched, next a photographer and today a visual artist in explosive progress. The brand is the self-portrait which has been reshaped, renewed and challenged again and again.

In european art history, and especially among the painters, there is a strong tradition of exploring your own portrait. Jacob Juhl has placed himself in the slipstream of these great artists, Rembrandt, van Gogh, Munch and Trampedach, and like them he has used art, as Henrik Ibsen says, to “hold Judgment Day over himself”.

The self-portraits of photographers are often quite discrete – a refined silhouette of a profile with camera like that of hungarian André Kertész, or a hazy depiction in the mirror like the german Dieter Appelt chose – blurred self images which seem to deny the otherwise familiar insistence on accuracy and vividness of the photographic image.

Not so with Jacob Juhl. Here there is no doubt that the young man with the closely cropped black hair, the trimmed beard and the enamel blue eyes is the artist himself, for as we see him so has he seen himself in picture upon picture ever since he first set foot on the artist’s path three years ago and chose the digital film and the glass eye of the camera to give new shape to reality. Not before long does the spectator realize that with Juhl documentarism is completely unknown territory. All focus is on the other unmistakable characteristic of photography: *the illusion*. The spectator is deceived and confused fruitfully, not just as in the mirror hall of antiquity where people and objects are doubled, no, we are frequenting a neo-bourgeois reality where stress and the threat of being fired flourish and the truisms of management speak concerning flexibility and adaptability are demonically depicted in the individual struggle with oneself as overflowing – three, four, five, even up to eight versions of the same person in ironic, threatening or destructive self-confrontation. The black attire is anonymous but with the hood timelessly and archetypally enclosing *the pirate*, next *the executioner*, next *the nightman*, and even sending rebellious signals all the way up to today’s squatter- or hip hop-culture.

Jacob Juhl is productive and it will lead too far to go down all of the paths on which he has set foot in the latest 12-15 months to explore himself and his persona and shape the experiences into new surprising or provocative series. Doppelgängers, grotesque masks and the linguistic-grammatical innovations of the titles can not hide that it is still the self- and time-confrontation of the same artist and the corresponding physiognomic distortions that we witness. But Juhl is not for those that need to retain. As the scenic tales are abandoned and a split-screen in the style of David Hockney or Lucas Samaras is introduced Juhl gives decomposition physical existence by transferring the self-portrait onto rough knot-filled boards that challenge the illusion, or he goes to the edge by dissolving the reality representation of the self-portrait into digital pixels. What comes next? The audience awaits...

Finn Thrane