

Dark Teeth in Shining Smiles

Magnus Andersen expands painting beyond the canvas in a total installation that grins at contemporary fantasies of idyllic rural life.

By Francesca Astesani 19.10.21 Mini Artikel på dansk



Magnus Andersen, *Agrication, Tranen*, 2021.
Photo: David Stjernholm.

The colour yellow has an apparently simple and straightforward semiotic. The most luminous hue in the spectrum, it evokes radiant days bathed in sunshine and elicits feelings of optimism and happiness. But rotten teeth can lurk inside bright smiles. Yellow is also the colour of diseases like malaria and jaundice, while its pigments originate from toxic metals and urine.

Agrication

Magnus Andersen

Tranen, Hellerup

25 August — 14 November 2021

Magnus Andersen's solo show at Tranen, *Agrication*, is showered in intense yellow light, creating an exhilarating gaseous container for a total multimedia installation that addresses contemporary idealisations of rural life.

The coloured glow floods the space from skylights covered in pieces of yellow foil assembled like the tissue paper crafts often found in kindergartens. This nod to a didactical aesthetics reminiscent of Waldorf education recurs in many of the exhibition's formal elements and is central to its conceptual architecture.

Education must play a pivotal role in reorienting urban life towards more sustainable alternatives. How can a bright rural future be placed in the hands of children who have never seen a living cow? Scenes from a fanciful pastoral future unfold in the six paintings on view. But this narrative's potential optimism is tainted by eeriness. The pervasive hue that forcefully alters all colours provokes an immediate sense of mistrust towards this imaginary future – a feeling that is not eased by the characters' smiles, cracking up on unnaturally coloured faces.

Wood carvings at the base of the paintings didactically introduce the language of this new way of living where technology and natural rhythms will ostensibly co-exist in harmony. But Andersen's 'school' is as paradoxical as the contemporary dream of idyllic farming. Its basic vocabulary is made up of peculiar connections that span millstones and drones, function keys and green strawberries, solar power and bitcoins: a mismatch where past, present, and future disappear into the absurdity of their symbolic combinations.

In this time of ecological disaster, we desperately need to imagine alternatives to an unsustainable urban life. I sometimes force myself to imagine my life in the country. There, I would reconcile many of the ethical paradoxes I struggle with, all those nagging reminders of my lack of consistency in the real world.

Magnus Andersen's cynical approach is a warning towards naïve fantasies of this kind, and a refreshing take on airy discussions that, in art contexts, can uncritically embrace romantic visions of the natural world and our role as humans within it.



Magnus Andersen, *Agrication* (detail), Tranen, 2021. Photo: David Stjernholm.

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