

A Ray of clarity,

- On Viktors Rosdahl's painting

Rosdahl's paintings flow seamlessly between allusions to contemporary events and art historical references in a perpetual state of here and now. In his painting we find Romantic motifs with a penchant for massive mountains, and motifs featuring contemporary urban environments, popular culture or specific events from the past and present, or the motifs originate from his own family albums.

A useful point of departure when viewing the paintings is to consider them in terms of an interplay between painting as action (verb) and the final completed painting (noun). When considered as the former, it is a daily activity wherein the activity forms the basis of the work in the studio. In a similar vein as that of an alchemist, Rosdahl uses and tests a variety of materials such as epoxy, egg oil tempera, mineral silicate emulsion or oil chalk as accompaniments to his oil painting. Hence, Rosdahl's paintings can appear very different in terms of their characteristics and the texture of their surface.

As completed physical works, most of Rosdahl's paintings can be seen as interpretations of preexisting images, based on, for example, a photograph or occasionally earlier works from annals of art history. His selection of motifs that have captured his interest may be highly random and coincidental, but they often have something in common: there is a palpable tension in the image, an ongoing uncertainty about what the image actually conveys or means, something that jars the senses and that persists over time. Sometimes, Rosdahl keeps images lying around for decades before he decides to possibly use them in his art. Once he has decided on an image, it is transformed through the daily work in the studio. Rosdahl experiments and works with scale, cropping, colour choice, and light, adding and removing elements from the original image. Each individual painting can begin as a struggle that strives to physically work out an understanding of how the image in question can be understood as a motif. A physical labour occurring through the act of painting, in which it works as a medium to reflect, try to understand and gain knowledge about events in the world. It may be a section of a scene based on a specific event. Rosdahl often returns to the same motif - sometimes several years apart.

Sometimes, whatever initially caught Rosdahl's interest, doesn't necessarily have any bearing on what the finished painting ends up being. The paintings take on a life of their own, so to speak, and the explorative work embedded in each painting occurs on its own terms. This process certainly contributes to the fact that Rosdahl's paintings generally function as solitary individual works of art.

But how do Rosdahl's finished paintings relate to the viewer? Do they make statements about the world? What do the subjects and motifs represent historically, ideologically and in the present?

Rosdahl engages in dialogue with various facets of art history; Romanticism, in particular, forms a significant point of departure, both in terms of how it views the artist and the role of artists, and also in regard to the primary subject matter usually attributed to Romanticism. The former concerns art as a form of knowledge in its own right, one in equal standing to philosophy and science. In the latter regard, the motifs of Romanticism are found in Rosdahl's predilection for and fascination with massive mountains. However, Rosdahl had previously also been in dialogue with the artist Olof Krumlinde (1846-1945), who was important for north-western Skåne, and his paintings featuring landscape motifs from Kullen.

Consequently, there are many references to Caspar David Friedrich and his views on inner and outer landscapes. Humankind can both stand in opposition to nature and simultaneously be part of the same universe, depending on whether we see nature as sacred or profane. But it would seem that in many of his paintings, Rosdahl makes reference to Friedrich's imperative in which he calls to the viewer to open their eyes and see the magnificence of nature. For example, in the series *Utopian Strain*, with the man sitting on a rock looking out over the landscape or the sea, or in the many other works that feature the figure of the wanderer, such as *En inneboende rörelse i universum* (2025), *Stjärnstoff* (2025) and *Vandrare* (2017). The latter also containing a nod to Dick Bengtsson's painting *Bergsvandrarna* from 1974. Mountains possessed a multi-layered meaning within Romanticism; it could represent the grandeur of nature or a connection with the sky, but it was also a reminder to the individual that humankind is no match compared to nature, heavily outweighed by its magnificent forces. Apart from providing art historical references, the mountains - and in some cases the Swedish mountain ranges - are allowed by Rosdahl to represent a multitude of things: personal memories, something beautiful, dreamlike states - the possibility of utopia. These are represented in the paintings by both the presence of wanderers in many pictures and perhaps the more inaccessible peaks such as the Matterhorn.

But Romanticism also had a dark side. For some artists, national Romanticism turned into nationalism proper and could be used by nationalist movements. National Socialists also interpreted (national) Romanticism in their favour and actively used the aesthetic in their ideology. For example, mountaineering became a symbolic ideological sport, one that required both respect for the mountain and nature to succeed, but ultimately also presented a way to prove the strength and heroism of the individual and to show a mastery of nature. It is no coincidence that Adolf Hitler often posed in photos and films from his Alpine home in southern Bavaria, Berchtesgaden - with the

Bavarian Alps in the background. Unlike Friedrich's paintings, Hitler allowed himself to be portrayed from the front, looking directly at the viewer rather than at nature. This symbolically emphasised his ego and strength. The importance of the mountains as a motif also recurs in popular culture, for example without irony in *the Sound of Music* and with considerable irony in Rammstein's music video *Ohne Dich*.

In this exhibition

The current exhibition of Viktor Rosdahl's work, *A ray of Clarity*, at Dunkers Kulturhus, 21 March - 21 September 2025, includes several new paintings. The exhibition space is open and deliberately stripped down in terms of partitioning walls, signs, spotlights and the like. The spectator is immediately confronted with the totality of the exhibition, which is greater than all the individual paintings put together.

The exhibition literally moves on two parallel planes that interact in dialogue with each other. The first part makes up the majority of the exhibition and here the works are positioned at a height that matches at the viewer's viewpoint. Here, calming, romantic and dreamy sensibilities dominate. The artist has intended for the viewer to be able to "wander into" the larger paintings. A central component of the exhibition is a suite of four paintings, 2015-2022, which are shown in their entirety for the first time. In these four paintings, themes and motifs such as massive Scandinavian housing development programmes, yearning, nature and geopolitics are brought together to form a complex whole that communicates human aspirations and dreams. In the painting *Caravans Out of Empire*, 2015, the romantic Alpine massif has been relocated to Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan, which now forms the backdrop that frames a contemporary geopolitical reality. This region is where Swedish military troops were stationed between 2006 and 2014, in connection with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan: a NATO operation with a mandate from the UN and which resulted in several Swedish soldiers being killed. And as it says on the Swedish Defence Forces' website: "The operation that changed the Swedish defence forces". The mountains of romanticism are juxtaposed with an underlying violence.

If Romanticism and Caspar David Friedrich represent a more analytical and reflective position in the exhibition, there is also a reference to Vincent van Gogh, *Inferno Vincent*, 2015, which in the exhibition represents the faith in the uncompromising artist who wants to achieve a new way of looking at the world. For many artists, this endeavour is a matter of life and death.

The Frieze

The second section consists of a new series of paintings from 2024-2025 positioned on the north side of the room, arranged as a frieze of pictorial representations of a contemporary here and now. The motifs are taken from stills from a music video that appear in police investigations into the world of gang crime, such as the fatal shooting of the 12-year-old girl Adriana on the 2nd of August 2020. One work is entitled: *Trauma zoner: 2024:296:149* and the title references the number of documented gang related shootings and explosions in Sweden in 2024. How should we interpret these motifs that show a reality that is now all around us and can occur anytime and anywhere in everyday life? Unlike the recurring figure of the wanderer in many of Rosdahl's other paintings - who are turned towards nature - are the shooters instead facing the visitor? These images seek our attention.

The frieze is certainly positioned on a different plane compared to the other paintings in the exhibition, both literally and in terms of subject matter. But, at the same time, it interacts with the other work through a certain asymmetry so that an offsetting occurs vis-à-vis the rest of the exhibition. These paintings perhaps represent a threat or a possible disturbance to the calm, romantic and utopian. Darkness. Rosdahl combines the different planes into the form of a question. How should we look at these images? What do they mean? What does it say about the present? The works that are placed at a height that matches the viewpoint of the visitor are mostly filled with faith, yearning, hope, ideology. But in the frieze motifs, all ideology is gone, political struggle no longer exists. It is empty. The struggle is now just an individual self-glorification embedded in the image of success. The individual has become an ideological virtue that is maintained collectively in the absence of other values.

Closure

In the exhibition *A glimmer of clarity*, the artist asks questions about the driving forces of humanity, its collective history and attendant ideologies, and its significance in the present. What forms does struggle take when belief in something greater has failed and the individual is left without character, education and guiding ideology?

The title of the exhibition, *A glimmer of clarity*, could refer to the moment or occasion when a work of art or an exhibition completely opens itself up to the viewer, conveying an ability to see the world with new eyes, beyond the realm of fluffy ignorance which lacks substance. Informed by a belief in art as a source of deeper kind of knowledge – both an inherent and extrinsic knowledge. The mists are dispelled. Replaced by a sense of clarity that allows one to see the world as it really is. A world of which we are simultaneously all a part.

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