

JIM THORELL

illicit electricity

27 April – 16 June 2018

From some distant patch of chalky rock, a strange creature is emerging. The white stone is flecked with pastel smudges, which suggest floral or lichen pigment, frozen in sedimenting earth, unfading against the laws of decay. The creature is no less indignant towards nature's dictates. Despite being entirely skeletal, it still seems strangely alive, staring upwards with hollow eyes. Then there are its wispy bones, all coral red, including ten long fingers more frog-like than human.

Jim Thorell's painting *Night Ship* (2018) provokes the suspicion that such an entity might actually exist. Ridiculous, perhaps; but it's believable absurdity that breaths life into the Swedish artist's oil, pastel and charcoal paintings, and their cast of anomalous beings; amongst others, a gossamer young woman with hollow moon eyes and a face sketched in swooping black strokes, and further down the line, another rusty skeleton. The latter – named *Tragic Dope Fiend* (2018) – is feline headed and carries a long stemmed flower. It's also connected to a cloudy sack, which could be a speech-bubble or the undead kitty's guts, drifting away for lack of purpose.

These paintings intertwine many studied precedents: James Ensor's saturated masks and skulls, Marc Chagall's vibrantly naïveté scenes, pressuring the picture plane like wild children's books, Antoine Watteau's pastel rococo picnickers: no less freakish, actually, than Thorell's subjects. In so many ways, these pictures invoke the multitudes who lurk in wait on the other side of sleep – or the studio door. We're talking about the traditional kind of nightmare spectre, but also the art historical precedents that stack up in an artists mind, terrifyingly seductive as any ghost.

The energy of Thorell's work, is the feeling of flirting with such surprises and neuroses; but of doing so from the safe confines of waking life. It's this effect that most clearly enunciates the artist's relationship to the fantasy space of video games and films. But these canvasses produce a more unsettling believability; their handmade-ness produces an empathy alien to industrially produced films. More over, his painting techniques embody a vision of our known world that is unstable and shapeshifting. Here, temporal dimensions humbly collapse within the moment of seeing.

In *Orfeus Mindhunter* (2018), an androgynous figure with swift eyes and slender fingers presses their bald, chalk white head against a large pink heart. Only this heart also happens to be a mirror; and by extension – as mirrors are to rooms – a portal in the space of painting. Through this egress appears an imperfect doppelganger. Its contours are likewise sketched in charcoal. But, hollow as a phantom, this character reveals the painting's muddy under layer. Same goes for the first subject's jacket, which is partially filled with a blue wash, seeping into the picture's background like liquid cigarette smoke.

The eight paintings in this new body of work embody multiple dimensions, coinciding on canvas: we see the strangely discontinuous zones on two sides of an incognito mirror, but also the manifested duration of manual picture making. There's no perfect equation or formula, to account for the way Thorell's techniques become players equal in effect to the chimeras described, with their radiant cadmium ears, uniformed bodies and – as in *Prins Hatt* (2018) – glowing eyes framed by architectures of muddy brick. Then again, it's hard to know what those brown brushy shapes are, exactly. That's how it goes with dream work.

Jim Thorell (born 1981, Stockholm, SE) lives and works in Stockholm. He graduated with a MFA from Art Academy Valand in Gothenburg, SE in 2010. His work has been exhibited internationally at venues such as: Setareh Gallery, Düsseldorf, DE (upcoming), Tatjana Pieters, Ghent, BE; Pina, Vienna, AT; Gillmeier Rech, Berlin, DE; Roman Road, London, UK; Loyal, Stockholm, SE; Carl Kostyal, Stockholm, SE; Moderna Museet, Malmö, SE; Brand New Gallery, Milan, IT.