

Anders Moseholm: Landscape and Memory

Anders Moseholm is a painter of landscapes and cityscapes whose meticulous arrangements of reality carry with them social and spiritual implications. He sees the relationship of the city to the countryside to be symbolic, and equal in nature; his interpretations site the city as a place of organic growth as well as being the center of horrible pollution--dirty air and garbage pervading the urban streets. There is the smell of reality, then, in this group of paintings; but his nature paintings are somewhat different in the sense that they reveal an elegiac, even a tender emotion that suffuses his studies of individual trees and small groves--Moseholm believes that we have entered a period of ecological crisis and that it is up to us, as citizens of the world, to do something about the exploitation of our natural resources. Moseholm is not a political artist, preferring to see his work as suggestive of hope in regard to the future. Yet his concern involves his studies of the outdoors with a moral awareness which, even if it is not directly stated, nonetheless makes it clear that the artist possesses a great respect, even a reverence, for the world of woods and valleys, mountains and streams. As the artist sees it, painting can create hope by reading the world as a place of beauty rather than a site of defeat.

This being so, it is nonetheless difficult to believe, as Moseholm does, in the beauty of nature without the belief becoming sentimental in character. But the trick of these paintings lies in their ability to develop awareness and embody beauty without becoming bogged down in mawkish sentiment. In *Red Nature* (2002), for example, Moseholm has painted what in many ways might be considered a typical landscape; there is a narrow path leading down the middle of the composition to a clearing with a few bare trees in the distance. On either side of the path, there is heavy foliage, and nothing about the painting gives pause--except for the color! The red hue used for the entire work is a color of warning, suggestive of the toxic environment that has done so much to weaken if not (yet) destroy the beauty of nature. To paint so patently an idyllic scene in colors that actually reflect nature would be to mistake nature as organically healthy, free of distress. But to render nature in the violence of the color red is to recognize that something is terribly wrong; nature is seen to be wounded or sick. In this way Moseholm can indulge his penchant for making a beautiful painting, at the same time sounding the alarm that such beauty is vulnerable and open to attack.

The artist repeats the trick of rendering nature in other colors; there is a striking *Black Nature* (2002), a study of foliage in black that takes up most of

the compositional plane, and also *Orange Nature* (2002), in which words, written on top of the outdoor study, are negated by their having a line drawn through them. Here Moseholm shows his clear mistrust of culture's being able to save the natural world; he is in part a realist who does not forget the particularly human capacity to destroy what in fact should be loved. *Like a Rabbit in Headlights* (2002) is a remarkably lyric study of a forest in black; trees loom up on the left side, with a bright clearing on the right. It all seems innocent and idyllic enough, yet the title gives a warning to the audience: the rabbit is frozen with fear at the sight of a car with its lights on, bearing down on the helpless animal. Moseholm's recognition of ecological danger is accompanied by an equal awareness of the tradition of the landscape in northern culture, and he is prepared neither to give up his warning that nature is being violated nor to sweep over quickly a tradition that he quite naturally belongs to. In a sense, then, Moseholm uses his command of painting to caution us about a problem bigger than art; there is something noble, even visionary about his doing so.

Moseholm similarly treats his cityscapes as portraits of potential violence. In *Gateway* (2002), he paints a city gateway consisting of five huge open arches, with buildings behind the monumental structure. There is something menacing about the image, as if the artist was being supportive of the fascist architecture of Germany. Yet the picture might also be a warning about the sterility of such architecture, in much the same way that the natural landscapes warn us about the current embattled state of nature. In the cityscape *Surroundings* (2000), we see a number of smallish buildings against an open sky, with everything painted in a dark gray, nearly black wash; to the left of the painting Moseholm has included the word ³Surroundings² in capital letters, as if to emphasize that the city is very much a part of our daily experience and cannot be dismissed as merely the raw fabric of an urban arrangement. *On Location* (2001) is a study of a city at night, the windows of buildings lit by artificial lighting. This is what Moseholm is so good at, namely, the juxtaposition of the artificial with the natural, with each commenting on the influence of the other. Buildings exist to contrast with forests, and the reverse is also true. While we are taken in with the strong compositions and sense of form Moseholm has, he never forgets that he is a painter rendering both the artificial and the real.

The interior studies reflect a kind of cultivated calm; here it seems there is a kind of harmony, the sort sought after by so many of us. In *Studio* (date is missing), one can see a table set in a careful way--there is a nod to the pleasures of a comfortable life, which is seen as a rich rather than a depleting

experience. Light travels easily through the open windows of *Studio 2* (date is missing), with a guitar lying on the couch as a symbol of the art that Moseholm pursues in the space recorded. The calm arrangement of light and furniture in *Studio 1* (date is missing) suggests that hope is possible, even in the beginnings of the 21st century, a time too often of terror rather than peace. Moseholm's vision of exterior and interior worlds answer the very questions he implies in his paintings of landscapes that are deliberately surreal in their color scheme but nonetheless all the more real for their beautiful detail. He documents a dream through a life of art, rejecting the heavy pessimism of the moment for something more liberating acutely human: a vision with hope for the future.

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