

Low Definition Cityscape

To be marginal has its own advantages. In the 1840s, a lonely, nearly invisible Dane, sitting in the Frederiksberg Gardens outside of Copenhagen, far removed from the world-historical events raging across the European continent, came to astonishing insights about the existence of the modern man. Indeed, nobody else knows about the principle of observation better than Søren Kierkegaard: observation, if possible at all, is always observation of the other. The observer on the margin, then, has always something to say about the center, which necessarily eludes the center itself. Anders Moseholm's work, never losing its strikingly distinctive style he has cultivated from the very beginning, now seems to be moving towards its truly profound mission – that of observing the condition of the contemporary world from the vantage-point of the margin. The haunting imagery of monumental cityscapes is not supposed to be identified, but one thing is for sure: it is anything but Danish. And as a Danish painter, Moseholm promises to achieve, indeed has achieved, a vision of today's metropolitan world, which a painter in New York or Los Angeles, in Paris or Berlin, is hardly capable of.

Yet the artist does not only capitalize on spatial distance. Vaguely functional buildings, indefinable monuments, street corners and open squares, harbors and bridges, street lamps, and above all, crowds – all seem to blend into poignant memories or uneasy apprehensions, but refuse to appear in the daylight of the present. Temporal distance renders the cityscape into at times animated, at times lugubrious dream-images, bizarre yet never uncanny, unsettling yet never eerie. The artist plays with the historical depth – the metropolitan life is either a long lost paradise, or a future utopia, blurred, uncertain, incessantly struggling against the clarity of here-and-now.

This overarching strategy of spatial and temporal distancing is accompanied by a host of almost ludic maneuvers of reflection. Some pictures stage a tense interplay of seemingly unrelated images, some stage the uneasy co-existence of mechanical reproduction and artistic subjectivity, and all of them dramatize the medial specificity of the visual material by integrating rarely legible written words into images. It is in these multifaceted and multilayered strategies of distancing that the aesthetic claims of the cityscapes reside. The city in the contemporary world is the very figure of clarity, not only because of the quintessential urban phenomenon of street lighting – what spectator can fail to notice the floating shimmers of light suffusing almost all the canvasses? –, but more importantly, because the city is the most highly defined node in the web of information which makes up our social fabric. It is in the city that information is generated, governed, exchanged, manipulated. The brightly lit city surrounded by the darkness of the countryside – whoever has sat in an airplane approaching an airport at night would remember this image. In many ways, this image also epitomizes the position of the city in the symbolic order sustaining our society. It is precisely for this reason that what is excluded by this symbolic order would prefer to aim its most violent and destructive energy at the most urban of all urban centers. Art, as philosophical aesthetics has known ever since its birth in the eighteenth century, is the other of clarity. But it is anything but a bedfellow of violence, as a certain contemporary composer mistakenly suggested. Art never seeks to destroy clarity. Instead, it at once reflects and reflects on clarity by means of various strategies of distancing. In this sense, the artist's cityscapes, in their deft deployment of spatio-temporal as well as other maneuvers of distancing, provide an articulate and powerful statement on what art is. In other words, in confronting the highly defined modern city with ingeniously composed low-definition cityscapes,

the artist uncovers the reflexive and redeeming character of art. Art is always timely. Moseholm's art is timely in that it reflects on and redeems the modern city in precisely this moment when it is under siege.

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