

REVOLUTIONS ARE THE NEW BLACK

Welcome to Anusland, Breastland and Faceland

Hell to some, everyday life to others, and an intelligent criticism of a contemporary time in which fitness centres are becoming more taboo than brothels. Asgar and Gabriels's paintings represent young, beautiful, self-sufficient people in an ecstatic rush of graffiti, post-modern trash, photo realism and classic references to everything from Michelangelo to Hollywood, as well as great quantities of luminescent paint, applied to make it look as if it were running down the canvas.

In the same way that you don't hear a washing machine until it is turned off, it hasn't been possible until now to see that not everything was allowed. Just when you thought that painting couldn't get any wilder, that it could never again become relevant, and that the limits of art would have to be tested in some of its other remote corners, Asgar and Gabriel took a step in a direction that seems to leave nothing sacred. As they say in the sticks: "They don't pull any punches". We are talking college parties inscribed in compositions with Greek divinities; these are Sodom and Gomorra images that in the previous mid-century would have caused even the best of us to faint from shock. They show homosexuality, boozing, drugs, an abundance of cute little dogs, bubble gum, and the most trivial rubbish. Even apocalyptic conditions or something akin to Armageddon would just make these young people pull out their mobile phone cameras. We are presented with perfect poses and lips half-parted in the midst of the revolution. It's a shameless sort of painting. But only apparently so. For although there is top-level frankness and everything revolves around the young people's own pleasure and intoxication, the bodies displayed are perfect. Their casualness is a gimmick. Every detail is choreographed, and while the battles before took place externally, the

horrors have now moved inside. While previously people would be prompted by ethical considerations to engage in the surrounding world, today all problems are of an aesthetic nature. Today the civil rights that our ancestors died for can be withdrawn in less time than we spend queued up in front of an Apple store. Human rights can be violated on the street by a neo-corrupt police society while we're having blond highlights added at the hairdresser's.

While it used to be possible to gain an overall view of the world – there may not have been a detailed recipe to follow, but at least there were pictures on the outside of the box to go by – young people today have all the pieces within reach. They know they can do everything, but they also know that everyone else has the same possibilities, and therefore it comes down to their own little identities, and nothing else. It takes a self to know what you want. Being aware that you have to create yourself by yourself, you start with the low-hanging fruits: the body, the clothing, the hair and the make-up. When you've got that under control and still don't know what you want, then comes the need for anaesthetization, inside yourself, in your orgasm, in drinking.

Messages abound in Asgar and Gabriel's work, as opposed to most of contemporary painting. The artists moralize and wag their fingers, not at specific tendencies, groups, political affiliations or tastes, but at all of contemporary life. Their overall approach is elegant. The title of the exhibition, a citation from the 1968 student revolt, says it all: "Under the Paving Stones, the Beach". Both the young people and the Situationists used the sand under the cobblestones as a metaphor for the ideal life, while the cobblestones referred both directly to the violence used by the young when they threw the stones at the police, and to the bourgeois society as standing in the way of this utopia, this beach.

They fought for their freedom. They wanted to escape from the moralistic iron grip of the bourgeoisie. They wanted to have a say in decision-making. They were tired of capitalism and the consumer society, and in Paris this resulted in something resembling a civil war.

The title is also a piece of romanticized violence, at the same remove from reality as that of the people in Asgar and Gabriel's paintings. But while the 1968 rebels distanced themselves from the potential damage caused by a cobblestone, for example, by looking at the larger perspective of their actions, the people in the paintings distance themselves by concentrating on the smallest perspective. They think only of themselves and their own pleasures. They have shrunk since the legendary sixties and been numbed by mass media and consumer goods. When they walk towards a burning building, they take a picture. When everything is burning, they have another drink and lick the nearest twat. When blood is oozing out of the head of a person next to them, they pose lewdly as though standing in front of a camera. They part their lips and spread their legs. They all look like something in an advertisement. Like photo models paid to look like the people we all dream of being. Beautiful and turned on.

In all of the paintings the lack of a sense of presence is grotesque. In the most recent work, *Kunst ist Anarchie* (Art is Anarchy), they set fire to money and scatter papers containing something as bourgeois as graphs and diagrams, in the midst of wrecked cars and people appearing to be dead. Nevertheless the atmosphere is that of absolute peace and harmony as though everyone were deaf or engaged in warfare without sound. One person is even playing drums as though artistic expression can be used in actual battle. There is also a girl reading a book, marking the page with her finger so that she can remember how far she got when the revolution is over, and she will be going home to take a long, hot bath. Another

person is dressed as a ghost. If something is more one thing than another, so be it. This is a party.

The party is in full swing in *in der hohen Wellen unserer Abendteuer* (in the high waves of our adventure) where eight women are aboard a boat being capsized by a giant octopus. The model for this work, Gericault's *Raft of Medusa*, shows a group of terrified shipwrecked people who know that they are about to die. And here there wasn't any giant octopus! The young people in Asgar and Gabriel's painting are partying despite the fact that the sail is torn, the boat is full of water, and the octopus is about to pull them down along with it. One of the women is already hanging out over the rail, and while four of them try to haul her back inside displaying varying degrees of commitment, another woman is trying to bail out the boat with a small, white bucket. Yet another is posing with a homemade fishing rod and a beautiful smile, while the last one stands with her head bowed down and her hands up in the air in some sort of rock'n'roll gesture. We have become blind to death. We live isolated from a reality where death is something you die from – to the extent that we wouldn't know what death looks like if we met it. We simply live in a reality completely different from the one we are moving around in. We construct it ourselves via media and friends, and we are always right and always on the right track.

In *nous penson*, modelled on Delacroix's famous painting of the July revolution of 1830, *Liberty Leading the People*, clothing is torn to pieces and blood is running, but this has happened in aesthetic battles, not in anything intended to overthrow a ruler. The woman taking the place of the soldier wearing a high hat in the original work, has a Molotov cocktail in her hand and three books under her arm; her hair is completely perfect, but her outermost T-shirt is slightly ripped. But then how are we to know in which way it should have been different? A few dead people are lying

there; that is how it is when you revolutionize. It is staged; this is how it could be done, or the way it might look if one were to rebel, but no one has any idea. Rebellion is a possibility so remote that we must indulge in silly and bombastic fantasies. We know from television how wars against terror look, but we also know that it is not the way they really look, but the way the rulers let us see them. At least we suspect that it all could be represented quite to the contrary, and it is dead certain that those we fight have another view of the truth we pursue with our attack. So what possibilities do we have other than to bet on the horses that have been sent out on the track? If we are not satisfied with the reality constructed for us, we must try to construct another. Here you are, a new one, complete with blood and scarves tied in front of the faces. Wow, wonderful, cool, we'll take it. Revolution is the new black. And in a month there will be a fashion series in a magazine, styled like a scene from the discotheque in Bali. This must be what it is like to be permanently drugged. Everything is a few layers away, and you think that you are thinking. The girls in the boat who are supposed to save their friend from the big, nasty octopus have flung out a net and are trying to pull her in. This is how it's done, right? Saving one's friend. Or what? Looking at their facial expressions, one would think they were filing their nails.

In a way it is also appropriate that it is a Medusa image, of all things, that serves as the model for this anaesthetization. Medusa was not just a daemon, she also turned others into stone when they looked at her. The present time has cast a spell over our youth and turned them into human objects that exist only when they are being seen. And this is perhaps where the greatest paradox resides. For the casualness that characterizes them is based on a desire for authenticity. It has to be genuine. It has to come from within. This is also why the fitness centres are becoming more

taboo than brothels. Everything has to be perfect, and you're not allowed to care. Your muscles must bulge and your stomach be flat, all of their own accord. A trip to a brothel, on the other hand, could easily be defended in connection with boundless drinking and whoring – as a transgression, as a genuine experience.

It is about surface, about existing in the eyes of others. It is part of the great spell. If no one can see me, I don't exist, the thinking goes. This is also why it is considered so attractive to be known. Then if you find it difficult to remember who you are, you can just step outside and be recognized. Just take prosperity as an example. Who really cares any longer whether people have loads of money? Isn't it more about behaving like a rich person? Dressing like a rich person and doing "rich" things? You don't have to spend much time in a metropolitan city before you see this mantra repeated endlessly: "If I am something, but no one knows it, then I'm not. If I'm not anything, but everyone thinks I am, then I am."

We are living in a masturbatory culture where at most a bit of oral sex between girls takes place, but mainly because that is what is expected, if you are naughty. And who doesn't want to be considered naughty? Sex has become mutual masturbation. The few who are in physical contact in Asgar and Gabriel's paintings are looking away. In the large *Auflösung der Ökonomie* (Dissolution of the Economy) a girl has her arms wrapped around another girl's stomach while blowing a big bubble with her pink chewing gum. A man and a woman are blowing smoke into each other's mouths, from a distance, the man with his eyes closed, the woman looking directly at the observer. Another woman is being licked, either enjoying it without looking or thinking about something else. A young man is looking at a woman's crotch, while she is looking across the top of his head. And a small green spaceman has his own ideas about it all. The

closest they come to having sex is when they piss at the edge of the water while staring at those on the beach.

In the painting *did you ever leave for an island* a girl is sitting with an ass right in her face, because another person is bending over next to her. The title of the work is painted across the picture, but visible between the ass and the girl's face is the shadow of a semi-circle in front of the "i" in island, and suddenly it says "did you ever leave for anusland". It is at any rate a utopia, and yet not; the bodies are perfect in Asgar and Gabriel's universe. It is an Anusland, a Breastland and a Faceland. It is a dreamland for anyone in it, and a nightmare for those who are awake. The world has become a place you shrug your shoulders at. We're going to die soon anyway, so we might as well have some fun. If I look happy, I probably am. Under the Paving Stones, the Beach. On the other side of me is where I am. But I have no idea how to get there.

Michael Jeppesen