



MARIA STENFORS
unit 10, 21 wren street
london wc1x 0hf
020 7837 0819
info@mariastenfors.com
www.mariastenfors.com

PRESS

glass magazine
Cristina Bogdan
What Red Blue Is In
06/02/2013

How does one experience the world when they lack the capacity of abstract thinking? Is our experience of the world "natural" or "artificial" – "abstract"? Such questions have always been asked from the scientific and philosophic perspective. Polish painter Mela Yerka sees the death of painting as an opportunity for this medium to ask these questions from a new standpoint. "Painting," she says, "is always abstract. It is as artificial as can be. It is not part of this world." Therefore it is an ideal medium to question precisely this world.

The pretext is the artist's fascination with feral children – that is, children who grew up either in the outdoor wild, or were locked up in the space of their home. Language was not part of their existence, hence they lacked everything that would have distinguished them as humans. They were not able to think abstractly. Discovered at an older age, they were a source of joy for scientists and psychologists, who experimented heavily on them. Some re-entered society as humans, others became burdens and were forever lost. Their portraits on the gallery walls are spectres of humanity, never real embodiments. Their gazes are barriers, not links. The question of abstraction is asked at many levels in the show. Although all the paintings are figurative – according to Mela, "abstract painting is merely a supplement to painting as such" – their arrangement in the white space constitutes a presentation of the abstract condition. On a second level, one can access a narrative. This is conveyed by the presence of the children and some of their companions – as characters, and natural elements or objects that are immediately perceived as symbolical or even fetishist – as setting. "Can painting tell a story?" asks the artist. It always really tells its story of the relation figure-ground, and from here on the field is open. It can tell the story of these children, or the story of humanity. It can expand in time, or condense into presence. Going back and forth between these levels of abstraction, one is narrating their own endless story.

Would the children in these paintings be able to perform such operations? Painting is for humans, is what Mela Yerka shows. However hard we try to escape our condition, our attempts are still part of this world. What is left is the domain of imagination.

Mela Yerka, What Red Blue Is In?

This show is at Maria Stenfors, from Jan 11 – Feb 16, 2013

Maria Stenfors, Unit 10, 21 Wren Street, WC1X 0HF London, United Kingdom



MARIA STENFORS
unit 10, 21 wren street
london wc1x 0hf
020 7837 0819
info@mariastenfors.com
www.mariastenfors.com

PRESS

Paul Carey Kent

ArtLyst

<http://www.artlyst.com/articles/london-art-exhibitions-explore-unusual-materials-in-february-lineup-review>

Mela Yerka: What red blue is in? @ Maria Stenfors

That confused title is apposite, as young Polish painter Mela Yerka's paintings all relate to the world as experienced by 'feral children': sad stories, but raising the classic questions of nature versus nurture in stark form. They range from direct portraits to apparent still lifes, such as the tumblers in which Genie Wiley kept a supply of water obsessively to hand. What makes this more than a socio-philosophical diversion is the painterly way in which differently-formed worlds are conjured through means additive (egg tempera; glass panels with thread; silver leaf...), subtractive (bleach on unprimed canvas) and materially neutral (velvet paintlessly stroked into an image).



MARIA STENFORS
unit 10, 21 wren street
london wc1x 0hf
020 7837 0819
info@mariastenfors.com
www.mariastenfors.com

PRESS

Art Review: Mela Yerka at Maria Stenfors

Londonist

16/01/2013

<http://londonist.com/2013/01/art-review-mela-yerka-maria-stenfors.php>

This exhibition has the feeling of a group show. There are a variety of 'painting' styles, techniques and use of materials on display but they are actually the work of one artist, and an emerging one at that.

Mela Yerka has created a set of works reflecting the lives of abandoned children and the lives that they lead. These include haunting portraits through to the collection of glass jars hoarded by one child, just so that she may have some possessions to call her own.

This show even goes back as far as biblical times, with a work showing Moses being found abandoned in the reeds – created by slowly etching away at the canvas using bleach. One painting depicts a boy on all fours but only his outline is visible and he has been whited out – a reflection on how society doesn't like to acknowledge his existence. Our favourite and most powerful piece is a portrait of a Ugandan boy painted on black velvet. The density of the material gives the sense that he is curiously leaning forward out of the darkness that is his home.

Many artists tend not to vary their styles because if one type of work sells well then there is commercial pressure to keep producing more of the same. This has worked well for many established artists and young artists often follow suit. So it's great to see a recent graduate who is assured enough to keep experimenting with varying styles and techniques, with some great results.

Mela Yerka: What Red Blue Is In? is on display at Maria Stenfors, 21 Wren St, WC1X 0HF until 16 February. Admission is free.



MARIA STENFORS
unit 10, 21 wren street
london wc1x 0hf
020 7837 0819
info@mariastenfors.com
www.mariastenfors.com

PRESS

Art-Corpus

Mela Yerka: What red blue is in? Maria Stenfors

Anna McNay

12/02/13

<http://art-corpus.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/mela-yerka-what-red-blue-is-in-at-maria.html>

"What red blue is in?" is clearly not a well-formed sentence. Syntax is one thing feral children – children who have been abandoned at a young age, and brought up by animals, or left to fend for themselves – cannot learn, if they are only "rescued" beyond a certain stage in their development. Another thing they struggle to establish is abstract thinking, in turn something essential to our enjoyment and appreciation of figurative painting, which requires the ability to see an image, or a representation, emerging from the canvas, rather than just to see the paint marks and canvas itself. Feral children might, therefore, seem a peculiar choice of subject matter for an artist who, herself, is keen to experiment with precisely just how different techniques and ways of making marks might lead to producing various representations of a real world thing. But in Mela Yerka's case, it couldn't have turned out better. This small selection of works, which takes the viewer on a trip through art, as well as societal, history, is at once thought-provoking, and, in numerous instances, quite exquisite.

Yerka undertook a lot of research at the outset of her work for this exhibition, but it ultimately led to her taking her own firm stance and route, and deliberately cutting off at a certain point, so as not to get too entrenched in the intriguing and morbidly fascinating case studies of these children. So keen was she not to weigh the exhibition down with too many connotations, that the working title of Forbidden Experiments was abandoned. This phrase has often been applied, however, to the protagonist of a number of the works, Genie, a girl who suffered a case of terrible abuse and neglect in Los Angeles before being discovered, aged 13, in 1970. Here she is celebrated in four beautiful works. One, Genie Wiley with family, is an oil on linen worked up from a photograph of Genie with her brother before the abuse began. It is eye-catching in its orange colours, with a heavy complementary- coloured blue shadow cast by her mother who holds the innocent toddler. The van Gogh style grass strokes perhaps suggest something of the madness that lies ahead, when Genie was to be left in the cellar, tied to a chair, for most of her first 13 years of life.

Two further works depict Genie as a teenager after she was found: one, Genie Wiley (younger), has been breathtakingly created by stroking a dry brush against deep green velvet, and then setting the resulting picture with fixative. Her face thus appears almost like a hallucination as you near the canvas and peer at it from a certain angle. The other, Genie Wiley (older), is a haunting grisaille from which she stares out, wide-eyed, and

catches the viewer's gaze, like the child everyone would want to take home from the orphanage. Alongside the van Gogh grass, elements of great masters such as Piero della Francesca, Luigi Garzi, and Rembrandt are also featured in some of the other works, and techniques are explored as diverse as egg tempera on linen, oil on velvet, thread between glass sheets, and bleached linen, where the canvas is "painted" on to with bleach, so that the image is not immediately visible, but only appears gradually, thus necessitating a slow working process with many layers built up over time. As with the green velvet piece, there is a kind of presence emerging from an absence, the trace of an image, something which is not quite there. Perhaps this sums up the existence of these feral children, both in, of, and for themselves, with regards to what they have before and after they have been found, as well as once the public furore and interest has died down, and also with regards to the absence of humanity on the occasion of their initial abandonment or mistreatment. Either way, this suitably subtle exhibition, now taking as its title one of Genie's attempted utterances, is well worth seeing.