

Jan Valentin Sæther Fine Art Studio

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PRESS RELEASE

Oslo, 23 October 2003

On Exiles, Surveillance and the State of The World: Jan Valentin Saether at KunstVerket Gallery in Oslo

In his new exhibition "Contrasts. Identities" Norwegian artist Jan Valentin Saether explores the modern world's struggle for identity and control. Employing both traditional painting as well as photography, photocopies, wax, lead and steel, different aspects of the problems facing the Western civilization are put on the spot: the increasing degree of surveillance, our attempt at total control to keep us out of harm's way (mapping the world, monitoring the body, the brain, the streets), the outcasts sentenced to some sort of external or internal exile, the deep injustices in the distribution of goods, and the rising fundamentalism.

The Exile Portraits

Usually a portrait represents someone loved, someone familiar. One does commission a painted portrait, perhaps to honour and remember some socially significant dignitarian. A portrait is costly, takes time to produce and radiates a certain sense of authority. The painted portrait usually does not represent an unwanted person. The six portraits Saether shows at KunstVerket are the beginning of a series intended to depict 42 people, both living and dead, in some kind of an exile. People that somewhere in the world are unwanted. In the spaces between the portraits, the visitor is encouraged to write the names of people they know are in exile. So far, the series consists of the philosophers Julia Kristeva and Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Norwegian-Iranian actor Ali Djabbari, the director Luis Buñuel, peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, and Saether himself – a Gnostic. These are all people that have experienced or live in some sort of an exile: Bakhtin and Aung in exile in their own respective countries, Buñuel and Djabbari as refugees in a foreign country, while Kristeva's and Saether's exiles are more spiritual in nature.

The Envelope Pictures

In a series of pictures placed in envelopes that then have been waxed shut, we find two main themes: refugees and surveillance. Satellite pictures of downtown Oslo show clearly that Orwells vision of the future has by now long been a reality. Even poverty is under surveillance in a major work consisting of fragmented elements of homeless refugee children in Uganda. The world has been mapped down to the smallest detail – the imperialistic project of the Western World is accomplished and bankrupt. The bigger picture of today's world is a sad one. Says Saether himself: *"The West as a civilization is no longer able to relate to the whole complex of problems and covers its powerlessness by attending to the fewer cases that flourish sentimentally in the public space. We are on the descending slope as a civilization and are in a brutalizing process. A brutalizing of children."*

The envelope and the wax can symbolize our memory. Every day, millions of pictures are pumped into our brains. Pictures of war, poverty, soccer, etc. It is exhausting to think of. We have also never learned to see, to digest all these pictures. These pictures in the media are almost instantaneously pushed to the rear of our brains, where a veil of oblivion soon covers them – symbolized by the transparency of the wax and the envelopes. The pictures lay there like some worry in the back of one's head, but we cannot quite remember what it was that saw, what it is that affects us.

Black Mirrors

Photographs of turned-off TVs make up the third part of the exhibition. The screens reflect empty rooms, deserted rooms. The TV is off, and Elvis has left the building... Nobody is at home. The misty mirror images depict empty homes in pastel – the home sphere as unreality, mirrored in the blind eye of the medium.

Contact Information:

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More Information and Press Photos:

Saether's Home Pages: <www.janvalentinsaether.com>

KunstVerket's Home Pages: <www.kunstverket.no>

EXHIBITION

Jan Valentin Saether: "Contrasts. Identities"

25 October - 9 November 2003

Opening: 25 October at 1.00 PM

KunstVerket Gallery

Tromsøgt. 5 b, N-0565 Oslo, Norway

Tel. (+47) 23 23 41 50

Opening hours: Tue-Fri 9 AM-4 PM; Thur 9 AM-6 PM; Sat 10 AM-4 PM. Sun 12 AM-4 PM

[Pictures & Info about the Artist ->](#)

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Briefly about the Artist

To many Jan Valentin Sæther (b. 1944 in Oslo, Norway) is first and foremost known for being one of the leaders of the neo-figurative movement in Norway in the 1960s and -70s. Others may remember him from his getting the highly debated position as chair of figurative painting at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Oslo, Norway in 1996. Few will argue the fact that he is one of Norway's most outstanding artists within the figurative genre.

During the last eleven years Sæther has gradually moved away from the classical and from oil painting, to experiment with other materials and expressions. New tools such as the xerox machine and materials associated with alchemy – blood, lead, wax – have gradually been incorporated in his works. In 1991 he showed the project "An Artist in Exile: The Viloshin Letters" in Phoenix Art Gallery in Santa Monica, California, - a project consisting of an illustrated letter novel in which the main protagonist, a certain Janosh Viloshin is exiled somewhere in Russia and has coded illustrated letters smuggled out to his friends. The illustrations are made by xeroxing and drawing on already xeroxed drawings over and over again.

In 2002 Sæther showed the installation "Envelope" at Galleri Sub Comandante in Oslo. Photos of the severely mutilated corpses of three Palestinian teenage boys, naivistic drawings with speech bubbles, and artists' manifestoes from the twentieth century were enlarged and enveloped. The envelopes were thereafter impregnated with wax. These were his first works incorporating wax.

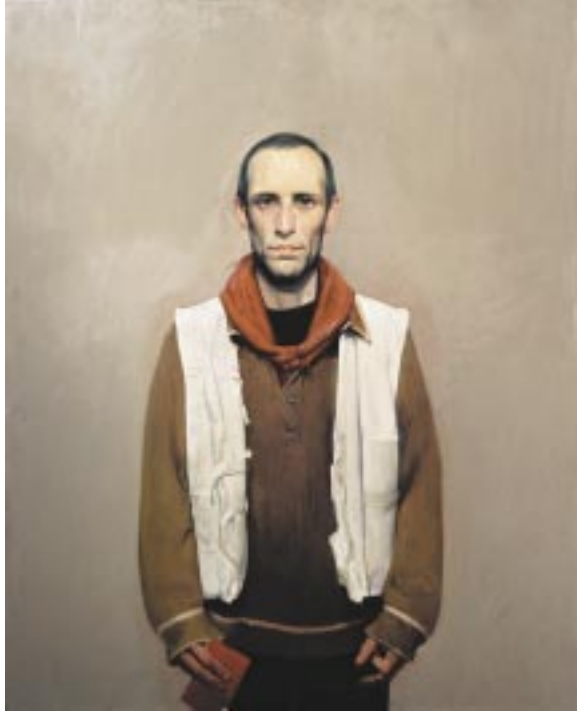


Sæther at work on the portrait of Ali Djabbar.
Photo: Hanne Storm Ofteland

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The Exile Series (Paintings):



Exile: Ali Djabbari. Jan Valentin Saether / BONO © 2003.
Photo: Espen Dietrichson



Exile: Jan Valentin Saether. Jan Valentin Saether / BONO © 2003.
Photo: Espen Dietrichson



Exile: Mikhail M. Bakhtin. Jan Valentin Saether / BONO © 2003.
Photo: Espen Dietrichson

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The Oikos Series (Photographies):



Oikos 8. Jan Valentin Saether / BONO © 2003.
Photo: Espen Dietrichson



Oikos 4. Jan Valentin Saether / BONO © 2003.
Photo: Espen Dietrichson



Oikos 14. Jan Valentin Saether / BONO © 2003.
Photo: Espen Dietrichson



Oikos 2. Jan Valentin Saether / BONO © 2003.
Photo: Espen Dietrichson



Oikos 1. Jan Valentin Saether / BONO © 2003.
Photo: Espen Dietrichson

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“Waxed” Works:



Bibelblokker: Corpus Auctoritatis. Jan Valentin Saether / BONO © 2003.
Photo: Hanne Storm Ofteland



Study for Uganda: Ars Memoria. Jan Valentin Saether / BONO © 2003.