

impatient girl

tanja nis-hansen

solo exhibition
12 may — 1 july 2023

Girl or non places

About a year ago I met Tanja in her studio in the outskirts of Berlin. It was spring then, soon summer, and I remember the sensation of entering a colorful and lively room that mirrored the outside seasonal vibe. Tanja pulled out some paintings that were stacked behind a small kitchenette at the back of her studio. Some works were just about to be shipped to Miami and, with a strict deadline, I remember her being on a thoroughly controlled schedule. Feeling happy, she also admitted to being slightly exhausted.

A sense of being stretched too thin emotionally is a core theme in Nis-Hansen's artistic research. Notably, this relational dynamic is present in her recent work *STRETCHER, Stretch her!*, 2023, which signals toward a mental state of being strung out while, simultaneously, it thematizes the physicality and materiality of painting as such. Whereas an actual stretcher keeps the canvas in place, the word itself is spelled out with stems, creating a different image for the inner eye: 'Stretch her.' There is a distinctively crafty quality to Nis-Hansen's works. Particularly in the way she dissects both visual and literal meaning. Her style is poetic, cartoonish, and energetic. Through an artistic language that unfolds in familiar yet peculiar visual expression, she mixes letters, painterly figuration, and narrative with abstract patterns and colorful decoration.

Visiting her Berlin studio I was overwhelmed by the sensitivity Nis-Hansen manages to capture and relay via the caricatured expression that characterizes her figurative style. Between monsters and other trippy figures I traced copied pages from the mother of Virginia Woolf Julia Stephens' book *Notes from Sick Rooms*, casually taped on the "back" of Nis-Hansen's scenography-like series of paintings *Employee of the Month*. Similarly to the experience of finding a meaningful letter hidden in a drawer, I felt that in these half-covert notes I encountered a secretive gesture, a message: a hint of an artist's personal references and interests. Whereas the works' sculptural quality hold a third dimension to Nis-Hansen's painterly practice, the submerged textual correspondence unfolds a fourth space that reverberates a sense of sisterhood across time and space.

When she thus combines literal messages with a highly expressive visual language Nis-Hansen borrows from late-capitalist commercial style and entertainment industry. Illustratively, a title such as *Impatient Girl* on a meta level reflects the fast communication that is essential to consumer society. Moreover, working site specifically, Nis-Hansen has changed palace enterprise into a waiting room. Rather than inviting longterm rest and immersion, this space encourages peoples' passing through. A waiting room thus echoes a notion of "non-place". Much has changed since 1995 when French anthropologist Marc Augé coined this term, yet I think that airports, waiting rooms and, indeed, art galleries share in their function as containers for interpersonal interaction and the fast transference of significant messages.

With its title, *Impatient Girl*, riffing on Madonna's 1985 hit "Material Girl" this show may invite broader reflection on nostalgia, privilege, class as well as body representation. Nis-Hansen's use of powerful painterly excess and imaginative worlds further calls to mind Judy Chicago's *Power Play* series from 1986 that similarly confronted traditional gender roles to reckon with themes such as vulnerability and toxic masculinity. Moreover, by situating 'impatient girl' in a waiting room Nis-Hansen offers commentary on the exclusivist history and present of the world her artistic medium is embedded in.

Substantiated by the conceptual landscape Nis-Hansen's work introduces, the show *Impatient Girl* amounts to a commentary on contemporary critical discourse concerning fragility and mental health. Entering this discursive terrain, her work raises questions of care and pushes them, eventually, towards 'the uncanny' by utilizing E-X-P-L-I-C-I-T-I-O-N as its primary representational and communicative tool. *AREYOUREADYTOGETHEALTHY*, 2023, asks one work while an accompanying image of a strong hand holding an apple obscures easy access to and reading of this question.

By stretching out a range of sensory and affective impressions and mixing them with fragments and symbols associated with folklore tradition (e.g., the apple, the frog) and science (e.g., the watch and the DNA string), Nis-Hansen's exhibition joins an exciting range of strong artistic visual communication and expression and, in so doing, points towards the precariousness of knowledge. In my opinion, one of the most confronting questions this show puts forward is; who is one to trust? As a whole, Nis-Hansen offers a contribution composed of jolly twists, labyrinth spins and amusement-park aesthetic that is highly preoccupied with art history, attitude and specifically the tradition of painting. The plasticity with which she combines form, media and content thereby creates an elastic and generous framework for her playful, artistic research and experimentation with deep and complex matters.

text by Mai Dengsøe, Art Historian and curator