

When Beauty is not Enough, by Stephan F.F. Jost

Arngunnur Yr's mastery of painting and the clarity of her vision enable her to take risks that others shy away from. She does not worry about the tension between accessibility and sophistication, but simply embraces it. She looks for what is fundamental in our physical and emotional worlds, and then explores. What does Arngunnur Yr find? This is not a simple question to answer. Perhaps a better starting place would be to ask: What do we as viewers find?

Technically, Arngunnur Yr's artworks tend to be oil on wood or paper. Formally, her images are most often essentialized landscapes structured around a horizon line, with a foreground, a background, and a sense of vast enveloping space. Arngunnur Yr purposely chooses this comfortable and accessible image because of its seductive qualities. She is aware of what this landscape embodies, and chooses it to manipulate it. The use of such a traditional landscape structure, with its attendant familiarity for the viewer, frees Arngunnur Yr to push the limits of her painting technique. She uses a distinct palette that at first glance seems poetic and refined, but in Arngunnur Yr's work, always beware your first impressions. After methodically building up her landscapes with over 100 layers of paint, she often attacks the very surfaces she has created. Working subtractively, she uses various techniques to remove the finely rendered forms. This has the effect of revealing the various layers of paint and exposing her labor, acknowledging the element of chance and lack of control, setting up tensions as the exposed colors often clash and undermine the very harmony that she worked so hard to achieve.

Arngunnur Yr's works are extremely beautiful paintings, but they always contain passages that are raw, exposed, and vulnerable. In her process, she takes a seemingly perfect painting, attacks it, and ends up with a more complex, subtle, and perhaps most important, human work. Her extraordinary painting technique allows her to create a physical world; yet this same technique moves the landscape from the physical world to one that is emotional, and for many, spiritual. It is not the emotion of quaint harmony, but rather a faith, hard-earned and then humbled. Her true insight is knowing that what is most beautiful is perhaps not the most desirable. She recognizes that the ability to paint images that are merely beautiful is not enough, because in some fundamental way they deny that which is most human. How is all this possible? Because Arngunnur Yr paints with no fear.

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