

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Andreas Eriksson Existential Landscapes

Online Viewing Room

24 April–17 May 2020

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<https://www.stephenfriedman.com/viewing-room/3-andreas-eriksson-existential-landscapes/>



Andreas Eriksson's meditative works offer a unique window onto the artist's rural surroundings in Medelplana, Sweden. Describing them as "existential landscapes", Eriksson is typically known for his subtly textured paintings of the natural world. In recent years, the artist has expanded his formal language by making large-scale, handwoven tapestries rendered in subtle hues of undyed yarn. Hovering between abstraction and figuration, both his paintings and tapestries can be interpreted as patchwork topographies or details of organic forms such as trees, earth and rock formations. This Online Viewing Room highlights the formal and conceptual connections between these two distinct aspects of Eriksson's practice, both united in the artist's enduring interest in the passing of time and his relationship to the canvas. The OVR is accompanied by a digital and written commentary from **Hettie Judah**, art critic and regular contributor to *The Guardian*, *Frieze* and *The New York Times*.

Andreas Eriksson was born in 1975 in Björsäter, Sweden. He lives and works in Medelplana on the south bank of Lake Vänern. Eriksson represented Sweden as part of the Nordic Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale (2011).

Solo exhibitions include: 'Nite Flights', Neugerriemschneider, Berlin (2020); 'Memories of Snow', Cahiers d'art, Paris (2020); Hakgojae Gallery, Seoul (2019); 'Cutouts, Mistakes and Threads', Braunsfelder Family Collection, Cologne (2019); 'Kria', Stephen Friedman Gallery, London (2018); 'Work in Progress', Skissernas Museum, Lund (2017); Public art commission, Nya Karolinska Sjukhuset, Solna (2018); 'Röta, bråka, skäkta och häckla', Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm, and Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Trondheim; Centre PasquArt, Biel; and Reykjavik Art Museum, Reykjavik (2014-2015); 'The Imminence of Poetics', 30th Sao Paulo Biennial, Sao Paulo (2012) and 'Walking the Dog, Lying on the Sofa', MUMOK, Vienna (2008).

Eriksson's works are included in prominent international collections such as Centre Pompidou, Paris; FRAC, Auvergne; MUMOK, Vienna; Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo; Gothenburg Museum of Art, Gothenburg; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Skövde Art Museum, Skövde and National Public Art Council, Sweden.

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Hettie Judah on Andreas Eriksson

"For the last twenty years, Andreas Eriksson's studio has been in Medelplana in Sweden. He works between the woods and the water we might say, in a forest to the south of the great lake. While he has worked in a variety of media, Andreas is best known as a painter, albeit one who takes a conceptual approach.

He experiments with the textural possibilities of paint as a physical material, in some instances using oil, acrylic and egg tempera together in the same painting. Andreas makes us very aware of the act of painting itself. Looking at one of his paintings we are immediately aware of the direction in which he has pushed and pulled the brush, illustrated on the canvas in streaks left by the bristles.

A few years ago, Andreas wrote a poem to painting. The images evoked were strong and difficult. It ended with the memorable couplet, "she drinks turpentine and eats pig's bristles". He has also spoken about the struggle of starting each day facing a blank canvas and of "doing battle with paint". I imagine his relationship with painting is not a straightforward one. As we see in his recent exhibition at Stephen Friedman Gallery, 'Mapping Memories, Tracing Time', it might be more correct to describe Andreas as an artist whose subject is painting, rather than simply as a painter.

Given what we know of the geography in which Andreas works, it is easy to conclude that he is a painter primarily concerned with landscape and the natural world. On a certain level that is not incorrect, but his interest in his natural surroundings take an unconventional direction.

For a previous show, he produced a schema or map from an earlier, existing painting. From this schema he made 22 new paintings, each different but based on the same underlying map. 'Kria' translates roughly as 'school assignment', suggesting an act of learning through repetition. Beside the colour, the force of the brush and the liquidity of the paint, the single difference between these works was apparent only on very careful examination. Examination of an element that is often overlooked or ignored in painting: the supporting linen itself.

For 'Kria', Andreas used 20 different linen yarns, most of them from Sweden. In this and in the reduction of an existing painting to a map, in which zones of paint become blank territories, we can draw a direct thread to the woven work that we encounter in 'Mapping Memories, Tracing Time'.

Linen is an ancient material and one that needs cool and wetness to flourish. Until recently the production of linen was very local. It is a textile that can be produced from seed to garment within a single village. The flax stalks once brown are pulled up rather than cut to keep the fibres intact. They are often then left in water so that the bark and pith rot before drying and beating to release the long fibres from the woody debris.

As Gilda Williams has pointed out writing about 'Kria', flax seeds also give us linseed oil. A material that Andreas uses to thin his paint. The tapestries in 'Mapping Memories, Tracing Time' carry only colour intrinsic to the linen thread they are woven from. They are evocations of the Swedish landscape made using the product of the Swedish landscape. Natural materials turned to depict themselves. Here Andreas' brushstrokes, those characteristic marks that we have come to look for in his paintings, are instead rendered in thread. The fibres of the brush are evoked through the fibres of the linen itself. Sections that might have been the product of a few gestures in a painting can take many days to produce.

All of the tapestries carry some numbered variation on the title 'Weissensee'. If we look at that title poetically, we might read 'Weissensee' to mean 'white lake'. It seems apt as these tapestries are so subtle that they seem denuded of colour. But they are warm and earthy in tone. Nothing like the bluish white of a field of snow or a frozen lake.

More prosaically, 'Weissensee' is the name of a district in Berlin that is home to Andreas' weaving studio. It is here that a group of weavers have worked on five looms over the course of two years to produce these tapestries according to Andreas' maps and instructions. The different territories on each map are rendered distinct from the others by the use of linen threads from different areas or of different ages, and through variations in the weaving technique and surface embroidery. Territories of the finished tapestries might be distinguished by a particular knotted texture or the stands of long fibre sprouting from the surface.

Andreas has described the tapestries as "existential landscapes". But we might also see them as a conceptual extension of painting in which the picture migrates to the canvas itself."

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