

Captivating Fleetness

The transient glint of light is Øssur Mohr's relentless condition of work and joyful source of inspiration .

By Anna V. Ellingsgaard

Think carefully

before you see

this landscape

only once

Øssur's art is an eternal search and longing to recreate the fleetness of the moment and the changing glimmer of light, and a continuous reminder that it can only be done in glimpses.

The Enchanted Mountain

The mountain too

dissolves

and sinks into

other colours

and changes shape

inside you

.....

before the drawing

is completed

Øssur is known as the artist who paints Leirvíksfjall (Mount Leirvík) as seen from Fuglafjörður again and again. But it is a mistake to think that he stands at his window painting the view.

Leirvíksfjall haunts my consciousness, but more as an undefined and alluring force than as a mountain. If it were a view I was painting, I'd have finished long ago.

But Øssur doesn't finish, for all the time new flashes of light strike, and the colours of the mountain, bay and sky change once more. Many perceive the enchanted mountain as an Øssur Mohr characteristic. But he himself does not feel bound by it, as many may think. And no doubt it surprises most people when he says that he could easily paint other places than Fuglafjörður.

– I don't quite know how interesting I find this discussion of particular artistic characteristics. In many people's eyes my works may look similar. But I don't stand there speculating how I paint or consciously try to cultivate a certain motif. In fact I doubt if it is feasible, for my paintings are most likely just an extension of myself as a human, so it can hardly be different.

The Unknown

When Øssur took up painting, his motifs were mostly houses and people. But the people vanished rather soon. The houses remained, but they were no longer houses with windows and doors through which one could enter. – I might no doubt quite as well drop the town and houses too. But perhaps I'm not quite ready – yet. For no doubt I feel more drawn by what lies further out at sea and up in the sky. It has something boundless, even religious about it. At one time I shall live in all eternity

.....

like dust

I shall in time live

In his most recent paintings Øssur has let go of the old connections. The horizontal space has, even if hesitantly, been suspended. The town, the old moorings, is still there, but now mostly as a springboard into the ever more abstract universe. In between the deep blue and sharp white colours one now glimpses new shadows often as the contours of a person walking up among the clouds.

– I cannot quite explain these shadows of people, but I was much surprised when I read the poem in which Alexandur Kristiansen says

When you walk

the legs are your questions

about the day tomorrow

– Alexandur has written these poems inspired by my art – not by particular paintings, but there must be something which has called forth the idea of "the legs as questions to the future." Maybe these paintings are questions about where to I am going artistically, Øssur muses.

Nothing Comes out of nothing

Technically Øssur is preoccupied with investigating the connection between material and art. For nothing comes out of nothing. Nor does art, Øssur reminds us. – It ought to be seen or at least sensed that the paintings would not exist at all without canvas, paint, brush, spatula etc. And it is fine if the smell of oil and turpentine is still hanging in the air.

The fusion of material and expression thus becomes Øssur's comment on the endless discussion of what makes work become art. He finds it hard to see the artistic aspect in modern conceptual art. To him there is much difference between being an artist and an inventor. The difference arises i.a. in the artistic process.

– A piece of art is always a process and a search which also leaves certain traces in the form of technical continuity, dynamics and energy, which in my eyes are one of the features of a good painting. When I draw attention to the tools and the material, it is i.a. to make this process clear.

- In the painting "After Rain" this quest gets a very concrete expression. It is as if the rain dilutes the paint which runs in thin stripes down the canvas and the window pane, so that the sky, mountain, fiord and painting dissolve into a kind of new and timeless understanding of the beginning of all things.

Down
from above
the sea and the light
at a slant
the drop
that fell
before
when everything was
water

The Scent after the Downpour

Even if Øssur Mohr belongs to the younger generation of painters, he has unusually many exhibitions behind him. This year Øssur can celebrate the 15th anniversary since his first exhibition in 1993. Clearly much has happened since then. But Øssur thinks the greatest changes have come since 2000 when he resigned from his job to dedicate his life to painting.

- Much happens of course when one no longer paints in one's spare time, after everything else has been seen to. I paint more whole-heartedly now and shall hardly ever return to painting any one piece of art in one stretch.

Øssur also thinks that he has a less romantic perception of what it means to be an artist. The illusion that there are paintings which are easy to create is long gone, and the process is seldom as spontaneous as he would like. But the inspiration is still the same – the gleams of light which disappear as quickly as they came, and he still paints best just after a downpour, while he still has the scent of steaming soil in his nostrils.

Øssur Mohr covers it all:

The structure of the town's houses

A split second of "glottar" (glints of light) over the fiord ...

The spring day when the colours explode ...

The total variation of the mountains' shades of colours

The raging of the storm

The fog like a sea over the mountain slopes

The winter's snow-covered storm-whipped mountains.

Randi Ottosen, The Art Paper (Kunstavisen).