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C-print

The Bipolar Suite

“There is power through art and a spiritual outlook to accept and understand the imperceptible and carry on beyond the point where sense and sensibility end. I move between realities and somewhere in the midst can extract trust, knowledge and insights that I’m not able to find or articulate other than through my artistic practice”, says Martin Ålund, who is currently presenting the new solo exhibition *The Bipolar Suite (Otherworld)* with Wadström Tönnheim Gallery in Marbella.



C-P: It's always exciting to report when Swedish artists are exhibiting with solos outside of the Nordic territory and on more distant soil. Especially given the present pandemic reality it's a great feat getting a solo off the ground and getting to open it. What's your rapport and history with Wadström Tönneheim Gallery like?

M.Å: My collaboration with Wadström Tönneheim Gallery began back in 2016 as I presented a solo exhibition while the gallery was still located in Skanör (Sweden). It proved to be a very successful partnership. Wadström Tönneheim Gallery eventually later relocated to Marbella in Spain. I've participated in a string of art fairs and group exhibitions over the years with the gallery. It's exciting to now get to present a new solo in Marbella where my art finds a new audience. Since there's an ongoing pandemic to consider I sadly could not participate in the installing and the opening of the exhibition. It's been a smooth and fine ride nonetheless. We were in contact during the installation through live-stream and the opening took stage through images and videos on social media. On the one hand, it's a peculiar experience to not meet your audience face-to-face but on the other, it's positive altogether, seen from other ways. A rationale behind doing an exhibition for me is to make a statement which in turn allows me a new body of information that can extend to my practice as I carry on from there. The mere fact that the paintings have left the studio and currently are housed elsewhere in the shape of an exhibition generates this transformative energy of sorts.



Martin Ålund, *The Bipolar Suite #6 (Otherworld)* Acrylic on canvas 100x187cm, 2021

C-P: It's an eye-catching and bold title that the exhibition bears; one that to some extent is descriptive of artistic choices and the breadth between certain works in the exhibition; letting on a greater stretch between the possible visual and aesthetic experiences to be had. How would you describe the "binary" situation in the exhibition between two (or various) opposites in your paintings?

M.Å: The binary angle of the title *The Binary Suite* can be described in multiple ways. The narrative around an artistic expression and a process naturally changes depending on how you relate. There are some concrete traces of a binary relationship between the paintings that on the one hand are dark, obscure, drawing-paintings with semi-figurative motifs and can be seen to depict landscapes, trees and figures seated amid a certain feverish energy. On the other hand, they are colorful, brighter abstract paintings with fields and compositions deriving from softer movements. Meanwhile what comes to play altogether is an exciting encounter where the different expressions are juxtaposed together. It's as though a synchronization comes forth and stresses an interdependence between the light and the dark. Moreover, the binary has to do with energy. Not as simple however as departing merely from one negative and positive polarity but rather that the intersection of the different expressions gives rise to an array of connections that can be twisted and

turned around and which can disappear and again reappear.

What gives furthermore are micro and macro cosmoses; visual contexts which are random and illogical at the same time. It's play and seriousness at once. Improvisations, movements and dance, as well as stories and pulse are prompted forward. I never know what ultimately will come out of a painting as I begin to paint it. I only know that my task is to paint and draw layers after layers, and follow one attempt after the other and keep an open mind in the process until the painting closes itself and eventually appears finished. You can think of it as tuning a string instrument – suddenly a balance emerges which gives rise to movement.

I've been keeping notes on my studio walls while working with these works. There are of course a lot more stories to tell about them; from the more technical and concrete to the more emotional and private.



Martin Ålund, The Bipolar Suite #7 (Otherworld) Acrylic on canvas 100x160cm, 2021

C-P: I remember a visit in your studio last year looking at what then appeared like two suites of paintings that alongside each other could have an interesting and quite unexpected interplay, just as you describe yourself. This is the sort of balancing on a thin line nevertheless that takes the command of a great painter like yourself to pull off deftly. About the paintings of darker disposition that hover between abstraction and figuration, where natural surroundings dawn before the eyes, you've mentioned both Alice in Wonderland and shamanism as points of references which does in fact resonate with me.

M.Å: That's really nice to hear about how it resonates with you. The mystical, magical and dream-like in Alice in Wonderland and shamanism inspire me since they address contradictions in the state of being. I would also refer to the myths about Orpheus and Eurydice and Narcissus and Echo. Those are myths and stories which disclose human dilemmas and such that I relate to also on a personal level.

Through my work I keep a rapport with artists from art history who sometimes appear in my studio as guiding spirits and conversational partners – take Carl Fredrik Hill and Helen Frankenthaler. At a core level I aim to give into spirituality, fantasy, mysticism and magic in a way that is inspiring and allows for greater presence and curiosity. There is power through art and a spiritual outlook to accept and understand the imperceptible and carry on beyond the point where sense and sensibility begin end. I move between realities and somewhere in the midst can extract trust, knowledge and insights that I'm not able to find or articulate other than through my artistic practice.



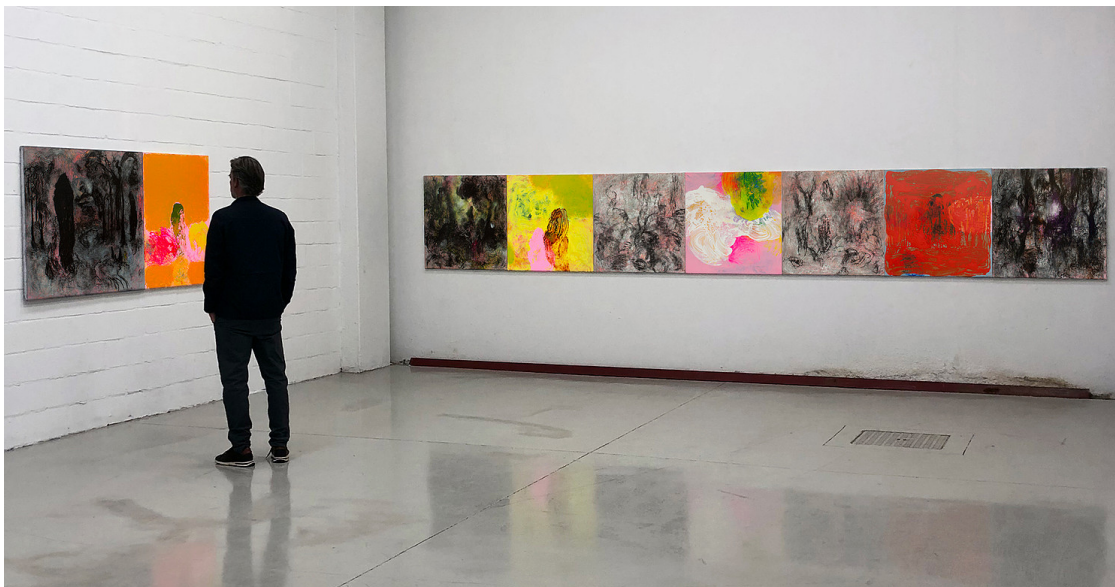
Martin Ålund, *Dancing Alter Ego*, video still, performance, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France, 2018

C-P: I recall that you've said that a point of departure for this exhibition stems back already to a residency at Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris during a supposed encounter with a masked danced alter ego that led you towards exploration in otherworldly realms. Intriguing! Do *tell*.

M.Å: I did the residency in Paris in the summer of 2018 through the Royal Academy of Arts. It proved to be a very altering and pivotal stay for me. Except for seeing amazing art, not in the least at Palais de Tokyo, I also got to know lovely colleagues and friends and was part of forming the international artist collective GoGo which is still collaborating together. What's more is that I found myself in a studio situation that was challenging and brought forth the unexpected. A significant alter ego came to me. I was about to fixate a monumental charcoal drawing which covered the walls of the studio and to protect myself from the fixative I was dressed in plastic and a mask. By impulse I photographed myself in this attire. When I later looked at the image it was as though a revelation happened; this alter ego surfaced and possessed me. I started to dress in plastic and mask at nights and let my body and this alter ego drive me to do whatever came forward. A dance emerged, trance-like Dervish-dance Isadora Duncan-style.

My alter ego you could say was a guardian spirit which required me to disclose layers within me which had been buried and that required me to face reality in another manner. Together we explored new borderlands artistically, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually and physically. I had done performance when I was a teenager and as a young adult, for example in the group Porno Boys in Umeå in the 80's. But it had been a while since I was doing performance. This brought performance back. I had already since a few years been painting more and more in a performative fashion. I had sort of been dancing as I was painting and had done projects that departed from that. It dawned on me that the dancing and masked alter ego which had been there since long already, finally got revealed.

Since then I together with my alter ego explore whatever it is that it wants me to find and express. It's as if we together have traversed into otherworldly paths – *the Otherworld* – where I've been able to make discoveries of phenomena and truths that I previously have not dared to see or accept. I've increasingly come to integrate my alter ego with myself. It no longer needs to take shape only through performance. I guess you could say I'm liberating layers of myself and in my art that have before been closed off – or perhaps that rested in the subconscious.



Martin Ålund, *The Bipolar Suite (Otherworld)*, Wadström Tönneheim Gallery, Marbella, Spain, 2021

C-P: I can see that the exhibition in the midst finds a septuple display of seven works arranged modularly together, apparently to great visual harmony, despite the disparate appearance of some of the works. What can be said about some of the considerations when it came down to the final installation process?

M.Å: Installing an exhibition is a lot about relating to a room. There's many aspects to consider; a flow, light, scale, architecture and so on. You can plan an installation prior to an exhibition but just as light is almost impossible to control, you have to be open to what organically might emerge as you are installing. Me and the gallerist Mattias Tönneheim kept in close visual contact and dialogue per phone during the installation process. Mattias knows his gallery space and presented a first installation proposal which we adjusted together. The site-specific unions where paintings meet in new ways have created novel expressions while the singular qualities in the paintings are still manifested and asserted. I find it very interesting how these new paintings bear such capacity in flexibility.



Martin Ålund, *The Bipolar Suite #2 (Otherworld)* Acrylic on canvas 100x200cm, 2020

C-P: You were a recipient of the prestigious Maria Bonnier Dahlin Grant while still at the Royal Institute of Art and I'd think of you as an artist's artist; one who takes part in collective contexts and is part of creating opportunities for other artists. You've seen many shifts happen in art over time. In terms of painting, if you had to give your take on what the current "moment" for Swedish painting is like, what would be your thoughts to share?

M.Å: I've always been interested in and inspired by painting. To pinpoint a moment in time for Swedish

painting is challenging since it really depends on the specific context and from which gaze the question is approached. From where I stand, there's my background, experience, my own context and position, both structurally, socially and culturally, to consider. I see a lot of inspiring painting both in Swedish and international contemporary art. I can spot a painterly playfulness among many young painters which inspires me. I also see how great painting of older artists is occasionally found in the spotlight and (re)discovered. Painting as well as other artistic expressions and techniques continue to see light and run forward in the bodies of work of artists and in their studios, no matter how trends come and go.



Martin Ålund, *The Bipolar Suite #12 (Otherworld)* Acrylic on canvas 100x120cm, 2021

C-P: Lastly, what's in store for you next in 2021?

M.Å: What's next up in 2021 is the group exhibition *Heat/Energy* at Kummelholmen in September-October. There's also a new exciting project with the artist group Muskot that will be shown in Stockholm in the fall. I'm also releasing a record with Magnus Engstedt in a project called Outer Glass. I will also continue to embark on new projects with the music group Hybris Healers. I imagine there will be a lot more to come in terms of projects and collaborations but irrespectively what I will do is continue on painting.

THE BIPOLAR SUITE (OTHERWORLD)

JANUARY 30 – MARCH 27, 2021

Wadström Tönneheim Gallery, Marbella, ES

www.martinalund.com

