

Jan Sæther was Mr. Nerdrum`s opponent for the professorate of figurative painting at the Academy of Art in Oslo in 1996. Mr Nerdrum withdrew his candidacy, and Mr. Sæther was appointed professor. Later, with Sæther`s second exhibition in Oslo, it became clear that his interests had changed. He had stressed from the very beginning the importance of "open-mindedness", and had now become an installation artist. This article is my response to his explanation for this switch, given in the interview that marked the end of his professorate.

Good dog!

The equilibristic opportunism of Jan Sæther.

Last Sundays Dagbladet printed an interview with the suitably modest Jan Sæther. A modest Sæther with suitable opinions is interviewed by the alert guard dog Harald Flor. Flor is eagerly barking, angered by the figurative painting class at the Art Academy which was created by – or "dictated" by, as Flor has it – the Culture Department. (A clear attack on the "Free Art").

But Flor likes the new Sæther – the person who made Sæther`s old, figurative paintings is "dead" and Sæther has now found "himself". However, it is a little odd that he finds himself by doing what everybody else is doing, and by saying the things you are supposed to say in order to get a position in the Art milieu. He performs the mandatory attack on Nerdrum, and also tries to reduce "Kitsch" to "Nerdrum`s" term only. When Sæther thus tries to confine the Kitsch term, he tries to transform a serious attempt to create a superstructure for classical-figurative painting into the "PR-stunt" of a "strange" painter. Sæther himself is of course not strange. Far from it. But the fact that he is no longer able to convey anything in his paintings and instead has chosen to become an artist does not concern or affect anyone but himself, and should not be taken into account for any kind of "development".

What is serious about all this is that the "process" that led him away from classical-figurative painting started already 10 years ago when something "died" in him. This "process" should have kept him from applying for the position in the first place. What he reveals with this early orientation towards Art (the real Art), is the dishonesty that lay behind his initial application. The professorat for classical-figurative painting was to serve students wanting to develop their talents – not artists who want to be so-called "open-minded". I am thoroughly acquainted with the type of "openness" Sæther is speaking about. It is open for everything... except going in-depth in one discipline, and especially not old master painting.

It should have been Sæther`s task to be a symbol for this type of painting. His head should have been raised, not bowed. It is therefore a shame that he could not, or did not want to, understand that "Kitsch" entails respect for old master painters. And therefore it is also a shame that he did not read (enough) about the term to understand that the painters/sculptors/composers that were accused of "Kitsch" from the mid 19th century onwards, were exposed to this exactly because they did not follow the command of Art. They were too "sentimental" or "filled with clichès"...

Kitsch shall become a term with a positive superstructure so that painters will not have to bow their necks like Sæther does.

And another thing: The Kitsch-term is not only "Nerdrum`s" – if it belongs to anyone, then it is mine as well.

Jan-Ove Tuv,
Kitschpainter, assistant to Odd Nerdrum.