

FRÉTTIR,

15. April 1999

Article By Halldór Björn Runólfsson

An exhibition by Tumi Magnússon in Gallery Saevar Karl in 1994 carried the title "Liquid Still Lives" The artist had never shown works of this kind here in Iceland before, and the exhibition is therefore a turning point in his career. As the title of the show conveys the paintings are realistic pictures of liquid material. In each painting two kinds of liquids are depicted, and the title of each picture is a description of the subject matter. Like for instance "Salmon Blood and Pollack Oil" or "Red Wine and Honey." Also there are titles like "Ink and Mustard" and "Quicksilver and Silver Polish"

With the aid of traditional oil colours and canvas Magnússon tries to describe the two liquids as accurately as possible – or by using super realist tricks. Where the two substances meet there occurs a condensation or saturation. It is as if one contrastive colour magnifies the other one and merges with it in an incredibly subtle way. Magnússon is a natural talent when it comes to the delicate osmosis of insignificant motives. Nothing is too absurd to be exalted by treating it with sincerity and care. What might appear to be made with airbrush technique, is actually painted by Magnússon in a true classical fashion with a paintbrush.

The interaction of transparent, semi-transparent and opaque fields in these works is at times quite incredible. The palette is undeniably beautiful and extremely complex. In fact it is at times romantic, with connotations to the neo-classical, as if Magnússon were an apprentice of Ingres from the beginning of last century. But at the same time the humorous side of his work is precisely the way he upsets the sublime by connecting it to the absurd. This "brutality" provides the artist the freedom to tackle the esthetic without falling prey to corny sentimentality.

The well known words of the late Marcel Duchamp are once again proven true:

"When a work of art is concerned the most important part is the title."

Without doubt, many of those who see Magnússon's new works are bothered and deterred by the titles and the knowledge of their origins and subject matter. In that way Magnússon once more outwits those who want to be complacent and thoughtless in their consumption of art. However beautiful his pictures may be, Magnússon is by no means the artist of those who imagine that the "beauty-sleep" is the ultimate object of artistic enjoyment.

You must view these paintings again and again so you don't forget what you have seen. This produces a peculiar addiction – the need to repeat the visit to the gallery because you can't be sure you didn't miss something important. And in that way you repeat the process that still further infects the lines of visual communication. The viewer is therefore in constant need for experiencing the strange enchantment contained in these perception-distorting paintings.

Probably the narcotics department of the police should be notified of Magnússon's exhibition to see what they say about the influence of his paintings.