

VI, VII

Martin Sæther

Gjenboer

28.04–22.05.2022

The work of Martin Sæther has its starting point in humble materials that are so ubiquitous in Oslo homes, architecture and interiors, they are often overlooked: vestiges of vintage wallpapers, patterned and ornamented domestic items like decorated toilet paper and paper party napkins.

Often his works revisit relics from the history of Norwegian design, leftover in apartments from previous owners, and sometimes unwanted. It is from this concept that the exhibition gets its title. “Gjenboer” is an archaic term, referring to the presence or absence of sightlines either into or out of neighboring apartments and homes, and the use of this term is restricted almost exclusively to housing advertisements.

Building on previous exhibitions, Sæther’s exhibition at VI, VII groups several kinds of works together, including 4 paintings cast in paper pulp that resemble “strietapet,” a wallpaper first introduced to Norway in the 1950s, and which came to fill almost every home over the next two decades. A plaster cast is also included of an imagined fixture (Untitled, 2022) as well as several works on paper constructed from vintage paper napkins so popular that enthusiasts have built entire collections around them.

BIOGRAPHY:

Martin Sæther (b. 1986, NO) lives and works in Oslo. He is a graduate from Oslo’s National Academy of Fine Art. Recent exhibitions include Min Strie, Femtensesse, Oslo; Rute, Oppland Kunstener, Lillehammer, Post, Destiny’s Atelier and a solo exhibition at UKS, Oslo.

Forthcoming exhibitions include “Jeg kaller det kunst” at Norway’s National Museum (Nasjonalmuseet), curated by Randi Godø and Geir Haraldseth.

Excerpted from a review of the artist's exhibition at Oppland Kunstsenter:

“Martin Sæther (b. 1986) grew up in Heidal in Gudbrandsdalen and has a degree from the Art Academies in Oslo, Vienna and Trondheim. Sæther's practice is characterized by time-consuming craftsmanship, testing of materials and development of new techniques, and reflects an interest in reuse and recycling. In his sculptural works, he processes an anonymous design language, and puts forgotten or translated objects and motifs in the foreground.

The works on display at Oppland Kunstsenter have been created through casting techniques with many steps and phases where he has worked with cardboard maché, acrylic plaster, acrylic paint and MDF. The two black paper works are made with cut-out black napkins that are molded into cardboard mache flakes and show, among other things, several circles that are reminiscent of solar eclipses. Another image shows a disfigured sun in a cloudy sky. In the works you can find several grids and circles, structures reminiscent of old and worn wallpaper, as well as organic drawings of seeds and nuts.

In terms of form, the works' grids and circles enter into a direct dialogue with the space in which they are displayed. One of the qualities of Sæther's work is precisely this smooth transition between work and reality, between sculpture, readymade and objects and architecture that is not intended as art. An important theme for Sæther is the relationship between craftsmanship and recent industrial production or tradition and modernity. He is concerned with the meeting points between a personal and an impersonal expression, and his works often discuss issues related to artistic authenticity and originality. The artistic expression gives associations to a contemporary visual culture, where one can recognize logos, pictograms and other industrial and graphic designs. At the same time, they are rooted in art history especially with some features of

modernism's design language and ideas.”

Excepted from the press release for his 2019 exhibition at UKS:

“[In Martin Sæther's work]...Trite toilet paper flowers and knobbly wallpaper surfaces are examined, manipulated, and scaled up by carefully collecting and soaking surplus newspapers, grinding this substance to papier-mâché, and casting large-sized reliefs or tapestries.

“[In a previous exhibition at] UKS, these wallpaper pieces are mounted onto life-size hand-crafted cupboards, likening IKEA's infamous industrial shelving system, BILLY. Merging tapestry and cabinet, 2D and 3D, the cupboards—with their white-lacquered surfaces and untreated chipboard edges—change from functional furniture to prop for Sæther's front-side reliefs, informing the artist's meticulous reassessment of local domestic objects, decoration, and interiors.

This unremitting nearness or mimicry is a dedication, honoring the collective, memory-loaded baseline patterns of our private possessions. But there is always a glitch. The familiar is askew, aggrandized, gawky, aloof. Shifting aesthetic histories and currencies surface, such as the dated formula of the ornamented tapestry toile, often used in bathrooms and etymologically related to “toilet.”

Employing the UKS storefront galleries, Sæther creates a matrix of modular faux furniture. The chipboard cabinets repeat and recirculate, copy and clutter naïve motifs of decor into a surreal swirl. This is a serial reckoning with everyday aesthetics and its pathologies that also extends into animation and a new publication.