

Golsa

BRIGHT VIEWS
FROM THE SHADE
Mark Frygell

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“Bright Views From the Shade” is a solo exhibition by the Swedish artist Mark Frygell, comprising several oil paintings made by the artist throughout the winter and spring of 2023. Delving into the depths of collective consciousness and drawing inspiration from fairy tales and myths, Frygell asserts his ideas through a series of evocative works that showcase a world teeming with contrasts. Within Frygell’s compositions, the interplay between light and shadow and interior and exterior spaces echoes the condition of the diverse characters that populate his scenes, rendering them a profound reflection of society.

In his works, Frygell creates sections of bright luminosity that clash against the spatial constraints of shadowy domains – ranging from dimly lit rooms to secluded balconies and cavernous vaults. These symbolic contrasts, rooted in Jungian motifs, become conduits for an exploration of the subconscious, wherein the concept of the shadow assumes particular resonance. Frygell’s fascination with collective consciousness unfurls as he illustrates how this intangible realm manifests through the kaleidoscope of fantasy, folklore, and mythology, transcending cultural boundaries and embracing various symbolic codes.

Frygell’s deliberate choice of a restricted palette further explains his artistic vision. By freeing himself from the confines of realistically referencing the real world, the artist delves into the interplay of diverse shades within a single color. In doing so, he invites us to explore the evocative and emotional aspects of color, casting aside the constraints of reality in favor of an exploration of the subconscious.

Mark Frygell’s interest in creating collages, sketching, and reworking existing images into new ones before moving on to the canvas has led him to explore AI-generated imagery. In preparation for painting, he creates AI images of basic concepts and ideas, which he uses as a reference to inspire the final work. Sketching for the artist emerges as a practice that allows him to create without (over)thinking. He connects with the tradition of automatism in painting and automatic writing, the act of creating without thinking about what one is doing and witnessing what comes out of this practice. Initially, and sometimes still, Frygell will sketch on pages of books because books are easy to bring on a journey wherever he goes, so they offer a convenient way to practice automatism.

Mark Frygell views AI as a tool for artistic reference generation, placing his interest in it outside the commonly discussed topics of the perceived threat of artificial intelligence to art and artists. AI for Frygell comes much closer to being one of McLuhanian’s “extensions of man,” a tool he uses to render quick ideas before moving on to the actual work. And yet, there is another aspect the use of AI helps bring to light, this time closer to Jungian psychoanalytic theory. For Frygell, what trumps all its other functions is the unique possibility of AI to arguably, for the first time in history, give us access to a network of collective consciousness, an intersection of human cultures, beliefs, and practices, of narratives and metanarratives that reveal who we are, or at least how we are.

Frygell’s paintings in the show feature a specific element, a frame within a frame, often a window, effectively separating the foreground from the background. In these elements, Frygell conveys multifaceted notions regarding society and the intricacies of human psychology. In *The Cave People* (2023), the artist presents a vibrant tapestry awash with green hues, where languid figures linger in the shadows, situated on the perimeters, skillfully framing the luminous outdoor scene shown in the center of the composition. As the title suggests, the human subjects find solace within their cavernous abode, casting a passive gaze upon the sun-drenched panorama beyond.

Despite their apparent proximity to the sun rays, they remain untouched by them, nestled deep within the recesses of the cave. Within the composition of the painting and the stark juxtaposition between the two settings depicted, yet another enigmatic clue emerges. What initially appears to be a window towards the outside may well be an illusion, a mere semblance of natural light and the external world – namely, a screen – for we bear witness to the cave people: trapped within their confines, yearning for a taste of the outside realm. In their state of stupor, they resign themselves not to pursue sunlight, content with the mere reproduction of it.

A number of dichotomies emerge from Frygell's work – exploring the inside and the outside, light and shadow, and the duality of spaces within and without. Among these realms, the characters that populate Frygell's paintings embody their respective environments, symbolically representing complex social dynamics and psychological struggles. In *The Cleaners* (2023), Frygell presents a scene that initially compels us to believe we're witnessing a menagerie of characters hard at work, united in their shared endeavor to clean an expansive space around them. And yet, upon further inspection, we observe that it is only the three characters residing in the shadows who are cleaning – the trio positioned in the sunlit windows of the opposite building seem to be absorbed in different activities: one of them peers out into the world through a window, another indulges in the mastery of a musical instrument, and the third appears to be embroidering. Frygell's deliberate juxtaposition of the activities of these two sets of characters urges us to ponder the power dynamics inherent within social structures of those actively engaged in menial labor, positioned in the shadows, and those occupying the sunlit windows, preoccupied with leisurely pursuits or passive observation of the outside world. The painting reminds us of the intricate webs of social dynamics and psychological struggles that shape our collective existence.

Frygell explores the contrast between characters immersed in darkness and decay and those in the bright sunshine once again in *Basement Sleepers* (2023). Here we can see a disturbing duo of grotesque figures gazing through a window, their perspective offering a glimpse of the world above, with vision limited to the sight of feet passersby scurrying along. The sunlit street above and the hurried footsteps of the people evoke a sense of life, motion, and activity, underscoring the stark division between the lives of the basement sleepers, who are not allowed access to self-realization, and the individuals in the world above. Like a narrator weaving a folk tale, Frygell intertwines his brushwork with contemplative vision, employing an array of symbols to invite us to reflect upon the hidden as well as apparent neuroses that permeate society.

Most of the paintings in the show feature characters in the act of looking outward, observing the outside world, in most cases through windows. The inclusion of windows as visual elements becomes significant in exploring the concept of shadow, as theorized by Carl Jung. These windows serve as symbolic thresholds, representing the liminal space between the conscious and unconscious realms. Whether they are mirages or actual portals into the blinding light, the subjects of the paintings have their gaze fixed firmly on them. Their unwavering gaze suggests a desire to confront and integrate their shadow aspect, seeking self-awareness and wholeness. And yet, most remain passive in their observation and stay in darkness. This juxtaposition of apparent longing for the light that remains inaccessible underlines Frygell's intention to compel us to identify with the plight of the subjects he paints. Jung believed that the integration of the shadow was essential for individuation, the process of becoming a fully realized and authentic self. Frygell emphasizes the universal human struggle to acknowledge the shadow by portraying characters who yearn for the light. The artist compels viewers to identify with the subjects, inviting introspection and self-reflection regarding their hidden aspects and unfulfilled desires.

Mark Frygell (b.1985 in Umeå) is a Swedish artist based in Stockholm. He has studied at The Academy of Fine Art Umeå and Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in Vienna, Austria.

In his works, Frygell explores his own relationship to figurative painting, the still-life and landscape painting as carriers of collective consciousness, moral symbols and identity. In line with these interests, Frygell's reuse of forms, colors, compositions, themes and expressions of a certain painterly language form an important part of his method.

Frygell's recent exhibitions include "I händelse av Mark Frygell" at Galleri Thomassen, Gothenburg (2023), "Iterative Fantasies" at Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Paris (2022), "Monochromes and Sculptures" at MARKET with Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Stockholm (2021), "Floating Mythologies" at Västerbottens Museum, Umeå (2020), "Paradise Fermented" at Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Stockholm (2019), "Model Top/Bottom Brawl" at Härnösands Konsthall, Härnösand (2019), and "Modernautställningen 2018" at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden (2018).



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