

The Eternal Village
Martin Aagaard Hansen
 May 10- June 30, 2023

Martin describes his paintings with terminology an archaeologist uses: scraping, digging, excavating to find ‘the chunk of something whole’. Like discovering relics underground, he makes paintings that also delve into the unknown, the search to unearth something beneath the surface gripping his every move. But, as with many a plight to find what’s yet to be found, this blind rummaging forces Martin to mine deeper and deeper. His recent paintings are loosely inspired by combing the ground of his own past, specifically where he grew up in Tornbjerg, Denmark, which – having been built only in the 1980s – is, like him, probing for a history to call its own.

He notes, astutely, that ‘finding nothing is also a discovery’. Recalling the barren suburbia in and around Tornbjerg, much of the tableaux in Martin’s paintings is voided by flat colour. These pockets of stillness attract skewed buildings and figures to orbit around, which, with their elongated forms, evoke the effect of a warped shadow under direct sunlight. In ‘Neighbourhood watch’, a beam of yellow light pierces from behind the scene leaving a pronounced halo around the lone central figure – or, similarly in ‘I too was a gorgeous animal (broken scope)’ an orb of lightly applied blue paint accentuates a window in the distance like the effect of holding a magnifying glass over a found relic.

Often depicted from a distance, or out of reach, the scenes Martin conjures are reminiscent of dreams where plots blur into one. In ‘Universal veil’ a turbulent storm made of accumulated crescent lines the shape of finger nails rises above a bustling conglomerate of people below, and in ‘Where city mist has risen’ an almost mirror-image scene of windows dissipating into clouds blurs with the looming silhouettes of marching ghosts below. Comparatively, in the other two larger paintings, both equipped with vertical horizon lines in the centre like the gutters and spine of a book, the distinctions are made more obvious: in ‘Grifters arena’ Martin’s underworld is split by a weather shift, our eyes descending from the umber muddied scene on the left, to a white frozen cave on the right, or in ‘Murky morning, early grin’ a drooping church steeple is incongruously paired with his omnipresent floating windows accentuated in pale blue oil.

As layers are continually removed, the initial base colours peer into view. Martin’s background in printmaking – notably etching, monotype and wood cutting come in handy, as his needle and brush excavate the earlier surfaces he’d made previously. Just like its title suggests ‘The Eternal Village’ is an ongoing, endlessly evolving quest for a past which may never be found.

Text by Ted Targett

Martin Aagaard Hansen (b. 1988 in Odense, Denmark) lives and works in Copenhagen. Recent exhibitions include: Autumn skullcap, Union Pacific, London, 2022, The Lurid Season, M+B, Los Angeles, 2022, Triple Burner, Union Pacific, London, 2021, The Tired Mask of Spring, Salon 75, Copenhagen, 2020, Velvet Ropes, Galleri Golsa, Oslo, 2019, Ein Plein Air, XYZ Kunstscenen, Copenhagen, 2018, Widnes, Kunsthall Ronnerbaeksholm, Copenhagen, 2017