

## Tarald Wassvik

*According to tradition*

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My father's father, Magnus, lived in the township of Glomfjord, the north of Helgelandskysten, a bit south of Bodø. When he passed, in 1989, he left behind a large number of paintings, drawings and illustrated poetry that was published at something called T. H. Blaasværs forlag. There are also wall paintings, assemblages, decorated objects and figurines living in various houses and cabins throughout Nordland County. Now and then some of its surfaces at flea markets, and sometimes our family can purchase treasures at the online second-hand marketplace finn.no. For many years he was busy with his various creative projects, which also went hand in hand with other inventions of a more practical quality. He also wrote articles for the local newspaper, expressing his many thoughts and opinions, sprinkled with Northern Norwegian humor and warmth.

His professional life was spent as a gatekeeper at Norsk Hydros fertilizer factory. According to local hearsay, the factory's keeper was often seen sitting by the counter at night, painting on one of his oil paintings: seascapes with porpoises in the midnight sun, romantic love scenes, twits and trolls — and reproductions of known art historical masterpieces. The pictures were often painted on found wooden panels and signed with the pseudonym *Mei*, a word play on the Norwegian word *meg*, meaning *me*, which was also short for his middle name Meidell.

I was told the following anecdote. It's about when the artist Per Adde visited Glomfjord in the 70s, by what was then called *Riksgalleriet*. Riksgalleriet was a social democratic state-founded initiative, meant to bring proper art to the whole of the land by nomadic exhibitors. Adde, a proper artist, befriended my grandfather at his opening, and was invited home to continue the conversation. The visit was unsuccessful, and apparently it ended in a vocal fight at the kitchen table. It turned out that the local was in distaste of modernism — especially abstract painting, and advocated a quite conservative artistic point of view (in a foreword of one of his poetry collections, *Dikt i dur og moll*, he writes a reactionary defense for verse, rhyme and rhythm), Adde, on the other hand is now, as the reader might have guessed, considered a pioneer of abstract painting of the North.

Sometimes it is those who pursue the same interests who are the most apart. Other times it feels like one knows people without ever having met them. The story about the two old men fighting at the table in a small industrial village always reminds me of something that painting might achieve: I may be using the words wrong, but for some years I have been thinking that there is an inherent dialectics in painting, where opposites can meet, in a form of synthetic embracement. On the one hand we have a wide world of historical anchoring, ideas of societal change, exclusionary economic circles and distant analysis. On the other we are dealing with a quite commonly available form of expression that deals with everyday life, with all of its practical implications and pathetic impulses. The hope might be that if we manage to make the two meet, we get a tool for doubt, wonder and contemplation. And a space to recognize our vulnerable interaction with our surroundings, and each other.

When I started working towards this exhibition I was on parental leave with my second child who was about to learn how to walk. It is one of those situations where one's ideas are put to the test. First of all it's almost impossible to combine a real presence and care for a child with any other activity. Secondly, you have those elementary philosophical questions that are signing up with full force: What kind of conditions did we inherit, and what are we about to pass on?

-Tarald Wassvik, August 2023

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