

Atti Johansson / *Kroppens landskap*  
curated by Lina Aastrup  
22.08 – 20.09.2025

## Kroppens landskap

*The material, defined in form and substance, in danger and in hardness  
so hard against the world's soft bodies  
A knee a foot a hand a heart and a head  
What can I do*

– From Atti's diary, 1983

The exhibition title *Kroppens landskap* is borrowed from Atti's close friend, the acclaimed Danish writer Kirsten Thorup. Thorup's text, written for the exhibition *Sken och verklighet* in 1993 at Kulturhuset and Museum Anna Nordlander, captures the layered complexity of Atti's imagery, where the inner and outer topographies of the body hold both vulnerability and strength.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout her career, Atti worked thematically in series: *Förbytta ting* (*Transformed Things*), assemblages exploring the subconscious; *Mekanisk/organisk* (*Mechanical/Organic*), monumental public reliefs addressing the emerging computer technology; and the paintings of *Ska skogens källa sina... (Will the Forest's Source Dry Up...)*, focused on environmental destruction. While the 1960s and 70s were dominated by broad social issues, in the early 1980s Atti turned her gaze inward once again. After an accident left her bedridden for a long period, she read Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Literature was always central to her life, and in the classic tale she found a new theme: the vulnerable human being and the individual's struggle with fear.

Just a year earlier she had taken part in a peace march from Copenhagen to Paris, organized by Women for Peace. The sight of exhausted feet and legs that had carried the women forward returned in many guises in her work thereafter. Events such as the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 and the war in former Yugoslavia deepened the sense of a time in which nature, humanity, and women in particular were under severe pressure. The paintings that followed circle around this condition of exposure and helplessness, but also of hope. As she put it: "All my Don Quixote paintings are about getting people back on their feet, about gaining a foothold. And to gain a foothold is the same thing as to have faith."<sup>2</sup>

In these works, soft arms, hands, legs and feet struggle against a chaos of hard mechanical tools. Her once didactic visual style shifted towards greater freedom, with machine parts taking on increasingly abstract shapes. Atti herself called them "building blocks". By the late 1980s, the elements were further abstracted. The symbolic colours that once marked the organic (blue) and the mechanical (yellow, orange, red, green) blend and are veiled by a white film. Threats to both human and nature are internalized and thus rendered invisible – like radioactive radiation or toxic pesticides in the forest.

In works such as *Kroppens landskap* and *Kroppens situation* we encounter a square, torso-like form enclosing a system of inner tissue and organs, seemingly compressed into too narrow a frame. Or perhaps they are maps of fields, hills, rivers and forests. In *Under huden* and *Förnuftets och dårskapens dubbelbild* appear the outlines of a head – brain convolutions, jaw, eyes. The language of *Förbytta ting* and *Mekanisk/organisk* re-emerges here, but in reduced, flattened, more intricate form.

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1 *Sken och verklighet* – Atti Johansson's pictures were shown at Kulturhuset (Stockholm) and Museum Anna Nordlander (Skellefteå), 1993.

2 Interview by Birgitta Tunelli, Swedish Radio P1, 1986.

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During the 1990s the female body became more present than ever in Atti's art. In *År/Sarajevo* we see an ageing, naked woman surrounded by a profusion of limbs and bones. "Women have had to pay so dearly; their bodies are so unprotected,"<sup>1</sup> she said. During this period Atti often incorporated textiles into her paintings, creating a resistance for the brush as it moved across the surface. Works such as *Livstykke* gain an additional dimension of intimacy and sensuality through this technique.

Privately, Atti grappled with a body that often failed her and caused severe pain. As she wrote in her diary: "My paintings are affected by the fact that my body sometimes doesn't function!! I constantly ask myself: how is the 'inner world'... Is the feeling altered, or does the feeling allow itself to be dominated by bodily pain?"<sup>2</sup>

Her motifs combine elements of landscape, machine, and human figure. Beyond a struggle between entities, they hold a transgressive potential in which fixed identities dissolve and new relations become possible. Running through all of her work is the exploration of polarities: illusion and reality, the synthetic and the natural, destruction and creation. The pressing issues of her time – computer technology, environmental devastation, nuclear power, the peace movement and the situation of women – form the backdrop to her art.

Today, Atti's work resonates with renewed urgency, reminding us that hope is found in the will to act – even when the outcome appears unattainable.

– Lina Aastrup, 2025

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1 Interview by Barbro Werkmäster, Provins, 1995.

2 Atti's diary, 1999.