

STEINAR HAGA KRISTENSEN BRUIINE PERIODE - LIEGEN EN OPSCHEPPEN

AN ESSAY BY
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The idea of the «period» in an artistic practice is most closely associated with Spanish painter Pablo Picasso's Blue Period, 1901-04, said to have come about as a result of personal struggle and loss. Resulting in a series of sombre motifs painted in blue tones, often tending towards social realism in their choice of subject, the works were not very popular at the time but would later become amongst his most celebrated. Other examples include Belgian painter René Magritte's *Periode Vache* (Cow Period), 1947-48. Seemingly a more conscious artistic turn carried out to make a statement: the stylistically colourful, fauvist-like work did not do well at the time, but succeeded in its goal of causing an annoyance amongst Parisian surrealists (later, Magritte would claim that his wife didn't like his new style and cite this as the reason for his subsequent abandonment of the venture). Steinar Haga Kristensen's latest exhibition comes about as the result of a very brown time, and so it is called the Brown Period.

Recalling my first encounter with Haga Kristensen's work several years ago: I was then struck with the immediacy of its visceral repelliveness, followed by an almost instinctual and intensely acute need to distance myself from its many unsettling implications. Later it would become apparent to me that the work I was then exposed to contained the first tendencies of his Brown Period, subtly present as early as 2008 in the exhibition "Brunt og Vansklig" (Brown and Difficult). In the years following, the tendency is mostly subsumed by Haga Kristensen's rich, though somewhat more polemical work, revolving amongst other things around the repetition of subjectively primeval motifs.

While the idea of the "period" within artistic practice is closely associated with a singular subject making a turn in their practice, it can also be considered in light of the wider term "artistic movement": For instance, the early avant-gardes which grappled with modernity and the death of god, the mid-century Situationist movement, with its politically radical colonization of previously unpoliticized territory, or more recently the Crapstractionist struggle to spiritualize neo-liberalist ideals such as overindulgence, money-grabbing, self-empowerment and selective ignorance. Movements such as this will most often (though not always) stem from a collective of ideas exchanged between individuals, the movements themselves slowly building towards a crescendo as they absorb and release artists - eventually petering out as they lose momentum or relevance. The central point being that while in progress, they form a framework that can allow an artist to effect a radical departure from the usual norm of artistic practice, be it collective or individual in nature.

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What becomes apparent in this exhibition is the result of Haga Kristensen's many years of intellectual and physical exertion, leading up to the realization that art can be made and enter history only as and for society - as one without the other is inherently absurd: While one may imagine that one is doing something as an individual, personal fulfillment as aesthetic sine qua non, or a simple notion of exploration; any act of creation is always either an affirmation or denial of collective responsibility and citizenship. From this comes the understanding that struggling through the mud and shit with all the others in the end is the only possible wellspring of meaningful inspiration and ideals. As such, the work comes into being from a state of decisive closeness to the matter at hand: A refusal to accept ignorance and intellectual debauchery; instead affirming the universal value of focused personal effort, even when facing the unending mountain of doubt stacked in front of us by modern society. At this point the Brown Period forces itself back into being with great urgency, momentarily pushing aside any established constraint to deliver its undeniable work while it still can.

There are many ways to look at an exhibition, many unfortunately involving degrees of self-inflicted ignorance. Whatever one's personal measure, we would all do well to treat Haga Kristensens Brown Period work with the same great attention to detail, urgency and seriousness with which it comes about - especially so, I would argue, for those amongst us who are still young and have most of their promising lives ahead of them, there is always so much to be done. Steinar Haga Kristensen the Brown Period 1646 Boekhorststraat 125 Den Haag February 15th 19:00. A performance will be carried out by Steinar Haga Kristensen and Eirik Senje at the opening reception.