



The Track (1), 2014, Collection of the artist

VIGGO WALLENSKÖLD

Mindful Portraits

Exhibition 23 September – 25 November 2018
Preview on 22 September 2018 5-8pm

In Autumn 2018, Maison Louis Carré presents an exhibition of Finnish painter Viggo Wallensköld (b. 1969). Named Young Artist of the Year in 2005, Wallensköld is well known in Finland, where his works are part of all the main museum and institution collections. This is his first show in France since 2005. 23 portrait paintings, covering his career since 2002, have been selected for the house and gathered from numerous institutions, private owners and the artist's collection.



Summer II, 2002, The Saastamoinen Foundation
/ EMMA Espoo Museum of Modern Art



Countess (3), 2016, HAM Helsinki Art Museum

Wallensköld's portraits may seem classical at first glance, but soon the viewer's attention is caught by some strange details. Alienation, imperfection and questions on intergender identity characterize many of his figures. Generally standing or sitting alone, these characters establish an empathic relationship with the viewer, through their humanity, quietness and familiar details. They are alone, but at the same time exude a sense of serenity, peace and tolerance. These mindful portraits open up a new dimension in our consideration of other fellow humans. Wallensköld's outstanding skill as painter enables him to visualize all these aspects.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue including a text by Pilvi Kalhama, director of the EMMA Espoo Museum of Modern Art, and an introduction by Niilo Jääskinen, Chair of Association Alvar Aalto en France, in English and French (see p. 3-5. Kalhama's text is also available in Finnish).

Maison Louis Carré is Alvar Aalto's only building in France and one of his most remarkable private houses. The villa was built for the art dealer and collector Louis Carré 1959-63, and preserves intact the furniture and interiors designed by the Finnish architect. Since 2006 the villa is the property of Association Alvar Aalto en France. Besides seminars and events, two to three contemporary art exhibitions are organized annually.

Introduction

In his paintings, Finnish artist Viggo Wallensköld has created an idiosyncratic world full of magic. His canvases feature serene and calm figures which, rendered with sincerity and empathy, are at times reminiscent of 19th-century funfair freak shows — distinctions between the sexes, or between humans and artifacts, are blurred and transgressed. His pictorial world could be interpreted as referencing today's discourses around transidentity or transhumanism, as well as Freudian and Surrealist themes. But Wallensköld subscribes to a classical tradition of painting, sometimes borrowing his images from family photo albums typical of the southern-Finnish minor nobility, or even from the iconography of Soviet Socialist Realism.

The Maison Louis Carré brings together the memory of two great admirers of art and beauty. Louis Carré wanted a house worthy of the paintings and objects created by the artists he represented as a dealer. Alvar Aalto was able to channel the friendship that blossomed between them into the creation of a jewel of modern architecture, realized in a spirit of humanist and organic functionalism, all the while respecting his own artistic freedom. For the Association Alvar Aalto en France, which now owns the Maison Louis Carré, this exhibition is the occasion both to introduce Wallensköld's work to a French audience and to pay homage to the friendship between Carré and Aalto.

The Association Alvar Aalto en France would like to thank everyone who helped make the exhibition possible, in particular the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and the many lenders of works.

Niilo Jääskinen, Chair of the Association Alvar Aalto en France

When the mind is at one with the space.

Viggo Wallensköld's paintings at Maison Louis Carré

The figures in Viggo Wallensköld's paintings pose for us without any sense of shame. Every one of them is in some way abnormal, defective or imperfect. But what is perfection? Are there even people who are in fact perfect? A person's integrity is not visibly perceptible or merely represented bodily. Zeroing in on the core of deviancy, Wallensköld's works remind us that we all are imperfect in so many ways.

Alienation is one of the most classic devices in modern art, and literature in particular. Wallensköld too uses the method to convey his message: his figures resemble dolls or statues, or even torsos, which is why we do not initially recognise ourselves in them. Our attention is nevertheless captured by some inner conflict in the picture, making us linger in front of the painting. Then something familiar catches our eye, and our imagination starts to build up a personal relationship with the figure through that familiarity. The details of the figures and interiors elicit in us a sense of empathy, and we recognise ourselves in the classically composed picture.

We begin to live in the same reality and mindscape as these naivistic creatures. We identify with them precisely because they have been distanced from our conventional notions, which facilitates our encounter with the world of these creatures and ultimately with ourselves. Life, like a Wallensköld picture, is riddled with conflict, which is also why it is so endlessly fascinating. We yearn for more life, for it to offer us something new, even if this moment in life is frozen. As yet, we are not ready to let go of it in the expectation of tomorrow and new experiences.

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In spite of their alienation, Wallensköld's figures have always been linked to the real issues of humanity in today's world. A case in point is intergender identity, which features in many of his works and is today a keenly topical issue in the discourse on gender politics. It is high time that we lift our eyes from the confines of a normative society and a normative idea of the individual and start talking about humanity plain and simple. Or is it indeed so that a person can only be whole if he or she is physically whole? No, the mind balks at the idea.

We are imperfect beings externally as well as mentally. Although we live in a world that puts ever more emphasis on superficial appearance, we should focus instead on mental issues and work on the health of our psyche. That is why Wallensköld's art, in which imperfection is imbued with a quiet mercifulness, and in which lonely figures stand erect in their own world, is more topical than ever. Deviation from the norm – the fact that something is bit off – is an inner norm in his images. We should not only accept, but even aspire to it. Imperfection is what makes a person an individual.

Wallensköld has studied humanity for decades, and he has been indispensable on the long path toward valuing and naturalising difference. Words are not enough; deeds are needed. Through his work, we have learned to see the abnormal holds a key to personality and humanity, and above all a whole mind. To be well, we must come to terms with ourselves and to be at one with the world. That is the kind of world Wallensköld is depicting.

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When I learned that works by Viggo Wallensköld will be presented at Alvar Aalto's Maison Louis Carré, I knew, instinctively, that these two would somehow 'mesh'. As I write this, I am still trying to understand how to put that intuition into words. Maison Carré, Aalto's masterpiece and a private home from the 1950s, emanates peacefulness and intimacy just like Wallensköld's paintings. The open interior exudes a breathtaking beauty not declared on the outside. The building is like a harmonious work of art, a peaceful abode.

The figures in Wallensköld's paintings are also at peace in the interiors where they breathe and where they pose directly to the viewer, to me. And so I, the viewer, too remain inside the paintings, and words are no longer needed.

As I linger in these spaces, I feel their unveiled state. I can feel how, deep down, in a very special world, my mind calms down and I am at one with my environment. The components of the building – its lines and materials, the light streaming through the windows and the nature embracing it – are all one. And so it is in Wallensköld's paintings. Everything is in balance.

It is good to be here.

Pilvi Kalhama

Director of EMMA - Espoo Museum of Modern Art



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Open:
March to November, Saturdays and Sundays 2-6pm upon reservation.
Private visits and groups upon request.

<https://maisonlouiscarre.fr>
<http://www.wallenskold.fi>

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