

From Studio Conversation With Robert Bordo, April 2013

**Robert Bordo:** You were talking about the brush, and how in those earlier paintings from observation you were setting up a one-to-one relationship with the hairs of the pelt to the hairs of your brush. And you knew no matter how much you love that metaphor - the exchange never works.

**Hanneline Røgeberg:** But it is worth trying. Using the thing being described to describe it...it is one of the reasons for painting for me, butting up against the inadequacy of my tit-for-tat reasoning.

**RB:** But you're not really dealing with adequacy as a criterion in these new paintings. We are still talking about this work as if they are representational paintings and yet they function within a different code now; they are sensed, not read. What's left is the feel of fur, the dispersed affect of the pelt, not a representation of it. From the representational to what's represented through other means. The subject is the manifestation of that interface.

**HR:** And I make these to get lost in. My scope becomes micro - a flea on a dog. I start with an event or conflict, and that is the legible field I paint to complicate. The conflict is a snag on my consciousness that won't let go, and not because it is necessarily topical, but because it feels, somehow, to have a greater application than just being itself, and I have to find what that is. Most of my work starts from thinking about what promises to repeat itself, what we - despite knowing better - reproduce, how experiences imprint themselves as patterns for the future. Often I don't have the tolerance or discipline to look at these things head-on, and the pelt becomes a dissociation tool.

**RB:** Still, these are about gesture, performance, - the painting enacts, or provides or gives -- they imprint the pelt, but the pelt is no longer the representation. It makes me think of putting an infant, naked, on a photographer's fur. It is such a bizarre idea of the primordial, and in turn it relates to adult sexuality and fetish. As you said earlier, sex never looks like what it feels like. Internalized as offerings, these paintings are ritualized; skin touching other skin also provides alternate meanings - what would happen if the public space you hint at in the backgrounds were to host the elaborate group grope - you're proposing: what does it mean culturally to have skin ritual imprinted onto the public sphere?

**HR:** The pelts allow me to go in and in and in until I lose my peripheral vision and defenses come down. I imagine pulling a fur cover over something as an act of tenderness or comfort, and it makes any normal means of visual analysis impossible. Consciousness isn't in the head any longer, but in the skin.

**RB:** Apart from the fact that you're burying the photographic reference here, it seems there is also a tremendous desire to kill off representational, theoretical space, where the kind of artistic act you're invested in would normally take place. In contemporary art I look to video and performance for the visceral. Only the residue and format of representation remains in these new paintings, of the fur - a rubbing, a frottage!

**HR:** You're too pleased! I just reread Michel Tournier's novel *The Ogre*, a novel about a man who rationalizes everything that happens to him. Toward the end of the war he is overseeing a boys' military academy in East Prussia. As he has done through-out, he continues to theorize and interpret the reversals of fate and his magical role in them, like the testing he performs to ensure the racial superiority of his charges. He conducts experiments on two twins, drawing elaborate diagrams of the body hair patterns on their little bodies. At some point he is "forced" to use his tongue to detect the growth direction, as their pale down is invisible to the eye.

**RB:** - and that's your brush. You have transposed their pelts to your fur. The way that you are describing it is also so forbidden, so...

**HR:** ...but the Ogre is telling himself all along that he is doing analysis, science! He is brushing this way and that and looking for a path that suggests itself in the whorls and cowlicks.

**RB:** ...except that you are conjuring specific images as ritual. I am not sure if this work enacts history as much as it fetishises the interdiction against thinking about it through forbidden erotics. Now we only think about such historical co-relationships distantly or theoretically. You are transforming what was the representational premise of your paintings into sensation - and enacting a brutality while "licking" the canvas. But back to frottage of the two surfaces, which I think of as a gay act: the two paintings, one thin, recessive, with a smooth sheen, and the other clotted, splooged, deposited-upon surface, like debris of explosions - they remind me of the sublimated imagery in "Fireworks" by Kenneth Anger - and function not as thoughts, but as residue as seen through your palette - and I am of thinking Kirkeby Kiefer, Hammershoi, a palette of the north. These paintings are a break from your earlier works. The pelt's implicit Rorschach is a signifier of secrets, of sexuality and of interpretive authority. All this becomes more explicit when you enact the feeling of it rather than the representation of it.

**HR:** A palette a little bit north and a little bit country. Jorn is interesting to me now. A friend introduced me to Karen Barad's work last year, who asks how language came to be more trustworthy than matter, and how the means for repeating history is in our infatuation with fluency - how being good at something makes us choose that over our not-yet-formed subject. Codes and systems are necessary to avoid madness, and I am as happy as the next person to have access to them. But I paint because painting can show both the inadequacy of my containment systems and the insistence of something to be contained anyway. I look for that gap in painting, - a gap of escaped content where madness is a new complexity, an added nuance. It becomes the matter that matters in the end.

**RB:** There's a difference between representation's success and painting's failure. Painting's failure at this point is historical and institutional and is regularly argued within contemporary culture. It is your expectation of representation that has changed - you no longer have any control over it, or wish to control it. You are making one skin with another skin, and it's both physical tool and metaphorical engine.