



HER NAME IS JUNE

Susanne Bonja

Kalmar konstmuseum

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June
2021, acrylic



Blush
2019, acrylic

We live so many lives inside our own, smaller lives with people who come and go, friends who fade away, children who grow up, and I never understand which one of my lives that is the actual frame. [...] Perhaps that is how the whole is told, with people who without hierarchy walk in and out through my face. No “beginning” and no “end”, no particular chronology, only moments, and what emerges there.

la Genberg, *Detaljerna [the Details]*, 2022*

Daydream 33
2022
Ink



Daydream 32
2022
Ink and
vinyl paint



*Translated from Swedish by Kalmar konstmuseum



Denier
2022
Acrylic

HER NAME IS JUNE

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In *Her name is June* Susanne Bonja gives way to her alter ego. It is about staging, through painting and drawing. Since her last exhibition, at Galleri Konstepidemin in Gothenburg in 2019, her work has continued and the person in the paintings has been given a name. June has taken control of the room, she stands straight and has staked out her direction, continued to look for answers. But still with a reminder of existence being weightless, precarious and at any moment cast into the abyss. Both the large-scale paintings, full of detail, and the more pared back drawings, explore nuances of conditions, moods, and events. June gets to play different parts. A fictional character – a reflection. June helps to formulate, manage, and embody things that have happened in real life. Susanne Bonja herself describes it as a parallel way of thinking. That is how the paintings come to be. It is allowed to take time, and she meticulously determines the right colours, perspectives, and atmosphere.

We often live according to contracts of what is acceptable in a normal conversation. Let us call it the everyday contract, the linear passing of time and its pre-programmed clock. Moreover, we often have times to keep. That which needs to be worked through, scrutinised, cared for, or that which chafes happens in parallel. Sometimes one must imagine and join together – art is open to that. There is no demand for truth. The artwork comes into existence through interpretations. Visual arts and literature differ in how they are created and how thought is materialised, but there are common denominators. It is about finding your way and letting something take shape. Then finally to determine that it is completed. But the road there is long, and attention to detail important.

Susanne Bonja carefully considers her details, like words. Presenting each one with great care. An item is constant in its physical weight, but depending on where it is placed, in which room, its meaning changes or the direction of the eye is diverted. Ladders, boxes, clocks, or as in one of the more recent works *Three o'clock* a bird sitting in a corner. Other details can be closed or open cupboards. Items, attributes, or details carry memories and ideas of their meaning. They can be metaphors for time, for being confined or for hidden family stories.

But the body is that which gives life to a room. How does the body move? How does June stand or fall in the paintings? Is it also possible

to perceive the absence or presence of a body. The drawings give examples of how interiors can convey human life without the presence of a body. It might be because of a piece of furniture, touched by someone sitting there or having moved around the room. This masterful way of creating is similar to how the artists Karin Mamma Andersson, Helene Billgren and Sara-Vide Ericson work with “their” rooms. They all have a way of using small shifts to capture traces of life and of events – to catch a presence that allows tales to continue in the mind of the observer.

Methods

Painting is in its essence colour. Susanne Bonja uses carefully selected shades to create the atmosphere she is after. She describes it as a control, a mood creator. Depending on her choice of colour, she can tone down or enhance that which takes place in the picture. It also depends on the contrast she wants, and she tries out nuances and colours next to each other. One method is to work with flat, monochrome colour swatches together with three-dimensional objects in several nuances. That creates depth and helps to distinguish layers in the picture. Her colour scheme has changed over time and today she is drawn to warmer, clearer colours. She describes how for example a yellow field of colour in a painting almost works as a light, making other colours shine and in a best-case scenario, when everything is right, interact with the full composition.

The sketch is an important part of the process. It is about trialling and quickly spotting an idea. For Susanne Bonja, the sketch process has developed and deepened further over the years. She describes how her ink drawings are a direct link between thought and action and a counterweight to the slowness of painting. She also uses another preparatory method which can be likened to a performance. Using a camera and a self-timer she uses herself to stage different scenarios. These photographs, “contact prints”, are a sketching method in themselves. At times, something is carried on to paper, which in turn is a test for a painting. Photography also works as a tool for studying how the body looks when for example it falls. She uses herself as raw material to work with composition.

The ink drawings shown in *Her name is June* have all received a number. Bonja describes how the digit is a form of construction and a play with numbers. Numbers, just like time, can be about battling with linearity and odd numbers. In her own world, she creates her own symbolism around numbers and their importance for linear time.

An existential search is taking place which is easy to identify with. How to achieve balance? Is it desirable? Is there a message in the picture? That is up to the observer.

Enhanced presence

Everyone is made up of layers, some open, others closed. I think that we are all too often obsessed with chronology, with finding connections, and that makes it more difficult to handle great emotions. Sometimes because answers must be found so quickly. There is a great impatience in “our” time. An impatience which permeates both private and public conversations. Art is good at letting go of chronology and thereby lower the speed. Art makes us reflect and ask different questions.

In preparation for this exhibition, I have visited Susanne Bonja’s studio several times and we have had conversations about her process and her art. Something that has struck me is the enhanced presence in her paintings and drawings. Without knowing the full story, I feel certain that something has happened. It is masterly done. Exactly what has taken place is not always interesting. Who has left the room, what was said or what disappeared. An enhanced presence entails intensity. It is there. In a similar way to how a novel makes me find new trains of thought, only to later return me to a passage further on. Because there and then it is what is needed.

With a broad presentation of an artist, where it is possible to see many works simultaneously, a cohesive story, a narrative emerges. In Susanne Bonja’s paintings, where June plays the main part, many twists occur. I perceive them as personal, but not private. It is like reading a whole novel. But with the beautiful undercurrent that June will continue to act, the tale continue to take shape.

Enhanced presence makes the artwork stay in your memory or consciousness. In the best case scenario, one is filled with an intense sense of existence being impossible to understand. And that is ok. A heightened feeling of life which is above chronology and without a beginning or an end.

Sara Hemmingsson
curator



Daydream 1-44, ink and vinyl paint

SUSANNE BONJA

Biography

Susanne Bonja, born in Växjö in 1966, lives and works in Kalmar. She often works on a large scale and in her art stages events where she intersects fantasy, dreams, and fiction with fragments from her own life. She trained in Gothenburg at Dömens konstkola, Hovedskous målarskola and HDK-Valand – Academy of Art and Design.

Susanne Bonja is represented with public works at among other places Sahlgrenska University Hospital in Gothenburg, Region Kalmar län and via the Public Art Agency Sweden at Linneaus University in Kalmar.





Three o'clock, 2022, acrylic

