

ANDERS KAPPEL "A FEW DAYS"

WADSTRÖM TÖNNHEIM GALLERY 2022



"Day 100", acrylic on panel/plywood, 30 x 40 cm

2000€



"Day 90", acrylic on panel/plywood, 27 x 20 cm

1100€



"Day 21", acrylic on panel/plywood, 27 x 20 cm

1100€



"Day 70", acrylic on panel/plywood, 27 x 20 cm

1100€

The mission Anders Kappel assigned himself was to paint 100 signs in 100 days. In most cases, the motif consists of a name or a word with a light background. Others include abstract forms, color fields, or lines. When we meet at the old farmhouse in Skräddaröd, an isolated corner of Österlen among horse paddocks, apple groves and rolling fields, signs fill the studio. All of them are painted on two-centimeter-thick, birch or pine plywood, cut into rectangles slightly smaller than an A4 sheet of paper — a practical and reader-friendly format. But the project is not as easy to grasp as one might at first think. At close range, the paintings appear worn and tattered, as though having been used over a longer period of time. The surface, that appears white from a distance, is streaked with the grain of the wood underneath, yellowed or marked in places with darker or more brightly colored pigments. Traces and shadows of underlying layers of paint, places or experiences penetrate forth. Fragments of that which has been forgotten, hidden or suppressed over the years. Piled on top of each other, the signs are reminiscent of books, as though the painting itself was just the outer skin of that which lies within. Seen as a whole, they coalesce into a White Book of sorts over the past and present.

“It’s all about wrapping things up and looking back. Of including both the good and bad experiences”, says Anders Kappel. It is tempting to read these paintings as a map, a journal or autobiography. Despite their down-to-earth appearance, these are possibly among Kappel’s most personal works. With his brush, he draws the contours of trademarks, administrative authorities and public transport companies, the logos of which are rendered in minute detail. They indicate locations, occasions, encounters and needs. Moments of failure and success, bureaucracy and travel, happiness and pain. At the same time, he inserts traces of artists that have been important to him, among others, the Russian constructivist El Lissitzky. Rectangles and diagonals, silhouettes of masts and lookout towers — everything becomes a part of Kappel’s own pictorial idiom. It is clear, however, that these signs are not only connected to the artist’s personal life. Do not be fooled by their seemingly neutral appearance. Despite, or perhaps thanks to, the fact that they make use of the established symbols and imagery of the public space and financial markets, they strike different chords and give rise to different associations in every individual viewer. The fact that the logos are hand painted might perhaps dampen their official appearance, but in no way lessens the effect. There is, on the contrary, something disarming to the uneven edges and traces of brushstrokes that causes one to lower one’s guard.

One can easily view these signs in relation to an art historical tradition. During the 1960s, American pop artists such as Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist incorporated advertising and popular culture into their paintings, silk-screens, collages and assemblages when commenting on the growing consumer society of the post-war era. Several of them had a background in fields of graphic design and marketing, the ideology and aesthetics of which they related to with a combination of admiration and critique. Even a Swedish pop artist such as Öyvind Fahlström experimented with well-known brand names, logotypes, and both current and historical courses of events in his works. With his signs, board games, and paintings, he playfully and subversively suggests various strategies to destabilize the established order of things.

Anders Kappel meticulously examines ideas and words, even when he speaks. Here, the idea of the artist as an analyst of the demands that life places upon us comes into play. It is all about formulating the essence, of boiling it down to one word, one surface, that, in itself, accommodates all other words and surfaces. Hanging on a wall in his studio is a row of rulers, tools and one final sign. A familiar vignette, known from countless cinema salons emerges against its matt, shimmering copper surface.

But once again, our expectations are upended. The surface upon which the vignette is painted bears the shape of a torn off film strip that continues even after the final word marks its end. Kappel's urge to create signs will surely not end here. To be continued...

This is an extract from the essay "Anders Kappel and the Art of Creating Meaning From Ambiguity" about Kappel's work written by the Swedish critic and art historian Caroline Söderholm.

Anders Kappel, born 1956 in Hasslö/Karlskrona (south of Sweden). He now lives and work in the village Skräddaröd outside of Simrishamn in Österlen Sweden. Educated at Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm 1982-87 and at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin 1988-89.