

Mia Saharla, Repeat

Sparkasse Wittgenstein, 25th of September 2014

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You remember things that happened long time ago, things you experienced as a child or that occurred in your childhood, something you perceived unconsciously.

There is a picture slowly arising in your mind, vague, misty, diffuse and ambiguous.

The picture in your mind emerges out of the dark. Remembering is an active memory performance: It means synthesizing the covered traces of your experiences. Thus, it is wrong to consider our memory static or fixed. It is no archive providing the past chronologically or like a card index or photo gallery. On the contrary: It is a liquid reservoir of perceptions, images and interpretations that have been generated and coded in the brain at an earlier point in time. In a new and current context these traces of the experiences are reactivated or even reorganized: Remembering is a creative and constructive process.

It is this process that the works of Mia Saharla deal with. Her series "The Way Remembering Is" are about remembering and forgetting and forces the development of pictures in the viewer's mind. Her pictures are relatively small, between 13x18cm and 30x30cm, a small paper size just like for a diary. The dominating colors of her pictures are subdued and reserved ranging from gray and grayish black to sepia brown that make the pictures appear as if they had not been developed completely. The pictures itself seem to be as vague as memories because the objects depicted appear like changing projections in the darkroom of consciousness. The artist explains the genesis of her pictures this way: "I have been sitting eyes closed on the floor of my studio, remembering and painting. In the end the landscape takes almost a stage-like form, where the rest of the vague memories are played again, in the mind's eye. The series is my attempt to paint visible the process of memory and forgetting. In the end it comes back to the act of painting, the gestures, adding and removing paint as our psychology and brain does with our memories, and how the act of painting communicates with my attempt to restore the image."

It is an existential necessity for a human being that the traces of the memories naturally fade, blur or disappear, especially those that are evaluated as not relevant or are taken for granted. This basic idea refers to Friedrich Nietzsche's treatise "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life" including the apology of forgetting. This apology can be considered as an economic defensive reaction to prevent "an excess of history". We are not able to keep, archive, save everything – we would feel overloaded. But we must rather choose, select, filter, to ensure a coherent way of life. Therefore remembering does not mean the recall of a saved image but the activation of a pattern, a feeling or impression that had been generated in the process of perception. That is why a memory is quite similar to an idea.

It is not the intention of the artist Mia Saharla to portray reality in a detailed way, to exactly reproduce a landscape or a human being. Her pictures often begin with an idea of a landscape, a plant or a figure. In the process of painting the objects get more and more abstract. Painting is a mental process being accompanied by a dialogue between the artist and the paint, the canvas and her own memories. Painting begins in that moment when the paint brush meets the canvas, it is gesture, it is idea, it is intuition.

Mia Saharla (born 1983) is a Finnish painter. She graduated 2010 (BA, TAMK University of Applied Sciences, the Degree Programme of Visual Arts) and has taken part in exhibitions in Finland and abroad since 2006. During 2012 she worked in Künstlerhaus Schloss Wiepersdorf supported by Finnish Cultural Foundation. Supporting her work during 2013 Finnish Cultural Foundation made possible the exhibition in Galerie Pleiku, Berlin.

This exhibition takes place in the course of this year's Literaturpflaster. Finland is the host country of the 66th Frankfurter book fair and this country is in the focus of the series of events in Bad Berleburg. That is why the works of a Finnish artist are presented in the Sparkasse Wittgenstein. But there is even more: Mia Saharla created a series of works referring to literature. Her cycle "About Ida" is based on Gertude Stein's novel "Ida".

Gertrude Stein, born 1874 in Pittsburgh/USA, went to Europe in 1902. She moved into an apartment in Paris in the rue de Fleurus rented by her brother Leo Stein which had been a famous meeting point for artists, authors and composers for some decades. Stein's work as an author is considered controversially but she created something completely new: Her keen language experiences included words and sentences that are almost endlessly repeated and slightly modified. Her written words depict a stream of consciousness that makes the reader feel a "continuous present" and a "pure being". Influenced by Cézanne's impressionism and by Picasso's Cubism she turned away from ordinary literature with a normal plot and began to write prose that obeyed the rules of abstract painting. The writer considered language as a stream with thoughts flowing into other thoughts and words flowing into other words. This structure can be found in Stein's novel "Ida" whose protagonist is an average woman of the middle class. She is a woman just like many women, a repetition of a woman's life.

The work "About Ida" describes Mia Saharla's interpretations of this woman, influenced by Gertrude Stein's technique to turn language and repetition into a steady stream. The pictures are painted with a flat brush style, partly sprayed. Her artistic gesture is full of expressionism as figurative allusions can be recognized: head, body, motion, constellations, but the physiognomy remains abstract. The structures are symbolic, almost without any form, with an objective character. The different values of brightness and the gesture emphasize the movement of the figure that cannot be caught by the viewer's eye. Just like the novel's heroine Ida who scurries from one location to another, who moves and sometimes seems to be at more than just one spot at the same time.

Dr. Andrea Brockmann