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Sigrid Sandström
By Olivia Booth

There are plenty of frontal elements in Sigrid Sandström's works – blank white “sheets”, collage-esc colored planes with ripped looking edges, some as if smacked on – but I'd say that the looking that one does, both at the time and in ones memory, amounts to a pile of obliquenesses. I approach the work almost as one would a non-rowdy crowd, not head down and plow through or dive in, but instead angled hips and pardon me's, amounting to a kind of involuntary do-si-doing. In fact thinking in terms of folk dance can get at quite a lot in the work: oblique approach upon oblique approach, fluidity not through the super continuous flow (though that makes an appearance as a decoy) but through the sum of mini-starts and stops, quarter turns and shuffles, a series of over-and-unders. As with folk dance, it is complex rhythms and not form relationships that are the great care here. Sandström is, in a sense, the orchestrator of those rhythms, and there is a flexibility about how many can join; joiners seem to keep coming in from the flies, as opposed to laid down frontally, so that even when they freeze in the form of flat frontal colored planes, they carry with them the force of the oblique entrance.

The decoy fluidity that I mention above appears in many of the paintings in one way or another, often in the form of a grand swoosh that establishes a kind of background. These fast swoops look like they might be made by squeegees, but how they were made doesn't matter, the effect is of high speed dynamism that wouldn't be interesting were it not given strangely low billing despite being given a lot of room. As I see it, Sandström's task comes to be exploiting and undermining this kind of fluidity in order to pull out and to foreground traction and resistance within it and to marginalize the usual and expected speed and impact. So that the foregrounded (literally and figuratively) forms – the cut, hemmed, sometimes redirected strokes or planes which form a kind of central pile – all help slow down the building speed of the swooshes and pull forth relations between “motions and rests”¹ making velocity a diverse affair, not a simple one, and consequently allowing color (especially blue) to exercise its own speeds and dimensions. Fluidity is disarmed and slowness outpaces speed; it's a triumph of slownesses over speeds and of resistance and traction over the windswept.

The images could be said to be of whirlwinds (often it looks like arctic ones), but they are also simply piles of things and I think they come into being less through the idea of representing a whirlwind and more out of the act of piling, phrasing and chunking rhythms and moves, amounting to a whirlwind in affect. It's piling as a way to get out of *composing* in its blandest verb form, piling as a kind of Earth Art solution to avoid

organizing forms in relation, and it's piling as a way to slow things down (as moves pile up, the piling itself slows the looking down). The whirlwind might be more in the making of the work; I imagine the painter in the constant throws of trying to turn the painting loose and yet still maintaining the painting's looseness, or “under-determinacy” (a word she uses it in her statement) and this is the kind of orchestrating which could only be done from inside somewhat of a whirlwind. It seems as if this under-determinacy comes from a painter who makes only the marks which they can bear to make, as opposed to ones that *must* be (driven by sureness), and in this way I imagine the mark-making to come from doubt and from default: dodging certain kinds of moves and marks, always second guessing, editing and hemming the ones she does make so that they are not complete (literally they appear ripped), always moving toward completion and always stalling it. This whirlwind process doesn't seem to be too historically driven, and though default might be a strategy, as in dodging marks that are too familiar or historically wrought or at least cropping and editing them down, hers is not a process of negation (undoing and messing with marks as signs). If indeed these works do speak to staking one's claim in painting, this stake is not necessarily for ones place in art history or the art world, but rather pitching a place in the already *indeterminate* dimension of the canvas, where one can do anything but hardly anything will do. In her case to move from this *indeterminate* place to a highly composed *under-determinate* one is a way of staking claim, but not through defiance, negation, assertion or aggression. Hers is an active world arrived at through ultra peaceful means.

I really appreciate that the painting doesn't seem to come with set terms for completion, it's refreshing that she doesn't rely on old school abstract painting moments of ‘Aha, now it works’, or new school abstract painting moments of, ‘There, I've sufficiently screwed it up’ but that finishing a work is just a constant issue/itch as far as I can tell. In the end, perhaps she doesn't actually turn the painting loose, leaving us to ask what the terms are that mark the end of the dodging and shuffling and orchestrating of rhythms that go into each painting: when the speed is sufficiently slow (is there a reverse speed limit here??) Or, at the point when there is nowhere to default to, when she can't bear any mark any longer? I can't tell, but I once heard an anecdote that pertains to how a painting ends about Jasper Johns saying that when one begins a painting, everyone is in the room with them, from Malevich to their grandmother, and as the painting progresses the crowd starts to filter out. This migration carries on as the painter works and thinks and as the painting is finishing up, the last of them leaves. Then, finally, the painting is done and the painter him/herself can leave. If in Sandström's paintings there remain stragglers, I don't mind at all, the company of peaceful strangers shuffling about fits the spirit of the work.

Olivia Booth lives, does art, teaches, and sometimes writes in Los Angeles. Her own paintings look more like sculptures and use planes of glass.

¹ I'm pinching some words here, like “motions and rests” from the Gilles Deleuze essay *Spinoza and Us*. Later I'll use “slownesses” and “whirlwind” from that essay too.