

Wetterling Gallery

Love Lundell

Delta

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When Love Lundell was just a small boy his dad – like many other fathers whose cultural awakening coincided with the student revolt of the sixties - had a poster featuring the American painter Maxfield Parrish's *Daybreak* on his sitting-room wall. This is something that eventually caused Love – just like Peter Doig and Danilo Stankovic – to become a sort of contemporary symbolist.

It has taken time for Lundell to find his real home. In his first exhibition at the Wetterling Gallery in 2015 the support wheels were still in place. All of the paintings were filled to the brim with clever references – from upmarket Shakespeare's *Puck* to Tony Wilson's cred-generating *Hacienda Club*.

Just like many another young artist Lundell uses references to gain legitimacy in the art world. But the references also function as a sort of mask which keeps critics, gallerists and visitors occupied, enabling the artist to carry on working in peace.

In the autumn of 2016 Lundell suddenly remembered the *Daybreak* poster and he immediately started to experiment with the same technique. This involves the artist applying layer upon layer of transparent paint on top of the typical background colour (Parrish Blue) until the sky vibrates with celestial light.

The artwork for Maria Andersson's 2016 solo album *Succession* marked the turning point. The muted, patinated palette competes with the dominant pastels of lilac, turquoise and cerise, at the same time that the flock of references is considerably diminished making it much easier to enter into the paintings.

Content no longer has to be masked and the 'cut & paste' elements from the dark alleys and ancient myths of popular culture are patently apparent. The source of wisdom (The Tarot) leaps directly from the rock while a sect member wades through the water after being baptised.

Right alongside there is an exotic pinup from Hawai sunbathing on a rock, an image that might have been cut from a 1950s picture postcard. On the other side of the lake a serene pavilion is reflected in the black waters of the lagoon. In the distance we perceive the 'Alpen glow' of the mountains inspired by Babar's adventures. The painting feels most like an illusory hallucination or perhaps a confusing dream. Suddenly a word turns up from the fertile moss beside the pinup: SEX – a species of subliminal reminder of suppressed desire. Why are all the women semi-nude?

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Points of contact with symbolism do not just pertain to form but also to content. Just like the symbolists towards the end of the 19th century, Love paints figuratively but his paintings are, in fact, a critique of naturalism. His aim is not to portray the outside of the visual world but, rather, its inner reality. A parallel reality that is not governed by the rules of logic but, instead, builds on the imagination, on memories, illusions and dreams. This means that Lundell's images – like those of Peter Doig – can be described as skewed and incoherent, not to mention the fact that the shadows generally seem to fall in the wrong direction.

Instead of making use of a scientific, central perspective Lundell employs a sort of collage technique, with sampled images from various sources. Advertising, Flickr, tales and myths are processed digitally, using Photoshop and filtering, and are then assembled into an “emotionally” true picture of reality. Just as Jean des Esseintes, the hero of Joris-Karl Huysmans' symbolist classic *Against Nature*, published in 1884, Love devotes his working days to constructing a reality that is truer than nature itself. The symbolists opined, quite simply, that the human artefact was more like nature than was nature itself.

But most of the roots of Love Lundell's contemporary symbolism date back to the early 1970s, a period in which pioneering graphic designers – who wanted to break with modernism – rediscovered symbolism; which is why Parrish's *Daybreak* came to feature on the cover of Elton John's *Caribo*.

In other words, Lundell's contemporary symbolism, just like that of Doig or of Stankovic, has its roots in the psychedelic disavowal of rationalist modernism. One factor that helps to explain the artist's 'muzzy' palette according to Victor Mosco was that looking at the record sleeve was intended to give the same hallucinatory experience as taking LSD.

Accordingly, Doig's *Orange Sunshine* from 1995 can be described as a sort of Renoir on acid. Trickier is *The Heart of Old San Juan* from 1999 in which a basketball court breathes like a glowing jewel. This depends on the fact that the 'natural colours' are amplified and shifted into fluorescent variants; emerald and pink as during a trip on LSD.

Doig's paintings are often concerned with his childhood years in Trinidad during the 1960s. Just like Marcel Proust he vainly tries to recall lost time, but instead of Proust's *madeleines* he uses LSD. A substance that suits our image-dominated communication society all the better.

Childhood is also a central motif in Lundell's art. In his painting *Cesspools in Eden* we are faced with three young women pasted into a canoe. Despite the fact that they are very different – something that is shown by their respective attributes of a chandelier, a tentacle from an octopus and a paddle – the artist has pasted them into one and the same canoe.

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In point of fact this is all about a sort of feminine *alter ego*. Growing up and maturing can be tough. There are times when one is full of confidence, like a sort of figurehead that illuminates the path for others to follow. On other days it feels as though one is being drawn down into eternal darkness.

In between these states one paddles along in the usual fashion, trying to keep alive on the right path. The water shifts in colour between lilac and cerise, though this is not the result of environmental pollution. Rather, it is the tension between different personalities in the split psyche that has given rise to hallucinations.

The structure of the water in *Cesspools in Eden* is reminiscent of batik – a technique used for applying colourful patterns to textile fabrics that was rediscovered by the alternative movement in the mid 1960s. In the documentary film *Magic Trip* from 2011 we see how the *Merry Pranksters* – headed by Ken Kesey – take LSD and then customize a white T-shirt using the batik technique in a pond they have filled with coloured dyes. Today, batik is hotter than ever. Hip streetwear labels like Huf – which sponsor PewDiePie, for example – sell any number of T-shirts with batik patterns to hipsters on their way to the next music festival. And on *Moot Designs'* batik hoodies, the word ACID is spelled out in capitals on the chest.

In other words, the psychedelic painting on *Cesspool in Eden* mirrors our own time. But unlike, for example, Doig's paintings, Love's contain a more developed narrative structure. Narratives that are reminiscent of Eric Fischl's paintings of life behind the scenes in typical American suburbs.

Fischl is one of the most influential narrators in contemporary art. His paintings positively reek of repressed sexuality and violence. One example is *Sleepwalker* from 1979 in which a boy stands and masturbates into a children's paddling pool. Even more alarming is *Barbecue* from 1982 in which the idyllic scene is disturbed by a teenager playing at fire-eating.

Just like Love, Fischl assembles his pictures using cut-outs from different sources. The fish in *Barbecue* definitely feel out of place. In Lundell's version of a similar pool party *Energy Slaves* – inspired by the prosperous suburb in which he grew up – a woman is seen lying down wearing a playsuit from *Alaïa* rocking up and down holding a large knife.

Right up close to the woman is an anonymous male. A sort of prop accompanied by an inflatable plastic palm from Chiquita together with Pippi Longstocking's monkey, Mr. Nilsson. There seems to be a real risk that the woman in question may puncture the inflatable paddling pool.

Self-centred mothers who lack impulse control are subjects that we prefer not to discuss publicly even though they are relatively common. In several of our most popular ancient fables – like *Snow White* and *Cinderella* – the mothers are even jealous of their children.

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Joseph Cambell maintains that myths act as tools for understanding life. In the same way that Jung's archetypes, fables or myths show that, beneath the visual reality, there is an eternal truth. But so that we can benefit from the story, the narrator uses metaphors – such as the glass slipper and the poisoned apple. In spite of the fact that the boundary between fantasy and reality is vague during childhood Love's 'cut & paste' *Energy Slaves* is understood as a wholly realistic moral narrative. A species of contemporary myth which is indispensable if we are to be able to cope with the roller-coaster that is life.

Dennis Dahlqvist