

AXEL JONSSON

*Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts*

Innsbruck

03.12.2022 – 25.02.2023

“Rosemary started drinkin’ hard and seein’ her reflection in the knife,” croaks Bob Dylan’s voice in the folk song *Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts* (1975). Only seconds away from the murder of her husband Big Jim, the protagonist recognizes herself in the flashing knife as the future perpetrator. Another image shows Lily in the stairwell of a saloon, with a furrowed brow, thinking about the next move of her “Five Card Stud”.

As in the setting of a suspenseful Western, it is the big and small moments of decision, the brief moments of human deliberation, that Axel Jonsson elaborates as motifs. Any movement, no matter how timid, can be a trigger or set a nonspecific action in motion. This applies to the brute thigh-birth of the god Dionysus as well as to the sudden launch of a motorboat in dark waters.

Drawing on cultural textual and visual traditions, Jonsson traverses the conceptual narratives of the Western world: Pop culture, coming-of-age scenes, Greek and Northern mythology, the Western, or the European Middle Ages, in order to transpose them into the contemporary present. In doing so, despite the figurative realism, Jonsson is not concerned with elaborating thematic narrative formats or questions of representation. Although the picture ensembles are related to each other, resulting in a choreography of painting, they refuse a formal ordering context.

Jonsson uses the specificity of the painting medium as a strategy to engage in aesthetic observation of human actions, interactions, and relationships. The focus is on careful movements, the careful extraction of gestures and facial expressions, the modeling of ideal-typical body images. In doing so, Jonsson uses a naïve, illustrative style of painting, despite his precise brushwork, which does not place him in the register of either homage or criticism. The juxtaposition of singular physical features in the paintings is also striking. Veins, chins, and Adam’s apples take on plastic dimensions and give the figures androgynous features. They seem to rest within themselves, performing only slow stoic movements. This allows the operative construction of the arc of tension to be felt on a symbolic level as well, thereby playing with the viewer’s expectations in that way, so that at the decisive moment — at high noon — both, the formal and narrative level advertise for the paradigm of an open ending.

Florentine Rungrama Muhry