

TOM ANHOLT

GALERIE MIKAEL ANDERSEN



“In his action movie mode, Treadwell probably did not realise that seemingly empty moments had a strange, secret beauty. Sometimes images themselves developed their own life, their own mysterious stardom.

‘Starsky and Hutch. Over.’

Beyond his posings, the camera was his omnipresent companion. It was his instrument to explore the wilderness around him, but increasingly it became something more; he started to scrutinise his innermost being, his demons, his exhilarations.’

Facing the lens of a camera took on the quality of a confessional.”

Werner Herzog, *Grizzly Man*

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THERE ARE NO STRANGERS HERE
JANE NEAL

There are no strangers here, only friends that have not yet met
William Butler Yeats

If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less, but to dream more, to dream all the time.
Marcel Proust

There is a shadow land, between dreaming and waking, where we can drift to after the alarm goes off, before the snooze button jolts us into the new day. It might only be a matter of minutes but time seems to stretch out like an endless carpet and the dreams experienced here can often seem as real - or more so - than our waking life: how many times have we risen, bathed and begun the day, only to discover, that in fact we were still abed?

Stepping into Tom Anholt's studio is akin to entering this realm. It's not so easy to define his painting practice, but we might reach for the term Magical Realism in order to describe the feeling that Anholt's work evokes. The world he depicts is often heightened, fantastical even, but it is convincing in its consistency and familiarity. From even the first viewing of his paintings, which range from small, attic window in scale, to large, open vistas, we have the feeling that the figures and scenarios he portrays are already known to us; perhaps just a little too far away on the horizon for us to identify them precisely, but certainly not alien.

W.B Yeats wrote: 'There are no strangers here, only friends that have not yet met', and so it is with the figures who weave through Anholt's paintings. We feel immediately that they are benign, more than this (as with a dream where we don't question the logic of a strange situation, or the context within which we would ordinarily be surprised to find a friend or member of our family), it feels right that they are where they are.

It is interesting to pursue the theme of friendship when considering Anholt's work. Anholt himself is a warm, engaging person, yet, paradoxically, he has elected to follow the solitary life of an artist. It is not uncommon for artists who are extrovert in society to people the grounds of their works with figures in order to 'create company', and this he does. A bigger challenge though, is what to do with all the figures from art history, and closer to home, who keep presenting themselves in the artist's head when he starts to paint. Anholt was struck by the words of Philip Guston: 'When you're in the studio painting, there are a lot of people in there with you - your teachers, friends, painters from history, critics... and one by one if you're really painting, they walk out. And if you're really painting YOU walk out.'

It has been claimed that during the act of painting, an artist can drift into a semi conscious state where he can access the subconscious realm freely. It is often helpful when thinking on this to use the analogy of swimming in the sea and submerging ourselves under water: gradually as we slip below the surface, the world around us - the bright blue sky, the shouts and cries of fellow swimmers - becomes removed. Then, it is just us amongst the all-encapsulating shadowy underworld of the water, accompanied only by the sound of our heart, beating loudly as we hold our breath.

Anholt not only succeeds in entering this dreamy, fluid state of being, his painting practice reflects it. Stylistically we can place him within a canon that draws from sources as diverse as early cave painting, Primitive art, Medieval art - particularly the cross-over from the Romanesque period to Gothic, and - much later - Symbolism and Expressionism. All these notwithstanding, there is another school of painting - a decidedly more recent, British one, to which Anholt could be said to belong. This 'school'

which has yet to be defined in a categorical way by art history, could be said to have its beginnings in St Ives. Looking first to the naive paintings of Alfred Wallis, the likes of Christopher Wood and (most notably), Ben Nicholson, were persuaded to confirm a modern direction in their practice. Fast forward to the early 1990's and we arrive at the hugely influential work of Peter Doig, who cites the Romantic, Impressionist and Expressionist painters: Caspar David Friedrich, Claude Monet, Edvard Munch and Gustav Klimt as major influences. Like Anholt, we can trace in his practice the influences of Surrealism, twinned with Magical Realism - thanks to the often unexpected angles both Doig and Anholt adopt as view points, and their intense - even psychedelic - colour palettes.

The series of works to which this essay refers, were all made during Anholt's residency in Vejby, Denmark, during the summer of 2014. The first painting Anholt produced was entitled: 'Vejby Garden' (2014). It was a painting of a sole shoe, discarded amongst the flora and fauna of an almost Botticelli-like garden - more decorative and formulaic in its execution, than realistic. And yet, despite the ornate patterning: the systematic scattering of mushrooms, little red flowers and blades of grass; it sets the scene for the genesis of Anholt's residency. The entirety of this series is concerned with focusing on the materiality of paint - Anholt's chosen medium - but also on his new experiments with painting on wood.

For Anholt, the relationship between paint and wood is very primitive. Wood is much more resilient than canvas and it can withstand a great deal of physical manipulation and punishment. Anholt himself is a physical artist. Tall, strong and sportive, he enjoys the punishing challenge of engaging with his medium. Many of the works he produced during this summer had paint

applied directly by his hands and fingers, and when he used the brush, he often pushed it hard into the surface of the wood, scratching and scraping, as is especially evident in the still-life, 'Shelf' (2014).

Anholt deliberately challenges both the preconceived notions of 'respecting' the art object, and the preciousness with which the art object is infused. He does this by being rough with the paint and the wood, at times literally throwing the wooden panels around in his studio during their making, and even leaving out his paintings during the night. The resulting objects - and these are deliberately described as objects, rather than paintings - are paradoxical. They record Anholt's mistakes and frustrations (the evidence takes the form of the thick paint left on the side of the works which was scraped off during a previous painting's incarnation, and the experimental treatment of the surface of the wooden boards, expressed through Anholt's scratching and scraping of their surfaces), as opposed to a dependence on traditional, painterly brushwork.

Painting on wood is a departure for the artist, who previously worked on canvas. However, it allows him to capture something of the immediacy of his subjects and subject matter. 'Tired Travellers' (2014) is decidedly naive in its treatment of both its subject and its protagonists. It is reminiscent of Anholt's early work, which has a child-like simplicity, but in terms of his artistic development, if we look at the edges of the painting we see (as afore mentioned), how Anholt has removed an earlier attempt but allowed the evidence of it to remain at the edges of the wooden board. The materiality of this left-over, excess paint is both visceral and fragile. It could snap off in the hand if the edges are not handled carefully when lifted. Anholt has deliberately decided to leave us this encrusted paint on the edges, not only to

remind us of the nature of paint itself, and the practice of painting (the building up of layers like strata, the process of piling on and taking off, until the desired effects are achieved), but in order to draw our attention to the notion of painting as the becoming of a physical object.

Anholt often talks about painting by using the kinds of phrases we might more readily associate with going to war, or at least engaging in a struggle. He quotes Picasso: 'Painting... is a way of seizing power by giving form to our terrors as well as our desires.' And comments: 'The more paintings are pushed and the more they go through, the better the result. You have these marks at the end that can't be faked - they can only be achieved in a genuine battle - a struggle - the beauty is in the scars, the mistakes. Seeing the hands of the maker is important: the ones that didn't work were the ones that were too polished, too clean; the beauty is in the scratched and pitted surface.'

Besides his subject matter and feeling for the visceral nature and plastic quality of his medium, it is also important to note how Anholt physically goes about the painting process. For example, 'Vejby Garden' was painted flat down, whilst outside in the garden. Anholt wanted to create the overall feeling of the environment he was in, rather than conjuring up one, specific image. Again this prompts us to return to the subject of Magical Realism as Anholt always intended to pursue a particular line, and a difficult one. He wanted to produce a special kind of reality, a magical one: he never set out to produce a carbon copy of nature or a clear and pure representation of form, neither did he seek to be fantastical; he sought to create the kind of world we could describe as playing into Plato's theory; a familiar but better version of our own, a place we would want to dream ourselves into, that our souls would instantly know and recognise, even long for.

Anholt's decision to work in wood after having painted previously on canvas was motivated by the qualities of his works on paper. He describes how he responded instinctively to its strong, robust nature. When working on paper, he lays it out on top of a wooden surface (such as a desk). 'When you run a brush over the surface of the paper and you feel the wooden surface underneath, it is comparable to working on board. You can really punch and push the brush, without the fear (as you have with canvas), of puncturing the surface. Additionally, the hard, smooth surface allows for a delicacy and fluidity within the paint. It is the range of approaches possible that excited me; to see a soft, sliding stroke next to a rough, scratched mark.'

Another recent development in Anholt's practice is his new found focus on the abstract nature of painting. Until now the figures and imagery have taken precedence but increasingly Anholt has become drawn to the medium itself. He is intrigued by the plasticity of paint and what he can communicate through pattern and texture, but also by the artist's relationship to the act of painting and the psychological as well as the physical implications. If we look at 'Red Woods' for example, it is possible to read this as the physical embodiment of Anholt's journey through what he calls 'the thrill and the rush' of making a painting: 'When you are lost in a painting you feel low down on the forest floor, but as it improves and you find your direction, you begin to rise until you feel you are rushing over the forest, lifting yourself up as if in the sky, being able to see; it's a magical moment'. This work - perhaps more than any other in the series - transmits the feeling of 'being able to see from all sides'. We feel we are both in the midst of the forest while simultaneously being able to project into it from outside.

The art of being able to take a step back in order to observe and depict whilst being fully in the midst of the action, is a skill that many artists and would-be observers never fully attain. For Anholt to have succeeded so young is laudable but not surprising. He has always been a keen observer, as his choice of subject matter reveals. Drawing predominantly from the traditional genres of portraiture, landscape and the still life, Anholt nonetheless aims to reveal not only that which can be seen, but also felt and imagined. This is apparent from works such as: 'Tired Travellers' (2014) which depicts three men in a boat. Despite the obvious literary connection we might draw with Jerome.K.Jerome's classic tale, we are intrigued by what might have brought together these three people: from whence they might have come and to where they might be going. In short, Anholt makes us care about his subjects - not in an overly sentimental way, but from an interest in their stories because the figures themselves are so seductively intriguing.

One of the biggest changes in Anholt's work is how his paintings have transitioned from something very two-dimensional to something almost three-dimensional, even sculptural. They have become (as deliberately afore mentioned), like objects. The small scale of the majority of these works and the intensity of their colour and mark making, epitomised by still lifes such as the gently humorous 'Still Life With Ants' (2014) and 'Vejby Flowers II' lends them a meditative, religious quality, synonymous with icons and other religious paintings. This is paradoxical given the robust treatment that Anholt has thrust upon them. Nonetheless, they possess an intimacy and concentrated intensity. The works appear to grow in the mind's eye and this gives them power. We might consider the text Gaston Bachelard quotes from in: 'The Poetics of Space', in order to reinforce this point:

'A prisoner paints a landscape on the wall of his cell showing a miniature train entering a tunnel. When his jailers come to get him, he asks them "politely to wait a moment to allow me to verify something in the little train in my picture." As usual, they started to laugh, because they considered me to be weak-minded. I made myself very tiny, entered into my picture and climbed into the little train, which started moving, then disappeared into the darkness of the tunnel. For a few seconds longer, a bit of flaky smoke could be seen coming out of the round hole. Then this smoke blew away, and with it the picture, and with the picture, my person ...'

Hermann Hesse: 'Fontaine'

Working small allows an artist to take more risks. It also means that when he returns to painting on a larger scale, he is usually more confident, tighter and less complacent. We can see this in the large scale: Moon Beauty (2014) where the whole painting is shimmering with a rich, luminous intensity. It is also a fitting place to end when evaluating a series of works born out of long days and nights spent in the cycle of working and dreaming and working and dreaming by Zealand's Baltic Sea. It is the culmination of a productive - and magical - summer.

JANE NEAL is an independent art critic, curator and author. She writes for a wide variety of international publications including: *Art Review* and *l'Officiel Art* and was invited to nominate artists for and contribute to Phaidon's *Vitamin P2*, and *Vitamin D2*. She co-authored *Art Cities of the Future: 21 Century Avant-Gardes* for Phaidon and recently curated the museum exhibition: *Nightfall*, considered one of the most important surveys of contemporary figurative painting this Century.

PLATES











































LIST OF WORKS

01

Vejby Garden, 2014
Oil on Panel, 150 x 130 cm
Private Collection

02

Still Life with Marco's Hammer, 2014
Oil on Panel, 30 x 40 cm
Private Collection

03

Vejby Flowers II, 2014
Oil on Panel, 40 x 30 cm
Private Collection

04

The Lifeguard, 2014
Oil on Panel, 40 x 30 cm
Private Collection

05

Still Life with Ants, 2014
Oil on Panel, 30 x 40 cm
Private Collection

06

Tired Travellers, 2014
Oil on Panel, 30 x 40 cm
Private Collection

07

The Drifters, 2014
Oil on Panel, 30 x 40 cm
Galerie Mikael Andersen

08

Village in the Rain, 2014
Oil on Panel, 150 x 130 cm
Galerie Mikael Andersen

09

Vejby Flowers II, 2014
Oil on Panel, 30 x 40 cm
Private Collection

10

Irish Family, 2014
Oil on Panel, 30 x 40 cm
Galerie Mikael Andersen

11

Still Life in Vejby, 2014
Oil on Panel, 30 x 40 cm
Private Collection

12

Red Woods, 2014
Oil on Panel, 30 x 40 cm
Private Collection

13

The Diving Club, 2014
Oil on Panel, 40 x 30 cm
Galerie Mikael Andersen

14

The Lifeguard II, 2014
Oil on Panel, 40 x 30 cm
Galerie Mikael Andersen

15

Shelf, 2014
Oil on Panel, 30 x 40 cm
Private Collection

16

The Moon, 2014
Oil on Panel, 40 X 30 cm
Galerie Mikael Andersen

17

Moon Beauty, 2014
Oil on Panel, 150 x 130 cm
Galerie Mikael Andersen

BIOGRAPHY

Born UK, 1987
Lives and works in Berlin,
Germany

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2014
Tom Anholt, Rainbow Walk
Galerie Mikael Andersen
Copenhagen

2013
Man Made
Galerie Mikael Andersen, Berlin
Days Like This
Russi Klenner, Berlin

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2014
Paper works and Sculptures
Galerie Mikael Andersen, Berlin
Drawings and Etchings
Galerie Kornfeld, Berlin

2013
One Each
Russi Klenner, Berlin
Alles Wasser
Galerie Mikael Andersen,
Copenhagen

Självpporträtt
Fullersta Gård, Stockholm
Synekdoche
Freies Museum, Berlin

2012
Billedstorm
Galerie Mikael Andersen
Copenhagen
Alles Wasser
Galerie Mikael Andersen, Berlin

Ridge Fine Art
Artists Showcase, London
Welten
Galerie Ardes, Berlin

2011
Ode on Melancholy
Janine Bean Gallery, Berlin
Out of Structure
Galerie Walden, Berlin

2010
Works on Paper
The Freies Museum, Berlin
Chelsea College of Art and
Design Degree Show, London

Sell Out
Subway Gallery, London
The Cult of The Cubicle III
Group Show, Berlin
The Common Room
Hackney, London

Bricks
Peckham, London
The Cult of The Cubicle
Pimlico, London

EDUCATION

2010- 2007
BA Hons, Fine Art. Chelsea
College of Art and Design,
London (First Class Honours)

2009
Konstfack, Stockholm

2007- 2006
ABC Diploma Foundation,
Falmouth College of Art
(Distinction)

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Images:
Inside Front cover: Studio House, Vejby Strand Denmark
pgs 22/23: Smørrebrød Lunch on the terrace
pgs 30/31: Drawing
pgs 40/41: George in the garden
pgs 54/55: Exhibition Installation View, Vejby Strand
Inside back cover: Map of Anholt Island

30'

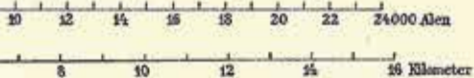
20'

10'

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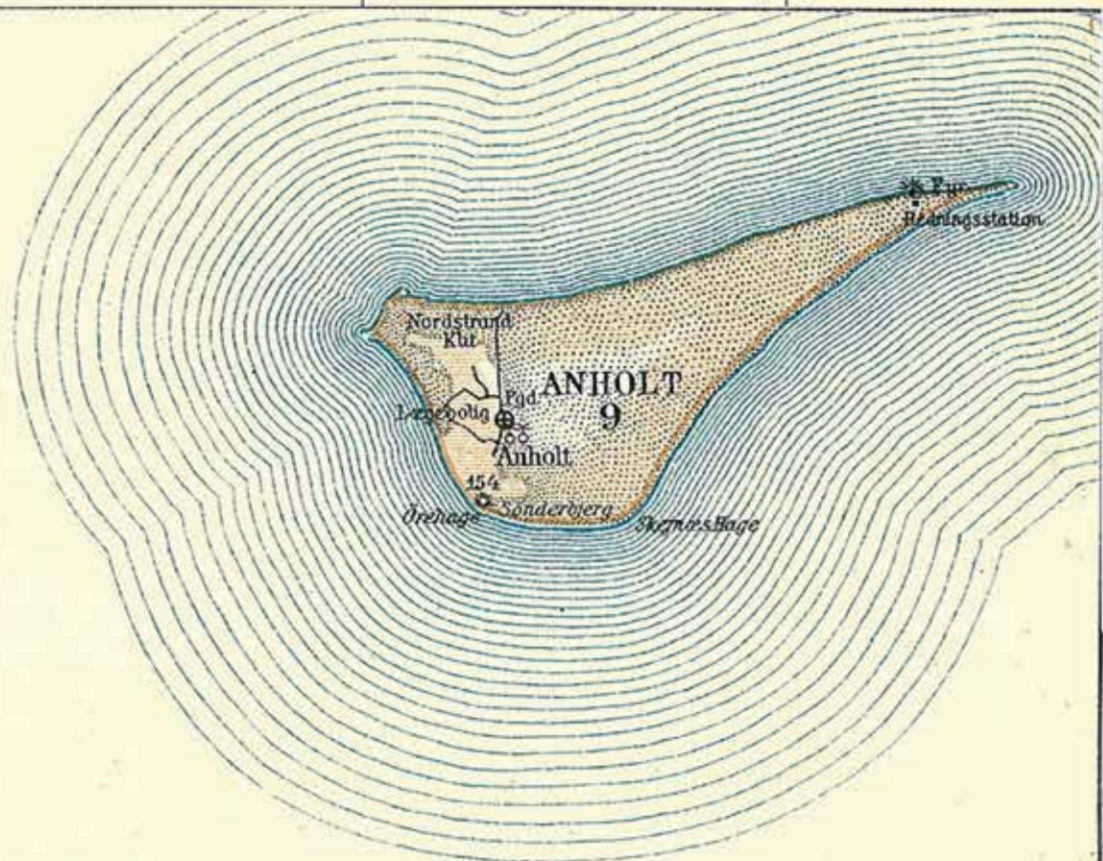


Inddeling

Herred	7	Sønderhald	Herred
do	8	Øst Lishjerg	do
do	9	Nørre	do
do	10	Sønder	do
do	11	Mols	do

Forklaring

☼	Vejmøller
○	Vandmøller
⚡	Fyr
•	Enkelt Gaarde
×	Ruin
(Landsby) [Pattern]	Skov
[Pattern]	Eng og Mose
[Pattern]	Lyst



40'

30'

