

Anna Bjerger

A LONG GLIMPSE

Born: 1973, Skallsjö, Sweden.

Trained: Central St Martins and Royal College of Art, London.

Lives: Småland, Sweden.

In broad strokes: Anna Bjerger's pictures are painted from photographs rather than life, their subjects derived from out-of-date reference books, instruction manuals, gardening books and magazines. Familiar, anonymous, intimate, yet curiously disconnected, these are unsettling narratives; the meanings becoming slippery and ambiguous. The pictures also call attention to the physicality of their medium. Paint is applied wet-on-wet in broad brushstrokes over aluminium panels. The speed with which the works have been painted seems to strive after the instantaneous quality of photography, while at the same time asserting the transformative nature of painting.

Influences and inspiration: 'For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be an artist in a romantic sense. I was nineteen and went to Germany with my lithography course to look at art, and I was confronted with German Expressionism, George Baselitz and also Marlene Dumas. And there are so many other artists... Edward Munch, Vincent Van Gogh, Vija Celmins, Otto Dix, August Renoir, Robert Ryman, Hanna Wilkes – the list is long. When at a loss, I turn to Philip Guston's writing and paintings.'

References: 'I mainly use found imagery, occasionally a personal photo will find its way into the studio. The process of collecting photographic material, looking through images, finding arbitrary connections and making a selection of what to paint is a big part of my work. Photographs contain ambiguity and are instantaneous objects of the past – to me they are a great inspiration. If I were thinking in terms of painting "live", I would find it daunting to consider the boundaries of the space I am depicting.'

Process: 'I think of this process – painting a photo – as a way of deciphering an image. I want it to be an intuitive and almost subconscious act, which is why I like to start a painting in the morning, first thing when I get into the studio. I don't think of it as an original, or a copy – the painting is a hybrid. When I paint the photograph, I don't change the composition or the framing, but I might exaggerate certain areas.'

Workplace: 'My studio is in an old school situated in the forest in the south of Sweden. It is a red wooden building from the turn of the last century; the only source of heating is a log fire. My husband, who is also painter, shares the space with me. We live in the school teacher's house next door.'

Painting: 'Painting should get under your skin. It is a balancing act between control and the accidental. Painting is the subject of my work: everything around it is just a way of making sense of it.'

Brushwork: 'I am using the paint and the brush marks to clarify the depicted image. I hope the painting exudes confidence, meaning it could be executed no other way. The texture of oil paint, colour, light and surface – it never ceases to engage me.'

Speed: 'I make a painting in one session; if it doesn't work I reject it. I keep the source material around the studio for a while before painting, so that it becomes familiar. To be able to capture a certain mood I have to keep the pace up not to lose momentum when painting.'

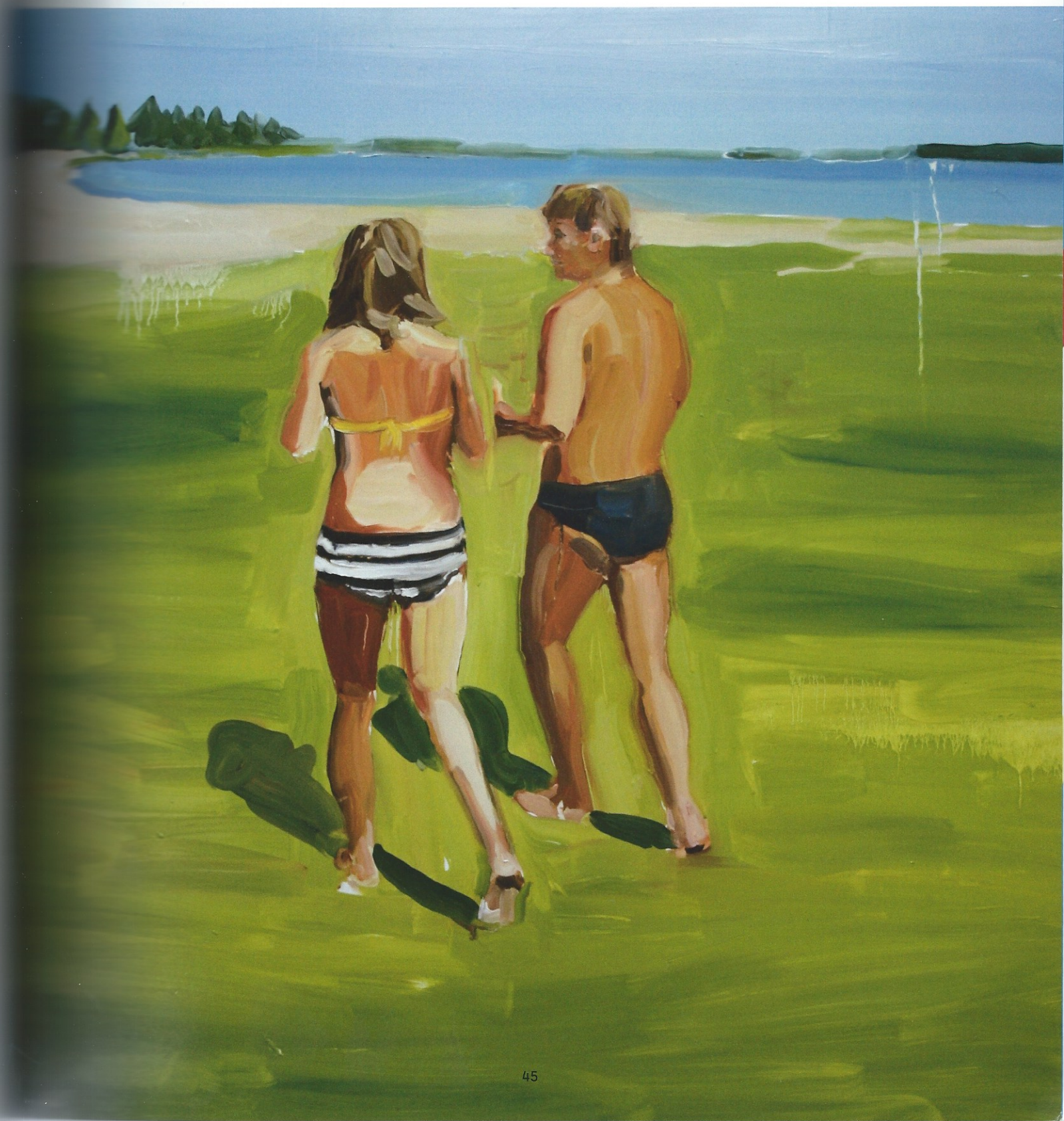
Rhythm: 'I tend to have months in which I paint every day, when I am in a flow. These periods are followed by months when I am not making much work, but spend my time thinking, reading and collecting visual material.'

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Repose, 2011, oil on aluminum panel, 120 x 60 cm, Photo: Peter Tihuis
Courtesy of Anna Bierger and Galerie Gabriel Rott, Amsterdam



Shoot, 2010, oil on aluminium panel, 80x70 cm
Courtesy of Anna Bjerger and Galerie Gabriel Rolt, Amsterdam



Smile, 2010, oil on aluminium panel, 30x40cm
Courtesy of Anna Bjerger and Galerie Gabriel Rolt, Amsterdam



