

Spirits of life

Published in conjunction with the exhibition

Spirits of Life at Projectrum Hjärne

Helsingborg Sweden

January 11th - March 1st 2019

Curator: Martin Schibli

Photos: Erling Lykke Jeppesen,

Siri Kollandsrud and Stig Persson

Text by: Agnete Braad and Alba

Graphic design: KAT-ART / Kathinka Fennestad

Translation: James Manley

Printed by: J & R Frydenberg A/S, Denmark

Published by: Alba S. Enström

All rights reserved © 2019 Alba S, Enström

ISBN

Thanks to:

Carin & Jacob Hjärne, Martin Schibli

Agnete Braad, Erling Lykke Jeppesen

Siri Kollandsrud, Stig Persson, James Manley

Michael Bjørn Nellemann and Torben Grøndahl

Front: In my dreams, 2018 | Acrylic/gouache/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm

Back: The popstar, 2017/18 | Acrylic/pencil/ ink on paperboard | 42 x 30 cm

SPIRITS OF LIFE

ALBA S. ENSTRÖM

Works on paper

Projektrum Hjärne
Helsingborg, Sweden 2019



Artist talk between the artist and the curator Martin Schibli at Projektrum Hjärne, Helsingborg, Sweden. 9.2 2019.

Strike a Pose

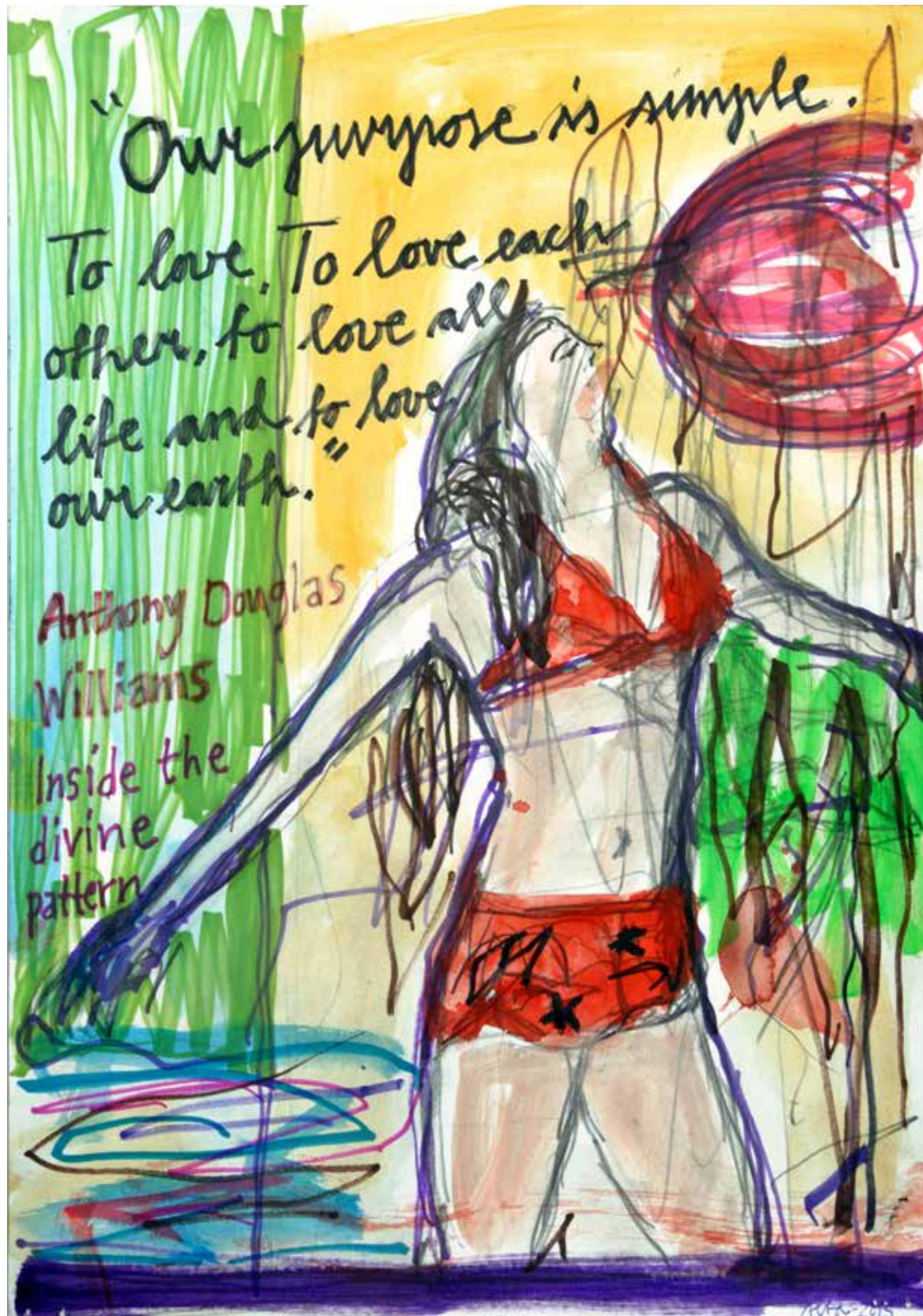
Women's bodies putting on the style, making a show of it, posing. People miming the models of the advertising industry – the choreographed look, both self-conscious and superficial. Alba Enström's works are greatly preoccupied with our modern world. He borrows the modes of expression and ephemeral, sketch-like forms of presentation we know from commercials and fashion magazines. But he does so with age-old motifs: woman, the beast, death. And in an age-old medium: painting.

Often the pictures are sensual, sometimes pornographic in expression, figures that are inviting and raise your expectations. But unlike advertising, which directs us only to skin cream or Rolex watches, Alba S. Enström reminds us of the existential – love and relations among human beings. And these are always as multifaceted and ambivalent as Alba's paintings and drawings are colourful. Something extremely contrastful is at work, not only between the contours of a body and a more profound philosophical statement about human life, which the artist samples and uses as a subtext directly on the canvas. He is preoccupied with our self-representations, the hunt for the perfect attitude, the sides of ourselves we like to

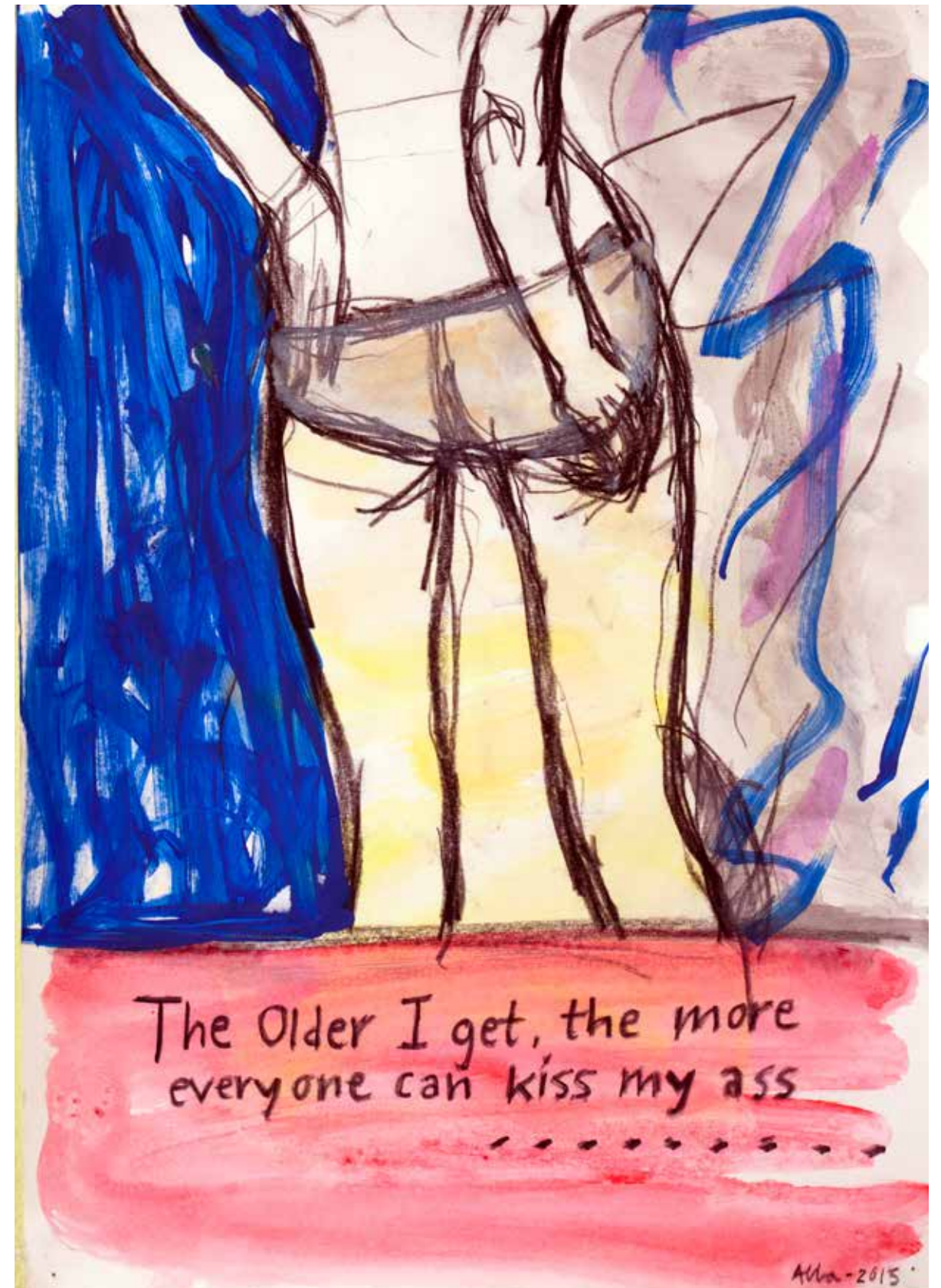
show off. What lies behind the presentation? He seems to be asking what we can use the selfie culture and the constructed reality of the media image for. The works are an exploration of the game of identity, for what are we to do with love and the fear of death if everything is only to have one particular expression? There is always something the camera or the brush doesn't quite capture. And that is a different, important contrast from the one between depth and surface in the artist. His insistence that every human being exhibits much more than one particular expression that can be captured and reproduced runs throughout his production. The pictures speak for a much broader, more diverse view of human life than the lustful gaze and the alluring pose which often have gender-stereotyped connotations. To strike a pose means precisely to put on a show for the camera or the viewer; to assume a dramatic or exaggerated bodily attitude or position, as for a photograph or portrait. With 'Spirits of Life' the artist investigates what lies hidden beneath the surface.

Agnete Braad, March 2019

Danish author and art historian
on the staff of Det Obelske Familiefond



Love for Life, 2016 | Gouache/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



The confident woman, 2015 | Acrylic/pencil/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



Born to be alive, 2016 | Acrylic/watercolour/ink on paper
| 42 x 30 cm



Homage to Fleetwood Mac, 2015 | Acrylic/ink on paper
| 42 x 30 cm



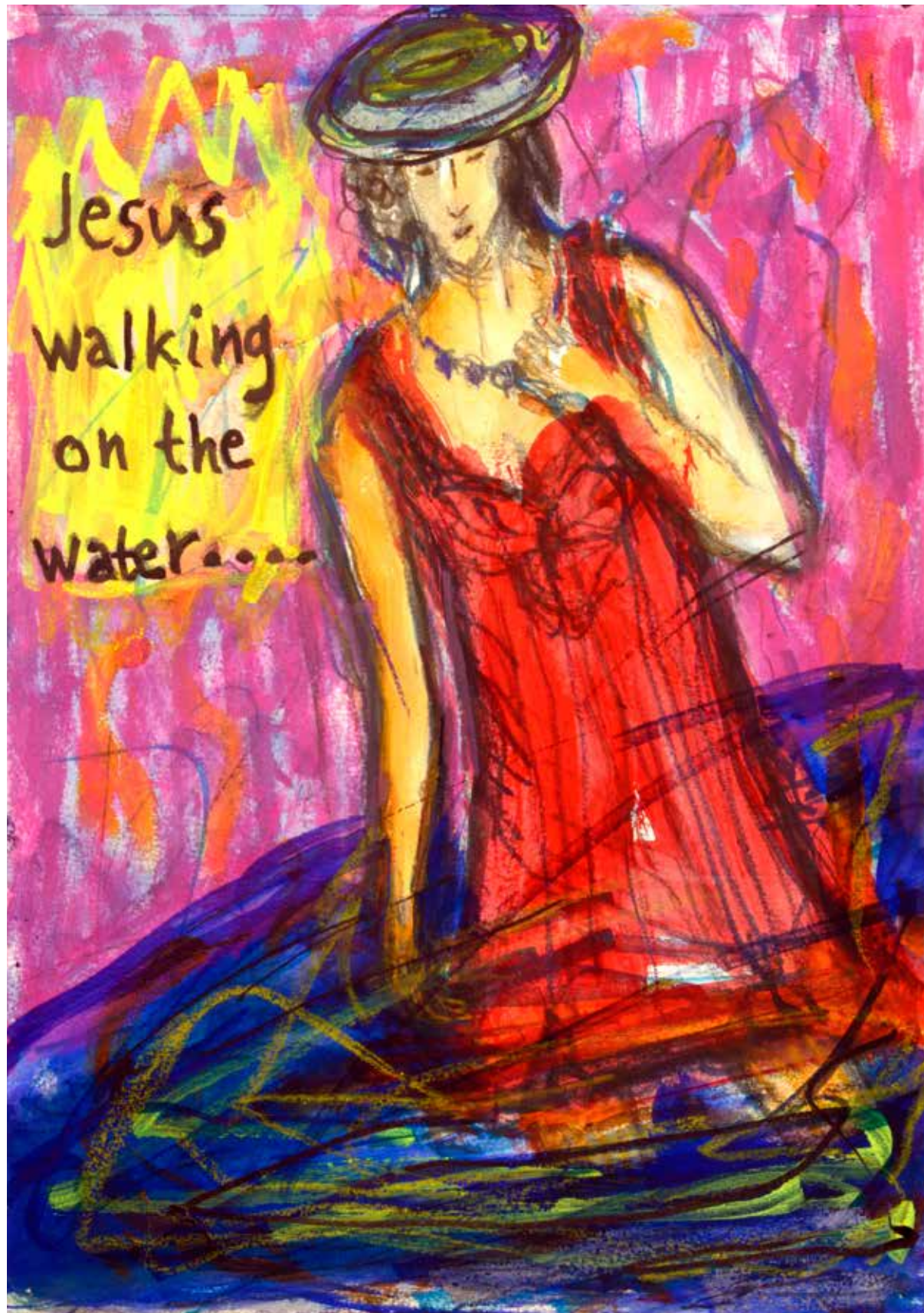
Unknown bird, 2018 | Acrylic/watercolour/ink on paper
| 42 x 30 cm



Charli XCX, 2018 | Acrylic/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



Homage to Deep Purple, 2015 | Acrylic/pencil/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm | / Private collection /



Jesus... (credit: Violent Femmes) 2016/17 | Acrylic/crayon/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



Goldfish, 2015 | Acrylic/pencil/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



The Russian cat, 2018 | Acrylic/crayon on paper | 42 x 30 cm



Be positive... 2015 | Acrylic/watercolour/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



On the catwalk, 2017/18 | Acrylic/ink/pencil on paper | 42 x 30 cm



Girl with big bag, 2018 | Acrylic/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



Woman in red dress, 2018 | Acrylic/gouache/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



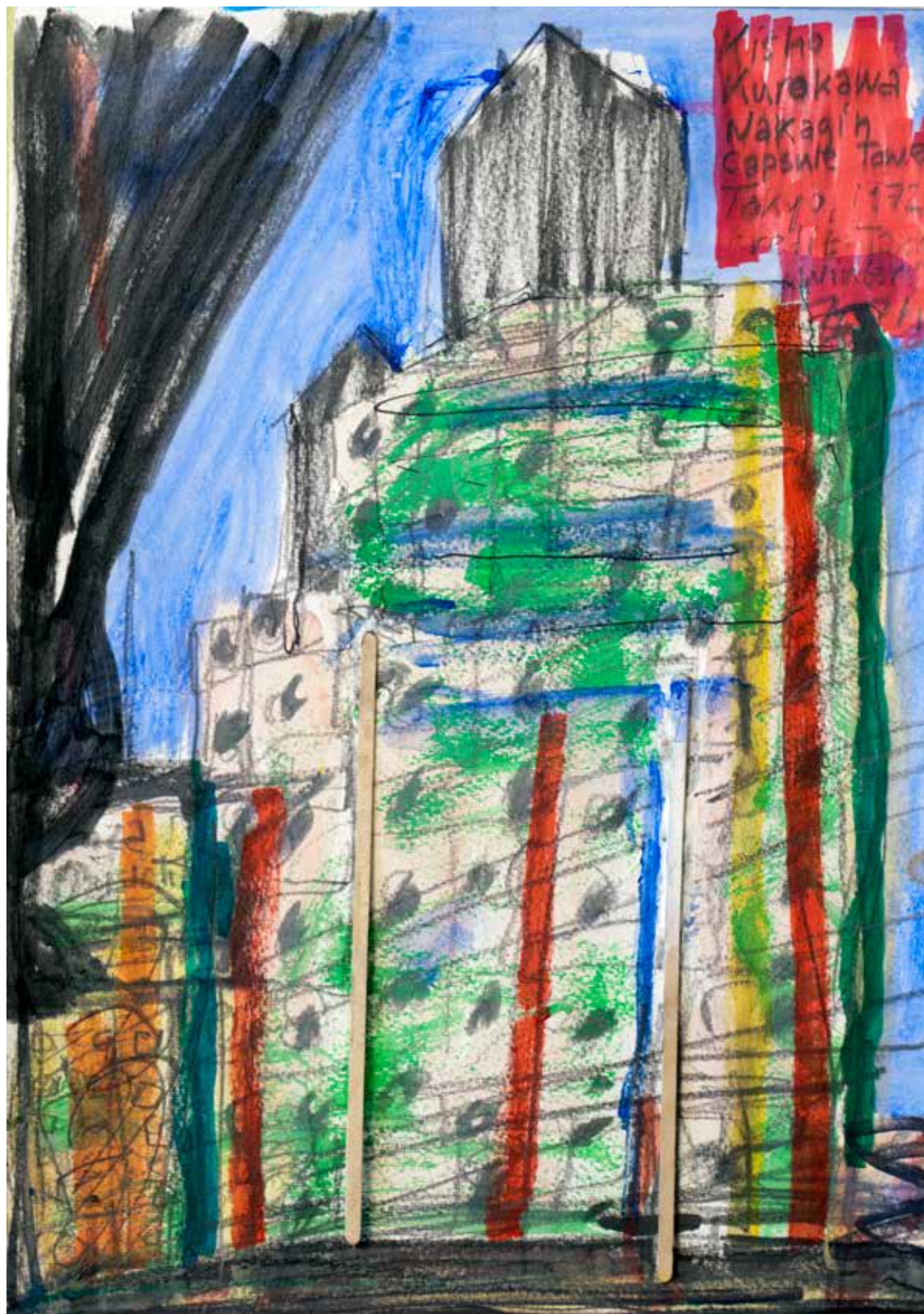
Woman with long neck (credit: Richard Avedon) 2018 | Acrylic/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm | / Private collection /



Leda and the Swan (credit: Kai Nielsen) 2018 | Acrylic/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



Hippopotamus with child, 2016 | Acrylic/pencil/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



Nakagin Capsule Tower, 2017 | Collage on paper | 42 x 30 cm



The band Tame Impala, 2015 | Acrylic/watercolour/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



Homage to David Bowie, 2017 | Acrylic/watercolour/pencil/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm

Some words from the artist ...

This booklet summarizes the exhibition "Spirits of Life" created by the curator Martin Schibli (SE/CH). It shows some of my paper works from the last couple of years. It's a product of constant dialogue and many ongoing conversations over the years between me and Schibli. And I think the drawings have got better than ever. I'm more focused and determined than I was twenty years ago. Anyway, I'm definitely happy to have been part of his curatorial work for so long.

My interests and subject matter are diverse. They include nature, erotica, fashion, love and death... But maybe they have changed a bit since I started back in the eighties. However, words combined with images have always been there. We're talking about some sort of sampling. The texts are often existential statements found on the Internet or on Instagram and presented by a woman that can frequently be seen in my artwork. My former principal Else Marie Bukdahl at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen once said that the words/sentences in my drawings and paintings could/should also be seen as a form of ornamentation.

I'm not 'conceptual', but I don't think there's anything wrong with being conceptual and I love some conceptual art. It's more about the idea than it is about the art. Anyhow, I'm much more emotional and my art focus on love and hope. And how complicated it can be.

I seldom make any sketches but I draw a lot and many times this helps me in my narrative artwork. It's hard, though. The thing is, I don't know how to draw. But that's what keeps it fun and interesting, figuring out how to do it. ... Again, it's all about being tuned in to a way of thinking, and I'm not sure if one way is better than the other. If you want to make a drawing or a painting that's all about drawing and painting. I say go for it.

I started working with pictures I collect from newspapers and magazines. I'm still doing that now, more than ever really. But for the first time I'm also using my own photographs in my work. It's all happening on a larger scale now. I have to find ways of keeping it fresh. The way I work is really quite basic. I like to make pictures. I make these pictures, and then think, "Oh, that's kind of cool." It comes to me naturally, like something I have to do. The Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn (born 1957) has said that art is about energy, not about fine materials or bad materials. That makes a lot of sense to me, I suppose, since I work fast and with notable bursts of energy.

My figuration is perhaps not especially detail-driven, yet the people I draw are definitely of a type: good-looking, strung-out, nihilistic, fashionable, scrappy, skinny, rock 'n' roll. And maybe there's also an androgynous quality to my characters. I think I'm drawn to the fashionably hipsterish sort of thing. And while I know on the one hand that it's superficial and stupid, I really like it.

It's as if you put a pair of sunglasses or a hat on someone and it totally changes them.

Anyway, pop culture is unquestionably part of my world and there's no getting away from it. And who am I kidding? I love fashion.

My work has been compared stylistically to that of other artists: Marlene Dumas, Karen Kilimnik, Elizabeth Peyton. – Well, I'm just doing my own work, but if anyone wants to compare it to work by those guys, then I'm really happy about it! I mean really, they're all great.

Finally, do I have a message with my artwork?
– Not really, but I try to pose and raise a lot of questions concerning identity, sexuality, gender roles, love and cohabitation. If I have a message It should be: Try to be yourself, live to the full and try to contain the positive Spirits of Life. Or in other words, to quote the American writer Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961):

“Live the full life of the mind, exhilarated by new ideas, intoxicated by the Romance of the unusual”.

Copenhagen, June 2019

“Some people think or expect that you should make the same kinds of art forever because it creates a convenient narrative. I want my work to embody my inherent contradictions.”
Kiki Smith

Kiki Smith, 1954. West German-born American artist whose work has addressed the themes of sex, birth and regeneration. Her figurative work of the late 1980's and early 1990's confronted subjects such as AIDS and gender, while recent works have depicted the human condition in relationship to nature. Smith lives and works in New York City.

“I am just beginning to understand what it is to paint. A painter should have two lives, one in which to learn and one in which to practise his art.”
Pierre Bonnard

Pierre Bonnard, 1867–1947. French painter, illustrator and printmaker, known especially for the stylized decorative qualities of his paintings and bold use of colour. And he was a leading figure in the transition from impressionism to modernism.



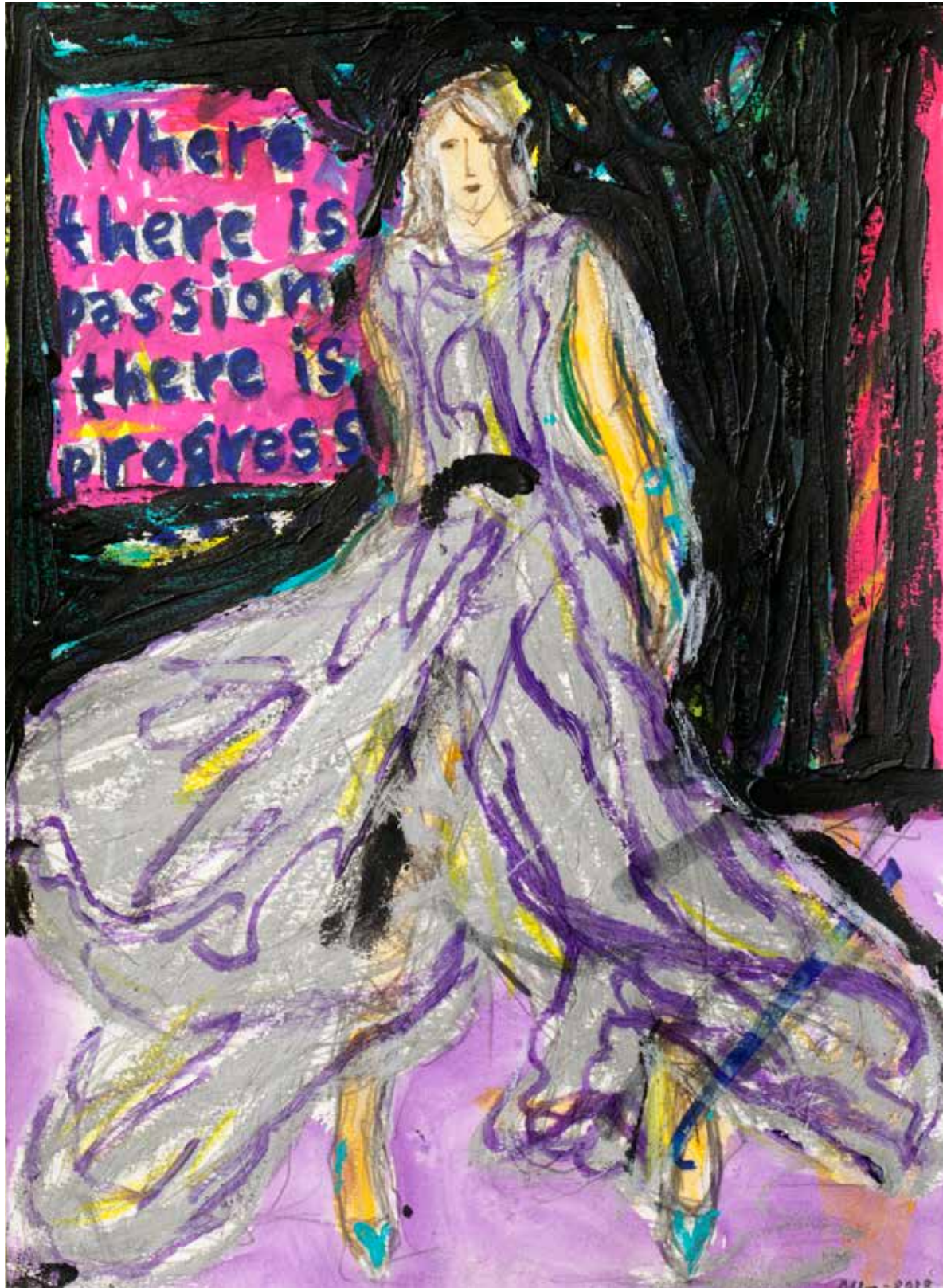
Chameleon, 2015 | Watercolour/crayon/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm | / Private collection /



The provocateur, 2015/16 | Acrylic/watercolour/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm



A rendezvous with Kusama and Vuitton, 2017 | Collage on paper | 42 x 30 cm



Passion, 2018 | Acrylic/oilbar/ink on paper | 42 x 30 cm

BIOGRAPHY

1960 Born in Stockholm, Sweden
Lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark.

1985- 1992 Studies at the Royal Danish Academy of
Fine Arts in Copenhagen.

Alba S. Enström has been exhibiting in Scandinavia
and abroad and is represented in official as well
as in private collections in Scandinavia, Bosnia &
Herzegovina, China, France, Italy, Russia, Spain and
Switzerland.

The artist is awarded by the Danish and Swedish
National Arts Foundations.

www.alba-art.com Instagram: [alba_enstrom](https://www.instagram.com/alba_enstrom)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1999 Ib Monrad Hansen
ALBA AND NATURE
ISBN 978-87-986888-0-4

2001 Max Liljefors
BONNARD GOES BONDAGE
ISBN 978-87-986888-1-2

2004 Martin Schibli
PAINTING AS AN ATTITUDE
ISBN 978-87-986888-2-0

2006 Erik Steffensen
POETRY OR REALITY
ISBN 978-87-991476-0-2

2009 Bo Nilsson
SOME NOTES ON ALBA S. ENSTRÖM
ISBN 978-87-991476-1-8

2010 Lars Ravn
INTRODUCTION BY A COLLEAGUE
Exhibition catalogue – Corner, Copenhagen

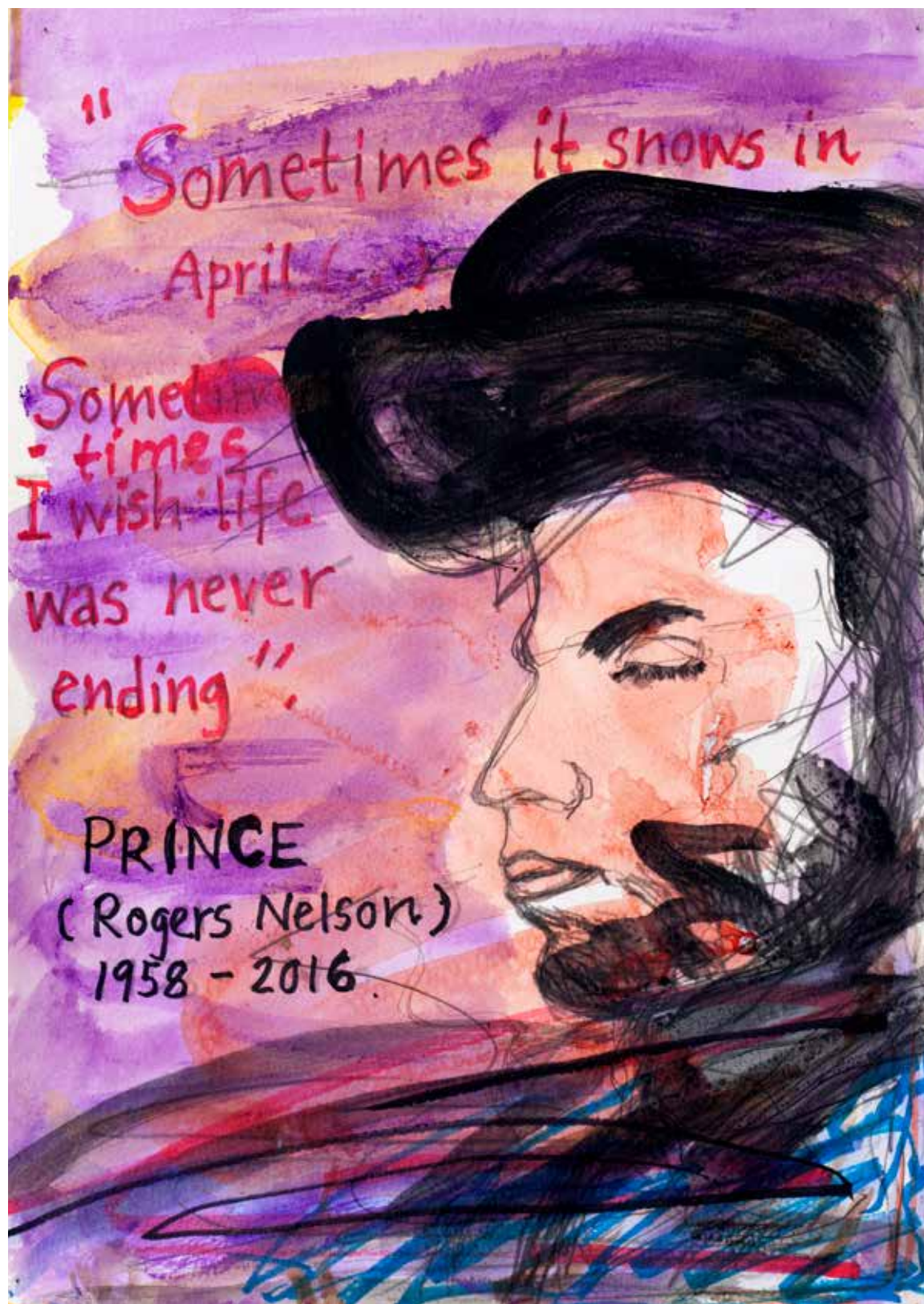
2011 Katarina Sjögren
THROUGH LOVE AND EMOTIONS
Interview – Crystal, Stockholm

2013 Katarina Sjögren
MOSTLY WOMEN

Martin Schibli
WHAT IS AN EXHIBITION?

Torben Grøndahl
THE HIDDEN SIDE OF THE EYE

Maria Kotlyachkova
Interview – Kalmar Konstmuseum, 28th November 2012
ISBN 978-87991476-2-5



Prince, 2017/18 | Acrylic/ink/pencil on paper | 42 x 30 cm



The loving couple, 2019 | Acrylic/pencil/ink on paper | 41 x 32 cm