

MARKUS ÅKESSON

ORGANIC FABRICATIONS

markusakesson.com // words by Sarah Claire Picton

Piercing the veil of time, myths are a vehicle to carve a passage through history. Told in song and ritual storytelling, enchanted poems and ancient proverbs, myths cultivate cohesion and give direction, offering cultures from Africa to Asia, Ancient Greece to modern-day, a framework upon which to find meaning. From the story of creation (told in the ubiquitous myth of The Great Flood), to making sense of natural phenomena (lighting in Zeus's signature lightning bolts; the rainbow from the Goddess Iris), our myths, our imagination, our freedom to express, provides us with new eyes, a new way of looking at truth, at life and ourselves. Traced back to the oldest written story *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (written c. 2150-1400 BCE) an epic poem in which the protagonist embarks on a quest to find meaning to life, myths ripple through time, shaping, uniting civilizations old and new. Mythology is, as scholar Joseph Campbell quotes "the underlying form of every civilisation and the underpinning of each individual's consciousness." You see, where there is life, there is history; and where there is history, there is myth.

Breathing life into the great stories are the many great storytellers of our time, the men and women who make room for myths to live on in motion pictures, in sound, in images, in words. The luminaries, the artists, the pioneers, the revolutionaries, these are the storytellers who, throughout the ages, have kept myths alive by igniting imagination and weaving through the fabric of society sacred narratives which transcend beyond the realm



of fact to a space somewhere in between. Among today's most prolific storytellers making room for myths is Swedish-based neo-figurative artist Markus Åkesson.

Markus's artistic journey is rooted in myth and magic. "In my childhood home there was a book called *Among Gnomes and Trolls*: a collection of Scandinavian folk tales and myths, illustrated in Jugendstil (or Art Nouveau) by the Swedish 19th century artist and illustrator John Bauer." A "real gem" the book inspired him greatly to start drawing as a child. Words continue to provide creative fuel, with books including *Art & Alchemy*, *The Art of Transformation* among the titles housed in his studio, a 19th century old glasswork factory in Pukeberg, Nybro; a small town surrounded by forests in southeast Sweden.

Represented by Galerie Da-End in Paris and VIDA Museum outside of Borgholm, Öland in Sweden, Markus captures audiences worldwide with work featuring in exhibitions and institutions in Rome, Paris, Berlin, Brussel, London, Vilnius, Stockholm and the US. Dominating the dialogue in his on-going series of figurative oil paintings, entitled *Now*



this page
Now You See Me, (Red Silk), 2018
Oil on canvas, 100 cm x 80 cm

opposite page, left
Now You See Me
(Blue & Gold Kimono), 2019
Oil on canvas, 180 cm x 140 cm

opposite page, right
Now You See Me, (Green Silk), 2018
Oil on canvas, 120 cm x 90 cm

You See Me, is the concept of beauty; an ancient ubiquitous myth explored in the mediums of art, cinema, literature – a myth, which Markus, immersed in nature, nurtures to life with strokes of intuition.

A backdrop to his childhood, the forest is like a family to Markus, who keeps its mystery, beauty and ancient lore alive. "Myths about beauty are often tales of paradox and contradiction, like Narcissus, who committed suicide after falling in love with his own mirror image, or the Scandinavian 'Hulder', the forest creature with a beautiful front and a hideous back, who lures men to lose their way into the forest." This otherworldly realm, abundant with beauty well-disguised, is a "hidden world that slowly manifests into his paintings. Working in a classical way with brushes and oil paints," he takes the viewer on a journey beyond fact, beyond fiction, to a place somewhere in-between. In this quest, his paintings act as "windows that allow the audience to glance into another world" - windows he leaves wide open for interpretation. The viewer, engaging with his artwork, transcends the everyday to experience a state of awe; it is in this transitional moment – in this in-between state – that "the artwork becomes something that is out of the artists control." In a democratic

decision ruling in favour of artistic freedom; he "never analyses, theorises and complicates the ideas or meaning of his work", he lets go of the paintings so that they can "live their own lives."

This ode to creative freedom captures the tone of Markus' artistic narrative; one which, like the greatest stories and oldest myths, is layered with intrigue. Adding to his paintings' mystery is his intuitive-driven creative process. The source of Markus' ideas and images are born not in sketches, nor in written ideas, but rather from dreams and meditational states of mind. The strongest of his reveries bursting, like creative rapids, into vivid reality. A reality he captures with wild imagination and in confident brushstrokes; a reality he shares with the world. Markus, "a spiritual person", considers "the artist as a shaman, who through his/her practice helps the viewer to see or enter another world." He "feels the need to understand and acknowledge different realities are as old as mankind itself, it is a part of us." Exploring themes of different realities, identity and ideas of beauty, Markus, in his *Now You See Me* series, engages the viewer in a dense, dramatic dialogue depicting figures fully enveloped in richly adorned, bright and lavish fabrics. In these paintings, "the protag-



left
Now You See Me, (Turquoise Silk), 2018
 Oil on canvas, 76 cm x 61 cm

right
Now You See Me, (Red Toile de Jouy), 2018
 Oil on canvas, 180 cm x 140 cm

opposite page, left
Now You See Me, (Opium), 2018
 Oil on canvas, 180 cm x 140 cm

opposite page, right
Now You See Me, (Blue Toile de Jouy), 2019
 Oil on canvas, 180 cm x 140 cm

"THE PROTAGONISTS, IN THEIR QUEST FOR BEAUTY, EVENTUALLY DISAPPEAR INTO THE BACKGROUND, CONSUMED BY THEIR OWN BEAUTY"

onists, in their quest for beauty, eventually disappear into the background, consumed by their own beauty." The masked models "become involuntarily hidden from the real world, and thus they come to represent a hidden reality."

He challenges what we know by arousing inner conflict. Greeted with a powerful palette – an introduction of imperial red, sunset gold, forest green, and sky blue – the viewer is bewitched by the overlaying of repetitive patterns. But initial consolations are quickly confronted with an unnerving *mise-en-scène*: dark, dense, and full of suspense. Set against a sinister backdrop, his protagonists – masked and motionless – are blind to the world, not able to breathe, nor speak. He shines a sophisticated understanding of light, shadow and composition on to each frame – illuminating each protagonist, and igniting imagination with every crease, every fold and every pattern.

Patterns have always fascinated the artist; partly because he "finds patterns mysterious and partly because of the technical challenge of painting them." Peering through the lens of nostalgia Markus recalls natural patterns from his youth – motifs echoing through the passage of time, to emerge in his artwork in the present-day. Growing up in the countryside, the young artist would lose himself in the lines of his bedroom's pine ceiling, tracing shapes as they fell



gently into his dreams. In *Now You See Me*, he paints a brightly coloured, textured tribute to the popular '70s flower patterns covering the walls and textile lamp shades from that era, a pattern Markus reminisces as beautiful. The flowers in the pattern in *Now You See Me (Opium)* are poppy flowers (from which opium is derived), and are "traditionally a symbol for the night, sleep, oblivion as well as beauty", while *Now You See Me (Blue Toile de Jouy)* is "a Toile de Jouy pattern, popular in England and France in 18th and 19th century". The idyllic vistas (comforting scenes of picnics and farmers in the countryside) make for an intriguing contrast when placed amid Markus' scenes of melancholia. His moody, surreal juxtapositions – staged and cinematic in colour – breathe in whimsy, while breathing out distress. Fabricating 'silky cover-ups' and 'cotton concealments',



his transcendent portraits distort and unsettle the viewer's reality.

The 'real world', for Markus, "is more of a mindset than a truism, and the same goes for the unreal, or the surreal world. We all perceive it differently." The paintings' repetition of pattern, arresting palette and organic motifs offer a visceral expression of nature as a true reflection of reality whatever face 'truth' wears, whichever way 'reality' is perceived, Mother Nature's presence prevails. Herein lies the beauty, folks. Because nature preserves the sacred notes to all the great myths: the splendour of natural phenomenon; love; courage; sacrifice; creation; and destruction. Nature carves a path to man's spiritual quest and Markus' work is the door through which the quest begins.

An ode to Mother Nature, to myth and to beauty, Markus paints an inclusive call-to-action for the world to stand together as ambassadors of Earth.

EXHIBITIONS:

GROUP - September 2019
 Galerie Da-End, Paris, France

GROUP - 18-20 October 2019
 Galeristes Art Fair, Carreau du Temple, Paris, France

SOLO - March 2020
 Galerie Da-End, Paris, France