ABSTRACT

LENA CRONQVIST AND THE PROBLEM OF NARRATIVE ART

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My PhD dissertation takes as its starting point a series of representations of girls by the Swedish artist Lena Cronqvist (b. 1938), carried out as paintings, drawings and sculptures between 1990-2000. The aim of my dissertation is to look at the complexities of images of girls in contemporary art and how these representations can subvert the objectification of women in visual culture. In this presentation I discuss the narrative aspects of Lena Cronqvist’s work. Her images of girls are figurative and narrative and may at first masquerade as ‘real’. By this I mean that the scenarios can, and have been, read as real accounts of actual events. I would like to suggest an alternative reading, namely to read Cronqvist’s narratives as fiction based on memories. Cronqvist’s figures are not cute, innocent, attractive or coherent with ruling ideals for girlish innocence, but that doesn’t make them any more ‘real’. At the same time as arguing that these images are fictional I relocate the narrative to take place between the painting and the viewer, instead of within the image. Thus, interpreting the images comes to mean addressing the viewer’s own bank of memories and experiences. I believe that this storage of memories exists on two levels: on an individual level and in our collective memory. The girl as an object of desire is deeply embedded in our cultural strata and informs both the viewing and the making of these images. One of my arguments is that Cronqvist’s representations break away from that inherent collective memory.