

Fragile as Punk

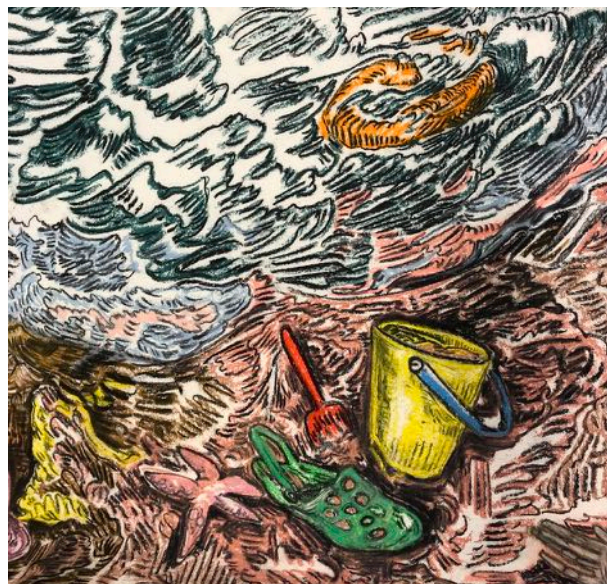
By Gunstein Bakke, 2018

Facing the works of Vanessa Baird I am as always struck by their dual aspect, how brittle and yet brazen they are. The figures we see are often helpless, disempowered and terrified, while being exposed to us, or flung at us, with an in-your-face attitude – like some kind of punk based on lace and crepe. And in these new works the sea, painted on such delicate paper, thickens and pours towards me, as does the smoke, as do the guts, in a continuous production of shit, death and time.

The surroundings we encounter in these motifs have grown out of a childhood and are still imbued with childhood, whether it can be related to picture books from colonial times or to more recent lenses through which the child's universe is represented. And the child we meet is a sort of helpless monster, one who keeps growing while her childhood – or the notions of childhood – still cling to her, making this child too big for herself, making her grotesque. Life with its processes of growth and sexuality have ambushed her, forced upon her an incomplete metamorphosis, and now she doesn't know which of her old strategies to use: to hide, to shut her eyes, to spill, to scream, to slay.

The bewilderment might also apply, at least through my gaze, to the bodies carried by the sea, drowning or drowned, fearing for their life or already having had it taken away, bodies which (because of the mounting) operate like an impotent, voiceless choir bobbing in the waves. And yet what we see are clearly images of images, motifs that float across and into each other, between art history and the TV screen and something that someone may have dreamt – 'dream' being analogous to 'shit' when it comes to what the body has to go through, not to mention what has to pass through it – and we have no way to escape these images that are the world, that are the shit we swim in and produce.

So it is an indecent, lacerated, penetrated and very real humanity we are confronted with here, the body's holes and orifices making it a vessel which floats because it leaks, because it is kneaded, stuffed, emptied. The overgrown child is still left to eat, bleed, shit, die, while the drowning punctuate the stream of images like a pain in the ass. Bodily functions and pre-programmed life stages are as overpowering as the waves of the sea and the winds that control them, and the bodies exposed to them seem just as helpless, as vulnerable.



Details from "An amazing thing happened to me: I suddenly forgot which came first, 7 or 8".