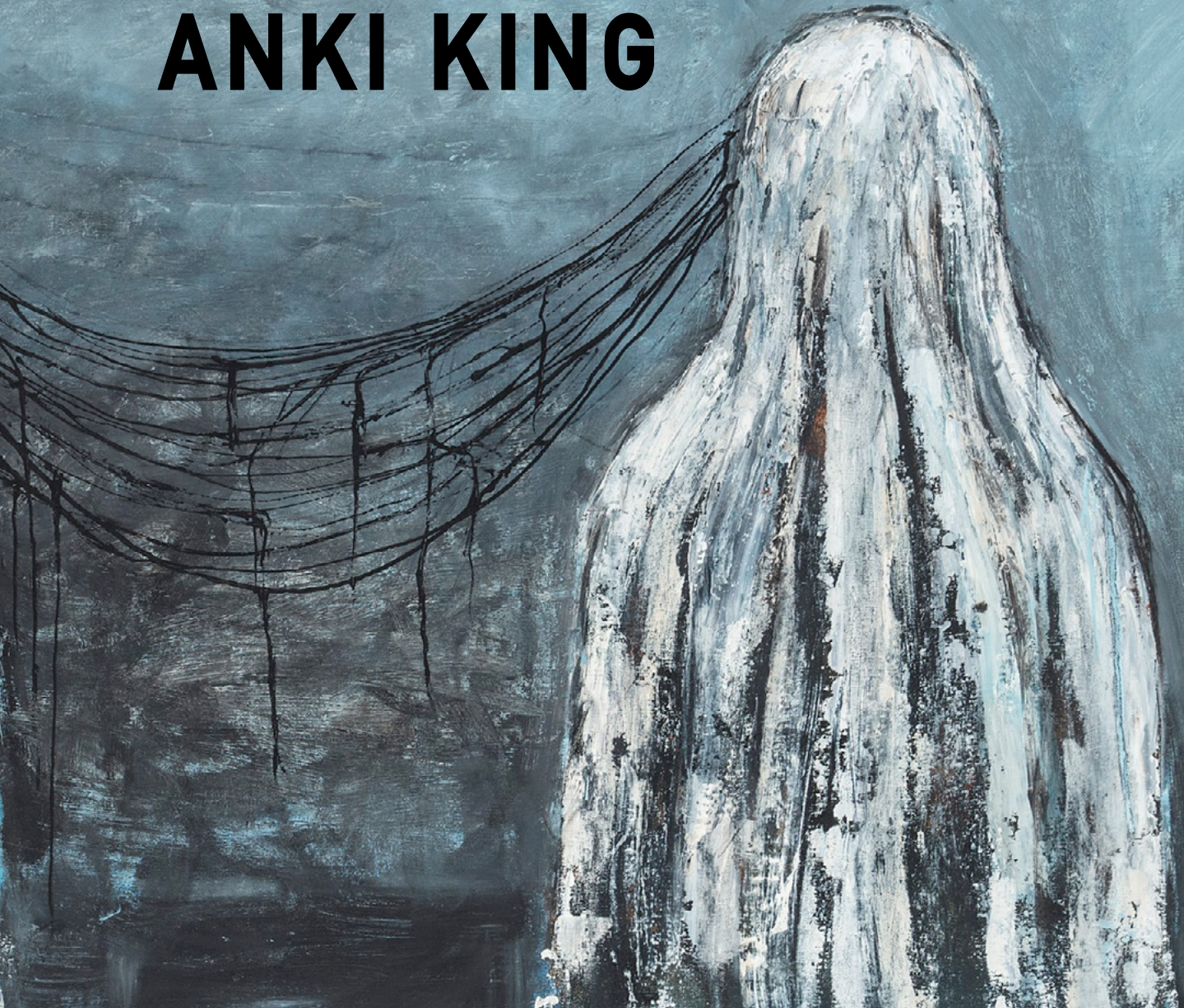


ANKI KING



Anki King

Waiting

June 22 - July 17, 2021

Essay by William Corwin

THE PAINTING CENTER

547 West 27th Street, Suite 500, New York, NY 10001
Tues-Sat, 11-6 pm, 212-343-1060, www.thepaintingcenter.org

Rebellious Spirits

“That is the sign of a rebellious spirit, to demand happiness from this earthly life”

Pastor Manders, Act 1, *Ghosts*

It's very easy to assume that the figures in Anki King's paintings are typical ghosts—as in supernatural beings—her palette is spectral and the figures are often forlorn or abject. But knowing King's background, that is, that she is from Norway, one is immediately reminded of her countryman Ibsen's *Ghosts*, and there is an overlap here. Ibsen was not happy that his title *Gengangere* was translated as *Ghosts* because (and I don't speak Norwegian) the English word failed to emphasize the implication of the Norwegian meaning, which is “one who returns.” Indeed the play is about secrets and unwanted people re-emerging, and destabilizing a respectable life. In King's paintings there is a lot more going on than mere haunting, there are shades of psychology, enigma, and wit. Her painting *Three Figures* (2019) is hardly frightening and the covered individuals seem to be simply waiting, we can't tell if they're facing towards or away from the viewer: are they watching us? Similarly, the initially shadowy and forbidding figure in *Under* (2019), is simply shrugging, making the time-honored gesture of perplexion or even frustration. The simplicity of King's composition and her focus on the figure with a negligible background force us to interact on a personal level. These paintings aren't about narrative, they're conversations.

In Ibsen's *Ghosts*, everyone has a secret, and in their actions they twist and writhe in order to hide the reality. The thick surfaces and heavily modeled brushstrokes of King's canvasses, reminiscent of Guston, also indicate a rich and unknown history for each work. A stratigraphy of meaning seems buried in these layers of oil paint. That is not to say that all is hidden. In the largest piece in the exhibition, *Feathered* (2018) a figure in silhouette, except for its legs and feet, stands ankle-deep in

a pond, or perhaps a flooded basement. Feathers have somehow adhered themselves to this being. Has this character been punished for some sin by being tarred-and-feathered, or has some strange absolution been conferred on a guilty conscience? Similarly, *Doorway* (2020) presents another dark figure with a small welcoming and brightly lit gateway emerging from its skirt. We may not be able to discern the circumstances of these beings, but they do speak despite their shrouds. Perhaps most significantly, in the little oil on board painting *Hand*, an open palm is thrust in our faces, front and center, exasperatedly pleading with the viewer to stop asking.

This is all not to say that these aren't supernatural either. King clearly wants to invoke those moments of twilight and dawn and the witching hours of the night when edges of things become imperceptible and details and features inscrutable. There is transcendence as well as mourning, in *Wind* (2021) a lone wraith is swept up in a gale and begins to evaporate, and in *Sleepwalker* (2021), a slim character in profile passes us by, intent on their dream journey. But King clearly respects the spectator's point of view and she refuses to lecture us. In *Shape* (2020) we may be seeing two actors in close and heated proximity, or a single figure crouching, the drama is in the contrast between the shaded figures and the luminescent background. There could be revelation or tragedy, it's our choice. It's the little passageway in *Doorway* that epitomizes King's title for the show *Waiting*. The figure stands motionless: King has scraped away at the black of its cloak, and it stands against a looming gray sky, the definition of stasis. But the door seems warm and comforting, at the very least an invitation to a solution to this frozen impasse. As is always the case, as fearful of secrets as we may be, once they are aired, we can move on.

- William Corwin, 2021



Three Figures, 2019, Oil on canvas, 32" x 66"



Hand, 2019, Oil on board, 14" x 11"



Feathered, 2018, Oil on canvas, 86" x 66"



Two, 2018, Oil on canvas, 9" x 12"



Shape, 2020, Oil on board, 12" x 9"



Reach, 2021, Oil on canvas, 11" x 14"



Under, 2019, Oil on canvas, 9" x 12"



Doorway, 2020, Oil on canvas, 25" x 14"



Spiked, 2017, Oil on canvas, 27" x 39"



Cover, 2019, Oil on canvas, 16" x 12"



Wind, 2021, Oil on canvas, 16" x 12"

Anki King

Anki King has exhibited frequently in the US and abroad. In 2010, she won the London International Creative Competition. In 2019, she was featured as one of nineteen Norwegian contemporary artists in *Kunstnerliv*, which was voted the best art book of the year in Norway. She is also featured in the documentary *Artists in NYC*, available on Amazon. For more information, visit www.ankiking.com.



Image to the right:

Sleepwalker, 2021, Oil on canvas, 18" x 14"

Design by Shazzi Thomas

Printed by Printing Center USA

Photographs by Cary Whittier, John Goodrich and Anki King

Special thanks to Will Corwin, Katharine Dufault and John Mitchell

