

# KUNSTMUSEUM THUN



## PAUL FÄGERSKIÖLD. BLUE MARBLE 29 MAY – 15 AUGUST 2021

### ENGLISH

#### INTRODUCTION

Paul Fägerskiöld (b. 1982 in Stockholm, where he lives and works) explores in his work the profound questions that preoccupy us today regarding humanity and our role in the universe. He brings in references to art history, physics, astronomy, history and science fiction, proposing different readings from these diverse perspectives. On view in the show are work groups that are interrelated. Together they form a network of symbols and narratives, also challenging visitors to create their own stories. The concept of “landscape” provides the basic framework for the exhibition. Fägerskiöld sees landscape as a place shaped in equal measure by social milieu and habits, by language and personal points of view – all factors that in turn affect and influence the way we behave in that landscape. The artist therefore explores what landscape painting can look like in the present day – in the Anthropocene age, when humankind and our technological advances have become the main factor influencing the earth’s processes, with humans even striving for domination of the natural world.

### NATURE VERSUS CULTURE (ROOM F)

The large-scale work *My Life in the Woods (after Bellini's St. Francis in the Desert)* (2018) consists of twelve canvases, each with a drawing. We see here a star, an eagle, the sprayed number 187, a handprint and some sort of flying object. Based on an understanding of the urban living space as being part of today's landscape, Fägerskiöld has collected signs and symbols that he repeatedly encounters on his daily commute between home and studio and which hence have a special meaning for him. When brought together, they spin a narrative that hints at their collector's own personal perception of landscape. Fägerskiöld alludes with the title of this work to the book *Walden; or, Life in Woods* by the American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) and its non-linear storyline. He simultaneously quotes the work *St. Francis in the Desert* (c. 1476–78) by the Venetian painter Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430/35–1516). What the two works have in common is their focus on a lone individual who leaves society behind in favour of seclusion in the wilderness, thus drawing a clear distinction between civilisation and nature.

### WHITE FLAGS (ROOM G)

As a symbol of home or fatherland, a landscape may also express a patriotic attitude, which is the theme of Fägerskiöld's series of *White Flags* (2016–ongoing). By showing only monochromatic flags, the artist breaks with their usual systems of signification. What happens when the flags are divorced from their purpose of visually conveying information over long distances? Rather than examining the depiction of landscape, these works explore how we ourselves create landscape as a habitat with the help of language and imagery.

### SPRAY PAINTINGS (ROOM E)

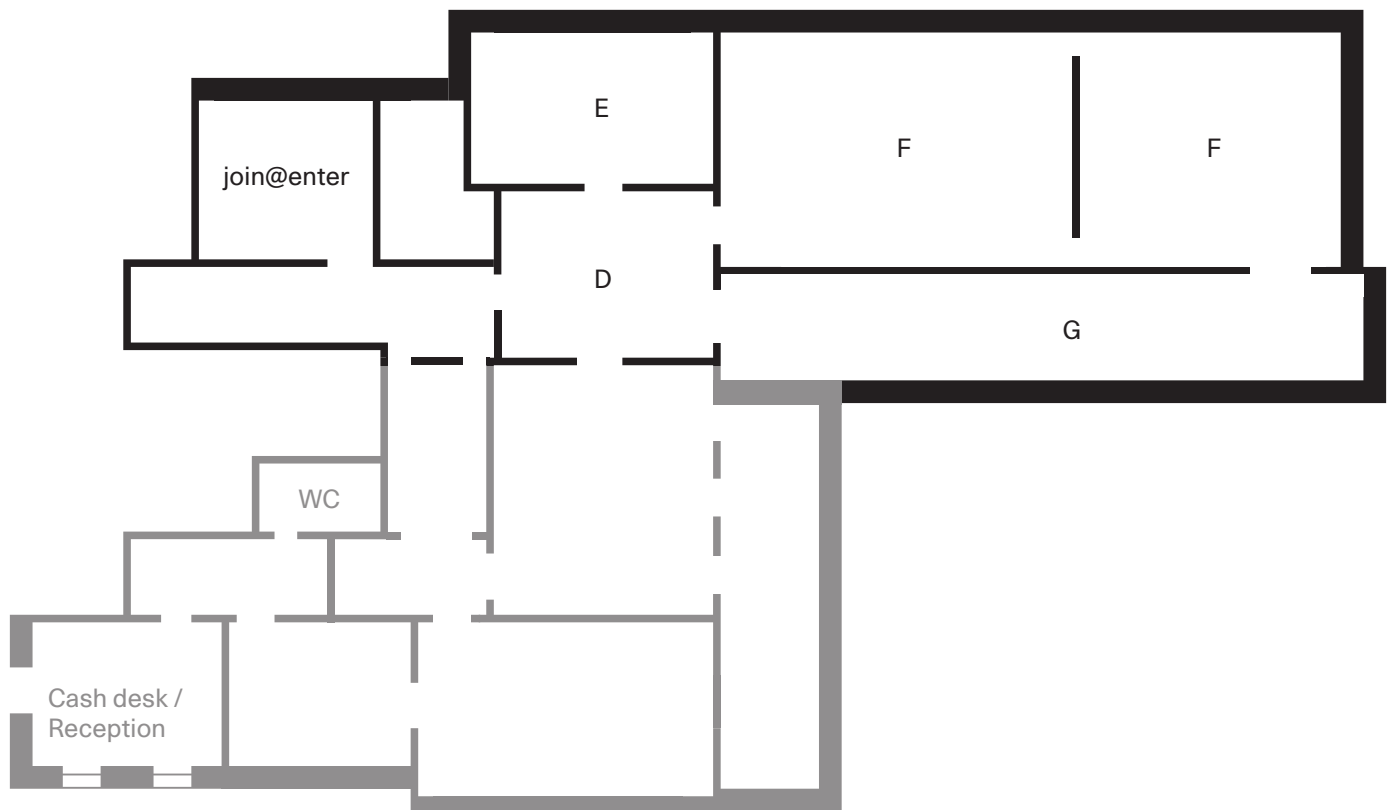
Looking shiny and grey from a distance, these pictures gain in vibrancy as we approach. They are composed of countless blue, red and green dots, which seem to shimmer and change as the viewer moves past them. In this group of works, the dots stand symbolically for the diversity of existence, which we can only grasp and get a more complete picture of by zooming out again. Whereas we construe time in the form of sequences of movement, an external perspective such as this one can even enable us to experience a moment of timelessness.

The title alludes in addition to the non-fiction book *Silent Spring* by US biologist and science journalist Rachel Louise Carson (1907–1964). Her influential text, which exposed how the use of pesticides had destroyed a great deal of flora and fauna, is considered the starting point of the worldwide environmental movement. Carson showed how human interference in nature had led to chain reactions with incalculable consequences. In an analogous manner, the spray technique Fägerskiöld uses in his paintings produces such a dense surface that the underlying layers are no longer discernible.

### SPIRIT IN THE SKY (ROOM F)

Attentive observers may recognise the symbol they see here. Set in the middle of a coloured surface is a graphic rendering of the Northrop B-2 *Spirit*, a strategic bomber and likely the most expensive fighter aircraft the world has ever seen. Its design is optimised to give it the appearance of a vague spirit in the air, making it extremely difficult to detect and hence to combat. *Spirit in the Sky* is also the title of a 1969 song by the US singer/songwriter

## OVERVIEW



Norman Greenbaum. While Greenbaum sings of his hope of going to heaven when he dies, the Northrop B-2 represents a deadly man-made flying machine. This disturbing field of associations is reinforced by the image's slanted horizon, which recalls the indicator of digital death in computer games.

#### STARRY SKY (ROOM F)

Fägerskiöld uses the software "Starry Night" to calculate past, future and fictitious views of the night sky. He chooses views that are relevant to his own life and interests, including the sky as seen from his hometown in the works *Stockholm. 1st January 100 000. North (2020)* and *Stockholm. 1st January 100 000. South (2020)*. These images present fictional vistas that none of us will live to see, nor can we begin to guess what the experience of looking up at the night sky will be like 97,979 years from now. Fägerskiöld was inspired here by the Stockholm cityscapes painted by the Swedish artist Eugène Fredrik Jansson (1862–1915). In the latter's most famous work, *Riddarfjärden i Stockholm (1898)*, there is a red line on the horizon that is said to grant the viewer a glimpse of eternity.

For the artist, the contemplation of starry skies also offers the most immediate way of entering into a dialogue with other artists or authors. A prime example is *Monastery of Saint-Paul de Mausole, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. Night between 17–18th June 1889. View east-southeast (2020)*, a paraphrase of one of Vincent van Gogh's (1853–1890) most important works. That work is titled – how could it be otherwise – *Starry Night*, and it shows the view from the window of the sanatorium where the Dutch painter stayed in 1889.

#### DIPTYCH (ROOM D)

Reminiscent of diptychs in their structure, the works on view here were inspired by the painting *Impression, Sunrise (1872)* by the French painter Claude Monet (1840–1926). That picture depicts a harbour where the orange sun is reflected in the water. Predominantly working in purple and blue, Monet dispensed with a clear-cut composition and spatial depth to concentrate instead on conveying an atmospheric impression. In his own work, Fägerskiöld takes up the dualism between sun and reflection on a flat ground. Reduced to graphic elements and hung side by side, they almost develop their own sign language.

#### THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD (ROOM F)

This monumental triptych connects all the work groups in the exhibition, relating to both landscape depiction and the use of language. The title can be deciphered as follows: THE = the specification of a certain something / GREATEST = seeing and evaluating something in relation to something else, or the basis of nationalist thinking / STORY = a fictional tale / EVER = a defined timeframe / TOLD = the act of storytelling. At the same time, it refers to the monumental US film *The Greatest Story Ever Told (1965)* directed by George Stevens, which tells the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

The dimensions of the work recall the traditional film format – like three big screens that can be read as opening credits, intermission and end, each presenting different perspectives. The painting on the left shows a view of the sky. The arrangement of the stars echoes the pattern on the American flag and thus relates to the White Flags opposite. The middle image alludes to the sun, around which everything revolves. The picture on the right then guides the gaze back to the earth, bringing into play the exhibition title *Blue Marble*, the name of a photograph

taken around 1972 that gave us humans our first remote look at our own planet, revealing both its beauty and vulnerability. This momentous shift in perspective enabled us to develop new ways of seeing the world, forcing us to question what we thought we knew.

#### BIOGRAPHY

Paul Fägerskiöld was born in 1982 in Stockholm, where he currently lives and works. He completed his studies at the Royal Art Academy in 2010 with a two-year exchange programme at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. His solo exhibitions include: Nordenhake Gallery, Stockholm and Mexico City (2020); Peter Blum Gallery, New York; Borås Konstmuseum, Borås (2019); Jönköping County Museum, Jönköping; and Prince Eugen's Waldermarsudde, Stockholm (2018). His work has also been shown in several group exhibitions in Europe and India. In 2018 he received the Åke Andrén Foundation's Art Grant, in 2015 the Swedish Art Grants Committee Working Grant, and in 2013 the Fredrik Roos Award.

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication (DE/EN) with essays by Helen Hirsch, Katrin Sperry and John Tremblay, published by the Kunstmuseum Thun and Verlag für moderne Kunst.

## IMPRESSUM

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