

The Perch Helps Charlotte Nicolin in her Battle



They are colorful. Depicted animals in water. The paintings have a depth, because within this naive form there is a profound thought. Charlotte Nicolin's fish are not just animals with gills and scales, but they also help us understand the urgency in doing something for our planet, in this case to save the Baltic Sea.

By Britta Röstlund

The workshop, and Charlotte's' living quarters are located in a small house in a beautiful courtyard in Paris' 11 th district. Far from the Baltic sea she paints her perch and cod. On the other side of the globe, her work is sold in a popular art gallery. Her three children are working and studying in various places around the world. For the Swedish artist, Charlotte Nicolin, the world does not seem to be composed of various parts, but is a single place that we need to nurture and pass on the best we can.

Worked with advertising in the USA

Charlotte left Sweden, already as a 24 year old. After having completed studies at Berg's advertising school in Stockholm, she moved to the U.S., and continued to work with advertising, because back then she thought that you couldn't support yourself as an artist. Now she knows that it is possible, and increasingly, the work in advertising had to leave room for the art. She later moved to Düsseldorf., Germany, after wich next stop was Paris, a city that had attracted her for a long time. Here she worked for a period of time with lithography.

Art galleries were complicated in France

Charlotte and her then partner got the idea to start an art gallery, but the cumbersome administration in France was the reason they left for Canada, to be exact, Montreal. It proved to be a successful move. The art gallery Nicolin & Gublin is a popular gallery and Charlotte is now a recognized artist in Canada where she has been both on television and in the press. Her oil paintings are reproduced on many gifts items, such as mugs, coasters, mouse pads etc. The products are sold in the art gallery, at museums shops worldwide and through the Internet. Charlotte explains that many people may not want or can't afford, to buy an oil painting, but they think it is fun to own an object bearing her art in their home.

Baltic sea project in Paris

After several successful years in Canada Charlotte moved back to Paris, but the gallery Nicolin & Gublin is still active in Montreal. Now she is working on a Baltic sea project, to inform and combat the environmental degradation of the sea. "If I can do something good for the world, I can die happy," says Charlotte who grew up on the Swedish east coast by the Baltic sea. Previously, she worked mostly with exotic fish. To become acquainted with our northern marine fauna was something new, and she discovered that the waters in the Baltic Sea contains more than perch and cod. There is amazing life down there.

Save the Baltic Sea. The words feel heavy, difficult... We are accustomed, to hear about the terrifying reports on the environmental degradation and climate debate, but how much of it do we really understand? Charlotte has approached the subject in a completely different way, a colorful, positive, light, humoristic and thus understandable way.

Positive motives in a darker color scale

Her paintings can be supplemented with easy to grasp information, to make us understand the state of our sea. The motives are seen from different angles. One painting portrays swimming ducks seen from below. She is aware of her positivism. She rarely watches TV where so much misery is shown, and she is convinced that we need to be more positive in order to have the strength to fight the problems. " Do you ever paint something more somber"? I wonder. Charlotte thinks. "Do you see the eels over there?" Two eels are peeking out from some rocks. The color scale is somewhat more restrained than the other paintings. "Is it gloomy?" She asks. No it's not, just subdued, like a cozy glance from down under. Charlotte is positive, even in a darker color scale.

An almost completed children's book

She shows me an idea, actually no longer only an idea, since it has already begun to take form - a children's book that is almost completed. She has had the idea for 20 years, and has been actively working on it for two years. It takes place under water, where more or less hidden dangers are threatening the fish from above. It is educational, and in two languages, English and French. The same day that I visited Charlotte the rumour that they would stop producing Kalle's Kaviar (a Swedish specialty of cod fish eggs in a tube), hit my three-year old son. The tube we have in the refrigerator may be the last. I explained to him that the cod would soon vanish from the sea, and I think that for the first time he came close to understanding that we need to take care of our héritage. The Memory comes to me as I browse through Charlotte's book. The environmental debate has to be at the right level. The children recognize the fish in the book which they themselves might have been fishing, or in any case eaten and they are warned of daily dangers all the time. If we are to stop the frightening environmental development, it needs to relate to something in our daily life. Statistics are not enough, these just fill the State Statistical bureau's already large reserve of data. It seems like Charlotte not only understand this, but is also trying to do something about it.

Youngest of five siblings

How did you become an artist? Are your parents artistic? Charlotte shakes her heads. There was an artist a long time ago in the family, but Charlotte's interest has emerged on its own. As a child she often sat alone in her room and painted, but she also has another theory of why she became interested in art. She is the youngest of five siblings, and believes that the further down the sibling scale you are, the more different you become from your parents. Nature has, however, always been present during her upbringing in Västerås. She remembers how she fished as a child, and the family rule was that those who retrieved fish would also clean it. "Maybe this is how I got interested in fish anatomy."

I feel sure that Charlotte's home, if not crawling with animals, will at least contain a few. But she shakes her head. She has had and still likes dogs. "But I like them too much to want one in Paris," she says, and I understand what she means. She is a true animal friend. Can you paint something without having a special message? "Yes, I can," she says and points to a flower with blazing colors behind her. We also talk about how well her paintings would do in waiting rooms. Some of Charlotte's life energy would be needed there.

Balance between everyday solitude and meetings

What is a normal working day like? In the morning Charlotte usually starts with responding to emails, painting, and she may also have some meetings throughout the day. The key is to find a balance between the solitary act of painting and contact with people. It can happen that she loses herself into a painting and forgets time and place. "On those days there will be no dinner served, but maybe this is the reason why I have such independent children" she says and laughs.

What does the actual painting process look like? A painting takes about 3 months to finish, but Charlotte always has several going on simultaneously. She begins by sketching, then painting, always in oil. It can happen that she makes large drawings like the one on the drawing board, a melancholic seal. Drawing takes less time. Figure drawing is something she loves to do, but she sees it as pure training. Most canvases are white, but Charlotte prefers to cover them with a dark tone, and then bring out the white areas like the old masters used to do. This gives a certain depth and more life to the painting. When it comes to studying fish the fishmonger sometimes comes in handy. Occasionally Charlotte will buy a fish, since it is

not obvious what a fish eye may look like from a certain angle.

Art is perceived differently by different nationalities

There is a difference in how diverse nationalities perceive her art. People from southern France and Italy may prefer a little more abstract art, and in earth tones. People from English speaking countries, like Britain and New Zealand, likes her bright colors, and when an Australian visits the art gallery in Montreal they will be sure to buy something. Are the animal motifs also perceived differently depending on the viewer's nationality? No, Charlotte believes it is more personal taste that comes into play here. "Some may not at all like my frogs, while others love them. "Everyone has a different taste ". We all live on the same planet, struggle with the same problems, and imagine if a frog or fish can help us in our battle!



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Magazine : www.sydfranska.com nr 30 2009