

# MARKUS ÅKESSON *NOW YOU SEE ME*



Markus Åkesson, "Now You See Me (Danse Macabre)", 2020 (detail)  
Oil on canvas, 145 x 100 cm

"How strange is the world, how strange are those days, unceasingly eluding us and yet, or constantly, striking us with their absolute necessity.

A human form stands out against a background of toile de Jouy. It stands out and refuses to be seen. We can barely catch a glimpse of it, but finally guess, rather than dream it. It is entirely covered with a cloth overflowing from its torso to wrap its face, and drooping sleeves hide hands and wrists. Not a single hair protrudes from this richly decorated shroud. There is something strange about these ghostly portraits. Covered with the very motif that lines the background, they melt into it and fade away, without disappearing altogether.

We are close to the classical portrait, in bust or mid-leg, face in profile or three-quarters, and haughty portrayal. One feels a strong attraction for Flemish painting and its virtuously sober portraits, on neutral backgrounds, measured colours, and exalted materials. And yet you can't see anything of their faces. A fabric with printed patterns covers them, which remind us of the famous indianneries of Jouy-en-Josas, of the scenes of Jean-Baptiste Huet. This veil covers

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them and hides their features from us, tirelessly, canvas after canvas, a succession of prevented encounters.

Markus Åkesson draws arcane and mystical journeys on the printed cloth. It is through its patterns – all rooted in the history of art and ideas – that his language is articulated and his symbolic research is deployed, in an in-between world bathed in disturbing strangeness, conducive to poetic escape.

There is the dance of death, directly inspired by the engravings of Holbein the Younger, a saraband where the dead and the living dance together in the heart of a period ravaged by the Black Death, vanity par excellence, a reaction to the anguish of death. There is the witch riding a leaping goat upside down, originating from a famous print by Albrecht Dürer, with a muscular body, breasts plumped up, hair in the wind, face howling; she symbolizes occult powers, ritual, and magic. There is the moth, a symbol that Markus has been painting for many years. As the dying sun reaches the horizon and floods the sky with orange light, breaking the thin membrane that separates the real world from the spiritual world, the winged animal comes out of its torpor.

Markus Åkesson is interested in esoteric spaces, meeting points, vanishing gaps between the hidden and the shown, dream and reality, life and death. It is a quest that unfolds before our eyes, a quest for meaning and a search for spiritualities. Then you can't help but think about those faces, that are always hidden from us. Faces that carry the greatest mysteries of mankind, and its most absolute thoughts. Wouldn't they be the object of this research? A painting by Magritte comes to mind, a magnificent kiss from two veiled lovers, an impersonal embrace, universal love. In all these works, hidden behind a succession of mythical motifs, lies human nature and all its secrets. But Markus, by drawing the contours of it, little by little, will end up painting its portrait. And then, through the veil will rise a voice: Now You See Me."

– Grégoire Prangé

**Grégoire Prangé** is an art critic and curator. Trained at Lycée Henri IV, Sorbonne University, School of the Louvre and ESSEC Business School, he co-founded the "Jeunes Critiques d'Art" collective in 2015, the "Interférences" association in 2018 and the "YACI" confederation in 2019. He worked on museum exhibitions (Zentrum Paul Klee, MUDAM, LaM), is a regular contributor to exhibition catalogues and artist monographs and is currently Curatorial Department Coordinator at the LaM-Lille Museum of Modern, Contemporary and Outsider Art.

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