

Light Lines

An exhibition of contemporary art by three Norwegian artists opens at Scandinavia House in October and runs through mid-January.

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notable Norwegian art historian, museum director and author Karin Hellandsjø, who has collaborated with the ASF on several occasions—notably the show “NORGE: Contemporary Landscapes from the Collection of Her Majesty Queen Sonja of Norway”—*Light Lines* will be accompanied by an array of programs including a symposium, gallery talks, lectures, children’s events and an audio tour.

The featured artists are Jan Groth, Inger Grytting and Thomas Pihl, all three with considerable familiarity with both the American and Norwegian art scene. Most well-known, perhaps, is Groth, who will be described at length in the following article by Hellandsjø.

Grytting, a native of northern Norway, residing in New York City since 1972, shares certain formal qualities with Groth—a reductive language that consists of varied lines, limited palette and gridded form. Her paintings serve as a “visual diary” as her emotions influence the tension in her hand, which then produces different qualities of strokes. The poetic and subtle variation in the lines is a defining trait of her work.

Pihl, Grytting’s younger contemporary, has lived in New York City since the 1990s and has been working for the better part of this century on his “Prearticulations Series”—paintings whose many layers are composed of semi-transparent acrylic paints poured on the canvas

Though seemingly monochromatic, these painting are made up of layer upon layer of diverse color; time is an essential aspect of his work.



PHOTO: KARIN HELLANDSJØ

Artists featured in the *Light Lines* exhibition are (from the left) Inger Grytting, Jan Groth and Thomas Pihl.

Shown in this article are two works each by Grytting and Pihl accompanied by their own comments.

In the *Light Lines* exhibition, each of the three artists will have a gallery devoted to their work with a focus on drawings by Groth and Grytting and paintings by Pihl, as well as a gobelin and sculptures by Groth.



Untitled No. 4, 2018.

“I work with color and natural light. The process to derive at a visually charged artistic result is to add layer upon layer of translucent paint. I disperse the fine pigment into a slab of acrylic medium, This not only to facilitate a vehicle for light to physically penetrate and infiltrate the surface which creates a complex blend of painterly and natural light. It also creates a mix of pigment and light so intimate, that it is difficult for the eye to differentiate. The layers of translucent paint are laid out with almost invisible contrasts to challenge and test the eye’s capacity to differentiate subtle and barely visible phenomena.

I hope to both clarify and obscure the eye’s ability to pin down where the experience clearly starts, and where it ends. I reduce the visual vocabularies to a seemingly monochromatic layout where the color and light bounce back to the eye. The grain



PHOTOS: JEANETTE MAY

Untitled No. 2, 2018.

of pigment is suspended in a slab of clear acrylic medium. This again opens up for natural light to penetrate the surface of the painting. The light occupies the translucent space between the surface and the canvas and surrounds the pigment.

This visual arrangement opens the surface of the painting to the onlooker’s own vision. My intention is to facilitate a display where eyesight pierces the surface and bleeds in through the suspended fog of pigment. The veiled manipulations and the sensuality of the surface may stand as metaphors for discovery and possible detection. I do not tell any stories. I want to ignite a flow of creative experiences between the artwork and the act of seeing.”

—Thomas Pihl



PHOTO: BILL ORCUTT

Untitled No. 19, 2017
Graphite pencil on Stonehenge paper
76 x 77.5 cm. (paper size).

“The main element in my drawings and paintings is the repetitive, horizontal line. I’m responding to a primal impulse to precise markmaking. I surround myself with a set of self-determined limits. The limits create a kind of order but I still have to make decisions based on intuition.

With an 8B Faber Castell pencil on paper I layer horizontal lines in dense columns, and build the drawing by repeating the gesture over and over again. Each time the pencil point breaks, I leave a small, white space. No lines are identical. I

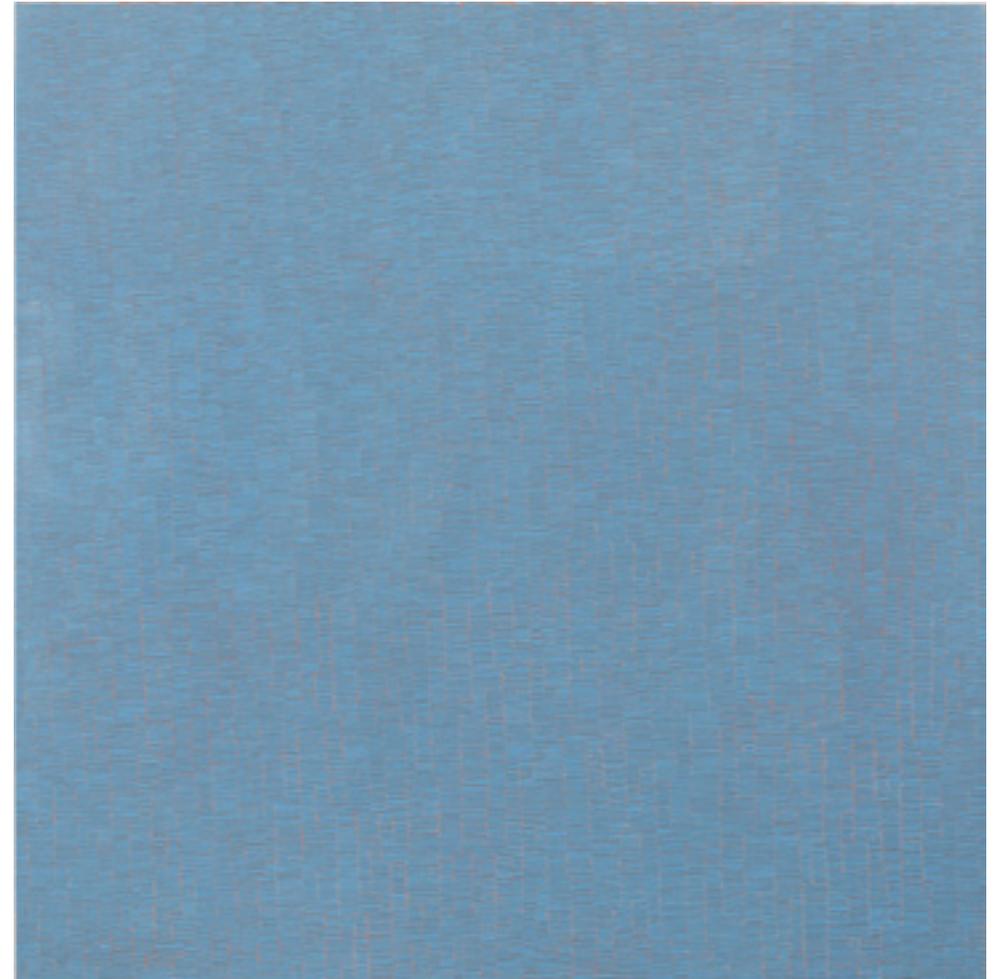


PHOTO: ELISABETH BERNSTEIN

Untitled No. 8, 2017
Oil on canvas
122 x 122 cm.

am interested in what I cannot control, the variable strength in my arm, impurities in the paper, the inability to exactly repeat the speed of the gesture. The process is a probing inwards, where emotions and insights are translated into graphic expressions.

My paintings are oil on canvas. I cover the white gesso surface with a thin, gestural underpainting of burnt sienna. When this is dry, I choose two close contrasting colors. I now build the parallel lines and their background with a #2 Filbert brush. In places, fragments of reddish underpainting show through.”

—Inger Johanne Grytting

Jan Groth

By Karin Hellandsjø

The eldest of the three Norwegian artists in ASF's Light Lines exhibition, his work is widely acclaimed both at home and abroad.



Maquette for Closed
2017, patinated bronze
118 x 18 x 6 cm.
Image courtesy of
Galleri Riis, Oslo.

PHOTOS: ADRIAN BUGGE



Maquette for Open
2017, patinated bronze
118 x 28 x 23.5 cm.
Image courtesy of
Galleri Riis, Oslo.

NORWAY'S JAN GROTH IS

one of its most acclaimed and respected artists. For more than a decade he has produced an unusually rich and consistent body of work and has exhibited in museums and galleries across the world. While living in New York during the 1970s, '80s and '90s, Groth played an active role in the art scene, exhibiting with galleries such as Betty Parsons and Marian Goodman, teaching at New York School of Visual Arts and his solo exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in 1986 did much to solidify his already strong international reputation. At the same time, though, he maintained a constant presence on the Nordic and Norwegian art scene through regular exhibitions and major commissions. His famous "line" has been articulated again and again, without ever losing its relevance, vitality and force.

The core of Jan Groth's artistic production consists of tapestry, drawing and sculpture—a range of media that is further distinguished by the fact that none serve as a means for the other. Rather, there is a continual dialogue in Groth's art, the diverse media forming the symbiotic whole of his production. In order to understand his art, one must view his works both independently and in context.

His tapestries are best known, and he has distinguished himself both at home and abroad mainly through his innovations within this medium. Toward the end of the '80s, he also began working with sculpture and has since then developed a substantial group of works, including monumental works and commissions.

Drawings are nonetheless his most important medium, that which links his entire body of work and without which his sculptures and tapestries would not have been realized. Groth's language—the sign's, the stroke's, the line's dialogue with the field—was first expressed in his drawings, and only then did the symbiosis between drawing, sculpture and tapestry develop.

As Groth explains it: "The crayon's movement and placement on paper are my signals and seismographic readings. They depict nothing in particular; rather they are organic references without a fixed concept. The rhythm is what is important, the play between the stroke's stiffness and displacements on the paper. In other words, it's about surface control. Drawing is channeling, process and experience. Some things I am able to put into words. The drawings say a good deal more."

When he arrived in New York in 1970 he discovered that there were approaches to art that resembled his own. He says, "I suddenly learned something about myself, and felt that what I worked with was a language, a completely legitimate language that was there to use."

Betty Parsons introduced Jan Groth to New York's art scene in the spring of 1972 with an exhibition of seven tapestries and 16 drawings. Solo exhibitions



Sign III, 1988
Tapestry in collaboration with Benedikte Groth
150 x 222 cm.
Image courtesy of Galleri Riis, Oslo.



Sign, 2004-06
Tapestry in collaboration with Benedikte Groth
220 x 445 cm.
Image courtesy of Galleri Riis, Oslo.

PHOTOS: VEGARD KLEVEN



Wall Drawing for Bergen Kunsthall I
2017, Crayon on wall, 328 x 707 cm.
Galleri Riis adaptation, Unique.
Image courtesy of Galleri Riis, Oslo.

PHOTO: ADRIAN BUGGE

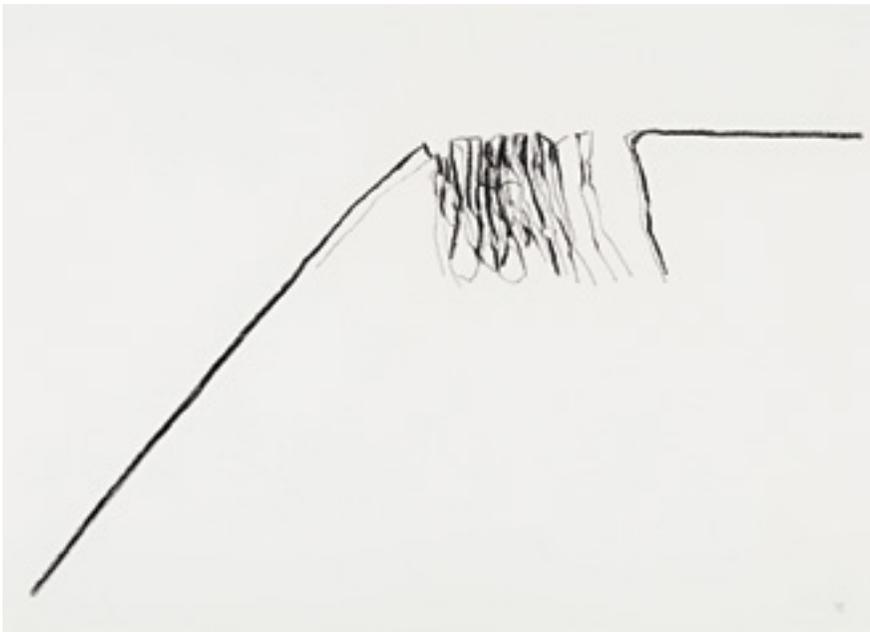
followed in 1973, 1976, 1978 and 1980, as well as showings in a number of her group exhibitions. Parsons's presentation of Groth's tapestries as art—on a par with drawing, painting and sculpture—at first raised some eyebrows. However, the acceptance of this genre as fine art by someone of Parsons's stature led to his tapestries being understood as art, not craft, first in the United States and then in Europe. The discussion of craft versus fine art was never really an issue. The technical perfectionism and beauty of the works seemed to naturally thwart any such objections. Groth's use of a monumental format was also important in this respect, as Americans had become so accustomed to this scale that it had almost become a quality trademark.

HIS ARRIVAL IN THE U.S. IN THE EARLY 1970S mainly meant for Jan Groth a confirmation of his own intentions and objectives. Here he met like-minded people as well as an openness that was inspiring and gave him self-confidence. However, it changed his life not only privately but also artistically, with doors that were opened and contacts that were established. Groth gained inspiration from contemporary artists such as Barnett Newman, Robert Rauschenberg, Brice Marden, Cy Twombly, Agnes Martin and many others. Here he found his own mode of expression corroborated. What Peter Schjeldahl recently wrote about Agnes Martin could also have been said about Jan Groth. "The effect of Martin's art is not an exercise in overarching style but a mode of moment-to-moment being." Here one can speak of a state-related art rather than an object-oriented art. This is also the aim of Groth's works, an art that has the appearance of an object but that is not a peephole; more a state into which the observer can be brought.

Groth's art is often erroneously linked to minimalism. Minimizing the expression and reducing the effects does not, however, of necessity mean that one can be called a minimalist, a term Groth opposed. In the U.S. he felt attracted by the openness and infinity of this art trend. Although he has always considered himself more as an expressionist with European roots, he felt a strong affinity with many of these artists, and was also influenced by them. His close contact with artistic life in New York during a period of 30 years left its mark. There was room there for all modes of expression, and the lines of communication were



Untitled, 1975
Crayon on paper, 62.5 x 88 cm.
Image courtesy of Galleri Riis, Oslo.



Untitled, 1971
Crayon on paper, 62.5 x 88 cm.
Image courtesy of Galleri Riis, Oslo.

| *The group show . . . will be his first exhibition here after an absence of almost 20 years.*

many. Even the abstract drawings of Philip Guston done in the 1950s have stroke formations that show close affinities with Groth's early drawings.

For Groth, just as important as the visual art was New York's experimental dance and music scene, particularly with the analytical postmodern dance performed by dancers such as Trisha Brown and Simone Forti, and with music by composers such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Groth quickly embraced the repetitive, serial aspect of the new music and movements in his own work, which since then have been present in his art.

WHILE LIVING IN NEW YORK, GROTH EXHIBITED IN numerous museums around the country and his works were acquired by public collections such as the Art Institute of Chicago, the Busch-Reisinger Museum in Cambridge, Mass., the Cincinnati Art Museum and Cleveland Museum in Ohio, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford Conn. and the Whitney Museum, Metropolitan Museum and The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Groth left New York and moved back to Norway in the early 2000s. Apart from participating in some group shows around the U.S. and exhibition with tapestries and drawings this year at the Minnesota Art Institute, he has not exhibited in New York since he left. The group show at Scandinavia House this fall will be his first exhibition here after an absence of almost 20 years.

Groth will be showing old and new works, the latest being a new wall drawing produced on site. After he stopped working in tapestry when his collaborator Benedikte Groth died, Groth started a series of monumental drawings in 2010—works based on small sketches/drawings that were meticulously enlarged and transferred directly onto the wall in collaboration with assistants. The work done for Scandinavia House will embrace the exhibition space in dialogue with one tapestry, two sculptures and a selection of drawings. The span between these works is large, but Groth's stroke still holds the line as described by the Norwegian poet Paal Helge Haugen: "His method involves a concentration of energy in an image, a condensing and clarifying of the important detail that is able to abruptly acquire meaning and become a world in itself."

PHOTOS: VEGARD KLEIVEN

Karin Hellandsjø spent almost two decades as curator at the Henie-Onstad Art Center outside Oslo before joining the National Museum of Contemporary Art as its chief curator and department head. She then returned to the Henie-Onstad Art Center in 2005, serving as its director until her retirement in 2008. She remains active as an art consultant, lecturer and writer. Her book on Jan Groth's oeuvre appeared in 2001 and another on that artist's drawings will be published this fall.