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Roaring and Wild

REVIEW: Ann Frössén is one of those rare artists who can portray the sea without getting into deep water, Sebastian Johans writes.

Green, white and brown. Thin, ink lines that delicately create a furious form. Angry, foaming waves that pound towards the beholder. Colliding waves that pull in different directions. With her painting *The Tempest* Ann Frössén embraces a positively Shakespearean measure, finding a ton of magic that corresponds to the world-famous author's play of the same name.

It is not surprising that water is a popular, if not exhausted motif, on the blue planet. As we know, it is not just the planet earth that is largely covered by this material, but water is the dominant feature even in places where there are relatively dry surfaces. People and cucumbers are obvious examples. Water is viewable, essential to life, and a major political issue. We are all part of the gigantic water cycle and, I imagine it to be one of a primary-school teacher's more enjoyable tasks to explain to the class that the water that rained on the Pharaohs is the same water that rains on us today. Equally extraordinary is the fact that the constant movement of the oceans refuses to lie and constantly drenches us with unpleasant truths that we would prefer not to think about. Such as the giant islands of plastic materials in the Pacific Ocean. Or the colonialism that exhausts fish stocks in the waters surrounding the continent of Africa, with the problem of piracy off Somalia as one of the obvious results. One might wonder whether the sea should not be a more important subject than it already is.

The problem of depicting the sea (as well as lakes, rivers, glasses of water, etc.) is, of course, a tempting subject with sensational, yet not particularly interesting, beauty. Strindberg noted that the sea is much more communicative if it is regarded as an essence and a violent force than as a sublimely delectable picture-postcard familiarity. The roaring wildness of Strindberg's marine paintings has given them classical status and these elements recur in Ann Frössén's portrayals of water; a reference that, apparently, she is mightily tired of. Perhaps that is the reason for her reaching for William Shakespeare who is one of a long line of creative people who took advantage of wild seas as a subject long before Strindberg.

At any rate, Ann Frössén can control the spirits of the air better than most and is pretty consistent in using the sea as her subject. The show at Galleri Strömbom includes a couple of smaller paintings as well as some larger ones, together with a video projection and a wall-mounted sculpture. All of the works are relatively small when compared with the monumental format that Ann Frössén often works with. But the feeling that the pictures convey is, on the other hand, gigantic. The sculpture stands out, consisting of a staircase (or wave formation) in which photographic elements showing waves have been integrated into each step. The work is not so remarkable but it says a good deal about the artist's approach. Here she is not portraying a specific watercourse but, rather, the enormous world-muscle that binds everything and everyone together. The larger paintings dive straight into wildly moving waters and can equally well be regarded as super-realistic or as abstract paintings. This, too, is a fascinating quality. Ann Frössén dares not to be ingratiating and she shows why certain motifs never wear out.

Sebastian Johans