

## Interior Alphabet

Lydia Ericsson Wörn, Tanja Nis-Hansen, Tao Siqi

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*Interior Alphabet* presents new works by three contemporary painters who share an interest in the figure and its capacity to encapsulate meaning. We develop language as a way to express our conditions, and an alphabet is like a set of tools or building blocks that can be used to communicate complex ideas. An interior space is often protected, often private, often domestic, often hidden from view. Inner life is emotional, intelligent and guarded by taboo.

In this exhibition, the figure is imagined as an alphabet of sorts – a fixed set of shapes that can be combined in various ways to communicate in a manner that is direct and recognisable, poetic, ambiguous or counter-intuitive, as desired. Here we find a series of images that negotiate with a world of bodies, objects and structures – using visual representation to offer a critical perspective on concrete realities but also to intimate towards something more ineffable.

Two paintings by Lydia Ericsson Wörn both depict a solitary figure in space. Ericsson Wörn often uses her own body in different positions as reference points for her paintings. Although limited in number and muted in appearance, garments are important in these images, as are poses – particularly as they relate to art historical compositions. In *Painter* (2024), Ericsson Wörn presents a torso and head in profile. A raised hand obscures the face. Beneath this covering gesture, only the slightly raised colour of a blushing cheek and the shadow of a thumb are visible – in place of any facial expression. The figure's blue chore coat protects against paint splattering, but also hints towards casual domestic labour, as well as the sort of blue smock-clad anonymous man we might find in a Cézanne painting.

Acting as a classical portrait and a conceptual formulation, Ericsson Wörn's paintings point towards our expectations from the body of the artist, as represented by her own image. Under what circumstances are depictions of the female body created, how do they circulate, and how does our understanding of them change if they are offered for sale or bought and owned?

*Painter II* (2024) shows a figure lying on a square area of pink ground, head resting on a blockish pillow. Their top half is shrouded in a monastic robe. Cut at the waist, the figure's bottom half is left exposed. One leg is raised in movement or suggestion. A black-grey sock pokes out from within (or behind) a dissolving mass of frenetic criss-crossing marks. This could be an alternative body that stands before the lying figure. The suggestion of dissolution or formation underlines the creation of the painting itself. If the subject is dissolving, the flesh is not melting but being transposed, as it blends with the jolting brushstrokes of the surrounding environment.

Tanja Nis-Hansen's paintings have often engaged with ideas of sickness and health, particularly as they relate to the perceived value of a body, correlated with its ability to complete labour in a capitalist economy. In the artist's 'An Apple a Day' series, blown-up exaggerated apples are presented as talismanic representations of wilful health and wellbeing. If an apple a day keeps the doctor away, it is the individual's basic responsibility to maintain their productivity through this simple routine.

Alphabet (Google's parent company) is the world's second largest technology company by revenue, after Apple. Are the parallels here purely coincidental? In *An Apple a Day (6/365)* (2024), Nis-Hansen presents an apple which appears somewhat like a realistic and ugly rendering of Apple's famous logo – a perfect bite taken out of the side, the remaining fruit left to yellow and wilt.

*An Apple a Day (5/365)* (2024) however presents an glossy unbitten apple surrounded by a softly swirling storm of silver flecks. In many respects this image represents the perfect or idealised form of an apple, in all its “A is for” glory. In the same way that an immaculate home is always suspicious, the alluring tactile surface of this painting seems to conceal and contain the sort of grotesque aesthetic that has been of consistent interest to Nis-Hansen’s practice in recent years. Like a worm who has burrowed through the core of the apple and is preparing to burst out from the front of the canvas, there is a sense of something rotten, lurking beneath the surface of this icon for biblical temptation, tech innovation, corporate capital and healthy living.

Primal urges, particularly those of a subconscious violent or sexual nature, and their restriction from society are of key interest to Tao Siqi. The artist often renders her paintings in saturated monochromatic palettes to introduce a sense of unreality to these otherwise detailed realistic paintings. In this way, Tao Siqi deliberately fosters a sense of tension in her works to allow viewers to explore this feeling and its implications from a position of relative safety. In *Cherish* (2024) a small furry chick appears cradled between a pair of over-sized fleshy hands. The bird is nurtured and trapped, protected from injury and in danger of being crushed to death at any moment. The bird looks out at us with an uncanny contemplative expression, human consciousness seemingly projected into its small animal brain.

The artist navigates a similar dynamic between cuteness and dis-ease in *Glance* (2024). Here a young girl appears to look out at the viewer from behind an ornate gilded set of bars, that could be a bed frame, gate or bannister. The image burns with a deep red and golden palette which feels quasi-religious, in a Catholic or Symbolist tradition. The cropping of the image and the theatricality of the girl’s haircut (think Aileen Quinn in *Annie*) point towards the artist’s interest in cinematic language.

Whilst the subject of this painting feels shy and retreating, its aesthetic points towards the bloody stylisation of films by Quentin Tarantino, and the dark realities and extreme characters depicted by auteurs like Stanley Kubrick and David Lynch – all of whom the artist cites as major inspirations. In this image, subjectivity is not concealed behind a cold outer shell. Instead it is the external world of surfaces, kept at a distance by a barricade, that pulses with feeling and terror. Hidden behind the gate lurks an individual with a vulnerable psychology. Perhaps the artist invites us to question the role that art plays in sublimating human emotion, particularly those feelings that threaten our social equilibrium, however they might manifest.

For each of these three artists, the human body is a communicative tool, one that allows for the production of expressions that can be shared and understood in a social context. At the same time, representations of the figure also provide a site for symbolic meaning that encourage us to reflect on issues relating to labour, economy, health, politics, psychology, existential threat and personal freedom.

**Lydia Ericsson Wärn** (b. 1994, Stockholm; SE) lives and works in Stockholm, Sweden. The artist is a graduate of the Hfbk Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main, where she studied under the supervision of Amy Sillman and Monika Baer.

**Tanja Nis-Hansen** (b. 1988, Faxe; DK) lives and works in Berlin, Germany. The artist graduated with an MFA from the Academy of Fine Arts, Hamburg under the supervision of professor Jutta Koether.

**Tao Siqi** (b. 1994, Wuhan, Hubei province; CN) lives and works in Shanghai, China. The artist graduated with a BA in painting from the Hubei Institute of Fine Art.