

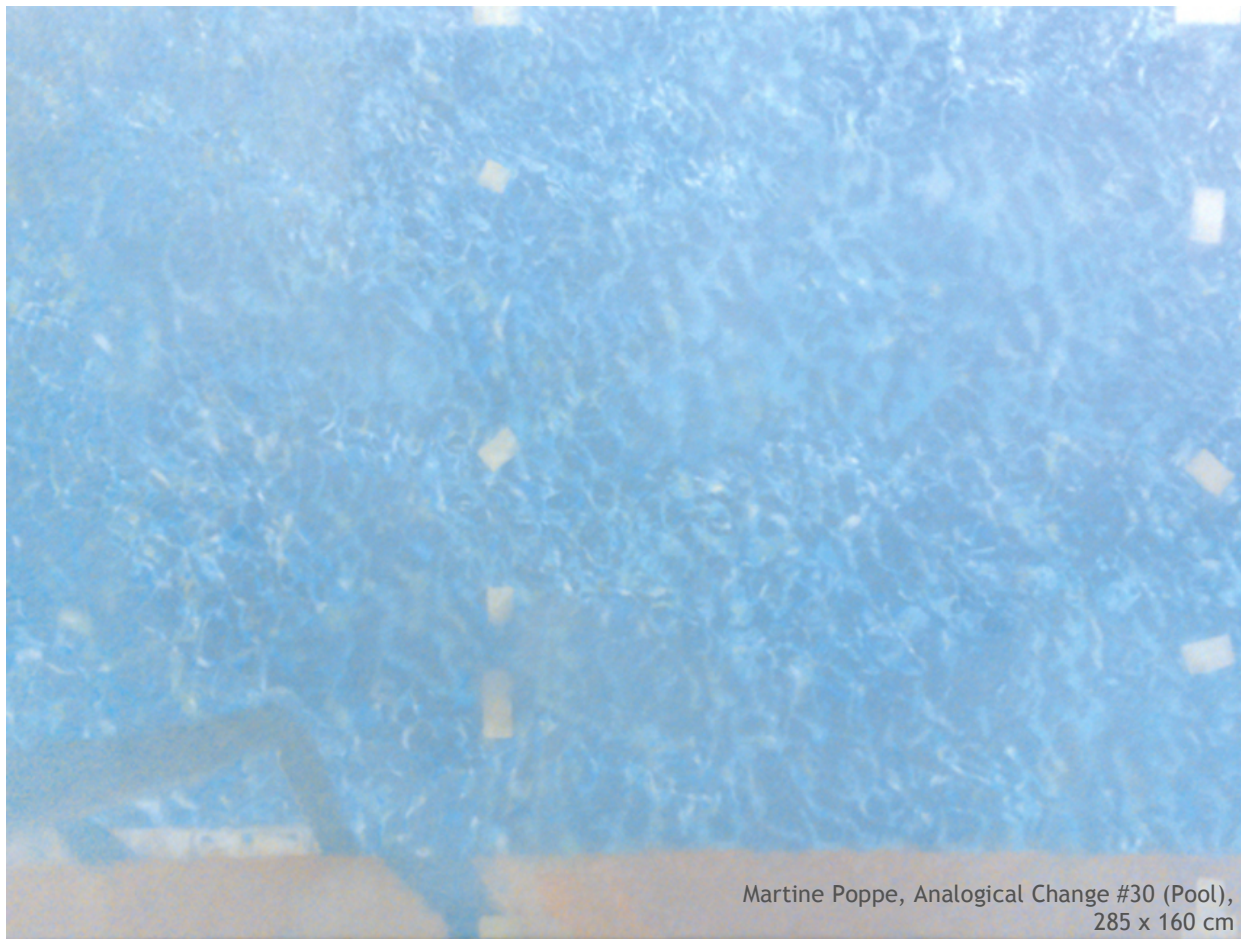
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Martine Poppe. Anatidaephobia

17 Oct–16 Nov 2014 at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London



Martine Poppe, Analogical Change #30 (Pool),
285 x 160 cm

Somewhere, somehow, a duck is watching you. No, really. Can you feel those beady eyes boring into the back of your skull? Turn around – there's nothing there. But you know that duck is out there, waiting, biding its time. What is there to be afraid of? This is *Anatidaephobia* (17 October – 16 November), an immersive exhibition at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery by London-based Norwegian artist Martine Poppe. In a nod to Gary Larsson's iconic *The Far Side*, the titular duck – and its gaze – is omnipresent through its very elusiveness.

What the viewer enters is, in essence, a fictional beach – an alternative reality in itself, its own far side. Taking on an installation-like quality, shimmery, refracted surfaces surround you; you are buoyed in a sea of crystal clear chlorinated water. The surfaces of these glamorous resort pools are rendered at times in delicate glittering waves; at others, like crumpled tissue paper, in Poppe's

signature soft, opalescent facture. The water, however, is just the horizon, not the main player – the real story is in a series of staged images of birds and robots in tropical environments. Together, they create a surreal narrative, a bizarre aviary.

The paintings in *Anatidaephobia* are continuations of Poppe's ongoing, explorative *Analogical Change* series, which examines the relationship – and subsequent distance – between an original subject and the finished work. Through meticulous layering of brushstrokes, she both reveals and conceals a Gerhard Richter-like process in which the original image becomes ever more obscured through repetition. This 'orthographic satiation' nevertheless preserves the meaning, despite disconnecting the finished product from its original source. "The image degrades and moves towards something less recognisable, yet it remains a series of representational paintings of the same photograph," Poppe has said. "It quite firmly emphasises the formal considerations in my work, the story of the photograph as subject and object, rather than its content." This is why, in *Anatidaephobia*, the water creates an immersive pool. It is not the main storyline – that is for the birds. "I think an important part of my aesthetic is that the paintings allow for a sort of breathing," says Poppe. "They never shout through the use of bright colours of hectic compositions."

Poppe works from an extensive image library that she has gathered over the years, picking and choosing carefully, as a curator might put together works, to create a stable whole in which each image speaks to the others. "When I choose a photo for a painting, it's always because it has something that balances the series as a whole," says Poppe. "Perhaps to balance something visually, or I might remember a picture that somehow breaks up a literary narrative between the other paintings in the series." Within *Anatidaephobia*, there are two visual 'breaks' – treasures for the viewer to find; in one case, they are quite literally golden nuggets waiting to be discovered. Folding source photographs into paper boats, the *Golden Nuggets* refer to a flavour lump of the same name (which, incidentally, resembles a golden egg) from the iconic *Mrs Grass Noodle Soup*. It is also nigh impossible not to draw parallels with the story of the goose that laid the golden egg, a study on the intangibility of miraculous creation and the impossibility to pin it down. It is also a nod to Linda Nochlin's essay *Why Are There No Great Women Artists?* "I'm not arguing this from the feminist point of view, but towards the idea of the golden nugget itself," explains Poppe. Nochlin argues that the myth of the artist genius (in this case, the golden nugget) creates a belief that the genius with which an artist is born will inevitably emerge. "This dissuades people (women) who don't consider themselves to be that kind of genius to become artists," says Poppe. "In this respect I have a quarrel with the golden nugget, and therefore thought it appropriate to name the source photographs after it. Rather than pretending that my paintings are some sort of superlative *tabula rasa*, I am saying that they are derived from copying photographs, or in other words, that there is no specific juncture where some kind of creativity drawn from nothing appears."

The second discovery is the elusive duck itself, which inspires such phobia in its gaze. Poppe's paintings are remarkable for the dual existence of the image itself and the complex painterly layers of which it is comprised, both which take on a sculptural quality. Viewed from the front, one is presented with the finished product, but from the side, a landscape of highly patterned brush strokes comes to light, the image dissolving into these marks. Viewed finally from behind, one discovers a completely different image, due to Poppe's use of transparent fabric as a support. "In a sense, the wall is a block and a problem for the viewing," muses the artist, "but I enjoy that because it is the wall that has put painting as a medium on its pedestal in the first place." Her works, then, are best viewed while moving in a semi-circle around them, as one would with a sculpture, allowing image and medium to flicker into one's planes of view. Here, however, a new surprise greets the viewer in the form of transparent golden ducks, stencilled directly onto the polyester. Invisible when looked at straight on, they can only be seen from a certain angle, the mark of their presence a difference in texture on the surface of the work itself. It is an Easter egg hunt of epic proportions – or rather, a duck hunt.

Living and working in London, Martine Poppe (1988, Oslo, Norway), received her BA Hons in Fine Art from the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London in 2011, going on to receive her MFA in Fine Art from Slade two years later. She has exhibited extensively throughout her native Norway as well as London, with recent exhibitions including Screen Space, Slate Projects, The Pickle Factory, as part of the Art Licks Weekend Festival and participation in New Order II at the Saatchi Gallery and Arcana at Kristin Hjellegjerde (all London 2014) as well as the Threadneedle Prize 2013 at the Mall Galleries; in 2013. Her work can be found in the Saatchi Collection, UCL Art Collection and University of Oxford and she has been the recipient of numerous scholarships and awards, recently shortlisted for the Contemporary Visions IV, Beers Lambert (2013) and winning First Prize in the UCL Portrait Competition.

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Opening Hours

Tuesday - Saturday from 11am to 6pm

Related Images

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Martine Poppe, Analogical Change #34
Martine Poppe, Analogical Change #32
Martine Poppe, Analogical Change (Venetian Blind)
Martine Poppe, Analogical Change #26 (White Whale)
Martine Poppe, Analogical Change #29

October 06, 2014

