

As if you had a choice in the matter- Audun Alvestad

FAD fadmagazine.com/2023/03/07/as-if-you-had-a-choice-in-the-matter-audun-alvestad

By Mark Westall

7 March 2023

Two men in white briefs stand on opposite sides of a paddling pool amid a verdant garden filled with dark green, leafy plants and slender palm trees. All around them are objects associated with leisure activities – a surfboard, basketball, bicycle, a deck chair. But the mood is subdued, the figures' expressions vague and detached. This tension, between lush landscapes and vacant figures, motion and stillness, is characteristic of Audun Alvestad's latest series of paintings which continue his explorations into the concept of leisure. "As if you had a choice in the matter", the artist's fifth solo exhibition at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery marks a shift in focus away from crowded waterpark and rollercoasters to quiet domestic settings – private gardens and backyards – that are both more secluded and subdued. Within these paradisaal settings, Alvestad considers the ways in which we attempt to fit in while also finding a sense of comfort and stability in an otherwise turbulent world.



*Audun Alvestad, I smile when I'm happy, I smile when I'm sad, 2023 Acrylic on Canvas 150 x 120 cm
59 x 47 1/4 in Courtesy the artist & gallery*

The exhibition borrows its title from a quote by the late painter Philip Guston in which he talks about style and the artistic process. For Alvestad, as it was for Guston, painting is an intuitive act – a way of simultaneously escaping reality and connecting with it, just as his characters, in creating their own private dream destinations, seek seclusion from and a place within society. Though the settings of the paintings change – from tropical gardens to swimming pools with slides and colourful inflatables –, there is an uncanny similarity

between each scene that highlights their unoriginality. The colour palette is constrained to the same muted tones, the characters are barely distinguishable and even nature has been cultivated to behave in a certain way. But this is the point: they are an idea of a place, a collective memory that feels familiar and safe, but also vague and unreachable.



*Audun Alvestad, Not as bad as I thought it would be, but its still pretty bad, 2023 Acrylic on canvas
150 x 120 cm 59 x 47 1/4 in Courtesy the artist & gallery*



*Audun Alvestad, Most of the times Im honest, 2023 Acrylic on canvas 150 x 120 cm 59 x 47 1/4 in
Courtesy the artist & gallery*

In many ways, what Alvestad's paintings capture is a kind of cognitive dissonance –

| a conflict between what we think we desire and the reality of that experience.

This is perhaps most clearly expressed in a large-scale diptych painting, depicting a brutalist staircase that juts out into the skyline over the ocean. There is a queue of people in white bathing suits waiting to jump, but instead of looking excited at the prospect, the

two figures in the foreground of the painting appear melancholy, their eyes downcast. This tragic-comic scene is relatable on the level that we have all experienced the anxiety of peer pressure, but it also reflects more widely on the problematic nature of aspirational culture. Destinations like these are designed for fun, but in our desperation to fit in with the crowd, to capture the same image that we have seen on our social media feeds, we forget to actually experience the place or the activity.



Audun Alvestad, Once I had a passion for beginnings, 2023 Acrylic on canvas 150 x 120 cm 59 x 47 1/4 in Courtesy the artist & gallery



Audun Alvestad I understand now that it was not to be understood, 2023 Acrylic on Canvas 150 x 120 cm 59 x 47 1/4 in Coutesy the artist & gallery

However, the paintings are less preoccupied with critiquing the desire to belong and more with the appeal of this kind of imagery and how that might reflect a wider lack in society or a sense of longing. Indeed, there is a tenderness to Alvestad's scenes – in the awkwardness of his characters as they fail to express themselves and connect with one another. In one painting, a man gazes shyly out at the viewer from behind a pink inflatable flamingo while in another he's floating in a swimming pool atop a white

unicorn, his legs kicked up in the air and his head turned towards the social gathering that he's not quite a part of.

In this way, the paintings become less about aspiration or exclusivity and more about our need to connect, to feel part of something. These luscious pockets of paradise may all look the same, but in a world filled with uncertainty, they come to represent a vital place of stability and rest.



Audun Alvestad The night is young, but I am old, 2023 Acrylic on canvas 150 x 120 cm 59 x 47 1/4 in
in Courtesy the artist & gallery

Audun Alvestad, “As If You Had A Choice In The Matter”, 10th March – 15th April 2023

Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery (London Bridge) Art Opening: Thursday 9th March 2023, 6:30 – 9:00pm

About the artist

Audun Alvestad (b.1980, Aalesund) is a Norwegian painter who received his MFA from the Kunsthogskolen in Bergen in 2016, after studying at the Det kongelige Danske Kunstakademi, Copenhagen (2015) and receiving his BFA from the Kunsthogskolen I Bergen, Avd Kunstakademiet in 2009. Alvestad’s paintings typically centre around “average Joe” types engaged in everyday tasks such as mowing the lawn, ironing shirts, or bathing. He has referenced his interest in exploring society’s changing gender roles and social structures as the reason for focusing on this subject. Additionally, he relies on generic types because they provide more space to play with the formal aspects of the painting.

Solo exhibitions include (Upcoming) As If You Had a Choice in the Matter, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London, UK (2023); Priority Lane, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Berlin (2022); Tan Lines, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London (2021); Here comes a regular, QB Gallery, Oslo, Norway (2021); Inadequate, Just Inadequate, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Berlin (2020); Høyte Hårveste, QB Gallery, Oslo, Norway (2019); It’s my Party and I’ll Cry If I Want to, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London (2019); Alnes fyr, Norway, July (2018); Gallery BOA, Oslo, Norway (2018); Varme Hender, Kalde Fotter, Trondelag Senter for Samtidskunst, Trondheim, Norway (2017) and Klamme Hender, Varme Fotter, Gallery Christinegaard, Bergen, Norway (2017); Lubinas & Dorados, Gallery Bokboden, Bergen, Norway (2016); The Holy guacamole and the girl twith the pear necklace, Gallery LNM, Oslo, Norway (2015); Holy guacamole, Gallery Fisk, Bergen, Norway (2015); Duene faller som fluer, Gallery Blunk, Trondheim, Norway (2014).

Group exhibitions include The Bunker Artspace 2022 Installation Exhibition, The Bunker Artspace, West Palm Beach, USA (2022); Facing the Sun, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Schloss Görne, Germany (2021); Enter Art Fair, Copenhagen, Denmark (2020); The Easter Group Show, Galleri Thomassen, Göteborg, Sweden (2019) and SPF 32, William Ulmer Brewery, Brooklyn (2019); as well as Specially Normal, with Christina Banban, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London (2018); Group show at QB gallery, Oslo (2018); We are the ones..., Carlsberg gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark (2017), The Summer Island Show, Gallery Kant, Denmark (2017) and Hostutstillingen, Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo, Norway (2017). He was recently awarded a three-year working grant for young artists by the Arts Council of Norway (2017) and Statens utstillingsstipend, Arts Council Norway (2016), Prosjektstøtte, Arts Council Norway (2016).

Highlights and collections. In 2017 Audun Alvestad received a 3-year working grant for young artist from the Arts Council Norway, Prosjektstøtte, Norwegian association of Artists. In addition, in 2016 Audun Alvestad was granted Statens utstillingsstipend, from

the Arts Council Norway, Prosjektstøtte. Alvestad's work can be found in many public and private collections amongst them the Bunker Artspace; the Preuss Collection, the Azman Museum and the Drake Collection.