

YLVA SNÖFRID

Nostalgia—Acts of Vanitas

Nostalgia—Acts of Vanitas by Ylva Snöfrid began on a street of SoHo, with the simple press of an unmarked apartment buzzer. After entering and embarking on a six-floor climb, the front door opened to a traditional Downtown, sky-lit loft temporarily occupied by the Swedish artist. An attendant was reading *The Odyssey*, the eighth-century BCE tale of Greek mythological hero Odysseus's decade-long expedition home after the Trojan War. It was required reading for each guardian shift of Snöfrid's installation during visiting hours: The epic poem offered something of a gateway to the artist's larger body of work. *Nostalgia* was a culmination of Snöfrid's own journey to dissolve the boundaries between her art and life, initiated in 2009, when she moved parts of her household and its daily activities into Brändström Stockholm gallery for her exhibition "Snöfrid at Her Mirrors, an Odyssey." For Performa 19, the artist voyaged from her home in Greece to create this live/work space in New York City for the course of the three-week biennial.

The room was sparsely furnished with wall radiators, a stovetop, mirrors, a few tables, and an unmade twin-size bed on a tilted platform. Candlesticks, palette knives, lobster tails, and lamb shank bones were laid out on a skinny-legged white table. Nearby still lifes, made in blood reds, fleshy pinks, bile greens, and chalky whites, doubled the presence of these objects. Many of these images were laden with esoteric diagrams and symbols, recalling the spiritual works of Swedish mystic Hilma af Klint (1862–1944). What was once an empty, skeletal space—a blank canvas—had evolved over time with layers of habitual mark-making, both painterly and domestic. Walking toward the middle of the dark hardwood floor, you encountered the artist dressed all in black, sitting on her knees, her long icy-blond hair grazing her heels while painting a canvas that was propped up against a chair. Her back was turned to visitors as she glanced upward into a handheld mirror and quickly returned brush to canvas. She was painting an enlarged and menacing image of the back of her throat in washed-out gray tones of gouache.

For the most part, Snöfrid proceeded with the painting, undisturbed by onlookers and continued to go about her day, alternating mundane acts of cleaning, cooking, sleeping, or eating with making artworks—all equal "acts of vanitas" for the artist, a reference to the seventeenth-century Dutch artform that symbolizes the transience of life. Depending on the time of your visit, you might get the chance to partake in a ritual directed by Snöfrid, at which point the artist would usher you to come closer into her personal orbit and take a seat

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with Uchenna Itam

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at a nearby table. There she would hand you a coupe glass filled with a concoction of champagne and her own "elixir" to perform what she called a "Transmutation." These séances revolved around incantations, summoning past times and places of her own life to imbue her artworks. Or she could invite you to dine with her and literally eat off of the surface of one of her paintings, subjecting the vulnerable picture to the assault of human voracity.

These intimate encounters transcended into spiritual manifestations. Guided by the otherworldly artist, we were not only reminded that life isn't just about the destination, but rather an epic Odyssey of living, and that art reveals itself in the transient exchange of making. BRITTANY RICHMOND

