Malmö Art Academy

2022–2023

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ISBN
978-91-985592-8-6

Publisher
Malmö Art Academy
Box 4035
SE-203 11 Malmö
www.khm.lu.se

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Malmö Art Academy

2022–2023

The academic year of 2022/23 kicked off in style with a study trip for the entire school to visit documenta 15 in Kassel, Germany, in September. We spent three days diving head on into one of the largest contemporary art exhibitions in the world, which this time took a decentralised form, giving rise to some interesting discussions among the faculty and students.

At the beginning of the fall semester, we also welcomed two new junior lecturers to Malmö Art Academy: Gabriel Karlsson and Joakim Sandqvist, with practices in sculpture and in drawing and installation, respectively. In addition to being wonderful artists, they have much to offer the Art Academy's faculty. In December, we said goodbye to P-O Persson, who retired after twenty-seven years at the Academy. We wish you all the best in your future endeavours, P-O.

For the BFA1 students this year, we introduced a new format for the first semester, which was developed and led by junior lecturers Youngjae Lih and Gabriel Karlsson. The course focused on building a sense of community in the new group as well as immersing them equally in theory and practice. Additionally, a set group of teachers worked with the BFA1 students throughout the semester. It was a great success, and we will continue this model next year.

This past year has been filled with a plethora of courses, some of which I will now highlight. Writer and cultural theorist Ana Teixeira Pintos led the decolonial course "Haunting and Affect," and the artist MC Coble held a weeklong class on queer, feminist, and activist performance practices, which was followed by a film theory course led by artist Shirin Sabahi.

Professor Gertrud Sandqvist gave two courses during November and December: one at the MFA level, titled "Matrix, Mater, Matter, Materiality, Materialism, New Materialism, Old Materialism," and the other at the BFA level, titled "The Girl" and presented in collaboration with professor Fredrik Vaerslev and artist Allison Katz. Professor Alejandro Cesarco gave a two-week course on translation in December, and professor Joachim Koester ran a three-day seminar in relation to law and the economy when practising as an artist after graduation. This last course was held in addition to one of our only compulsory course: "Economics and Law for Artists," led by Katarina Rehnman-Claeson, a lawyer with a PhD in Intellectual Property.

During the spring semester, the Art Academy ran three collaborative courses, one each with the Theatre Academy, Inter Arts Center (IAC), and Critical Animal Studies Network at Lund University (LU). The joint course with the Theatre Academy invited Lilith Performance Studio to work with students from across the two schools. Four of our students joined the Critical Animal Studies course at LU, led by artist EvaMarie Lindahl and scholar Tobias Linné. The collaborative course with and at IAC was on advanced 3D printing, led by our junior lecturer Youngjae Lih and IAC's artistic supervisor Margot Edström.

Gertrud Sandqvist also gave a theoretical course, titled "Hannah Arendt—Being a Citizen." The class was linked to Joakim Sandqvist's "on public art," with an option for students to join both courses. External tutor Marie Murracciole's "Sleep, Soma, a Studio in Our Head" was open to students from the KUNO network—a Nordic and Baltic network enabling mobility across the region for students and teachers. The course concluded with the installation of Anthony McCall's seminal work *Line Describing a Cone* (1973) at Båghallerna. This academic year also featured a range of technical options, such as the ceramics course led by ceramicist Margit Brundin. The welding course was run by technician Ariel Alaniz, and "Documenting Your Own Work" was directed by Youngjae Lih and guest lecturer Johan Österholm.

During the spring semester, we had two 50 percent seminars in the PhD group. In the first, Bouchra Khalili presented her thesis project, with response from the external assessor Andreas Broeckmann, followed by Yael Bartana, with response from the external assessor Margriet Schavemaker. And, in June 2023, Jürgen Bock had his 75 percent seminar, with response from Gregor Langfeldt. These seminars mark the development of an artistic research PhD and offer the doctoral candidates direct feedback about the progress they have made. Our current PhD group consists of Emily Wardill, Sven Augustijnen, Bouchra Khalili, Yael Bartana, Jacob Korczynski, and Jürgen Bock, all supervised by professors Sarat Maharaj and Gertrud Sandqvist. Professor Matts Leiderstam also once again contributed to the PhD seminars.

Also during the spring semester, we were happy to welcome three excellent external participants for the examinations in our Bachelor of Fine Art, Master of Fine Art, and Master of Fine Arts in Artistic Research programmes. For BFA3, we hosted Roel Arkesteijn, a renowned curator and author interested in forms of artistic engagement, "art for social change," and activism. Currently, he is a guest professor in an art and ecology programme and co-chair of the research group Body and Material Reinvented at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. For the MFA2 group, we had the pleasure of inviting Dirk Snauwaert, who has been the director of WIELS Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels since 2005 and who also, in 2009, curated Jef Geys for the Belgian Pavilion during the 53rd Venice Biennale. For the MFAAR programme, we welcomed Ruth Maclennan, an artist and a writer with an extensive exhibition practice who holds a PhD from the Royal College of Art in London. She is currently an associate lecturer for the MRes Art: Moving Image programme at Central Saint Martins in London. A huge thank you goes to all our external advisers for your insightful responses to the students' exam works.

In May, we opened the doors to the ten-day Annual Exhibition, which presented the plurality of ways it's possible to be an artist and offered an incredible level of deep engagement. Thank you to all the participating students, technicians, and teachers for their enormous efforts. Youngjae Lih, Gabriel Karlsson, and Joakim Sandqvist all did a tremendous job coordinating the Annual Exhibition—thank you!

This year we also began a collaboration initiated by Ronneby Konsthall in Blekinge, for which students were invited to submit to an open-call exhibition. Four of our MFA students—My Sjöberg, Cornelia Hermansson, Carin Alegre Castegren, and Amanda Moberg—were selected to show works in *Between Past and Future*, an exhibition inspired by philosopher Hannah Arendt's thinking, which opened in June 2023.

We once again had the pleasure of having Karin Hald as the wonderful editor and Eller med a as the excellent designers of the *Yearbook*. Thank you so much for your contributions—your collaboration has truly rethought and reinvigorated the format of this publication.

Finally, huge gratitude goes to the Academy's teachers, technicians, and administrators for making sure we provide the best education possible. And, of course, a massive thank you is due to our brilliant students. I also want to specially thank the external tutors who contribute so greatly to our school: Ann Böttcher, Charif Benhelima, Marie Muracciole, João Penalva, Michael Portnoy, and Nina Roos. Together we make Malmö Art Academy what it is—a world-class art academy.

—Maj Hasager
Rector, Malmö Art Academy

Master of Fine Arts
Year 2

Sara Andreasson
Oscar Eriksson Furunes
Daniele Di Girolamo
Hjördis Gréta Guðmundsdóttir
Djoana Gueorguieva
Rebecca Jansson
Mette Riise
Gälls Johan Kvarnström
Rosita Kær
Clara Mosconi
Maia Torp Neergaard
Beatriz Neto
Stacey de Voe
Amin Zouiten

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Sara Andreasson, *Sam, John, James, Kimal*, 2023. Video loop, 40 min. Installation view, *Cross-country, step by step*, MFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

Loop Trail, Duration: 24h

Sara Andreasson

Walking, Duration, and Film

To "walk" is a versatile verb with a range of possibilities that represent a journey of both an external and an internal kind. Sometimes for practical reasons, sometimes for physical or psychological ones. Through walking you can access meditative states—"flow states" or "zones"—that you wouldn't have been able to visit any other way.[1] *Att gå* in Swedish, to walk, to stroll—or my preferred form, *walking* (as the "-ing" ending carries with it the verb; to be in the *middle* of something)—is a gesture and activity that describes a longer process that cannot be reduced to a single step or moment. In my view, this is related to *la durée* or "duration," as conceived by the philosopher Henri Bergson, who says that our perception is constantly being shaped by memory. This is to say, there is a span of —for lack of a better word—time embedded in what we perceive as the present, and this span, which is also a kind of movement, is what he calls *la durée*. In *Matter and Memory*, he writes: "However brief we suppose any perception to be, it always occupies a certain duration, and involves, consequently, an effort of memory which prolongs, one into another, a plurality of moments."[2]

It's as if what we experience reverberates in our minds and prevents visible splices, where our perception transforms from one thing into another, and then into a third, and so on. This makes me think of walking, where one step is transformed into another, and without the memory of the previous step, we would lose our direction. Reaching a meditative state would never be possible if we were forever forgetting the breath that provides a calming rhythm—instead we would be embarking upon a new route to reach such a state, time after time, step by step. In terrain that lacks landmarks, memory is of particular importance, because there is nothing else to remind you of where you are going or where you have been. Such environs require you to remember the direction from which you came in order to reach another location and not walk around in circles.

By exploring the memory and rhythm that is generated by walking, I want to clarify how they relate to film and why film is an important part of my artistic practice. Bergson believes that film contributes to a false perception of what movement actually is. What we perceive as the moving image or film is actually a series of still images that are exchanged at a particular pace, and our eye perceives this as movement.[3] Whereas film can at best provide fragments of a sequence of events, our body in a state of walking can capture a space of time that cannot be reached by way of shortcut.

I agree with Bergson that film is not an entirely true translation of movement, but there are other aspects of this medium that I find intriguing. In between each still image is a small moment that gets lost—the technology cannot access it, whether the camera is shooting at 18, 24, or 29.97 frames per second. This loss is not necessarily something that I dislike; I think I see opportunity in these limitations, because the moments that are not captured by the camera or deliberately not selected during the filmmaking process carry other opportunities. Early filmmakers such as Georges Méliès succeeded in using this quality to their advantage. With inventive editing and elaborate sets, he created optical illusions, and film became a place where imagination could be simulated.[4]

In my video installation *Sam, John, James, Kimal* (2023), we follow Sam as she walks—following neither map nor compass. Giving yourself to chance and movement without a specific goal in mind creates potential, and here this potential takes the form of encounters with three different individuals: John, James, and Kimal. Each shares their thoughts on perspective, memory, and the gaze, which are the three fundamental elements of this piece. In the video installation, we repeatedly see a desert landscape through Sam's eyes. The movement in the image reveals that she is walking. She takes us on a journey through the landscape in which the story unfolds. Although her body is in constant motion, what we see does

not change much—the scale of the landscape is one that not many of us are used to. The distance between your body and the horizon is simply too great for a visual transplantation to be perceived. But the image that at first glance fails in its attempt to challenge is strengthened and deepened by experience. In addition to the characters mentioned above, an anonymous voice offers us new perspectives on how we can engage with this place. With its help, we are suddenly in possession of new knowledge with which to view the image the next time we see it. Bergson writes in *Matter and Memory*:

> We assert, at the outset, that if there be memory, that is, the survival of past images, these images must constantly mingle with our perception of the present and may even take its place. For if they have survived it is with view to utility; at every moment they complete our present experience, enriching it with experience already acquired, and, as the latter is ever increasing, it must end by covering up and submerging the former.[5]

This resonates with film and its ability to distort and shift narratives. Its storytelling often depends on images being arranged in a particular order—a previous image enriches the next. If the images that make up the film end up in the wrong order, the same knowledge is not established in the viewer and a different story is told. Altering the arrangement of images allows for a shift away from linear narrative and towards a kind of story that seems to follow a different direction, one that is not necessarily oriented to the future.

The Line and the Map

For years, I've been interested in maps and how they describe landscapes from a bird's-eye view in real as well as fictional contexts. The map and the landscape it charts become a backdrop against which more or less epic adventures can take place. The landscape depicted from above contains lines to study: paths, mountain ranges, and rivers. Across ages that can hardly be fathomed, meandering rivers have found their specific shape through the force of water in relation to the quality of the soil that embraces it. The plates of Earth's crust have made compromises together, curved, and formed mountains. I am particularly interested in the lines made by roads and paths because, according to the map, they seem to imitate the lines created by nature itself. Winding along steep mountains are serpentine roads, which from a distance could be mistaken for sharply curving rivers.

In addition to roads designed for automobile traffic, there are many other human-made lines, sometimes on an enormous scale, the oldest of which are over two thousand years old. Like the Nazca Lines in Peru, which were discovered in the sixteenth century. At the time, they were thought to be the ruins of an ancient civilisation—remnants of roads and landmarks. Four hundred years later, airplanes made it possible to identify them as geoglyphs depicting birds, monkeys, and spiders. Today it is believed that these figures were gifts to an external divine eye.

There are also contemporary originators of lines, such as the artist Robert Smithson. He points out that it may not always be enough to view art at eye level—sometimes distance is required to see more clearly.[6] Smithson devoted most of his career to valuing perspective and time and paved the way for what are known as earthworks, part of the genre of land art. Smithson was deeply interested in geology and the life of Earth itself, where everything is in constant flux. The movement of landmasses is inevitable, minimal, and almost static to our eyes, as if we and the organic material of Earth are dancing to different rhythms or, say, walking at different paces. The amount of time it takes for rivers to take shape and mountains to rise is almost impossible to imagine, but with imitation as an aid, geoglyphs and land art can make comparatively modest but nevertheless similar contributions. Despite the difference in scale between us and the planet we inhabit, Smithson still sees similarities: "One's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing, and conceptual crystallizations break apart into deposits of gritty reason."[7] Because despite the huge difference in pace and size between us and Tellus, we somehow need to try to live together. By drawing a parallel between our changeable states, Smithson makes us a little less alien to each other.

A piece I often return to in my artistic work, which touches on both walking and landscape, is *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) by the artist Richard Long. Using his own body, repetition, and gravity, Long walked back and forth to create a line on the surface of the ground. His presence lingered on the place he paced like a drawing, until the flattened grass found the strength to rise again. What Long did also occurs in collective contexts, and in these cases the lines are more enduring. Paths in forests form through collective acts, where the wear and tear generates lines that can be studied on maps. Thanks to returning feet and the weight of the body they carry, the line remains.

Tim Ingold, a professor of social anthropology, has studied such lines and written about different ways of moving based on them. *In Lines: A Brief History*, Ingold describes two different methods of transplantation and how they differ in attitude. What Ingold calls "transport" is a journey wherein the journey itself is not of great importance; rather, the main point is to get where you are going in the shortest possible time. This type of travel usually results in a line of motion that appears quite straight. However, when you move without a specific destination or time frame dictating when you need to be at a certain place, this is a type of transplantation he calls "wayfaring."[8] Here there is space for the journey itself to offer new knowledge and experiences. In an essay, titled "*Footprints through the Weather-World: Walking, Breathing, Knowing*," Ingold describes these two methods of movement as follows:

> The wayfarer is a being who, in following a path of life, negotiates or improvises a passage as he goes along. In his movement as in life, his concern is to seek a way through: not to reach a specific destination or terminus but to keep on going. Though he may pause to rest, even returning repeatedly and circuitously to the same place to do so, every period of the rest punctuates an ongoing movement. For wherever he is, and so long as life goes on, there is somewhere further he can go. Along the way, events take place, observations are made, and life unfolds. Transport, by contrast, carries the passenger across a pre-prepared, planar surface. The movement is lateral displacement rather than a lineal progression, and connects a point of embarkation with a terminus. The passenger's concern is literally to get from A to B, ideally in as short time as possible. What happens along the way is of no consequence, and is banished from memory or conscious awareness.[9]

The lines formed by these various types of movement are quite distinct. One winds and explores its way forward; the other is straight. The first seems to work with Earth's topography, where a relationship between the traveller and the landscape can evolve; this journey welcomes surprises and delivers unexpected possibilities. The second treats the landscape like a system, like map coordinates and grids that reduce the environment to a mathematical formula. Here you go *over*, not *through*—which is reminiscent of how we often relate to desert landscapes, in particular.

The Desert and the Eye

The desert landscape on a map can appear as a void, a non-place. When illustrated, it is almost entirely sand, and great care is taken to emphasise how vast and desolate it is. But just as I see possibilities in the voids between the stills in a movie, I also see possibilities in the vast desolation that is the desert. This is highlighted in my work *Sam, John, James, Kimal*, in which Sam takes her time crossing the desert and allows herself to be surprised by who she meets, and the story develops accordingly, despite the desert being a place that is often mistaken for a void.

In popular culture, the desert can be a tool to mark boundaries or even to render nature life-threatening. *The Wizard of Oz* takes place in the Land of Oz, which is surrounded by four different deserts: the Deadly Desert, the Shifting Sands, the Impassable Desert, and the Great Sandy Waste.[10] Each name confirms the unwelcoming characteristics of the desert; it is dry, desolate, and the wind will blow away your footprints, taking away your ability to retrace your steps. In the video game *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword*, one enormous desert is called the Lanayru, where you sink into quicksand if you are not in constant motion.[11] The challenge and threat here is not a monster, an evil wizard, or a heavily armed villain but the landscape itself.

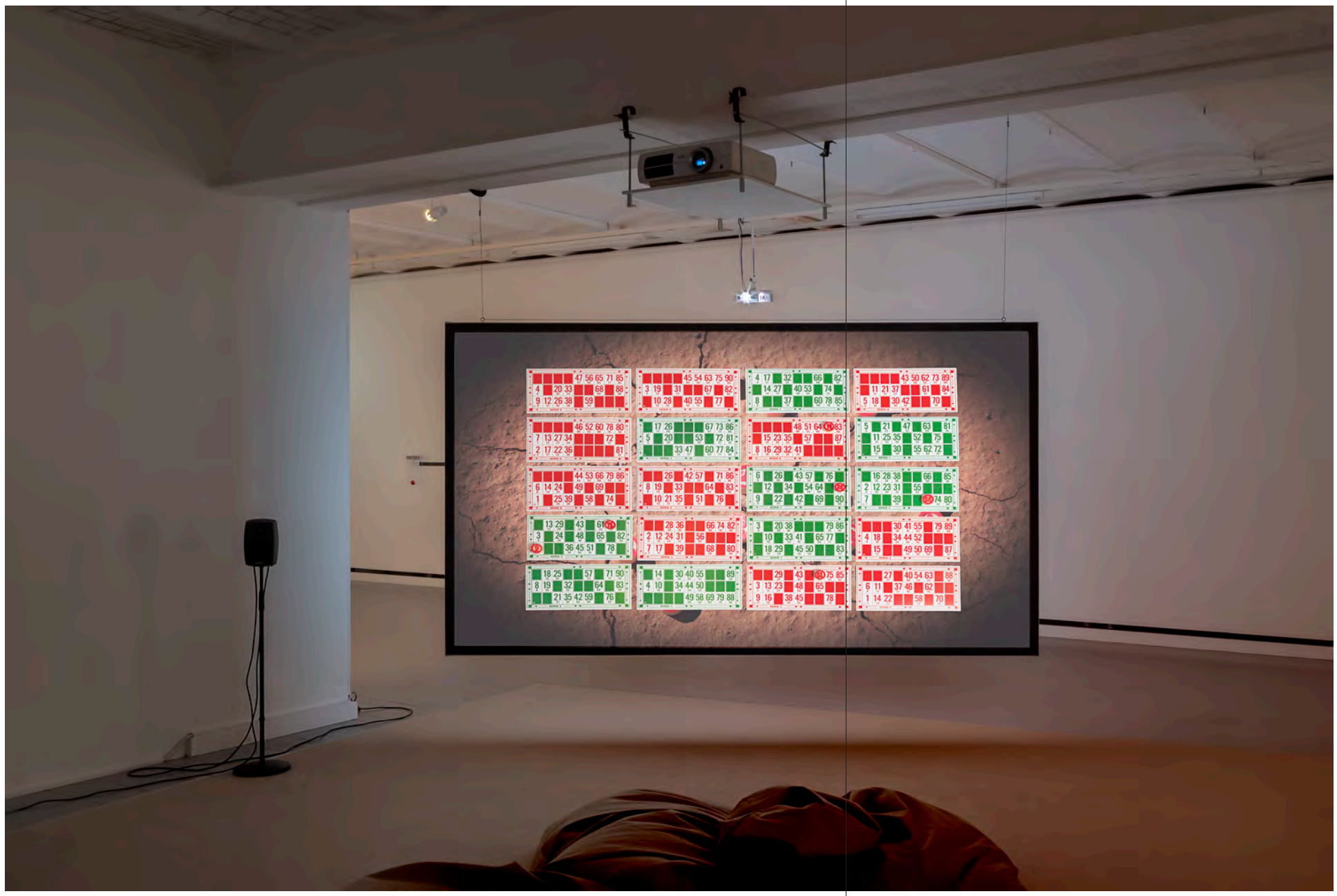


Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Sara Andreasson, *Sam, John, James, Kimal*, 2023. Video loop, 40 min. Installation view

The video material that I have been working for my graduation exhibition with was collected when I visited the Atacama Desert in Chile in September 2022. I would say that I am quite comfortable walking in a variety of landscapes, but in that environment, I perceived myself and my perspective in a completely different way than I was accustomed to. The horizon line did not appear as it usually does to me. I don't normally find it difficult to estimate how long it will take to reach a point I have identified on the horizon, but in the Atacama, I could not make that kind of calculation. One day when the sun was high in the sky, I spotted a blackness that looked like a cave in the mountain opposite me. I didn't think it would take more than twenty minutes to get there, but after walking for an hour, I had yet to reach the blackness in the mountain. Although I had been in constant motion, my surroundings had not changed shape, which was a dizzying feeling.

Perspective and location, as well as the distance between us and what we see, are factors that have a significant influence on our visual comprehension. Examples of this include my personal experience in the Atacama Desert, as well as land art and the discovery of geoglyphs. In my sculptural practice—which has run parallel to the making of *Sam, John, James, Kimal*—I have worked with distance, position, and texture, but on a less dramatic scale than what I experienced in the desert. I have explored the potential as well as the limitations of paper, plastic, glass, and metal, among other materials. Paper is bolted to metal wall mounts, while a red foam ball hangs valiantly at one edge of the paper. Another rests half-hidden behind the paper, its semitransparent surface preventing the ball's sharpest contours from making themselves known. Their relationship to each other determines what is seen more or less clearly—an attempt to imitate the visual shift that occurs when we view a landscape from ground level. What you see from a long distance does not usually appear as sharp as when the distance is shorter. It is therefore the viewer's position in space, in relation to the work, that determines what emerges and how the form of the sculpture appears.

> *"Even its most patently unalterable property —shape—does not remain constant. For it is the viewer who changes the shape constantly by his change in position relative to the work."*
> —Richard Morris[12]

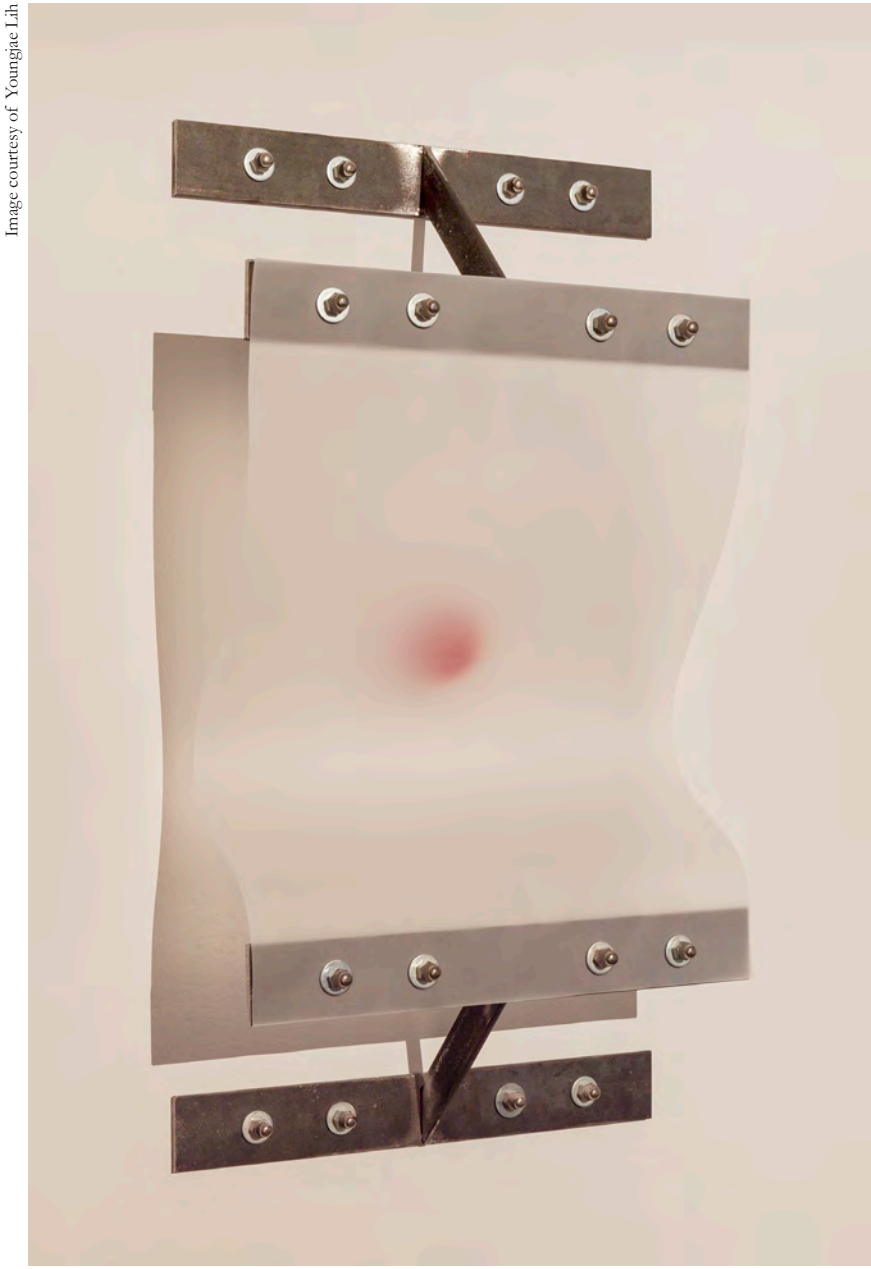
By shifting the body and gaze, the shape of the sculpture changes, and perhaps even a little more of its content can be revealed. However, there is one major factor that limits the viewer's opportunities: the wall on which the sculpture is mounted. Just as our visual perception is limited to 180 degrees, so is the perspective from which you can view the sculpture—it's not possible to see the side that is against the wall.

Darkness and Light

So far I have mentioned distances, voids, and forgotten moments between still images, and how they have the potential to influence our perception. What these have in common is that they resemble a kind of intermediary form. Darkness also belongs to this category. We often assume that it is easier to see up close, but then we risk losing the whole picture. Similarly, we are of the general perception that reality is easier to understand when it is illuminated—but light can also be blinding and erode details that we depend on to see the whole. Bright light makes contours less visible, whereas shadows give surfaces their structure. But darkness contributes more than form: it is also a an expanse to be experienced in itself.

For me, what makes reading a book such a powerful experience is the opportunity to dream up an infinite number of images, using my imagination as the main tool. Language that describes places with a series of adjectives facilitates a journey, even though the body stays in one place. That is why I was surprised when I read *The Tombs of Atuan* by Ursula K. Le Guin.[13] Images are rare in this book, because much of it takes place in dark tunnels. Instead of perceiving images, I perceived the sensation of rough stone against my fingertips and the stifling air on my skin. The book became an example of how darkness and empty space can hold unexpected value.

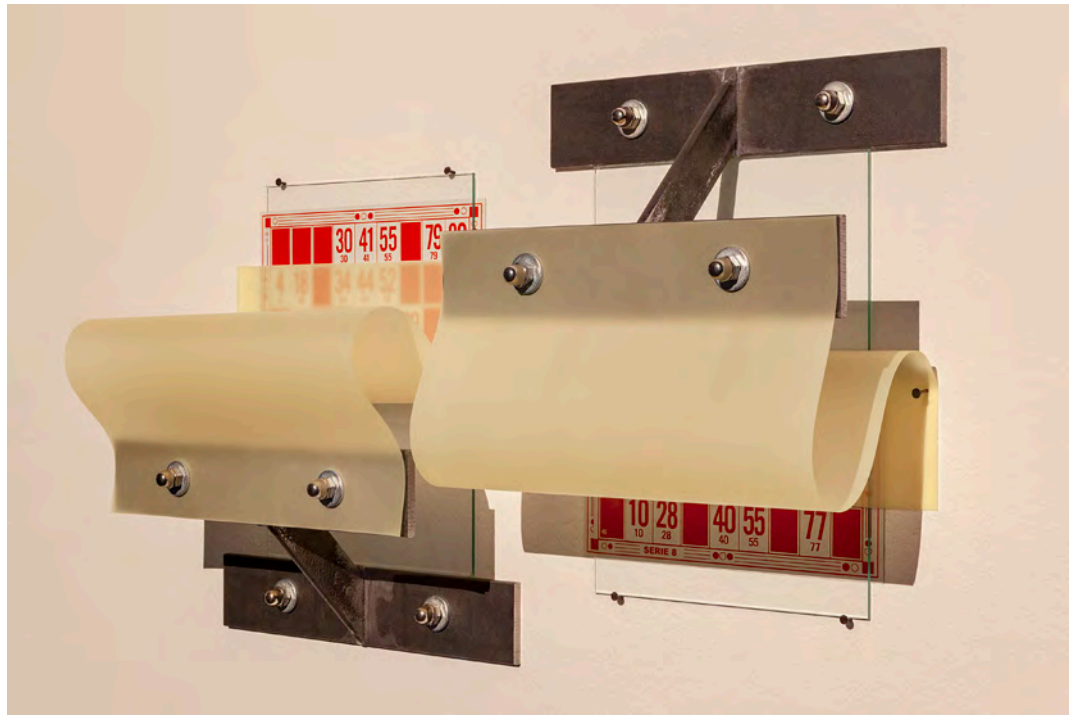
Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Sara Andreasson, *Untitled*, 2023. Steel, paper, foam ball, 38 × 29,7 cm

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Sara Andreasson, *Cross-country, step by step*, 2023. Installation view



Sara Andreasson, *Untitled*, 2023. Steel, paper, bingo cards, glass, 31 × 47 cm

For me, darkness feels relevant in relation to memory, or rather the absence of it. What would it be like to face an everyday life in which gaps in memory constantly make themselves known, and how would this be illustrated in the mind? Would it be a gap, void and darkness?

Back to *Sam, John, James, Kimal*. After following Sam through the desert landscape, a series of images reveal that she is now in the mountains. Four thousand metres above sea level, she encounters the James Webb Space Telescope. Stuck in the L2 orbit, the telescope looks towards the darkest parts of space and, with advanced equipment, Webb manages to capture shapes where nothing was previously thought to exist.[14] Galaxies have long been hiding in gaping voids. If we assume that memory loss is a darkness, then by extension we can assume that, even though we have forgotten, something exists in this void—it's just waiting to take shape.

In the desert, as mentioned, there are few landmarks to follow and daylight in such places is not helpful when trying to find your way. The sun illuminates no path to follow, but with the onset of darkness, the stars appear and with them, a map. Although stars are also light, it is because of the darkness that we can see them shine, and the darkness marks out the distance between them; together they form a map that one can use to navigate a previously inscrutable landscape. The shadows generated by the sun during the daytime can alter a seemingly static landscape. If you look closely, over a longer span of time, you can see the landscape changing guise through colour and shape, as the shadows move with the shifting sun. The desert is a place in constant rotation, where light and darkness distribute their presence across a twenty-four-hour period, and then begin it all again. Earth keeps repeating its movements over and over, an eternal comfort generated by the planet's rotation on its own axis.

Perspective, Memory, and Artificial Intelligence

There are reasons to return to *walking* here. The comfort and security generated by night and day have a resonance reminiscent of faith. When walking aimlessly through unfamiliar landscapes, you must expect kindness and good intentions from those you meet.[15]

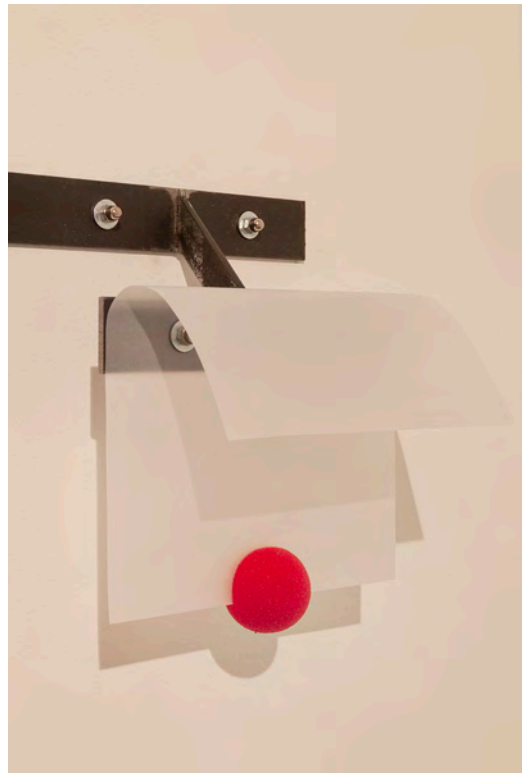
"At this point, the burden of the past should be set aside, as it was too heavy for The Wanderer to carry. The Wheel of The Year began its great cycle, bringing a whole range of new challenges and possibilities. The Wanderer is ready to take a leap and discover the unknown—the only thing needed is faith."[16]

The Wanderer tarot card can suggest a need to explore the unknown, as well as a place somewhere between the end and the beginning of a journey, where faith is required to take the next step. Trust in the world and the people you meet in it take you further. The Wanderer has no traditional home; instead, the road and the world provide a similar sense of belonging and security. The security that one usually experiences when one has an external place to call home is found within, as life is constantly expanding.

It is this attitude that marks Sam and the journey she takes us on. Hidden in the desolate landscape are surprises and chance encounters that rouse curiosity and a need to understand others, even though their perspectives are very different from her own. In the middle of the desert, Sam meets John, a being that is more than nine thousand years old. Outside the context of the film, we see that John is actually a GoPro 360 camera, mounted on a tripod. In this story, it plays the role of John, who shares his perception of reality and tells us that his eye can at a glance take in the full horizon around him; his field of vision is 360 degrees. Since Sam and the other people he has met in his lifetime have only half that field of vision, he encounters a lack of understanding. John tries to make himself understood by giving his field of vision a framework—1920 x 1080, an aspect ratio we are familiar with—in hopes that we will understand what the world looks like from his perspective. But there is still a distance, because Sam has no experience that is similar to John's. Yet beyond the aspect ratio, a void remains in the gap between their experiences—the encounter in the desert reminds them both of the uncertainty involved in trying to make yourself understood.

In his installation *Level* (1997), the conceptual artist Hans Hemmert offers visitors the opportunity to become equally as tall as their friends and strangers. Visitors attach platform

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Top: Sara Andreasson, *Cross-country, step by step*, 2023. Installation view
Bottom: Sara Andreasson, *Untitled*, 2023. Steel, paper, foam ball, 29,7 × 600 cm

soles ranging between five and forty-three centimetres thick to their shoes, helping each achieve a height of two metres. In a space where those gathered previously viewed their surroundings from their own height, a vertical shift has now occurred: their eyes meet at a common height. Putting everyone on eye level is a poetic attempt to increase understanding between human beings. The view from the window becomes almost identical, as they view it from the same height; yet each person has a unique way of interpreting the image, as their individual memories suffuse the buildings and city that take shape in the window.

Emotional reactions are often surprising. They can rarely be rationalised, and most of us will at times find ourselves in emotional landscapes that are hard for us to read. These cannot be categorised, and if we attempt to reduce them to a system, unique nuances are lost.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is grounded in already accumulated knowledge. For a machine to work with this material, the material needs to be organised. I find this interesting for two reasons. One is the borderland between humans that cannot be reached or categorised, and which is beyond the reach of AI for the same reason. The second is the copies of already accumulated knowledge that AI works with; all the material is from another time and stuck in the past. AI in its current iteration cannot take the advice of the Wanderer card and leave the past behind, because in doing so it would annihilate itself.

Abeba Birhane, a cognitive scientist, has written a thesis on humans, AI, and the fact that AI is not treated with as much suspicion as it perhaps should be. She portrays and underscores the complexity of people and relationships. From a system based on a small group of privileged people, AI predicts human behaviour and social structures, without taking into account aspects that are unique to individuals and various social groups. Birhane begins her thesis by describing a world view cultivated by Isaac Newton and others—a world perceived as rather static and objective. She thus points out the lack of space for other perspectives within it: "In a worldview that aspires for certainty and predictability, the very idea of ambiguity, complexity, and multivalence, the 'essence of being', so far as there can be any, is not tolerated."[17]

Surprises and split states do not seem particularly attractive in this view of the world. Such a world view affirms other values, where complex emotions are allowed to go through digital refinement in order to be simplified and become part of a system.

AI and machine learning (ML) relate to the past as a framework in order to determine what the future should look like—and this is what we should be suspicious of. Birhane argues: "As ML systems attempt to order the spontaneous and non-determinable social world, they create a future that resembles the past, leaving us no room for a chance to be different."[18] When we put too much trust in machines, they risk repeating the past, as it prognosticates the future based on what has already come to pass. Humans have a capacity that machines so far cannot imitate. We can be inspired, surprised, and afflicted by love. Creativity, imagination, and chance create a future that machines cannot conceive of.[19] Creative innovations in both art and medicine have the potential to change the world and change the direction of our path into the future. Surprise, spontaneity, and ambiguity are things that humans can relate to without drawing from previous experience —this is one way in which we are different to machines. Even though we are not machines and cannot predict what the future holds, there are still some things we relate to as if they were guarantees. That day becomes night and night becomes day is one.

Sam, John, James, Kimal

The final character that Sam meets on her journey is Kimal. Kimal is a mountain in the Atacama Desert that always looms on the horizon. In Chilean culture, she is seen to provide feminine energy that balances the masculine energy of the Licancabur volcano, which sits on the same horizon line.[20] In *Sam, John, James, Kimal,* Kimal is interested in chance, numbers, and the unpredictable. Numbers are a tool often used to transcribe formulas, statistics, or time, but numbers are also abstract. To some, they are spiritual, and they have the ability to exist in infinite combinations. Where many see mathematics and patterns, Kimal sees a chance to be surprised in an otherwise repetitive daily life where her eyes are forever turned to the sky.

In a place on Earth most often referred to as a void, Sam is surprised to meet John, James, and Kimal. This journey through the desert has followed the rhythm of her steps, and what was once the future has taken shape at a similar pace. A pulse that can be heard with a human ear. But even if we live at different speeds, we have opportunities to approach the scale of Earth and see our similarities.

> *"Scale depends on one's capacity to be conscious of the actualities of perception."*
> —Robert Smithson[21]

If we join Kimal in a supine position, our gazes turned to the sky, the celestial bodies reveal that we are in motion, even though we are lying still. At Tellus's pace, we are taken into the gap we call the future. We do not know what it contains, but it is there, constantly taking shape.

1 *Weird Studies Podcast*, episode 106, "The Wanderer: On Weird Studies," podcast, 1 September 2021, https://www.weirdstudies.com/106.
2 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W.S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 34.
3 *Weird Studies Podcast*, episode 76, "Below the Abyss: On Bergson's Metaphysics," podcast, 24 June 2020, https://www.weirdstudies.com/76.
4 For example, in *A Trip to the Moon* from 1902, Méliès suggests that humans have the opportunity to leave Earth for the moon, using, among other things, clever sets that suggest a perspective. A two-dimensional surface succeeds in simulating an alternative reality.
5 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 65, 66.
6 Robert Smithson, "Aerial Art," *Studio International*, February–April 1969.
7 Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," *Artforum*, September 1968.
8 Tim Ingold, "Up, Across and Along," in *Lines: A Brief History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 72–103
9 Tim Ingold, "Footprints through the Weather-World: Walking, Breathing, Knowing," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (April 2010): 126–27 https://quote.ucsd.edu/sed/files/2014/09/Ingold-Footprints-through-the-Weather-World.pdf.
10 "Deadly Desert," Oz Wiki, n.d., https://oz.fandom.com/wiki/Deadly_Desert.
11 "Sea of Sand," TV Tropes, n.d., https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/SeaOfSand.
12 Richard Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part II," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 233–34.
13 Ursula K. Le Guin, *Gravkamrarna i Atuan*, trans. Sven Christer Swahn (Stockholm: Raben & Sjögren 2014). First published as *The Tombs of Atuan* (New York: Atheneum Books, 1971).
14 James Webb Space Telescope orbits the sun 1.5 million kilometres from Earth in the second Lagrangian Point. See "A Solar Orbit," NASA: James Webb Space Telescope, n.d. https://webb.nasa.gov/content/about/orbit.html.
15 *Weird Studies Podcast*, "The Wanderer."
16 "The Wanderer – Wildwood Tarot Deck," tarotX.net, most recently updated 21 June 2021, https://tarotx.net/tarot-card-meanings/wildwood-tarot/the-wanderer.html.
17 Abeba Birhane, "Automating Ambiguity: Challenges and Pitfalls of Artificial Intelligence" (PhD diss., University College Dublin, October 2021), 11, https://arxiv.org/pdf/2206.04179.pdf.
18 Birhane, "Automating Ambiguity," 45.
19 Birhane, "Automating Ambiguity," 45.
20 During my visit to the Atacama, I stayed with Sandra and Carlos, who very generously shared local stories and ideas. Sandra is a llama herder, Carlos is a Shaman, and they both know stories that have been passed down orally across several generations.
21 Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," in *Arts of the Environment*, ed. Gyorgy Kepes (New York: George Braziller, 1972).

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Oscar Eriksson Furunes, *red*, 2023. Casted polyester, pigments, steel, photographic prints, variable dimensions

red light blue night watch

Oscar Eriksson Furunes

Sometimes you come across people, stories, and objects that make you stay in the moment, to let them affect you and explore how they make you feel. Like when you see an artwork and it captures you for even just a second longer than normal—there is a friction and attention that holds you back. Even after the moment has passed, the experience might arrest your mind and body for a while and come back to you at different times. The experience changes and develops, finds places to rest in your body. Places that you can revisit when you want to approach that experience again. Or it can come back at unexpected moments. The memory will change, but the experience of affect—those "hard-to-put-into-words feelings" that something in you changed because of this encounter—can still be felt, although not really explained. Those feelings of affect, the immediate reactions that occur between you and the object of affect, that which works on you, can be very strong and hard to reproduce. But they linger as moments of meaning that go beyond reasoning and language. Moments that go beyond conscious thought.

When I choose what material to work with, it often comes through this kind of affective encounter with a story or objects that hold a story. It is an intuitive process that involves a lot of listening, but also research. Listening not only to the story and the sensory experience of the material but also to its impact and trusting that what I'm doing means something. I trust the initial reaction and the process. If I start to doubt the importance of the initial experience, I find that the process gets difficult. I believe it happens at some point in the making of most artworks. For me, the moments of being affected by the world and wanting to be able to affect others are the reason I make art. I place and rearrange things to put those moments out there to speak back to the viewer. Art becomes a way of engaging with the world and with people, through material that can create new relations and moments of affect. I see my artworks as events with a duration rather than just objects or installations.

The visitors bring their own references, feelings, and understandings when meeting the work. I am interested in how an artwork can transform or translate a private experience into something shared with others—feelings we can recognise and reflect upon. I could explain it like this: the visitor can be seen as a cello that is played on by the artwork, and each viewer vibrates differently to create a unique tone. The different works in an exhibition also create different tones, which as a durational experience become a sequence or a mood. I want to create moments when you feel you can almost grasp the entirety of a tone, but then it drifts away or shifts, and becomes something else. Like affect, these feelings and experiences are hard to describe with words, but we feel them in our bodies.

night watch

I want to write about how an encounter with a set of objects and a specific story started the process towards my graduation exhibition, red light blue night watch. The title is based on the three installations of the exhibition—or events, as I see them: *red, light blue, and night watch* (all 2023).

I was sitting in my studio, looking out through its large windows, when I noticed an ominous figure on the rail of the top balcony across the square. It caught my attention, and so I focused my gaze to understand what the creature was. It was compact and dark in colour, and bigger than any city birds that I know of. It sat completely still, showing no observable movement.

I soon understood it was one of those plastic scare-owls used to frighten other birds and prevent them from dwelling and nesting. Suddenly it felt so present—even more than real birds. It had been manufactured and placed there with the direct intention to scare other birds and protect the balcony space of the flat owners. People are so often in conflict with city birds. I wonder if it has something to do with an envy towards their ability to

fly and move as they want. To me, the plastic owl became a potent image of how we exclude or include not only certain birds, but also people, through signals and objects meant to define the boundary of a space or a territory.

In the following days, I started researching the image of the owl in different cultures and mythologies. The owl has had many roles throughout history: the wise, the protective, the evil, the obstinate, the calm, and the transporting owl.[1] The most famous example is perhaps the owls of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and warfare. As a shy night predator with silent flight, the owl is a symbol of nocturnal vision, wisdom, and knowledge, but it is also an omen and harbinger of death.

The owl is in many ways a contradiction. It is at the same time the best and least known of birds. Like human beings, the owl has a wide, rounded head, with a flat face and a pair of large, wide-set, staring eyes. Because of this superficial resemblance, we humans somehow recognise ourselves in owls. As *Homo sapiens*, meaning "wise man," we see the owl with its human-looking head as a "wise old bird." Its humanoid stare makes us feel we know the owl, but at the same time we are rather sentimental towards and equally scared of them.

At one point during my research, I came across an article telling a story that has stuck with me and inspired the work *night watch*. On a blog made by former history students in Amsterdam, I read about how certain perfume lamps shaped like owls sitting on books were used as warning signals within gay bars and spaces in the Netherlands.[2] I felt immediately drawn to these queer objects with their inherent history, and I started looking for them online and in antique shops. I have gradually collected several owl lamps, twenty-four of which are part of the installation.

The perfume lamps, mainly produced in Germany and made for covering up the smell of cigarettes, were used in this specific context from around the 1920s until the 1960s. Even if homosexuality was not considered illegal during this time in the Netherlands, it was seen as taboo, and sexual preferences were not meant for the public eye. Authorities often used a law criminalising sexual contact between a minor and an adult of the same sex (Article 248-bis) as an excuse to arrest men and women accused of homosexuality.[3] This was part of the Dutch government's policy to discourage homosexuality and stop gay men and lesbians from meeting. Still, people would meet in open-minded bars that catered to a mixed public. However, these bars were closely watched by the vice police and therefore not completely safe. Until the 1950s, bar owners had to have permits for serving hard liquor, playing music, or allowing dancing. The vice police used permit inspections as an excuse to raid suspected gay bars.

In Amsterdam, several of these "open-minded" local bars with groups of regular visitors were located on Zeedijk street and in the Red Light District. To keep out unwanted visitors, most of these bars had doormen and thick curtains across their entrances and windows. When police, heterosexuals, or strangers wanted to enter the bar, the doorman would activate the warning signal: the owl lamp.

The porcelain owls' eyes are made of glass that shines with an orange-red glow. As the body and eyes of the owl started to glow inside the dim bars, visitors were alerted that they had to "act" straight, stop dancing, and hide the alcohol. Some records describe other types of warnings in historical Amsterdam bars, such as bells and even a button under the doormat that activated a light similar to the owl.[4]

The essence of this story affects me emotionally because the owl lamp symbolises the historical need for gay men and lesbians to hide their sexual orientation—but it also symbolises their persistence to keep meeting each other. There is a beauty, in retrospect, that however hard the circumstances, people will always find ways to communicate and get together. This is an observation that, in certain places of the world and for different reasons, is just as relevant today. Even if queer people have been emancipated and won rights in Western parts of the world, we cannot take anything for granted. Stories like the one of the owl lamp are part of understanding how and why we can live the way we do in the present moment.

In the second half of the twentieth century, as gay people began gaining emancipation, the warning signals gradually fell out of use in the Netherlands. However, the owl as a symbol and spoken codeword stayed within the community for some decades. The word "owl" (*uil*, in Dutch) referred to straight people, police, and strangers. Through my research, I have found that, today, the owl code has completely fallen out of both use and common memory within gay and queer communities in Amsterdam.[5]

Today, it is mainly one historical bar on Zeedijk that still tells the story of the owl as a warning signal: Café 't Mandje.[6] During my master studies, I had the opportunity to stay in Amsterdam and talk with the former owner of this small bar, which also happens to be the oldest gay bar still running in the Netherlands. It was opened in 1927 by Bet van Beeren, herself an old-school lesbian. On a shelf by the counter, an owl lamp still stands—but mostly it goes unlit.

The story and research around the perfume lamps became an inspiration for my durational installation *night watch*. For me, it is important that when I work with these objects, they are not meant to illustrate the original story. The work becomes something else, something

Image courtesy of Loc Vo

Oscar Eriksson Furunes. *night watch*, 2023. Perfume lamps, mdf, DMX light system, light installation 3:29 min. Detail

new, imbued with its own emotional urgency and context. In collecting and working with the owls, I wanted to fictionalise and amplify certain parts of the historical story. When I work with material, stories, and objects that already exist, I try to find strategies of turning, positioning, and amplifying, in order to transform their presence or make them strange.

I consider light to be one of my main materials to alter objects and the space of the viewer. Light is ephemeral, but at the same time it is one of the main prerequisites for seeing and for visual art. Both electric light and natural light change throughout the course of the day and over a season, and as such light is temporal and closely connected with our phenomenological understanding of time, movement, and space. Light is culturally coded, and we can speak of different light cultures, including across different times and contexts. "Artificial" light and knowledge about the light spectrum is also connected to technologies as well as how we use light to illuminate and code our physical surroundings. Seeing light as a rich material to work with, I find that I often make formal choices that are as simple as possible—a way of stripping down, to enhance the relation between the objects, the space, and the viewer.

I find inspiration in the artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres's works and his ability to imbue ordinary objects with emotional urgency and feelings of loss and absence as well as joy and beauty. Like classical *vanitas* paintings, his works reflect the transience of life by using ordinary objects as poignant symbols. Through a simple formal language developed in relation to conceptual and minimalist art, Gonzalez-Torres loads objects with intimate and personal references that move between private and public, personal and historical. Viewers come with their own references and memories when meeting his works, which are infused with the artist's personal narratives and the sociocultural circumstances of his time. I have noticed that several of his works are placed in liminal spaces—in corners, on the floor, or in passageways between rooms—and that he often works with the relation between two or more identical objects.[7]

His text portraits are installed along the top edge of walls.[8] They juxtapose and treat personal and larger historical events the same way (by year and title) in a non-chronological listing. For example, *"Untitled" Portrait of Jennifer Flay* (1992) contains this fragment: "A New Dress 1971, Vote for Women, NZ 1892, JFK 1963, Oakura Beach 1964."[9] Where do our stories begin and end—perhaps not only with our birth and death? We are not passive in relationship to history, and we are not as individual as we may think. Gonzalez-Torres's bead curtains and candy piles engage visitors on a tactile and metaphorical level.

In *"Untitled" (Perfect Lovers)* (1991), two synchronised clocks are positioned next to each other, slightly touching.[10] They will eventually fall out of sync. Many of Gonzalez-Torres's works have been interpreted as referencing his partner Ross Laycock's struggle with and death from AIDS, and eventually the artist's own death caused by the same disease. Simultaneously, his works are open to interpretation when met by visitors' own memories and references. We carry with us people, and we exist because we exist for others. While the work is infused with Gonzalez-Torres's love and loss of his partner, we as viewers can relate to these feelings of absence and inscribe ourselves in the emotional experience of the work.

The first of Gonzalez-Torres's light-string works, *"Untitled" (March 5th)* (1991), consists of two hanging light bulbs whose cables tangle together.[11] At some point, their light will start to fade, and inevitably one will burn out before the other does. This is part of the trajectory of the work. His works come with certain instructions for hanging and reproduction, but they can be fit to the situation or the wish of the people installing them. The text portraits can be extended and altered, and the light strings hung differently. His works are not minimalist sculptures that, for example, need to have a certain distance or relation between one another. Imbued with life and love, Gonzalez-Torres's works continue to change even after his death.

As a warning signal, the owl lamp was singular in its presence within each bar. But as a phenomenon within a specific context and time period, of course several of these owl lamps were around. For the *night watch* installation, I wanted to make them strange by arranging a large group within a darkened room. The only light comes from the lamps themselves, which switch on and off in a specific choreographed pattern. This references the story and the moment when the light was switched on, meaning danger, and when the light was switched off, meaning safety. The warning signal is no longer in use and is now taken out of its context and time. It is amplified and, by effect, distorted. What do these delayed and prolonged moments of warning mean today?

Another aspect I've been thinking about is how the owl perfume lamps might have been positioned within the bars. As the light needed to be visible for all visitors, I assume they were placed on a shelf or somewhere high enough to be noticed by everyone inside the bar. The idea of positioning the owls above eye level developed into seeing them as holding a certain controlling gaze and a position of power over us as visitors. I started to see the owls not just as a warning signal but also as a collective gaze—almost like a mob that exerts its collective authority over visitors who enter the space. Control is not just something forced upon us from the outside; it is also something we do to ourselves and our own communities. One can speak of a certain violence of community upon the individual, which has to do with conformity and norms. Within oppressed minority groups, it is especially important to unite around the same ideas and values, to resist the pressure and violence from the "outside" or the majority.

Thus, for me, the owls started to become ambiguous in character, both as something or someone that protects but also something or someone to fear. I saw them as an image of how patriarchy and systems of power work in all of us, like how homophobia can be internalised and acted out against others. The structures of power and self-control are perhaps more integrated into us than we often realise.

To position the owls above eye level, I created white triangular wall plinths, which in their simple formal aspect could be considered reminiscent of minimalist sculpture. The owls are all different—like individuals. Perhaps one could call them kitsch, which is also part of my attraction to them as objects. Collecting kitsch objects can be seen as a queer strategy to break with aesthetic norms and follow one's individual attractions. It can also be seen as an identity marker and way to signify one's cultural and social position as queer. I made the wall plinths as simple as possible, to almost become part of the wall and the architecture, so as to enhance the forms and colours of the different owls. Seeing the plinths as sculptural, I can appreciate their simple form in relation to the porcelain owls. All twenty-four owls are installed on the wall opposite to the room's entrance.

The owl lamps become loaded objects that are transformed—almost animated—within this work and given a new life. Some still contain dried perfume oil in their oil sockets. The room takes on a faint trace of this smell as the light bulbs heat the owl lamps. I see this trace as part of the objects and their material histories. The experience of smells and perfumes is highly individual, and we connect certain smells to people, places, and memories. The visitors bring their own references and memories into play when meeting the work.

The criss-crossing of the lamps' cables is an important part of the expression of the work. I want it to seem like a network that connects the owls and enables communication between them. Like a network of spies or civil informants that all face one direction: they obliterate all places to hide from their gaze within the room. Their uniform orientation, facing the room's entrance, makes me think of surveillance and control as well as the streamlining and polarisation of political narratives. The title of the work references Rembrandt's famous painting *De Nachtwacht* (*The Night Watch*, 1642), which is displayed at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.[12] It depicts a militia group in a dark urban context. I see the group of owls, with their glowing eyes, as reminiscent of this painting in a strange way.

night watch is a durational work. It changes from almost full darkness to all owls being lit within four minutes, before starting over again. As the brightness of the room changes, the atmosphere of the space is altered. Part of the light sequence is in Morse code. To understand it, one needs to know how to interpret Morse code, which is conveyed by the time interval between flashes of light, creating patterns for letters, which can be decoded to communicate meaning across long distances. I find it interesting how light is often connected with positivity, life, and knowledge, whereas

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Oscar Eriksson Furunes, *night watch*, 2023. Perfume lamps, mdf, DMX light system, light installation 3:29 min. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

darkness is usually associated with negativity, a lack of knowledge, the unconscious, and death, and even the lack of sight. In this work, light can be seen in the opposite way —as moments of danger—whereas darkness provides safe places to hide.

red

At sunrise and sunset, the sun's position is low in the sky and its light travels through the thickest part of the atmosphere. A red sky is caused by an atmosphere loaded with dust particles and moisture, which scatter the sun's light in a particular way: red wavelengths (the longest in the colour spectrum) avoid being trapped by the particles and break through the atmosphere. Depending on how the sunrise or sunset is coloured, which can be due to high or low air pressure, the red sky can indicate a coming change of weather and be used like a weather forecast. An old proverb among mariners goes: "Red sky at night, sailor's delight. Red sky at morning, sailors take warning."

While staying in Amsterdam and doing research on the owls, I decided to visit the IHLIA library's photographic archive. IHLIA LGBTI Heritage is an international archive and documentation centre focused on historical LGBTQ material and topics. I was hoping to find some old photographs of Café 't Mandje and other bars showing the perfume lamps and their positioning. I could not find any owls, but while looking through the archive, I was taken by a series of photographs by Gon Buurman (1939–).

Gon Buurman is a lesbian photographer who has focused her work on documenting the lesbian and feminist scenes in the Netherlands and Belgium from the 1970s onwards.[13] She donated some of her documentary photographs to the IHLIA archive. I was immediately captured by the intimacy and closeness in her portraits and the contexts she depicts. She is close to her subjects, among them, and you can almost feel she has a feminist approach in her way of photographing. The series of photographs that captured me was from the opening night of a women's dance evening called Labyrinth at Café Floor in Amsterdam in 1986.[14]

In the experience of looking at photographs, the literary theorist Roland Barthes defines the "punctum" as moments of affect that go beyond the "studium," which is the cultural, linguistic, and contextual reading of the photograph.[15] The punctum disturbs and pierces the studium and creates a subjective and emotional reaction to the image. In Buurman's photographs, I immediately feel the wounding and touching details of the group of people, mostly women, in the dimly lit bar. Arrested in time, the scene within the photographs holds a tension. There are moments of affection, sensitive touches, glances, and euphoric gestures, but also uncertain looks.

Looking at the people's faces, gestures, and positions in relation to each other and the space, I can recognise something similar in myself—feelings of love, but also hurt and vulnerability, somehow even loss. Perhaps it is a projection of my own loss that reflects in them: a loss that I can never really get to know these people. Or perhaps it is the loss that, despite the love and community I sense within these photos, we know these moments are short and pass by swiftly. Or maybe it is a loss that comes from the experience of being queer—that we can feel safe only within confined spaces among like-minded people and knowing that the outside world is different. Perhaps there is a sense of longing as well in this feeling of loss: a longing for a queer community and identification across time.

I wonder: How much of myself do I read into these people, and why is it that I identify with this group of presumably lesbian and bisexual women? Maybe the loss is more a feeling of absence—that we don't share the same time and space. But then again, in some ways maybe we do?

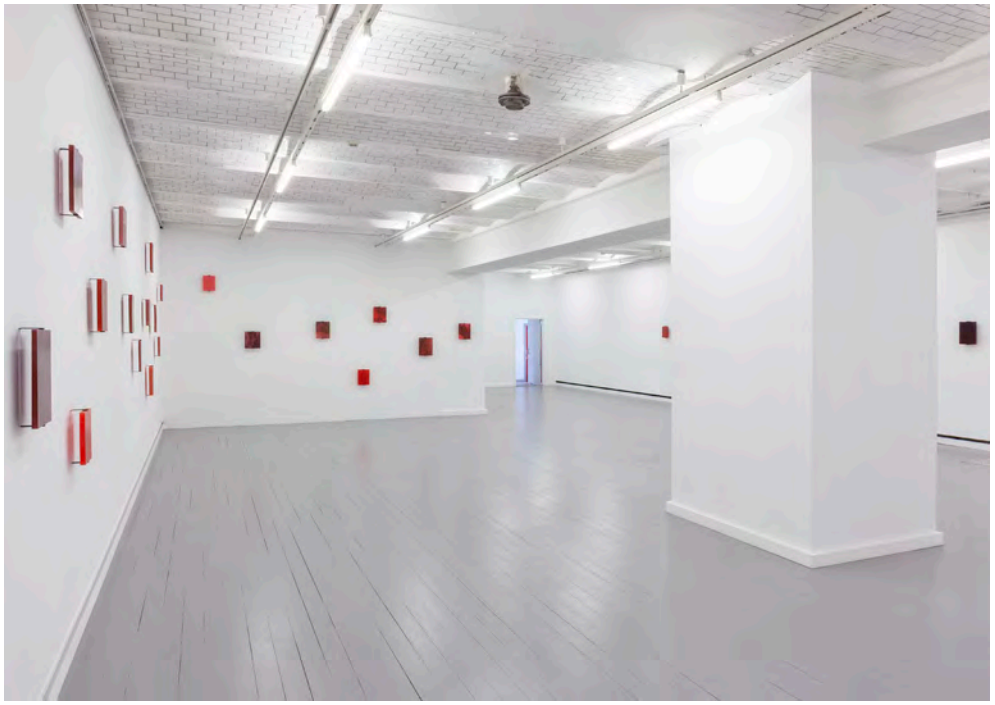
Professor of English and author Heather Love writes about historical relations to queer pasts in her book *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*.[16] She describes how queer subjects build imagined communities of the marginal and the excluded across time through "strange fellowships" and "partial connections." This has to do not only with self-identification with queer historical subjects but also the need to "touch" and perhaps alter the past to make sense of the present. Queer history becomes a critique of the discourse of historiography and history itself, as something that has been left out. In this way, queer history, as complex, contrasting, and situated, points to the fact that all history is constructed and narrated.

The mainstream US-focused LGBTQ movement has told a certain story, often starting with the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City, with everything before this cast as the "dark ages of gays," when homosexual people had to live in secrecy. Parts of the historical LGBTQ community has at different points in time romanticised Greek antiquity, with its Eurocentric world view and practice of same-sex relations, which was connected to notions of ideal masculinity. This is the reason why images of Greek sculptures and myths reoccur in homosexual historical contexts.[17] Alongside the narrative of gay people being oppressed and victimised throughout history, which of course is also true, there are also examples of how gay people have been among the oppressors. The gender theorist Jack Halberstam points out, in *The Queer Art of Failure*, that some gay men were also Nazis and that homosexuality was for a time tolerated within the Third Reich's administration.[18] He exposes how homosexuality has, to some extent, been used within fascism, masculinism, and authoritarian state power. After 1933, when homosexuality was no longer tolerated in Germany, the Nazis persecuted thousands of gay people and sent them to prison camps, where many died.

The first "modern" homosexual movement and burgeoning homosexual identity developed in Germany in the late nineteenth century up until 1933. The physician Magnus Hirschfeld founded the world's first homosexual organisation, called the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, in 1897. Its aim was to use science to improve public tolerance of homosexuality and repeal paragraph 175, which criminalised sexual acts between men.[19] Hirschfeld categorised, in the spirit of biology and science, so-called intermediate sexes and other sexual variants to naturalise homosexuality and transvestism (in the terminology of the time). He endorsed the idea that homosexual men belonged to a kind of third sex, with male bodies and female souls, and vice versa for lesbian women.

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Oscar Eriksson Furunes, *red*, 2023. Casted polyester, pigments, steel, photographic prints, variable dimensions. Detail and installation view



Around the same time, other organisations started to develop that held more conservative views, idealising "friendships" between younger and older men by looking back to Greek antiquity. Magazines like *Die Freundschaft* (Friendship) and *Der Eigene* (His own man) focused on friendship between men and the masculinity of male same-sex desire.[20] They were in many ways masculinists and believed that the roots of homosexuality were cultural rather than biological, in opposition to Hirschfeld. Any man could potentially be homosexual, and they considered homosexuality even more masculine in character than heterosexuality. They also saw male prostitution and so-called effeminate homosexual men as harmful to the movement's public image. There is a deep and troubling misogyny rooted in masculinist homosexuality, which reflects patriarchal systems and hatred towards women. In masculinist culture, friendship and comradery between men is idealised and elevated above other types of relationships. The "base instincts" of women's bodies and their sexuality was looked down upon, seen as something with the potential to demoralise and corrupt the "higher" minds and relationships of men.

Historically, a lot of attention has gone into studying and discussing male sexuality, whether it be heterosexuality or homosexuality. Female sexuality, on the other hand, has been overlooked and almost vilified in certain contexts. An example of this is the diagnosis of female hysteria, a nervous syndrome said to be caused by excessive sexual desire in women and leading to uncontrollable amounts of emotions. Whereas sexual desire in men has been perceived as a sign of vitality and health, sexual desire in women has been seen as promiscuous, dangerous, and taboo. Lesbian women have had to claim their sexuality in same-sex relationships, while gay men have had to claim love and friendship as part of their homosexual relations. No wonder, then, that historically a gap or division has existed between gay men and lesbian women.[21] This historical difference mirrors patriarchal society as a whole, and in some cases it has even enhanced these structures through producing segregated homosocial spaces and clubs.

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam links masculinist culture to the images of the illustrator Tom of Finland (Touko Laaksonen, 1920–1991), outlining how German military and masculine aesthetics that played with power and subjugation became fetishised within certain segments of gay culture (leather subculture and BDSM).[22] In the mainstream LGBTQ movement, the connections to unfavourable historical moments, movements, and figures are generally left out and not talked about, to focus the story on the oppressed and victimised gay figure, which better fits the desired narrative. Gay and queer people have, like all people, taken part in various decision-making processes, actions, and political movements. Queer histories can make our relations with queer narratives or fictions of the past more complex and complicate how we view ourselves today.[23]

In more recent movements for gay rights, the perceived negative emotional aspects of queer life, such as shame, invisibility ("the closet"), and failure, have been turned around to proclaim the positive ideals of pride, visibility, and normativity. In her book, Love looks to historical authors, writers, and other queer subjects who, in different ways, deal with the notion of backwardness and "feeling backward."[24] She takes a second look at the possibilities and values of these negative feelings and how they still contribute to forming queer experiences today. When we become visible, what other possibilities do we let go of? She turns away from a focus on "effective history" and towards a focus on "affective history." The question is no longer "Were there gay people in the past?" but rather "Why do we care so much if there were gay people in the past," or even perhaps, "What relations with these figures do we hope to cultivate?"[25] I also want to ask: What it is that we want them to tell us, and how do their "answers" affect our present?

Within the context of queer history and its relation to my own works, I am much more interested in melancholic expressions rather than mere nostalgia. Melancholy is a complex temporal emotion or mood with both positive and negative aspects, and it can hold different shades of emotions like sadness, love, longing, pleasure, and even dread.[26] It involves looking back at something lost, but also reflecting upon memories and engaging in contemplative imagination through the absent object of desire. The negative feelings come from experiences of loneliness, emptiness, sadness, or loss, whereas the pleasurable

aspects of melancholy come mainly through reflection and imagining connection. In its reflective solitude, melancholy enhances itself, prolonging its rhythmic moments of pleasure and unbearable longing. Through its ambiguity, melancholy can in some ways approach the feeling of the sublime. It can be self-induced, happen through associative experiences related to memories, or occur when looking at art.

I look at the people in the photographs by Gon Buurman and feel a desire for connection with them, but the fact is that a distance will always lie between us. Therefore, I make up my own fictions about who they are. At the same time as I recognise this distance, I also know that there is no distance between us—I identify with and feel close to them. Many of the women in Buurman's images have short haircuts and wear button-down shirts, giving them a more androgynous look. One might find it strange that, as a bisexual man, I identify with a group of lesbians. But I would like to go so far as to say that, within the work *red*, I am a lesbian woman. I want to transform my gaze into one of intimacy and feeling with the depicted subjects while sharing their gaze.

I wonder if we, as subjects carrying our own experiences, are able to change our gazes, or if we can even attempt to do so. If anyone, I believe that artists can try to do so. I think most people have thought about what it would be like to experience life as another person, as another gender, or in another time. A certain melancholy arises in the fantastical imagining of all the other people one could have been and the lives one could have lived. These lives are distant but at the same time close—and they affect us. I feel like if I were a woman, I would be a lesbian. Even so, as a man, I often identify myself with women more than men. I have always been fascinated and felt empathy with the hermaphroditic figure, as someone who holds both positions simultaneously. I believe the crossing of different genders, identities, and viewpoints is something we can explore through art.

In my work, I contemplate the longing for queer community across time, but also the fictional and emotional aspects of memory and history. How can we feel that other people's memories or experiences belong or relate to us? Is it only through identification? Such an attempt might at times be tricky, because how can we really speak of or for those who are not here? This is part of the ambivalence of working with archival material, and especially photographs that feature people and their faces. But maybe in remembering or speaking about another person, we *always* fictionalise or create our own image of them, even if they are still alive. We carry these images with us, and they can feel as real as the person standing in front of us, or more real than someone who has passed away.

The 1980s were formative years for the gay and lesbian movement, as the AIDS epidemic cut through relationships, families, and communities. At the time, the illness had no treatment, and the political climate stigmatised homosexuality. As someone born in the early 1990s and who grew up in the 2000s, I mostly gained knowledge about the AIDS epidemic through tragic films and TV series. Still, the stigma and anxiety around it affected me and others of my generation very much, and so I feel emotionally affected by something that I did not directly experience. I think one can recognise this feeling in other contexts as well. The past still works on us in the present and becomes part of how we imagine our futures.

In a strange way, I feel that I missed out on something important. Gay and queer people organised in political and activist groups like AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) to rally against governments' neglect and stigmatisation. Artists such as David Wojnarowicz, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Cindy Sherman, Keith Haring, Derek Jarman, and many more made art to process the illness and loss of friends and lovers, but also to affect the political climate and public discourse around AIDS, gender inequality, and homosexuality. Many of their works have a sense of urgency, loss, vulnerability, and anger, which is clearly a reaction to the experiences they went through. Buurman's photographs somehow transport me to the 1980s and help me imagine what it was like to be queer back then. I imagine strong connections, friendships, and community as well as joy, but also fear, sadness, and isolation.

Taking with me the ideas of all history as bound up in past and present construction and queer longing for relations across time, I started to work with the photographic material from the women's dance evening at Café Floor, as depicted by Buurman. IHLIA kindly gave

me the scanned photographs and the rights to work with the material. From the very beginning of looking through the photographs, I've had the feeling that I want to get closer to the people depicted. I followed this feeling, and it became the impossible ambition and intuitive emotional task I set for myself in the work *red*. As I "felt backwards" into the material and reached towards the depicted subjects, I aimed to create new connections between past and present through moments of affect and empathetic identification.

The bar is dimly lit, and the light has a warm tone. The photographs hold a large contrast between the darker areas and the warmly lit faces of the people. The images remind me of the atmospheric and dark paintings of Rembrandt, which I had recently seen in the Rijksmuseum. The light almost protrudes through the darkness. A dimly lit interior, candles and different objects, hand gestures and emotive faces. Micro- and macro-moments all within the same photograph and within the series, seen as a whole evening.

In one photo, almost all the depicted women look one way, except for the only woman of colour, who stands in the background and looks the other way. She has her eyes closed and holds her hand to her mouth in an almost pensive gesture. I wonder what she's thinking about. For me, she is one of the most important characters, even though she appears only in this photo. It's like she's having her own private moment within a moment shared with the others. In another photo, two women embrace each other. One holds her hand on the other's neck in an affectionate way, while the other holds on to the other woman's arm. Their eyes are closed but they are smiling, enjoying the moment together and holding on to it.

Moments within moments. Conversations by the bar, cigarettes and beer, striped and chequered shirts, a brown leather jacket and a deliciously red headscarf. Mostly people do not look into the camera, which makes me think they are relaxed and the photographer is one of them, part of the crowd. Some of the photographs almost seem like stills from a film, with their moments of pleasure, gazes, and shades of different emotions. There are tensions, relations, and directions within each photograph that one can study in detail.

Through these intimate observations, I decided to focus on different touches and gazes, which I cropped into smaller parts, taking them out of the photographs. It's like I wanted to isolate these moments, to look

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Oscar Eriksson Furunes, *red*, 2023. Casted polyester, pigments, steel, photographic prints, variable dimensions. Installation view

at them outside their original context and get closer to them, creating a new space between us. I've been working consciously with the scaling and format of the cropped sections, so as to create new connections and relations between them. I relate to the photographic frame in the sense that I don't want to centralise the depicted subjects or context but rather to create movement and tension that hints at a space and something happening outside the frame. The next part of the process involved casting thick plastic screens, which I saturated with red pigments, creating different tones of red, translucency, and sensations of depth. Finally, I installed the images in a composition at varying heights and closeness to one another. Some of the images or moments nearly touch each other, as if almost able to bridge the gap between them.

By extracting the sections from the larger photographs and partially blurring them behind red screens, I realised that the original context became obscured. What I created is partial, upscaled, and fragmented views of the set of moments that work as a larger composition within the gallery space. I wanted to create a feeling of partial presence—between presence and absence. It is not that I seek to illustrate or recreate that exact evening as I see it in Buurman's photos. This is not possible, and it is not my aim. I rather wanted to create something new that exists today, partly imagined but also partly real, derived from archival photographs. To create a space where we and they can almost meet—moments across time and space.

I chose to work with varying tones of red because of the warm tones of the original photographs. I wanted to amplify them and create a sort of red membrane or impression of red wax that the subjects are positioned within. They are simultaneously in the same and a different space than the viewer—close and far at the same time, like a memory. I find that colours work on us in a very affective and direct manner, and they can call forth certain moods and emotions. I think it is telling that there are so many specific names for red —more than for any other colour. The association is up to the viewer, as I don't intend to tell anyone what to feel, and red can be seen as a loaded but ambiguous colour. While a whole field is devoted to colour psychology, for me the lighter and darker tones of red may create feelings and associations of intimacy, joy, sensuality, romantic and sexual desire with orgasmic undertones, and blood and bodily fluids, but also fear, transgression, warning, illness, and perhaps even death. All these feelings and moments exist within love and imagination.

red is based on my initial experience and feelings of affect and closeness when looking at the photographs of the Labyrinth dance evening. The past cannot be brought back, but we can restructure the past as memory and imagination through aesthetic experiences and melancholic reflection. The installation touches on sculpture, portrait painting, and photography, but, as I touched on earlier, I see it more as an event, where several moments are tied together in a larger composition. The gaps between them are part of expressing that some things are absent. For the visitor, I hope they can bring forth feelings of love and connection but also uncertainty, and perhaps even sadness that moments of closeness will surely pass, which I also sense in the original photographs.

light blue

One morning, I passed by a shattered digital billboard next to where I lived in Malmö. I collected the glass and brought it back to my studio. I continued gathering broken glass whenever I saw it lying around the city, from either broken storefronts, bus shelters, or digital billboards. Have you ever noticed how beautiful the shattered glass of bus shelters can be? Tempered glass breaks into thousands of even pieces that are quite dull, not too sharp. There is something about the way light refracts in the piles of broken glass, giving it a light-blue tone, almost turquoise. It also feels a bit dangerous and otherworldly.

For the installation *light blue*, I spread a large part of the collected glass unevenly in the emptied storage room of the KHM2 Gallery at Malmö Art Academy. It has two windows that let in direct natural light. The light fell on the broken glass and made it glimmer. It could perhaps elicit some associations to Felix Gonzalez-Torres's candy works in silver and gold wrapping, although it is very different.[27]

Image courtesy of Loc Vo

Oscar Eriksson Furunes, *light blue*, 2023. Shattered glass, sound equipment, sound installation 21:16 min. Installation view

I spread the rest of the glass throughout the gallery. I wanted to work with this material partially because of my initial attraction to it, but also as a contrast to the other works in the exhibition, *night watch* and *red*. Whereas the original context for those two works' material was interior spaces, I saw the broken glass as having a relation to public and liminal spaces, like a broken transition between inside and outside. As if the confined and safe interior spaces had been split open by violence. The illusion of safety and seclusion shattered. Maybe there is no such thing as a "safe space"? Visitors were able to walk around the room and step on the glass, if they dared. The broken glass made a crunchy sound, almost like walking on snow.

The scattered glass had an ambiguous sense of danger and attraction, and I hoped this same feeling would be evoked in the visitor. I think the relationship between queerness and public spaces involves some of the same type of ambiguity, between danger and attraction. This can be seen in how gay men historically have sought out certain railway stations, streets, squares, and parks to meet as part of so-called cruising culture. Gay and bisexual men have found ingenious ways of coding their appearance, language, and presence in public spaces. This is so they can recognise each other and express what they are looking for without saying it directly. If one is too direct, one could face arrest historically or, still today, violence. The same goes for all queer people in public spaces.

I want to quote the Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles: "I've thought for decades that there are no dangerous places, there are dangerous moments. And I think that if something was democratized in Brazil, maybe it was violence. It is in every direction, in every way."[28] Meireles has worked with fear and different moments of affect in his installations, to find resistance and reflect life under military dictatorship. Many of his works play with the imminence of danger through material and associative connections. This specific way of resistance through indirect speech and codes can be observed within groups of people who oppose repressive regimes, including among queer people. I find that Gonzalez-Torres's works also possess this quality, in being both personal and public while coded with his own experiences.

An important part of the *light blue* installation, or event as I see it, was a faint soundtrack that played in the room. The work's title references not only the colour of the broken glass but also the Russian word *голубо́й* (*golubój*), which is synchronically used for "light blue" and "doves," because of the bluish tint of the bird's neck plumage. A Georgian friend told me how in Russian the word for "light blue" is also slang to describe gay men. Similarly, the word for "pink," *розовый* (rózovyj), is used for lesbian women. I find it interesting that colour is not only gender coded but also sexuality coded. The common usage of *góluboj* for homosexuals came from the gay community itself and is often preferred over more derogative words. Its history relates to the pigeons in Sverdlov Square (now Theatre Square) in Moscow, where gay men would meet secretly during the 1960s and '70s.[29] Its usage further derives from the song "Летите, голуби" (Fly, doves) in the 1951 film *Мы за мир* (We are for peace). Gay men used the first lines of the song—"Летите, голуби, летите" (Fly, doves, fly)—as a code to warn each other about coming police or KGB raids.

The soundtrack in the room was a slowed-down and therefore unrecognisable version of this song. It features a children choir, but the edit stretches it, distorting the sound towards deeper bass tones. The soundtrack lent the room an ominous tone and atmosphere, as if something had just happened or was about to happen. Like the work *night watch*, *light blue* was a durational installation seeking to prolong and extend the moment of warning, without saying explicitly what it is about.

The text was written in March 2023, meaning my exhibition had not yet taken place. The exhibition was open 11–26 August 2023. I decided to write about the exhibition as if it had already happened, as a way to write the works into being, in a kind of reflective and imaginative way, much in relation to my own writing in this text and the potential of the past tense. It also means that some things might have changed between when I wrote the text and the actual realisation and manifestation of the works in the gallery space.

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Image courtesy of the artist

Daniele Di Girolamo, *Beautiful things fading away (encounter)*, 2023. Rotating dry thistles, brass pipes, motors, cables, power supplies, variable dimensions. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

A Wild Spring Onion

Daniele Di Girolamo

I remember my astonishment at discovering the wild onion. As a child, I spent much of my time in the countryside and often explored my home vegetable garden. I used to rip blades of grass and stalks of wild plants from the ground. A tuft of grass caught my curiosity, and—considering the little strength in the arms of a child who has just begun to explore the world—they put up quite some resistance to my pulling action. My fingers were now holding a handful of leaves whose small roots ended in a bulb shape. On a second look, that bulb was very similar to a miniature version of an onion. Was that really what it looked like? How was it possible for a vegetable to grow spontaneously, on a kitchen garden's forgotten edge, without anyone caring for it? It almost made a mockery of my grandmother's daily efforts to cultivate all her greens. Nevertheless, one could harvest this little onion and perhaps even find a way to cook and eat it like all other vegetables. It was there, together with the other plants, ready to be plucked.

Who could say, then, how many other edible plants were hiding in every corner of the countryside? And maybe our food was not just made of farmed goods; maybe there was much more beyond our capacity as farmers; maybe there was much more than what we know in the world; maybe the world was much bigger and more complex than that small garden where it, even so, revealed itself by hiding (in this case, underground). All these hypotheses crowded my head as a child without my knowing it. All I felt was mere amazement. An amazement sparkled by the analysis of a detail that changed how I read the world, connecting me with it in a new way.

A slight displacement showed me that the world was much more intricate, mutable, and elusive than I had believed up to that day. It pointed out the gap between how I thought things worked and how they actually were—a reality I knew very little about. The world began to reconfigure itself in my eyes, and it was transformed: I left behind my certainties, because it turned out they were not certain at all, and this hurt a bit but felt good, too. The world was not limited to that garden. It was tough to let go of that small security, but the awe and wonder helped. It is difficult to grasp the ungraspable. The displacement revealed that the attempt to block a river, to define a dream, can be unsuccessful—like being attached to an idea or obsessed with a memory you do not want to let go of. Or like having to say goodbye to a significant experience or person and finding it difficult to accept that, as with everything in life, even the beautiful things fade away.

As a spectator, this is what attracts me most to an artwork. And, as an artist, I have started noticing that this is what all my works tend towards.

Ambiguity and Non-fixity

On a formal level, my works often involve ambiguous shapes, movements, and sounds. These elements bring me closer to describing the moment when the world appears most mutable and elusive. When I work with a specific material, I try to give it an appearance that tends to be indeterminate or, in any case, not too fixed, so that it does not immediately refer to a single sensation or interpretation. I prefer when the formal level of an artwork becomes a base that can trigger more than one sensation or understanding. In this way, a form does not close or fix itself but unfolds by opening up more possibilities of experience.

For this reason, movement and sound are among the elements I employ in my practice. Both suggest an ongoing process and help to evade idleness. The ambiguity and non-fixity I am talking about do not aim at making perception false and questionable; instead, they want to let different sensations and interpretations coexist in the same space without being mutually exclusive. Ambiguity allows me to translate into a visual and auditory level the

perspective on the mutability of things; things that are often complex, contradictory, and comprising many coexisting elements—whether in the form of links or contrasts, visible and invisible parts, bodily sensations, or emotional resonances, whose internal boundaries are at times challenging to trace.

In *Sending a letter for sanding words* (2022), part of the installation is composed of two long shapes lying on the ground, with vaguely human-like proportions in length. They are made of thin aluminium sheets bent in various ways and whose external surface, the one facing upwards, is sandblasted. A soft plastic leather lining is on the inside of one of the two sculptures, the part facing the floor. From the many bits of feedback I have received, I can report a series of sensations that the sculpture evokes: its folds are reminiscent of crumpled paper and, at the same time, give a feeling of organic volumes. Even the nature of the material is not so immediate. The sandblasting process eliminated the aluminium's typical shine, making the sculpture matte. However strong the feel of the paper is, the sculpture's actual material is difficult to define. Only a few have been confident that the sculpture was made of paper; for the majority, the material remains an unsolved question.

Furthermore, the work reinforces a minor sensation of solidity through the fact that the sandblasted surface acts as a protective shell for the internal space in leather. This part evokes feelings of warmth, softness, and intimacy, but also the bony presence of a vertebral column that has lost its solidity. Many viewers take quite some time to identify the plastic leather—used, for example, for sofas. Those who read the caption with the list of materials have been surprised to learn about the presence of aluminium and absence of paper in the artwork. Now, it would not make sense to pinpoint who is right and who is not. For me, each of these sensations is true. Some of these sensations I had already identified and were the starting point for my work, while others I discovered through feedback. In any case, each one is valid and has the right to exist because the material evoked it. My intention was not to create an aluminium sculpture that looked like paper; instead, I was interested in creating a space of ambiguity.

"Believing you can explain things is just believing it, because things never get clear. The relationship between man and things is not only rational but also sentimental; let others say what they want. We must leave a margin of discretion, a strong interrogative component between the subject and the object."[1]

Goffredo Parise (1929–1986), an Italian novelist, journalist, and screenwriter, said this in an interview about writing. The same words may apply, beyond writing, to the act of looking at things and the creative process. The sentimental component he mentions makes me think of the dynamics of experiencing a work from which emotions, interpretations, and meanings can derive. These characteristics form the sense of the work, influencing and changing the object itself in the viewer's eyes. It is like they complete it. When I use a material or a sound, its ambiguous condition or non-fixity helps me leave an interrogative component between the work and whoever experiences it as a fundamental factor for completing it.

Parise is a writer who has greatly inspired me, especially with his book *Sillabari*. I would like to use materials in the same way he uses words. The book is a selection of short stories, each titled with a feeling or a word concerning the human condition, which he tries to evoke in a few pages. Parise does not analyse nor describe the feelings but instead depicts the circumstances in which that feeling is prompted, often daily, with the result of evoking it in the reader. His language is simple and direct, always close to bodily perception and the senses as the primary tool for navigating the world. It avoids intellectual constructions and interpretations and insists on a simple but acute description of the perception of reality activated by the senses. Each story is a window, a fragment of the flow of life of the characters he writes about, and does not claim to be exhaustive. This approach, together with an ambiguous and fragmentary grammar, allows the emergence of critical elements, such as the continuous mutability of life and the complex and contradictory reality of humans and things. An example is the opening of the story "Affetto" (Affection):

> One day, a wealthy but "respectable" man, who knew life also thanks to worldliness and futile and expensive things, came into the immense family home with the intention of "making it clear" to his wife that he no longer loved her—even though he loved her very much. […] The more time passed, the more the man felt within himself the duty to explain to his wife something that he knew was inexplicable.[2]

Image courtesy of the artist

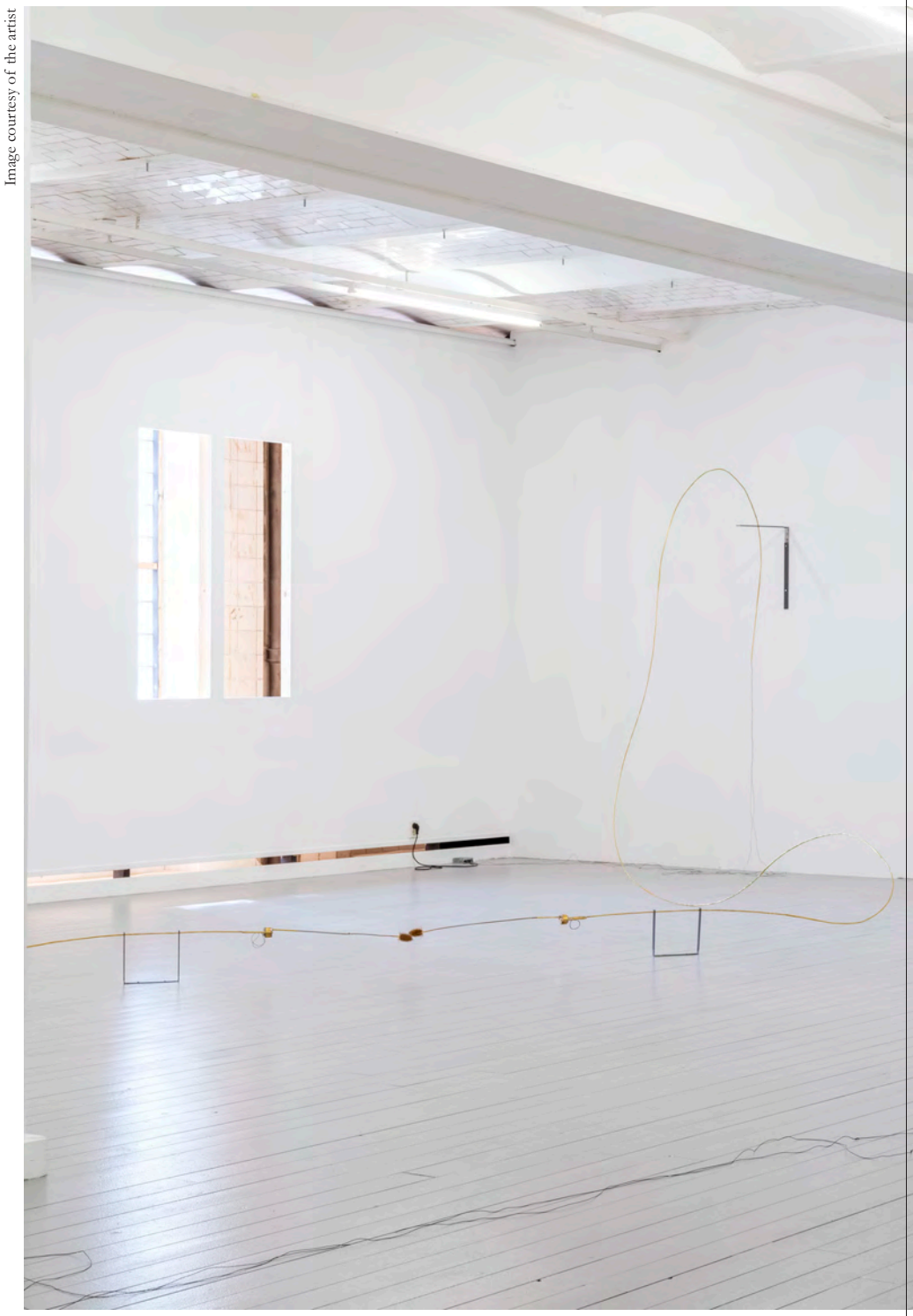
Daniele Di Girolamo, *Beautiful things fading away (encounter)*, 2023. Rotating dry thistles, brass pipes, motors, cables, power supplies, variable dimensions. Detail

To explain the feeling of affection, a contradictory situation is presented: since "he no longer loved her—even though he loved her very much," the man finds himself in the situation of explaining the inexplicable. The characters in the story have no names and are barely described.

"He allowed himself to be hurt a little, and also not," we read in "Dolcezza" (Sweetness). This indeterminacy can also be found in "Malinconia" (Melancholy), where the protagonist, a young girl named Silvia, is still inexperienced about the world, but "one thing was certain: the feeling aroused by those smells, made a little cold at twilight, closed up her throat and made her want to cry."[3]

A feeling linked to the passing of time and things: "the passing of time generates melancholy" is her grandfather's reply in another part of the story.[4] The same viewpoint can be found in the story "Cuore" (Heart), in the thoughts on the ephemerality of life: "Then he said, as if to himself: 'you have not changed, you are identical'; and she answered: 'you too'. Instead, the man knew very well that everything human passes and disappears, and perhaps this was the reason for his restlessness."[5]

Image courtesy of the artist



Daniele Di Girolamo, *Beautiful things fading away*, 2023. Installation view

Images courtesy of the artist

Top: Daniele Di Girolamo, *Beautiful things fading away*, 2023. Installation view
Bottom: Daniele Di Girolamo, *Beautiful things fading away (conversation)*, 2023. Heat-bent metal, motors activated by the recording of a conversation, audio device, cables, 50 × 70 × 75 and 50 × 70 × 85 cm. Detail

What is perceived is often a reality that cannot but be ambivalent, where contradictions coexist. Through the ambiguity of language, Parise fragments a fixed reality into a mutable, contradictory, and complex experience like that of a person's interiority. The matter becomes lighter and opens a window into a deeper space.

Spirituality and Material Processes

Another aspect of Parise's style that inspires me is the inseparability of the spirit from matter, of the invisible human side from its corporeal part made of senses, nerves, bowels, and ligaments—as if soul and body live in symbiosis and cannot be disjointed. I find this inseparability in many areas of daily life: literature, spirituality, and art. A final example from Parise is the story "Paura" (Fear), which tells of an elderly lady returning home at night:

> She walked slowly, in that childish, rather heavy way, as it happens when the spirit so close to the muscles, tendons, and nerves has already succumbed to the illusions of the past, and the only thing left to do is to drift along like a boat. Indeed, the long low horn of a tug or perhaps of a ship—a liner leaving the Bacino di San Marco—hummed three times, and the woman's spirit, as it always happened when she heard those sirens, livened up, and so did her way of walking.[6]

It becomes difficult to distinguish where the inner world ends and the outer world starts: "Was it the thought that had suggested the footsteps or the footsteps that had suggested the thought?"[7] One slips and transforms into the other:

> And at the thought of her solitude, she was a little lost between agitation and a sense of the nothingness of things and people. But the thought did not take long to change and, as it always happens in old people, it settled on the details related directly and immediately to her own life: a damp stain in the corner of her bedroom ceiling that seemed to grow bigger and bigger every day.[8]

I find a similar dynamic in the works of Giovanni Anselmo, who was part of the arte povera movement. The work *Respiro* (1969) is an example. Two large metal bars are placed on the ground, with a sea sponge in between. Due to external thermal conditions, the iron slowly expands or shrinks, allowing the sponge to gradually fill or empty with air:

> I remember that, as a boy, we used to play along the railway. In summer, as the heat dilated the iron until it became burning hot, the tracks came to touch each other, and the individual track segments came into contact. In winter, instead, the space between the segments was greater, and the track elements no longer made contact. […] When I inserted a sea sponge between two iron bars, […] this "breath" became "visible," that is, objectified rather than theorised.[9]

The work finds its meaning in the dimension of silent transformation, which, however, goes almost beyond the limit of human perception. By implying this limit, *Respiro* implements a displacement: it offers us a temporal and spatial dimension that normally surpasses us. This can happen, anyway, because the work remains in a very concrete dimension, with its roots in the material process.

Luca Vanello is a contemporary artist based in Brussels, and someone I had the opportunity to work with in the first half of 2021. His best-known works are large environmental installations composed mainly of white plants put in relation to other materials, which he processes by trying to alter their temporality, that is, by inverting or suspending them. The way he installs these materials creates a dialogue of mutual care with the aim of exploring new ways of being together. In particular, he processes the plants by extracting chlorophyll from the leaves. Then he treats them with vegetable oil to keep them soft. This operation prevents the leaves from deteriorating and creates a pause in the decomposition cycle. I find it fascinating when a material process of this kind also encompasses the meaning of the work; perhaps, one could say, its conceptual part or, rather, the research-related part. The suspension in the cycle of deterioration takes place in its material process, and this becomes inseparable from the invisible part it evokes: an attempt to contrast something very similar to death and, at the same time, an act of care for something already dead (the branches and the plants employed in the works). While assisting him,

I had the possibility to experience first-hand how much attention such a process requires. When I recall applying oil to the leaves, I still get the sensation of taking care of something that requires a great deal of time, patience, and listening. After the chlorophyll extraction, we massaged almost every leaf of every branch with oil, not just once but several times over several days. The image stuck in my mind is that of huge tables on which whitened masses lay, almost as if they are recovering and need to rest, and the whiteness of the light is the cure for those sheets of white leaves. The way Vanello subsequently installed the work was perfectly in tune with these sensations of care and suspension, which are evident even when seeing the work for the first time without knowing the lengthy process behind it. The process filters through anyway. Personally, I see another kind of temporality involved, which concerns the memory of something that has passed (dead) but which you still wish to take care of. Like remembering something in order to preserve its dear presence.

My first clear reflections on the symbiosis between spirit and body were triggered by a book I encountered during my education. I grew up in a devout Catholic family, which has always paid particular attention to spirituality. The book is called *The Way of a Pilgrim*, or *The Pilgrim's Tale*. It is a spiritual text written between 1853 and 1861 that is well-known in the orthodox world. It divulges the mystical practice of perpetual inner prayer, which consists of incessantly repeating the same formula while following the rhythm of the breath. Praying is a very concrete practice that affects the spirituality of the book's protagonist. The pilgrim travels in search of the Spiritual Fathers who can support him in his progressive learning of how to pray without ceasing.

The pilgrimage is physical and spiritual at the same time. The prayer is known as "the prayer of the heart" in the Christian world, and its origins date back to the Desert Fathers from the third to fourth century CE. It says, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." At the start of his journey, the pilgrim begins to pray by isolating himself and adopting a specific bodily position, with the prayer following the rhythm of his breath. The pilgrim repeats it a certain number of times each day. At first, it is challenging. Only with daily application and over years of practice does the enormous initial difficulty turn into joy. The repetitions increase throughout the pilgrimage until it becomes a perpetual interior prayer. Even the physicality of the prayer changes: it is proclaimed aloud to start with, and slowly, through growth, study, and meditation, the prayer becomes more and more silent. The pilgrim goes from miming it with the lips to only using the tongue in his closed mouth; eventually, the prayer becomes internal and perpetual, close to the heart, while still following the rhythm of the breath. Even the body changes its attitude in prayer. Towards the end of the story, the pilgrim no longer needs to stay still while praying:

> I sometimes walk seventy or more kilometers a day and I do not feel that I am walking; I only feel that I am saying the prayer. When a powerful cold chills me to the bone, I begin all the more intensely to say the prayer—and soon I am warmed all over. If hunger begins to overwhelm me, I begin invoking all the more often the name of Jesus Christ and I forget that I wanted to eat. When I become ill, when rheumatism begins in my back and legs, I pay attention to the prayer and no longer feel the pain. If someone insults or injures me, I only recall how sweet is the Jesus prayer, and then and there both insult and anger pass and I forget everything. I have become like some sort of half-conscious person; I have no worries about anything; nothing occupies me. I would not look at any vain thing and would rather be alone. Only by habit do I wish for one thing, to say the prayer without ceasing; and when I am occupied with it, I am very happy. Who knows what is happening with me?[10]

The prayer has a direct influence on his muscles and body. The spiritual and material parts become increasingly inseparable, in a constant cross-reference between praying with the body (praying as a physical act) and the body transformed by prayer (the body becoming a visible trace of the changing soul).

I was reading this book in parallel with creating an old work of mine (later entitled *Prayers*, 2017), which was based on simple salt crystallisations. I composed it as follows: Seawater saturated with salt slowly dripped from several bottles hanging upside-down

Image courtesy of the artist

Daniele Di Girolamo, *Beautiful things fading away (paper)*, 2023. Recycled paper from unsent letters, handmade brass frame, wood

from the ceiling on sea rocks placed on the ground. The water partially evaporated between one drop and another, allowing the salt to crystallise. Due to the prolonged accumulation of salt, the appearance of each stone progressively changed, becoming more and more white. With hindsight, the connection with the book seems didactic, but it was unclear to me then. I simply wanted to activate a very slow process and see what would happen by decomposing and recomposing elements belonging to the seascape. The book was not intentionally part of my research for *Prayers*, and the work was not pursuing the book. Only after reading it did I realise that my interest in producing the piece was the same thing that fascinated me with the book: an inseparability between materiality and its most invisible triggers, between spirit and body, between natural processes and human motions.

What fascinates me in all these cases is that the closer one is to the senses and the body (the closer one is to material and emotional processes), the more the possibility of jumping towards another dimension opens up. A displacement, indeed, where the transition is no longer just a formal ambiguity but also a difficulty in separating apparently opposite dimensions between the external world (made of materials and senses) and the invisible world (made of emotions and spirit).

It amazes me that this can happen in a single space, whether it is the space of a page, the intimate and spiritual space of a person, or the few square centimetres of a work of art.

If I have to bring everything back to my artistic practice, what I have learned from these examples is that if I want to talk about caring, spirituality, invisibility, and subtle emotions, I do not need to provide a description but rather prepare the ground in which that feeling of caring, spirituality, invisibility, subtlety, and more can arise and be evoked. The final work does not become a substitute symbol but a trigger.

If You Listen, It Starts to Make a Sound

When discussing creative processes with a chocolatier friend of mine, we often find ourselves talking about a public figure with whom we have many points in common: the Michelin-starred chef Niko Romito. His approach has repeatedly come back to inspire me over the years. His method is based on a deep study of his ingredients. His creations start from something other than the idea of a final dish and focus entirely on the basic material. He observes what it has to offer and lets himself be guided by it. Using the material as a starting point, he listens and extracts (through many complicated techniques) all its characteristics, nuances, and flavours and brings them back into the final dish. In fact, his dishes are often made of a single ingredient that has been decomposed and recomposed by layering all the nuances of flavours and textures extracted from it. The spectrum of flavours is already present in the ingredient itself, and the chef simply extracts and rearranges it by exploring the material.

Even if they belong to entirely different fields, I find many assonances between sculpture and Romito's culinary approach. It is an approach to material based on the actions of listening to it, following what it has to say, and orchestrating everything that can be extracted from it. This orchestration is guided by how it reverberates in you as you hear, eat, see, experience it.

"If you listen, it starts to make a sound." This sentence is a small fragment of one of my many conversations with a colleague on sculpture. Therein, I have realised how fundamental the dimension of listening is, both literally and metaphorically, in my practice; not only in the process of physically creating the work but also in placing the listening dimension for those who experience it.

I would like to go back to the installation *Sending a letter for sanding words* and talk about another element of its composition. I was working on some automatic rainsticks: a series of hollow cylinders, which, by rotating on themselves, cause fragments of stones to collide inside them, thus generating a sound similar to rain (basically like the musical instrument, but with a motor that activates the movement). I chose semitransparent plastic, the corrugated kind used for roofs (the juxtaposition of roof and rain fascinated me, and the semitransparency of the plastic suggests that of water), and I embarked on creating my motored cylinders. After several attempts, unfortunately, the sound was still unsatisfactory. The main problem was the non-continuity of sound caused by how I had modelled the plastic. In practical terms, I obtained the cylindrical forms by closing inwards what were originally rectangular strips of PVC. The two long sides created a paddle inside the cylinder that collected all the fragments (like a mill diverting water), which were then released in a burst after a pause. This short downpour bothered me, but after listening to it for days while looking for a solution, I realised that its rhythm was identical to that of the undertow or waves in general. At that point, I ran to the beach, sifted some sand grit, and inserted it into the sticks. The sound definitely improved and became richer. I built more sticks, and in the end, I obtained four rotating rods and an ever changing rhythm of the sound of the waves. Everything then became as if the sand could remember where it came from. An extraction of memory from the material was happening right there, both literally and metaphorically. The act of listening made another aspect of the material emerge; in other words, its sound triggered my memory of the sound of the sea. The following quote from Chris Marker's film *Sans Soleil* (1983) came to my mind: "I will have to spend my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining. We do not remember. We rewrite memory the same way history is rewritten. How can one remember thirst?"[11] And while continuing to listen to those rotating sticks, other thoughts arose. I thought about those times when you have an intense experience, whether it is a beautiful encounter or a loss, and it sticks to you, and you constantly keep on reworking it. It is as if the process of remembering is a constant reinterpretation of reality. Some things you remember more willingly, others you prefer to forget, and all this happens gradually. It is as if remembering something becomes rewriting it, and the process of remembering is continually smoothing out reality. Over time, your image of a person, or the dynamics of a particular moment, changes. Similarly, the sound of the installation—the memory of the sand—is constantly changing, as if memory continues to shape the present. The dimension of listening then does not end with the material's potential. Instead, listening also implies a reverberation: what you hear is also the reverberation of the material inside you, which triggers emotions, sensations, associations, meanings, and memory. Sound has a peculiar ability to stimulate memory, associating what you are listening to with something you already know and yet, as the sound itself, is quite hard to grasp. "Sounds familiar," as they say.

Listening to a material both on a metaphorical and literal level makes my practice less and less projected towards a final image and more inclined towards exploring what the material has to offer, what sensations it evokes, and how it reverberates in myself and the viewer. I continually reformulate the work until I feel I am approaching a point of balance between the "flavours" or "feelings" extracted —a sort of internal equilibrium. The idea of the work adapts to the material rather than the other way around; it is materially formed and inseparable from the material process. The concept of the work is developed in the material and resides in its operation. However, this process does not end with manipulating the material but also includes its reverberation in the viewer. The reverberation consists of the viewer's experience of the work and completes it. The reverberation the material activates is always an inner echo. This is why I need to stay close to the senses and the body: in order to seek a more direct relationship with those who experience it, myself first.

At this point, I am aware that all my works aim to be triggers for an experience rather than formalisations of a specific research project or concept. This awareness helps me to stay in the perceptive territory of sensations. Studying how these materials reverberate and what they evoke in the viewer is the next step. For me, a work's complexity does not lie in looking for specific themes that are already complex to analyse. My works perhaps want to stop one step earlier, because there is already so much to extract from a single element. In my eyes, the complexity of a work lies in organising the orchestra of flavours, in preparing the favourable conditions and the terrain in which something can be born.

Certainly, mine does not claim to be an objective process. The sensations extracted along the way are always influenced by my interests, tastes, and gaze, pointing towards what is there to be extracted. Often it becomes an ego battle of balance that I still know little about: forcing the material or letting it shape me.

Relations

I grew up in a large family with a dominant Catholic bearing. I am the fifth of six children from the same couple, and each sibling is a couple of years apart from the next. At its most crowded, my household consisted of ten people, including both my grandmothers, who, in the last years of their lives, needed the care and attention that my mother, a nurse, could give them. Our house in the countryside was constantly under construction, following the ever changing needs of our growing family. My father, who has a small building company, added one room to the house whenever he could afford it. To kill time when I could not play with anyone—but also, every now and then, when I needed to be alone—I often explored the countryside or the construction site currently in process at home.

After writing the above memory, my interest in the potential of materials, in natural and human processes and how they almost overlap in a simple but complex network of relationships, appears almost banal and obvious to me. However, I would like to underline that it is not a melancholic vision of my childhood that drives me to these interests. Perhaps the argument goes in another direction: it is also through those particular dynamics that my gaze on things has been formed (i.e., no different from how life experiences work for everyone else). It would be correct to say that everything I have written so far is not about my interests but about my gaze—what I am able to see.

Beautiful Things Fading Away is the title of my master's exhibition, which is about relationships: how we and things are structured through the relationships we belong to, not only in the present but also in the past; how a spiritual experience, a distant place, a past relationship, or a person who is no longer there continue to resonate in us, still shaping the present. *Beautiful Things Fading Away* is simultaneously a sensation and an atmosphere, and each work within it is a fragment of it.

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4 Ibid., 237.

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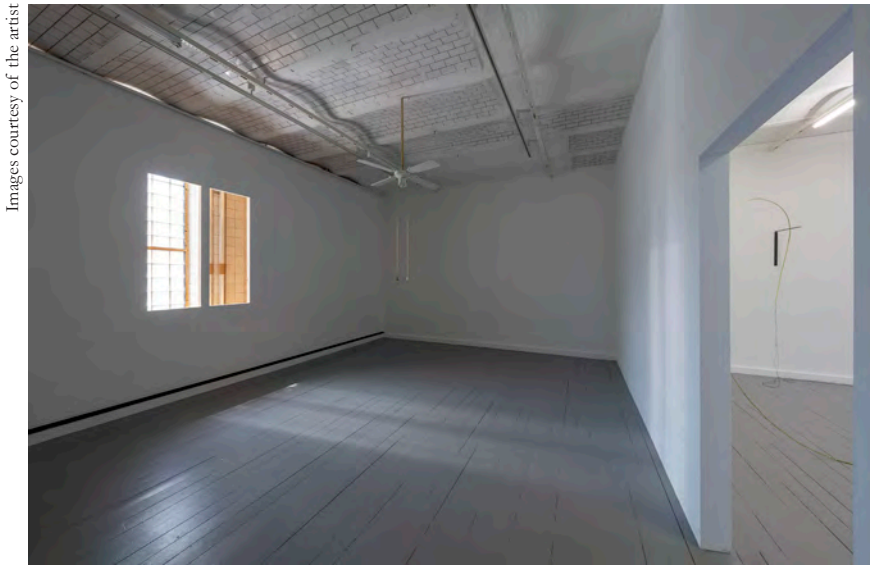
Images courtesy of the artist



Daniele Di Girolamo, *Beautiful things fading away (sleep)*, 2023. Bedroom Ceiling fan, dried almond blossom, brass chains, coffin screws, 230 × 106 × 106 cm. Installation view

Daniele Di Girolamo, *Beautiful things fading away (sleep),* 2023. Bedroom Ceiling fan, dried almond blossom, brass chains, coffin screws, 230 × 106 × 106 cm. Detail

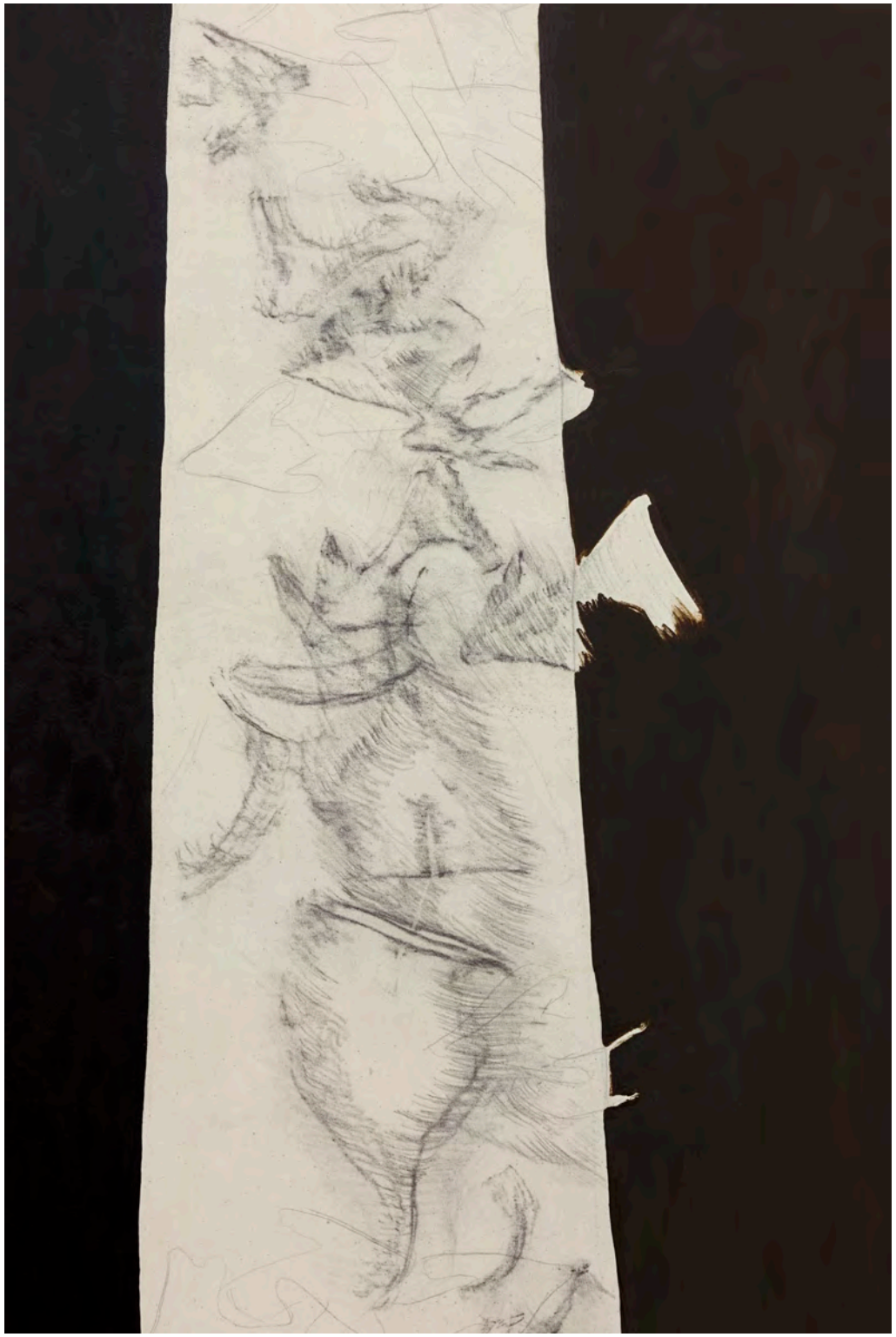


Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Hjördís Gréta Guðmundsdóttir, *overlap 1*, 2023. Oil on canvas, 180 × 130 cm.
the lost echo, MFA Exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

replacement of the lost echo
Hjördís Gréta Guðmundsdóttir

There is embroidery on a painting. It is woven through the base, which forms a grid. Before the base warps and bends, the grid has counted the steps of markings that have travelled through time and stopped here in anticipation.

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I borrowed the needle from a museum storeroom; it was very sharp but too rusty to embroider with, and I wondered if I could sand it down. The eye of the needle was also rusty. *Flettesting*, or the braided cross-stitch[1] —the projection of arrows going in directions, and, on the back, straight lines across their exposed side—has been my subject matter.

My interest in this embroidery technique was not only sparked by the surface of the stitch, which is characterised by the depth of the braiding, but also by the cultural value and aesthetics of the surviving tapestries. I try to explore certain tensions that I see in them and the story behind the works, specifically in relation to the meaning of the term "cultural heritage" and how its environment can touch on what I understand to be the nurturing of nationalism.

In my master's exhibition, I use these tapestries in the works, which consist of paintings and a long tapestry. This usage is based on references to patterns and motifs from old tapestries that are accessible in the archives of the National Museum of Iceland in Reykjavík, together with one piece of embroidery preserved in the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp
Sophie Taeuber-Arp's (1889–1943) body of work spans both the fields of handcraft and art, for instance in the form of embroidery and paintings.

The work *Embroidery* (1918), which is 11.1 x 8.3 cm in size, is composed of several squares of different sizes, sewn together with a cross-stitch. The abstract image lies within a thick wooden frame covered in gold leaf. The accompanying description of the work states that it is "Wool on canvas in a historical frame."[2] It straddles these two worlds —art and craft; the embroidery is in miniscule form but exalted in a gold frame. Varying shades of pink and red surfaces overlap with black squares in the work. These squares are themes throughout her practice, appearing in both paintings and pictorial embroidery.

There are several ensembles where she made gouache paintings and embroidery based on the same motifs. The works *Composition with Rectangular and Angular Arms* and *Composition with Rectangular Planes*, both from 1928, are examples of this. The former is a gouache and drawing on paper while the latter is cross-stitch on canvas.

Through these works, in which she constantly mirrors the images back to each other, I find a connection to my own practice: using a pool of information and motif forms that can repeatedly be revisited and mined. *Composition with Bird Motifs*, from 1928, is a picture plane in which recurring forms are rearranged and simplified in an embroidered version. Her textile works are characterised by straight lines and rectangles that go hand in hand with the traditional technique of the cross-stitch. The surface is covered with the stitch, which is equally dense over the entire area. On this surface, I connect these embroidery stitches within their frames as one focus point of the grid.

The grid is repetition, imitation, and a trace frame. It is a place of anticipation and temporary transparency, perhaps an evasion of vulnerability. In her book, *The Originality of the AvantGarde and Other Modernist Myths*, Rosalind Krauss addresses the debate on originality in the modernist movement. She suggests that the figure of the grid is the area where the contradiction of modernism takes place. She reflects on how the "self," a source of originality in modernism, does not correspond to the origin of the grid, which was one of the main themes of the avant-garde movement in visual arts.[3]

"Structurally, logically, axiomatically, the grid can only be repeated."[4]

Repetition occurs in Taeuber-Arp's work and is the basis of the needle stitches in embroidery. The woollen yarn fills up the woven foundational structure, but it does not disappear. It is always a replica of itself and without an author. The grid is in itself a mapping of the surface, an organised metaphor for it, and it progresses by repetition. Krauss points to this continuation, the repetition, which is covering something up. I see it as a departure of vulnerability.

Fífa in Braided Cross Stitch (2019) is an embroidery image that I made based on a photograph of Arctic cotton grass that I took during a hike in Kangerlussuaq, Greenland, in the summer of 2017. The flower is characterised by a white woolly bud on a narrow stalk, and I used mohair to stitch the image unevenly but densely over the surface.

While making the image, I had been given access to look at needles in the National Museum's storage in Reykjavík, which were mostly identical to the needles I used. The only difference was how rusty they were, but some were also too long to embroider with.

I punched a few stitches with one of the needles. It proved very difficult, as the rust snagged on the wool, and I had to force the needle through each point. There was an orange trace of rust in the linen after this effort, and I wondered if I should perhaps have left it alone. I recorded the moment on film and decided to display it along with the embroidery as a QR code on the wall.

The QR code is also a grid, and it refers to the almost pixel-like marks of the cross-stitch, stuck to the fabric underneath and within it—its skeletal grid.

When making the image of the cotton grass, I referred to the embroideries that were on display at the National Museum of Iceland, reflecting on why more embroideries and relics from before the Reformation in Iceland have not come to light. A similar story applies to Sweden and Finland.[5] The only evidence of earlier embroidery in Iceland is in written sources, and the oldest preserved pieces of embroidery are believed to date to the second half of the fourteenth century, although the vast majority is dated post-Reformation (1550).[6 7] The question remains unanswered, but I mention it here as an open speculation.

The repetition in the stitch, the endless movement of the arm, concentrated in the elbow, becomes almost an endurance test of independence in my art—chasing the ego. The repetition, the reconstruction, and the replacement are a determination to understand and examine more deeply. To understand the knowledge that the subject holds each time. Thus, these themes have been my tools to understand what their values are and why they exist.

These values can be personal but also predetermined—we endeavour to find reasons that suit us, that are suitable for expressing how we see ourselves and others, how we position ourselves in the world.

I wonder if there is something unsaid in these things, and what mystery their existence holds as such. There is an experiment that I try to bring forward—that thing that was not mentioned for a reason. Through these formations, I try to touch on them, the reasons, the nourishment of independence.

Cecilia Vicuña

I have been enthralled with Vicuña's quipu works. Her body of work, which is based in poetry, painting, performance, installation, and other media, touches on what she calls the precarious (the moment of emergency)[8] —a cultural heritage that lives through the tangible. The works are both cultural heritage and visual art,[9] inherited and expressed, temporary and endless. That is how I see them.

Her artistic practice, which begins and ends in poetry, repeatedly deals with the tumultuous history of dictatorship and democracy in Chile and throughout the Americas.[10] Her work explores the rise of socialism following Allende's presidency, Pinochet's military dictatorship, and Chile's complex transformation after these events.[11] Despite the political allusions in Vicuña's work, that which she calls "the precarious" can still be said to be the common thread in her practice.

"The precarious" is what exposes itself to others.[12] It is what confronts the unconscious and the unpredictable. That which dwells near the anarchy of being a vulnerable body in the journey of time. The tapestries I refer to are also in conversation with "the precarious" in connection with these factors, their sensitivity to time, and with regard to the environment of the time they stem from. Vicuña's quipus address this, among other things.

Quipu is a device/tool used by ancient Peruvians for recording information. Quipu is based on cord, using differently coloured, knotted threads.[13] Juliet Lynd has discussed Vicuña's reference to the relic that is quipu, questioning whether it is an objective way to open up the debate on the colonialism that engulfed the continent.[14] The existence of the quipu as a medium of language largely disappeared following the introduction of the European alphabet in the sixteenth century.[15]

Vicuña's quipu works, which refer only to their original purpose, do not have a system around which their essence revolved before it was forgotten—or was exterminated. They flow between being poems, unspun lengths of wool, knotted threads like their originals, performances, photographs, and more. Quipus that remember nothing.[16]

Vicuña describes in an interview how language is the human way of expressing what we experience but cannot explain, that we reach for but cannot say.[17]" … words—being multidimensional creatures—are caretakers of the deeper and unknown aspects of our imagination."[18] In fact, Vicuña's works are a narrative; however, I find that the boundaries between where the stories begin and end are blurred. The remade quipus refer to the history of the tradition behind them; they are a type of echo of what was an established record. The works are directed towards ritual. They deal with the stories and traditions behind them, and Vicuña is not only commemorating something, but redescribing it.

The defunct quipu system is revived through ritual. Are Vicuña's quipu works like the words she describes? Are they a way to reach out to this thing that cannot be explained? The tapestries I reference in my master's exhibition were a way of storytelling, sometimes without words. They are made up of frames, which mark the events of a certain story. In this way, the embroidery images appear as narrative.

In Walter Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller,"[19] he touches on the attributes of the storyteller that have disappeared following the mass production of the novel, resulting in a divide in the listeners, which is his main concern in this text. I associate my art with storytelling. Not only female narratives and ideas about the "good girl" that are imprinted on us before we are born, but also narratives that address time and are wrapped here in a story behind the braided stitch and the lost echo, which I will get back to at the end of the text.

Benjamin writes, "Memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation."[20] Here, he is pointing out that remembrance and reminiscence both have origins in memory.

This relationship between remembering and reminiscence manifests differently in the modern novel and the storyteller's narration. It is the muse that is drawn from the narrator's memory that makes this difference. The novel remains unchanged and remembers everything—while the storyteller's narrative is always looking for the muse, mining the memory.

Benjamin describes the tendency of the storyteller to express a narrative of life experiences and travel, a narrative that contains something practical, whether it is overtly expressed or hidden in the feeling of the story. For him, it is knowledge or truth that lies behind the stories, which are then interwoven with the retelling and memory of the listeners. This practical element in the story can appear in three ways, through morals, advice, or proverbs. These are the points that give counsel to the narrative. This is what Benjamin describes as the truth of life experience: knowledge/wisdom.[21] He wonders if this knowledge is diminishing, and subsequently the existence of the storyteller as well.

I believe Vicuña's quipus contain this usefulness to which Benjamin refers. Through her ritual approach, there is a need to celebrate these knot-systems. I am wondering how my

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Hjördís Gréta Guðmundsdóttir, *overlap 2*, 2023. Oil on canvas, 180 × 130 cm

Hjördís Gréta Guðmundsdóttir, *overlap 3*, 2023. Oil on canvas, 180 × 130 cm

own artistic practice stands next to this ritualistic remaking and constructing of another narrative.

What succeeds the storyteller's narrative is information. Thus, the listener, who has now become the reader according to Benjamin, no longer has the opportunity to interpret the narrative in their own way. The feeling and psychology of the story do not get breathing space, and so the information does not have the same afterlife as the storyteller's narration. The source of the story is drawn from natural history, from death. That is where its validity comes from.[22] I think the narrative in my art could emerge in this validation, in natural history. I wonder if it is similar to Vicuña's description of words, an art that reaches into that which cannot be explained but tries to interpret it. Perhaps it tries to interpret certain areas where the source of the narrative resides, and where death is happening—the fragmentary and temporary, remembrance and reminiscence.

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The work *A Patch for Gísli's Sweater* (2019) is a knitted patch made to fit on the sweater of a famous recluse farmer in Iceland.[23] It is knitted in the colours I imagined the sweater to be: grey and brown. The patch is 20 cm long and 17 cm across at the widest point. Its edges are different: they are designed according to the imagined shape of the hole in the sweater, rather than a regular repair in a sweater that would be even across all edges. Along with the patch, I made an embroidered image resembling a landscape, obtained from the Google Maps view of Selárdalur, where the remains of Gísli's farm stand. The embroidered image was made with a stitch called braid stitch, which is one of the traditional Icelandic needlework stitches.

The unsolicited patch has never found its way onto the sweater, which hardly exists anymore. Its appearance also does not necessarily refer to usefulness, but to a flat circle of wool that disappeared or dissolved. The hole in the sweater, a consequence of much use despite the strength of the wool, is the place I look to. I wonder if I see time there; I wonder if it was always there and whether it is the imagination that has determined this tendency to interpret the hole as a certain hint of a question mark regarding emptiness. In there, in the hole in the sweater, I may have been immersed in my art—to fill a void. Is this a desire to close something unsaid, make amends with or change the past, throw away question marks, cover up a truth or form a new one, refine, romanticise, swallow shame, and then vice versa? I put this forward as a consideration into this text.

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I approach cultural heritage through the language I know, and also touch on the environment I was brought up in. Handcraft is therefore a central point that I look to, though it matters more where it leads, even though history and tradition are present here.

These tapestries to which I refer are traces of their time. The braid stitch, a historically important embroidery stitch, is no longer used in the sense it once was—as the basis of a narrative. And I think about it in connection with Benjamin's writings on the narrator who draws the muse from memory, and the listener, the reader, who feeds on death from the narrative, natural history.

Morehshin Allahyari

Morehshin Allahyari's work has been on my mind for a long time, and I believe her art has influenced me as an artist. When I first got to know her visual world in a course in feminist studies during an exchange programme in New York in the spring of 2018, I did not have the opportunity to see her work in person. Later, at the *Manual Override* exhibition at The Shed in New York in 2019, I saw her installation *She Who Sees the Unknown: Kabous, The Right Witness, and The Left Witness*.

The work is one part or one story out of five from the series *She Who Sees the Unknown*, which Allahyari worked on from 2017 to 2021.[24] The research project, which revolves around reshaping certain djinn goddesses from Islamic folklore, aims to open a discussion on colonialism in the history of the Middle East.[25] Allahyari uses sculpture to retell the story of the goddesses. The sculptures appear in the form of 3-D printing, 3-D simulation videos, and archiving.

In her works, she strives to recreate—and tell—myths and history.[26] She uses archiving and narrative to intertwine the contradictions

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Hjördís Gréta Guðmundsdóttir, *overlap 4*, 2023. Oil on canvas, 180 × 160 cm.
Installation view (bottom) and detail (top)

in the aforementioned myths with the aim of referring to the effects of Western technological progress within colonial policies in Southwest Asia and North Africa. Her works touch on the social and political aspects of cultural heritage, connecting it to modern times, for example, through technology.

One of her better-known works is the 3-D-printed sculptural series *Material Speculation: ISIS* (2015–16). The sculptures are based on historical artefacts and art that the IS organisation destroyed. The series was a protest against the Syrian state, following the presidential election of Bashar al-Assad in 2011.[27] Allahyari reconstructed the destroyed relics from the ancient city of Palmyra through 3-D printing, using publicly available data for the reconstructions.

These are aspects that I touch on in my works. Just as I look at the work of Taeuber-Arp, who draws on both new and old motifs from her own work and the environment, I look at Allahyari's work while wondering whether the story behind the works and the information is what shapes them.

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In the performance *Patriot* (2020), I set up a gasoline-powered generator and vacuum cleaner on the road. The performance consisted of vacuuming the gravel on the road until the vacuum-cleaner bag was full. First, the generator was turned on and then the vacuum cleaner was plugged into it. Next, I hoovered until the vacuum-cleaner bag was full of gravel. The performance ended with the bag being taken and placed on the pavement, then the vacuum cleaner and generator were turned off. The vacuum-cleaner bag, which had almost turned to stone, stood up after this endurance test of hoovering up gravel from the road. In this stint of nonsense, I tried to fix the impossible, in complete opposition to all logic. The generator burns fuel to generate electricity for the vacuum cleaner, which fills up with dirt, sand, and rocks, never achieving its goal of cleaning the pavement and gravel road. Whether the gravel is better placed in the vacuum-cleaner bag is unclear, but perhaps the sincere self-centeredness of the ego, the patriot, is nourished.

In her video works, the artist Cinthia Marcelle depicts how the role of machines and ideas on labour are being transformed. In the work *Fonte 193* (2009), a fire truck has taken on a new role.[28] In the work, the camera angle is directed downwards diagonally, with a circular drawing made of lines in the sand filling the centre of the orange surface. The car is driven in circles, following the same tracks, thus creating the drawing. On top of the car are two firefighters, pumping water from the roof towards the centre of the circle. The description of the work states that the fountain has been turned inside out.[29] These are also irrational gestures with a romantic setting. The machine becomes an embodiment of imitation through its capacities and limitations.

In the performance *Human and Excavator* (2022), I placed a construction excavator in a parking lot, framed within four orange cones. The cones were connected with a striped marker, forming a square. Outside the frame was a box of large chalks and construction tape. On the beak of the excavator, chalk was attached, the tape sticking out and touching the asphalt. The performance took place in such a way that the driver of the excavator drew a picture with the chalk on the parking lot. Lines criss-crossing and overlapping each other formed something that resembled a pattern or a trace. These are the stitches of the braid stitch. The needle has become the arm of the machine and the chalk, the wool. The capacities of the excavator, to shovel and transport, are pushed aside, allowing it to acquire a new role that does not serve the same purpose. It becomes a tool to draw a temporary picture of the course of the braid stitch. It sews clumsily with the chalk, loudly and imprecisely.

Julie Mehretu

Julie Mehretu's older paintings are important to me. The works, which are full of marks and gestures, are formed based on different urban landscapes. She uses cartographical images of cities and breaks them up with the vertical forms of the marks.[30] The works offer diverse perspectives through symbolic pieces of architecture. Basically, they use a specific grid and load it with drawings and traces.[31] I struggle to describe these marks here; in a chapter from the book *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in Post-medium Condition*, Mehretu describes them thus: "The marks are percussive, repetitive motions, marks / that shift with each motion, faster, accelerating / to gain that wicked MASS of marks (being) that devour, / consume, digest, and decimate their place / until they morph it / shift it / fuse into it / splice through. / To find the break, in the linear. / The mark is insistent."[32]

The marks take over the surface; they carry weight and movement while they consume the image and their location. Mehretu describes the drawing in the works as an imitation of written language, but not words, and I think that also applies to the gestures ("Mimic writing but not words").[33]

What the marks do on top of the grid, or the map, is move its stability. In her works, Mehretu develops the idea that cities and certain architecture within them are simultaneously spaces that contain fragments of collective experience and the gathering of individual perspectives —different individuals.[34] These are spaces where individuals position themselves, much like the map, and the viewer's perspective changes accordingly. For me, the works are an attempt to achieve a holistic perception of a space, place, or city.

In an interview, Mehretu talks about how she collected motifs and information from the environment before starting her *Stadia* (2004) works. For example, she collected drawings of sports fields, whether they had been built or not, signs or markers, and used the marks to superimpose the drawings on top of the architectural drawings, the grids.[35] She describes how the markings and gestures are almost eating up the foundation plan of the sports field and, at the same time, holding it up.[36] Her interpretation of her own work is related to her mixed background, being from both Ethiopia and the United States.[37] It is based on trying to locate oneself. That is the point from which the works are created and is the method for understanding different cultures. Living in the "Nepantla" space, "in-between."[38]

In the work of Mehretu and Allahyari, I see a connection to my own artistic creation in relation to the idea of allegory. The same combinations of signs and shapes that Mehretu takes from the environment and puts together on the canvas lead Allahyari to document artefacts and artworks from the past. The two main characteristics of allegory are the confirmation of the remoteness of the past and the tendency to revive it for the ideas of the present.[39] Craig Owens wrote this about the return of allegory in art in the text "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism." He describes how allegory has activated the gap between past and present through reinterpretation, which otherwise would keep the past distant and poorly understood.[40]

Allegory in art appears as a replacement, with the purpose of becoming something else or revealing a new understanding of the subject. Thus, the allegory is a supplement, a supplement that builds on its original image and interprets it.[41] Through allegory, the artist appropriates the prototype of the subject and reproduces it with his own vision.

There is melancholy in this distance to the past, and melancholy is expressed in the fragmented. In the fragmentary and its traces, there is space to define, or decide, draw conclusions, and fill in. The core of the allegory touches on this, the temporary life of the fragmentary, the ruins of the past, natural history.[42] It is again death that we look to. Fear of the temporary and the inevitable emerges with the genesis of the allegory as an attempt to save the fragmentary ruins.

It is this sense of allegory that I reflect on in my own artistic creation, and these ideas about compensation that I continue to measure against the fragmentary and to fill in the void. I wonder if it is within these voids that I find space to reflect on my own ideas and speculations—whether that is where the braided stitch belongs.

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Embroidery, a technique based on precision and repetition, is a slow medium, and the tangible relics of the braid stitch live there. The knowledge within the relics is what seems intangible. There is something I don't know. The knowledge comes from a real object that had a different utility or purpose, but that has become a symbol of its time. It is also the symbol of that which we set upon it. The knowledge is there, within the walls of the

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Hjördís Gréta Guðmundsdóttir, *the lost echo*, 2023. Wool on juteduk, flettesting, 9 m × 90 cm. Detail

Hjördís Gréta Guðmundsdóttir, *the metaphor and synonym*, 2023. Ceramic stoneware, wool, sound measurement of *the lost echo*. Detail

purpose of then and now. The subject, the embroidery, stands between me and the replacement. The trio—me, the lost embroidery, and the replacement—work together to open a conversation about the loaded meaning of the artefact. Where the replica leads remains somewhat unpredictable, even in its finished form. The way societies load things, tradition, and other cultural heritage with meaning is variable and unpredictable, but that is where I am searching.

This theme, interpreting a certain phenomenon through reconstruction, is a way towards understanding. Not only the past, but rather the self. A way to place the self in the context of time and the surrounding community. But there is undeniably a performative aspect to the reconstruction of artefacts, which is not for archaeological purposes. The image, or the representation that is supposed to interpret the subject, can be a long way from reality.

Although, when working with poetic license, half reality, or whole, it does not have to be far from the truth. It can be easy to look at history and understand it as truth. We can form ideas about the past, but experience is perhaps the only thing that comes close.

"Mimesis" is an imitation that has similar, or alludes to, qualities of its original. The features can be tied to the poetic or be metaphors, or even abstract. A specific symmetry emerges between the real and the imaginary. The nature of the idea of the imitation indicates that the fictional art has a specific goal or argument, rather than standing as a direct imitation of something that exists in reality.[43] This also suggests that the pleasure of the work does not lie in reality but is ingrained in the poetic license of the author, who chooses symmetry over poetic reasons. According to Angela Curran, poetic mimesis is not necessarily based on something that exists in reality but can be either real or not yet in existence—the possible.[44]

A lost piece of embroidery, which is believed to be from the seventeenth century, is stored in the National Museum in Copenhagen. One can imagine that it lay dormant for a hundred years. What is known at this point is that its existence is long forgotten, and at one point it was so forgotten that it almost didn't exist. The only information about the work is a few lines from Elsa E. Guðjónsson's book on embroidery traditions.[45] She describes it as a long altar cloth, with images of various animals and strange creatures. In addition, there is a text running across it, and fifteen frames surround the figures.[46] The piece is made of black java base and sewn with a light-coloured yarn. Unlike other tapestries from this period, the base is visible, and the outlines of the pattern are sewn.[47] In the following, reference will be made to the embroidered work in question with the title *the lost echo*, the name given to the tapestry by the author.

The lost echo is an example of relics that disappeared from their place of origin and migrated to another country. In the history of *the lost echo*, its cultural value for its origin has changed to some extent with the move. The way it has been forgotten and seemingly hidden has made its existence almost disappear.[48]

Despite not having access to it, from inside the museum's storage,[49] one can still imagine what it looks like. Not necessarily in the real sense, although it is loosely possible, but from this point on, in one's own version.

I came to the decision to remake, or make a new version of, *the lost echo*, because I felt it needed to be replaced in hopes of getting closer to understanding the tapestry or experiencing it.. As an artist, I sought to use those tools and spaces to find a way to recreate it, whether it was through literally recreating the embroidery or through other means of correcting what seemed to be off. Through knowledge of the community that exists around the braid stitch and its history, and connection with the National Museum of Iceland, I have felt that *the lost echo* should have a place on the surface, along with the complex interfaces that its fragmented history tells. By looking at other embroideries from similar eras and the information available about *the lost echo*, I felt I could create my own version of the piece. The replacement of *the lost echo* is the hypothesis of solving the self-made error, one way or another. Perhaps it might shed some light on its cognisance or explain its existence in a different way.

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One of my subjects, the braided cross-stitch—or a path in the form of arrows that create a braid, with straight stitches on the reverse side that nobody sees—merges in these experiments between embroidery, performance, and painting: grids that spawn repeatedly and withdraw from vulnerability.

I wonder if the rust will eventually fill the eye of the needle.

The Invisible Woman narrates.

1 In Elsa E. Guðjónsson's *Traditional Icelandic Embroidery*, the braided cross-stitch (also called "the long-armed cross-stitch" or "the long-legged cross-stitch") is described thus: "The old cross-stitch, or braid stitch, is characteristic of Icelandic embroidery after the Reformation, in addition to the fact that this type of stitch was then used as the main and secondary stitch on various other types of clothing, ecclesiastical and secular. Although on a small scale, the type of stitching is already known from the late Middle Ages, as it appears on a few pattern pieces ... The oldest written sources about cross-stitching can be found in Sigurðarregistri from 1550," Elsa E. Guðjónsson's *Traditional Icelandic Embroidery*, 3rd ed. (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2003), 29–31.

2 Sophie Taeuber-Arp, *Living Abstraction*, ed. Anne Umland and Walburga Krupp with Charlotte Healy (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2021), 47.

3 Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 7.

4 Krauss, *Originality of the Avant-Garde*, 9.

5 Harriet Bridgeman and Elizabeth Drury, eds., *Needlework: An Illustrated History* (New York: Paddington Press, 1978), 231, 251.

6 Guðjónsson, "Icelandic Embroidery" in *Needlework*, 259.

7 Hanne Frøsig Dalgaard, "Denmark," in *Needlework*, 240. One of the oldest pieces of embroidery in Denmark is a wool blouse from the Bronze Age. It was found inside an oak coffin in a graveyard at Skrydstrup in South Jutland. A young woman had this blouse and there is wool buttonhole stitching around the neckline and sleeves. My classmate Rosita Kær shared with me the history of this blouse and its restoration, which her grandmother worked on for the National Museum in Denmark. We had a conversation about the blouse at the beginning of December, which centred on a question about the need to fill in what we called time. There was a big hole in the blouse, which wasn't restored by the museum, and we wondered if it was mostly in this hole that the time was present.

8 Cecilia Vicuña and Elianna Kan, "Cecilia Vicuña," *Bomb*, no. 146 (2018–19): 103, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26876271.

9 José de Nordenflycht Concha, "Techné, Poeisis, and Ruin: Cecilia Vicuña's Paideia," in *Red Thread: The Story of the Red Thread*, by Cecilia Vicuña (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 130.

10 Juliet Lynd, "Precarious Resistance: Weaving Opposition in the Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña," *PMLA* 120, no. 5 (2005): 1590, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486270.

11 Lynd, "Precarious Resistance," 1590.

12 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Arts of Noticing," in *What Happens between the Knots: A Series of Open Questions*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2022), 26.

13 Dieter Roelstraete, "Cecilia Vicuña," documenta 14, n.d., https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13557/cecilia-vicuna.

14 Lynd, "Precarious Resistance," 1590.

15 Lynd, "Precarious Resistance," 1591.

16 Lynd, "Precarious Resistance," 1594.

17 Vicuña and Kan, "Cecilia Vicuña," 104.

18 Vicuña and Kan, "Cecilia Vicuña," 104.

19 Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings*, vol. 3, 1935–1938, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), 154.

20 Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 153.

21 Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 145.

22 Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 150–151.

23 Gísli O. Gíslason (1907–86) became known as the last boondocks farmer in Iceland after Ómar Ragnarsson's TV documentary about Gísli was aired on Christmas Day in 1984. Gísli Oktavíus Gíslason was a lone farmer who lived off his land in Selárdalur in the Westfjords. A biography was published after his death, and his hat has been put on display at the Museum of Fine Arts in Hnjót in Vestfjörður.

24 Morehshin Allahyari, "About She Who Sees the Unknown," She Who Sees the Unknown, 2021, https://shewhoseestheunknown.com/about/.

25 Allahyari, "About She Who Sees the Unknown."

26 Allahyari, "About She Who Sees the Unknown."

27 Erin L. Thompson, "Recreating the Past in Our Own Image: Contemporary Artists' Reactions to the Digitization of Threatened Cultural Heritage Sites in the Middle East," *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 15, no. 1 (2018): 45, https://doi.org/10.5749/futuante.15.1.0045.

28 "Fonte 193," directed by Cinthia Marcelle, Vimeo video,12:07, 31 October 2008, https://vimeo.com/2115662.

29 "Fonte 193," video description.

30 Kathryn Brown, "The Artist as Urban Geographer: Mark Bradford and Julie Mehretu," *American Art* 24, no. 3 (2010): 106, https://doi.org/10.1086/658211.

31 "The dynamism of the underlying grid thus mirrors the movement of the restless eye that seeks to take in the broadest possible range of aspects on the space before it." Brown, "Artist as Urban Geographer," 108.

32 Julie Mehretu, "Notes on Painting," in *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in Post-medium Condition*, ed. Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 272.

33 Mehretu, "Notes on Painting," 273.

34 Brown, "Artist as Urban Geographer," 110.

35 Lawrence Chua and Julie Mehretu, "Julie Mehretu," *Bomb*, no. 91 (2005): 29, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40427192.

36 Chua and Mehretu, "Julie Mehretu," 29.

37 Chua and Mehretu, "Julie Mehretu," 29, 31.

38 "'It's Very Hard to Understand What Our Reality Is': Artist Julie Mehretu," YouTube video, 9:14, posted by Louisiana Channel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R71GBWjyjLE&ab_channel=LouisianaChannel.

Here she is referring to Gloria Anzaldúa's theory about "Nepantla." Anzaldúa's writing and theory about the "in-between" have been important to me since I first read about it. "The unspeakable" is what appears in her poetry and texts, in the issues of those who live on the US-Mexico border, "in between." Anzaldúa's theory opened up a discussion about displacement. She created a certain genealogy for the descendants of the in-between place, to experience themselves as neither and both Mexicans and Americans—she calls this a state of "Nepantla (in-between)."

38 Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (1980): 68, https://doi.org/10.2307/778575.

40 Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," 68.

41 Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," 69.

42 Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," 71.

43 Angela Curran, "Mimesis as Imitation," in *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Aristotle and the Poetics* (London: Routledge, 2016), 35.

44 Curran, "Mimesis as Imitation," 42; Aristotle, Poetics, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin Classics), 9.1451b29-32.

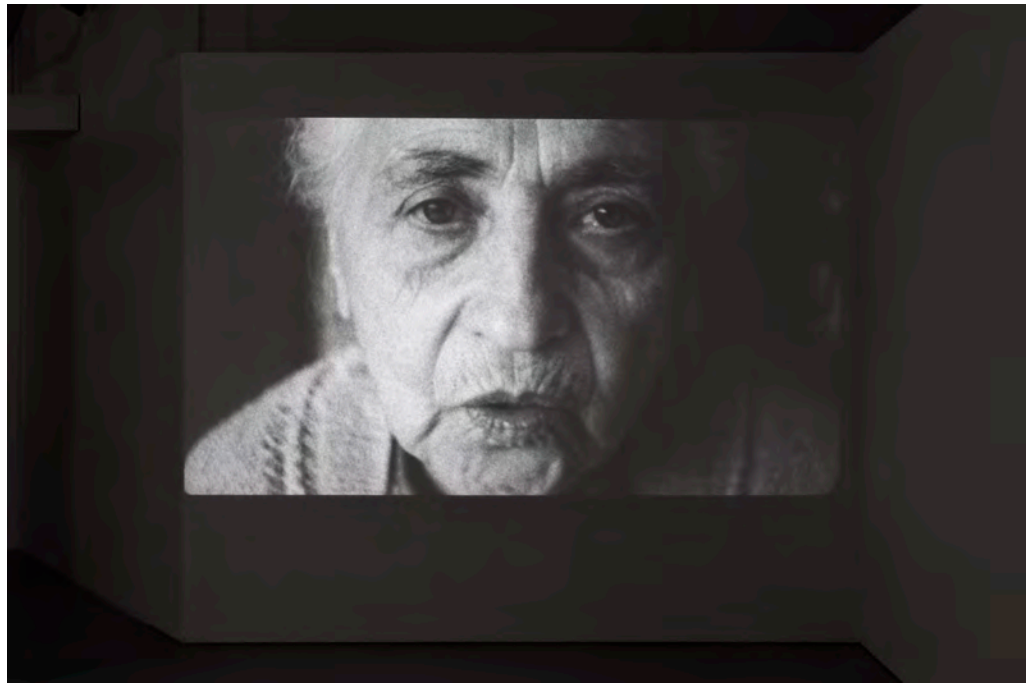
45 Guðjónsson, *Traditional Icelandic Embroidery*, 31.

46 Guðjónsson, *Traditional Icelandic Embroidery*, 31.

47 Guðjónsson, *Traditional Icelandic Embroidery*, 31.

48 Susan Pearce explains in "Collecting the Other, Within and Without" that we tend to assess museums and history from the perspective of "Our"/Same or "Other". This means that relics we associate with and understand come from Our perspective, and thus are an accepted part of history. Meanwhile, when we see what we do not understand or is distant, we choose to experience it as distant/exotic, which we then use to shape the ideas we have about our own history/cultural history. Susan M. Pearce, "Collecting the Other, Within and Without," in *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), 302.

49 Nationalmuseet Copenhagen, reference number: CCCLXXI.



Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Djoana Gueorguieva, *A/breath* (original title *дъх въздуха*), 2023, 16 mm film loop (3 min loop)

Djoana Gueorguieva, *A/root: in-between two poles, out of the brain, into the water, and down the drain* (right), 2023. Moving Image Art loop, 16 mm film, digital, Home Movies, Prelinger archives, 6 min loop. *A/fold* (left), 2023. 16 mm film, 6 loop. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KMH1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

Regathering of threads in states of unclouded pt1

in betweenness

Djoana Gueorguieva

I had intended to write this entire text while on a train. Many of the passages were pulled together in various notebooks en route to and from somewhere. Nearly every one of those passages provided a window of moving images.[1]

In *Overture* (1986),[2] a 16 mm film projection, the artist Stan Douglas uses archival material to portray a passage between two tunnels through the Rocky Mountains from the point of view of a train in motion. When exhibited, the tarnished six-minute black-and-white footage, created in 1899–91 by the Edison Company, plays in a continuous loop. Even within the work, the footage seems to repeat itself: similar textures traverse the screen on the sides of the mountains and on the surface of the celluloid. As the use of repetition breaks our perception of time, the film steers us into a disoriented sensorial trance. The steady monotone voice of writer Gerald Creede reads Douglas's reworked version of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*, 1913). Proust's text echoes the footage as its protagonist meanders through fragmented time. We experience the text's transitory moments in between a waking awareness of impending sleep, as mirrored in the footage. The train enters a dark tunnel, into an absence of light, and the voice breaks into silence, almost alluding to the idea that the narrator's eyes flicker; his chin dropping to his chest as he almost "takes off," falling into sleep; suddenly the train exits the tunnel, and the voice returns at a different point in time within Proust's exploration of this spatio-corporeal state. The mention of this film is important to this text, as it mirrors scenarios in which I reach a state of unclouded productivity.

I see my art practice as an endless weaving together of polyphonic[3] textures and narrative threads. My voice within this weave consists of texts and images stemming from different streams of thought while flowing in a multitude of directions. Throughout this text, I would like to lead you through my practice in an act of deweaving, as well as a re-examination and contextualisation of its many voices. You will notice many words with the ending "-tion": a suffix implying the formation of an action. As I sit here on the train, I'll use my writing practice as such—a slow, active attempt at pulling apart the threads of my foundation. In locating the red threads left by other artists, writers, and filmmakers across a few years of searching and researching, we will re-examine memories and contextualise their relationship to and in the world that defines this polyphonic weave.

Narrative Thread 1. *Of Modern Polythematics*

There has been a battle of translators throughout the prologue of my art practice, that of documentary and editorial. By "translators," I'm not referring to my mother tongue, Bulgarian, or my adopted tongue, English, or any of the other three languages I've been known to work through. Although I'm certain they've played a part, I will not speak of this form of language or translation yet. Here, I'm referring to the others before me who interpreted the world in a form that I could understand and continue to build upon through my practice while giving something back. In this instance, "translation" is "transcreation," as elaborated upon by the poet Haroldo de Campos and writer Augusto de Campos as the act of creative "adaptation" and "emulation."[4]

My first experience in academia was in political science and languages in 2008. I was captivated by understanding the theoretical policies of the EU,[5] the aesthetics of migratory cultures, and nomadic identities in diaspora, in addition to holding the phantasmagorical idea of a diplomatic passport that would grant me freedom. I soon discovered that my drive to better understand the world around me while connecting with others would not be met behind a desk, in an office, or at an embassy. It would perhaps be better achieved through the machine I'd carried in my backpack every day since I was eleven. The camera.

Subthread. *A mechanical appendix*

For a human who is quickly distracted, easily amused, and overly sensitive to their immediate surroundings, I experience an almost instant bodily effect upon picking up a camera. At first, the anxiety of missing something outside the bodily range of my exterior mechanical appendix is heightened. Time is ever so apparent, yet it is as if it suddenly slows down as light dilates time on the surface of the sensor. Characters and details that normally protrude in several directions become neatly framed within the viewfinder; there is stillness not only in the end result but in the act. The motion of recording becomes not so different from note-taking. My need to verbalise the experiences witnessed are suppressed as they are recorded.

Narrative Thread 2. *Function over form in education; Peering through the mechanical, a one-eyed mask in a matrix.*[6]

Despite my second academic experience, leaning towards photojournalism and filled with lectures and conferences guided by figures such as Martha Rosler, bell hooks, Nikita Dhawan, Aki Sasamoto, and Laure Prouvost, an economic instability arising from a lack of silver spoons pointed me in the direction of editorial portraiture as a means to chip away at my educational debts. A portraiture focused on capturing the surface details of aesthetics as opposed to the personal realities of the subjects in front of the lens. The desired result for most of the images I would create was bound to textured simulated realities meant to provide the viewer with a fantasy of marketed materiality.

The role inhabited by the photographer —in this case, myself—was that of erasure, expunging any characteristics that tied the subject to our present existence, and in doing so taking the position of assumed "control." This form of photographic process not only stamps out the subject's possession of their sense of self but also the photographer's, who is employed by a greater commercial entity to market the ambivalence of conflicting hegemonic social identities. By creating quasi-tautological distances that diminish real subjects against fake backdrops and mystifying scenes without explanation or meaning, the photograph provides the spectator with nothing but a fetish.

Philosopher Roland Barthes's analysis of fashion photography in *The Fashion System* speaks of exactly this elaborate theatrical illusion I found myself stepping into.[7] In the last chapter, titled "The Fashion Photograph," Barthes points to the syntagmatic relations[8] between the fragility in the semiotics of "fashion" as a structure and the signs carried through the representative imagery. Fashion itself is perhaps not the villain but more so the imagery markets that use it to create a false idolised identity, which I found unrepresentative of the connections I had originally set out to explore.[9]

Subthread. *Metaphorical studio collectives for the inclusion of reality*

In the following paragraph, I'd like you to imagine yourself in my mind. In this mind of mine there is a studio filled with many drawers and desks, at which sit my fellow artists- and writers-in-residence. They are a family of friends informing my practice and challenging my visual language. As I began to outgrow the editorial language of images, a slow shift in friendships began. In photography, Viviane Sassen and Sarah van Rij left my studio, taking the likes of Helmut Newton and Irving Penn with them. Despite this, Sassen's use of geometric shapes in her compositions, Newton's use of high contrast, and Van Rij's framing all remained in my visual archive. However, their spots as translators in my metaphorical studio collective slowly became filled by others more capable of pulling the red thread throughout my particular point of focus. This happened again and again, from photographers Wolfgang Tillmans and Justine Kurland to Alessandra Sanguinetti and Claude Cahun, and film directors David Lynch and Shuji Terayama to Věra Chytilová and Ulrike Ottinger.

I slowly grew into my own shape and found peace with the contradictory influences that shaped my beginning. Other women who found unity in using the camera as a way of examining a woman's relationship to herself and her body became prevalent actors in how I chose to translate my surroundings. When unplugged from the theatre of editorial photography, I was able to open a door to allow a photographic and recording practice of a broad reality. Here, there was no need to paint the background or smooth out the imperfections. Instead, these aspects remained tangible, providing context and moving the narratives I was confronting to a place where they could take multiple directions. As the colour temperatures from the outside world started to fade in, the usual series of automatic shortcuts became useless.[10] Openness to risk makes possible a practice of negotiating with the exterior world through gestures. I re-invited the unexpected to shape how I deconstruct my surroundings and construct my visual language. This new language provided an openness and curiosity towards revisiting other mediums that had been prevalent in my childhood, such as film and performance.

Narrative Thread 3. *Constructing questions between "reality" and what is supposed to be "fiction" with Farocki, Godard, and Sekula*

Due to the nature of the medium, allowing for "the inclusion of reality" still leaves photography and film as a temporal echo of both fiction and reality, even in its documentary uses. Just because a camera is attempting to show something doesn't cement that it is visible, nor does its assignment of "meaning" remain solely in the perspective of the viewer. I was originally drawn to photography for its innate ability to communicate without text. Not to say that the photograph does not carry within it a text, interpretable in many ways, but it is often dependent on the context it is presented in. As an attempted representation of our three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional plane, a photograph offers the possibility to take multiple perspectives and alters the "reality" of what we see. For instance, one image presented alone is not the same as the same image presented as a part of a series. The greater the number of images in a series, the more of a directional narrative is built, until eventually you arrive at moving images—last stop, cinema. Sequentially documented time with a timecode always feels more connected to reality, even if it isn't.

I digress. Let's return to the concept of the visible and invisible, as well as the stipulations between seeing and wanting to see. Through critical description, repetition, and clever montage in *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1989),[11] I understand that the filmmaker Harun Farocki is asking us to question why we place so much faith on the representation of reality through imagery, as it is possible there can be more than just what we see. Putting more emphasis on *why* we are looking than at *what* we are looking at encourages us to include other sensory features, such as smell, sound, and touch, to better understand the world.[12] Like Farocki, I find that the presentation of images outside their original context can magnify for the viewer something that was in front of them the entire time. Urging one to look further before assigning meaning. One of my favourite examples of Farocki's work is *How to Live in the Federal Republic of Germany* (1990),[13] in which he humorously portrays mundane scenes of "West Germans" partaking in educational seminars—how to be a cop, how to clean a woman whose given birth, and how to cross

the street—juxtaposed with shots of car doors being shock tested and other various repetitive mechanics in an effort to point to a nation's loss of autonomy. How deliciously awkward and satisfying. I wonder what actions might be chosen to show this loss of autonomy today. The act of scrolling?

Having moved photography to the sidelines for the last four years, using primarily film, performance, and installation in my practice, I explore what these mediums can offer while keeping the questions of photography present in my mind. An important question myself and many others have considered in film practice as much as in photography is "the invention of photography. For whom, against whom?," as posed by filmmakers Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin.[14]

In a 1978 essay titled "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," which the photographer Allan Sekula included in his book *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works*, he calls for a semiotic practice of photography: one that is aware of the camera as a machine capable of corroborating different truths. Sekula writes: "The only 'objective' truth that photographs offer is the assertion that somebody or something—in this case, an automated camera—was somewhere and took a picture. Everything else, everything beyond the imprinting of a trace, is up for grabs."[15]

I strive to use photography and film as acts of collaboration. You are not alone as *Homo faber*[16] just because you hold the machine in your hands. To assume sole responsibility for the creation of a "still" or "moving" image is crude without acknowledging the mechanisms set into motion within the machine: situated within its surroundings. The camera works as an intermediary between photographer and subject —mediating what is seen through its lens based on a multitude of set parameters that either create a distance or fill it in. The subject being photographed should be co-author, the traces they've left upon their surroundings considered. This ability to manipulate angles, time, light, and motion enables a photographer to shape others' perceptions of what is considered "real" through the individual representations of reality. Every photo or film tells a story of a version of someone's reality.

In another essay, "Reading an Archive" from 1983, Sekula seems to answer Godard and Gorin's question by posing his own set of queries that lay the foundation of his photographic practice: How does photography serve to legitimate and normalise existing power relationships? How does it serve as the voice of authority while simultaneously claiming to constitute a token of exchange between equal partners? What havens and temporary escapes from the realm of necessity are provided by photographic means? What resistances are encouraged and strengthened? How is historical and social memory preserved, transformed, restricted, and obliterated by photographs? What futures are promised; what futures are forgotten?[17]

Throughout my own practice, I also attempt to ask these questions. I find that by answering questions with further questioning, one arrives at a method for creating "unfinished conversations."[18] This method encourages experimentation while addressing the responsibility all people, especially artists, have to history, social context, and our audiences.

When revisiting the works and texts of Farocki, Godard, and Sekula, I add on questions while reflecting on my own work: How much do we owe, if anything, to the "real"? How about the appropriation of archival images as a means to rewrite past and present against dominant narratives through the use of non-linear time? Non-linear time, as in many of Trinh T. Minh-ha's films and writings, seeks to negotiate an ambivalence of the visible and all images being "memory images … experienced in 'now time,' which is neither past, present, nor future, but now time bearing all of them."[19] In my own work, I try to adopt Minh-ha's politics of "speaking nearby,"[20] as opposed to "speaking about" or "speaking for." This praxis is demonstrated in, for instance, her 1982 film *Reassemblage*. It is a questioning praxis of intervals and twilights, in-betweens and the travelling self, of migrants at home, and of the many *with* one rather than *in* one's narrative, as Minh-ha explained during the 2016 lecture "Just Speak Nearby: The Politics & Practices of Art Writing." "Speaking nearby" is speaking with an indirectness that does not objectify topics and subjects but self-reflects, allowing for a proximity with the subjects one wishes to address.

What of the voices within the within the voice?

I previously worked handling the archives of photographers and filmmakers by sorting and organising but not through creative interaction. My work *While I Still Have a Voice* (2021) is the result of my first real experience handling a massive personal archive with the intent to produce something. I am a woman who has, over time, amassed a rather large video archive of my own that similarly lives in the dark depths of forgotten hard drives, marked as "Unfinished" or "Amateur B-roll," and I often ponder what someone else might make of my scraps.

This work is a contribution to a collaborative project under the ironic name of *Amateurinnen** (2021–). This collaboration between the Austrian Film Museum in Vienna and a handful of artists grew within the context of enquiring into feminist aesthetics. Many of the films that would end up in the museum's archive —by Adele Kraft, Siglinde Kurz, Margret Veit, Renate Schweiger, Annemarie Vavrick, and others—were never intended for public consumption or to be viewed in the cinema, having been created within a personal context. Some were on their way to being discarded or labelled, pejoratively, as "dilettante" when they were scavenged by the film museum. This archive—which we were generously offered to examine with many artistic freedoms—consists of hundreds of films produced by women in different periods of their lives and in several different eras. The objective of *Amateurinnen** became to put into question how a hobby can henceforth be understood as an artistic strategy.

I frequently returned to the images and contemplated their makers' choice in staying on a particular subject or frame for an extended period of time.

At first thinking: "Here there was something —a pause, a thought, a message."

Then reverting to: "You're just searching for something active in this body of work by women. Isn't it solely the act of placing it within the art world that's throwing a 'feminist' blanket over it?"

Foolish thought: "Aren't they just simply 'home movies'?" Although, so were the staggering films of Allis, director Morgan Dews's grandmother. A series of daily tape recordings and home movies made by Allis for her husband, Charlie, across several years of neglect and strained motherhood shows the woman's struggles with conformity and the imposed conventions and rules of being a housewife. As the title of Dews's resulting film suggests, years later, the recordings and films were found in an envelope marked "Must Read after My Death" and composited together by her grandson in a 2007 documentary of the same name.

Addressing our use of the archive in a publication titled *Keeping the World Okay* (2021), the artists Kelly Ann Gardener, Leonie Huber, and Eszter Kállay wrote a response to film theorist Laura Mulvey's widely quoted ideas in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989):[21] "These films may not bear political content or even hold the intent of political change; yet they stand as witness and landmarks for these women stepping behind the camera as makers of meaning."[22]

At first when sitting with *their* archive, I felt the need to proceed with the utmost caution—as if raiding my grandmother's wardrobe without her consent. Handling each film carefully, considering its contents and its duration, in its entirety, as a whole. Gradually, the more time I spent with each of the films, the more these recordings started to turn into memories playing over and over in my head, some more clear than others. They were not quite *my* memories—the primarily heteronormative perspective of romantic ski holidays and large family gatherings bore no similarity to my own narrative. But I spent so much time with the films that I began to grow into them, taking pieces here and there from one folder (one filmmaker) and some from another. Yet I was still unsure how to tie them together, or to what ends.

That year, I was often in Sofia, Bulgaria, doing research for another project and living with Oma (my father's mother). In living

together, we slipped into a routine I'd outgrown long ago, where suddenly I was being taken care of again. Daily shades of care labour presented themselves in every hour, highlighted at each meal, as I sat working, wanting for nothing. A woman who'd long ago been released of her motherly and wifely "duties" had been rebooted into a pattern engrained over years of unreflected-upon domestic labour as a migrant woman. I'd begun to follow after her with the camera, catching her slow, calculated movements as she elegantly ignored me. I was doing something I did on a daily basis and was, unconsciously at the time, mimicking the filmic actions of Adele Kraft, Siglinde Kurz, Margret Veit, Renate Schweiger, Annemarie Vavrick, and the other women in the archive by using the recording of images in motion to create memory.

Why was I referred to as an "artist" and they were termed "amateurs," when so many artists, such as Jonas Mekas and Chris Marker, have been using the "home video" format for years? Even if it took until the fall of 2019 for curators at the Museum of Modern Art in New York to put on the show *Private Lives Public Spaces* to showcase the importance of the amateur in action, creating "home movies" as an alternative to commercial filmmaking.[23]

I'd decided then, with my grandmother, that upon my return to Sofia in two weeks' time I would put the camera in her hands and have her record for a week. We would then sort through the footage and have her narrate the films from the archive as well as her own in an effort to create a commentary on domestic labour, the amateur, and what creates an environment for a woman to make her own film. Before I left, we watched my copy of Alina Marazzi's *Un'a ora sola ti vorrei* (*For One More Hour with You*, 2002),[24] after which Oma commented: "It was very touching, but, Djoana, why is it that all this footage was filmed by her grandfather? You said this was addressing feminist genealogy, no?"

On the long train ride home, I thought about our conversation afterwards, and about how with everything happening on the screen, that it had been this—who had been holding the camera—that had affected her.

A week later, she passed suddenly, and just like that our project ended before it began. Instead of pushing the footage I'd recorded of her into the hard-drive pile, I found comfort in winding time backwards. Watching her drink Turkish coffee, preparing perfectly soft-boiled eggs, her wrinkled hands as they smoothed out the tablecloth before I entered the room. Rewatching my long, still shots of her daily movements, I thought of Chantal Ackerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce,1080 Bruxelles* (1975), in which actress Delphine Seyrig peels potatoes for two and a half minutes.[25] I wished I had filmed Oma rolling out pastry dough for one hour. That I had more surplus reality. That my scenes were longer.

That was now impossible. What I did have, though, were several conversations I'd recorded during earlier stays with both of my grandmothers. As I listened to them, I found one in which Oma recounts a moment from her childhood: a song Oma's grandmother sang to her as a scared child in the isolated, dark Turkish suburbs. Then I plead with her to sing it, so that I may save it, and she obliges me. But not before remarking, "It's probably now on the internet, but I wouldn't know what to look for."

While I put together the pieces for my film, I played the audio recording on a loop: she translates from memory the handed-down title: *While I Still Have a Voice and Can Sing*, originally titled *Der Jäger Abschied* (*The Hunter's Farewell*). I wonder if the words she chose to translate the title from Austrian to Turkish to Bulgarian are self-referential, or if her grandmother came up with the title when she sang the song to her at the same age she was singing it to me now. Oma's sense of humour would have allowed for that.

Wer hat dich, du schöner Wald,
Aufgebaut so hoch da droben?
Wohl den Meister will ich loben,
So lang noch mein' Stimm' erschallt!

Who have you created, you wonderful forest,
Built so high up there?
This master I would like to praise
As long as my voice rings out!

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Djoana Gueorguieva, Linens handed down from mother to daughter, dyed on *A/current* metal structure demonstrating three different stages, 2023. Monitors in-between screens; *Re-collected* Series, 2023. (n1sin01=n2sin02) showing diasporic memories of Lili/Victor/Negra. Installation view

As I begin to piece together a visual narrative, my found "memories" from the Austrian Film Museum archive slip in, and I wonder how I can use my grandmother's voice to lift those found in the pre-existing narratives of each piece of archival footage. Will the application of her voice over the footage allow for the illusion that this is her story playing out on the screen? Offering a voice to the images, and offering her memory an image? How much faith do we have that sound belongs to the faces playing out the actions? This question renders me giddy with excitement to begin playing.

I recall the first time I saw Yto Barrada's films. It was in 2015, as part of a film programme shown atop the High Line park on the west side of Lower Manhattan. Deciding then to use Barrada's *Hand-Me-Downs* (2011)[26] as a point of reference to translate Oma's experience, using my personal archive of found footage and audio along with the films from the *Amateurinnen** archive and grounding these images using her voice.

In *Hand-Me-Downs*, Barrada employs archival film footage as a source of friction with which she can play on her own personal narratives. She creates a polyphonic texture by using her voice to narrate the unrelated scenes. She also introduces the voices of her father and mother without telling us. Through extensive research, the French-born, Moroccan-raised artist weaves together sociopolitical facts and familial histories to expand on the colonialist past of a land she belongs to yet does not claim as her own. Part of the message is already in the title: the work refers to the passing down of one item to another member of the family, or to the recontextualisation of historical documents and images. *Hand-Me-Downs* presents an experimental historiology that reshapes the unaddressed, fostering exploration of a different way of looking at history as something constantly in flux.

When I finished working on *While I Still Have a Voice*, I felt a feeling for which I cannot find the word in English. "Closure" does not do it justice. This feeling, regardless, transferred into productive speculation and new questions.

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Djoana Gueorguieva, *While I still have a voice and can sing*, 2021. Film essay, 8 mm loop film (7 min), digital footage, Vienna film archive footage

Would ask a bird

you where it's from

"Cultural identities come from somewhere, they have histories. But like everything else that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being externally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power. Far from being the mere recovery of a past, waiting to be found, and once found will secure our sense of self into eternity, identities are the different names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past."
—Stuart Hall[27]

In the essay "Identity and Diaspora," cultural theorist Stuart Hall insists that political identities are pushed upon us by institutions of power seeking to fit us into categories that highlight our otherness and differences to easier manipulate our narratives within history. Hall invites us to consider the importance of embracing a concept of a fluid view of identity. One that situates itself in an unfixed history resembling an open-ended conversation with ever shifting ideas of present, past, and the earlier mentioned "now time" of Minh-ha's film *What about China?* (2022).[28]

Derived from an interest in the topic of diasporic women, my work *Migratory Birds Pt. 1* (2022) serves both as a personal prologue to a project still untitled and as part of a conversation with my previous project *While I Still Have a Voice* and a subsequent work, *Re-collected* (2023). Through the work, I seek to draw attention to several questions I have regarding belonging, nationality, and the conflicts that arise from not heeding Hall's message to avoid categorising others into singular national identities based on sociopolitical and consumerist ideologies.

The voice of this hybrid essay-film is broken up into four parts represented by different voices.

The First voice starts with two questions: "Why did we go?," Why did we stay?" The "we" form asserts that the question's addresser could be the birds or even the narrator opening the discussion—to you, to the "us"?

The Second is the voice of the researcher Stuart Weidensaul, an ornithologist and author of *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds* (1999).[29] Text from his research on the migration of birds and his theory that we should be looking at birds not as residents of one place but of the whole world jumped out of context and into my narrative. As the voice recites a restructured version of a passage about the inseparable bond of particles so entangled that, even when physically separated, what affects one instantly affects the other, I weave together my own 8 mm film and found footage from the Bulgarian Film Archive of mother birds and scenes of women on the move, some alone, others carrying children on their backs. This juxtaposition of scientific text with hyper-consciously montaged found footage that carries its own history and context references artist Penny Siopis's similar approach in many of her films, leaving room for the audience to arrive at their own conclusions.

The Third is the voice of reflection. At first further reflecting on Weidensaul's text, then proceeding to rationalise his theory. The narrator, speaking to themselves, draws up a speculation: "One is prompted to ask how closely these theories might apply to ourselves, there sometimes not being one clear reason as to how we chose to remain here or how we ended up there in the first place." Again, the images, shown in combination with the tone of the science text, attempt to reflect on the loss and sacrifice made by those in search of belonging and refuge, questioning the tall tales of places that promise "sinews of peace"[30] one day and suppression the next. Demographics show that women make up nearly 50 percent of the world's migratory population—but how often are we confronted with their narratives?

The Fourth is the voice of collective memory—the voice of the birds, my voice, speaking in my mother tongue. I bring in the "I" here, as I too owe something to this narrative and to the stories of those who are not able to speak. A set of questions are repeated: "Where are you from? Will you stay here? What are you doing here?" I recall the last time I escorted a colleague to the border-control line for

"non-US residents," echoing in the undertone of the delivery. The voice cautions about asking these redundant questions of origin with care, to not presume that "I" am not from "here." If this were the case, then where am "I" from, and does "here" then belong to "you" or "you" to it?

The Third voice returns with a poem: "We spilled ourselves across the world"—a phrase my grandmother often uttered with a sigh from the doorway each time she watched me pack my bags. The film is at its end, and we hear one more question meant to revisit the impertinence of questions enquiring into the motives for one's existing other than in the country inked onto their credentials or matching their exterior characteristics. "Would you ever ask a bird where it is from?"

It was important for me that you can hear multiple voices in *Migratory Birds Pt. 1*, even when just one is narrating—although this is not something I would ever explain, until I was asked to for this text. In the beginning of her film *Obscure White Messenger* (2010),[31] Siopis uses different modes of address, switching between the "I" and the "you" throughout the scene, making it difficult to distinguish who is speaking and who is being spoken to. Subtitles stream across the screen as music plays in the foreground, making it feel like the words serve to translate the emotions in the notes. Forced to read them to understand, we internalise the material. As you read the text—which comes from an interview of Demitrios Tsafendas, spoken directly after he stabbed the prime minister of South Africa to death in what was described as an act of madness—an image of an octopus in muddy waters wriggles its tentacles on the screen, eliciting an uncanny correspondence between the narrative and the footage. The film progresses at a similar rhythm, ushered forward into the story of a character yet to be revealed to us as we meander through markets filled with veiled figures and exotified beaches in what can only be called a late "home video" aesthetic, documenting travels abroad in what seems a time (the mid-1960s?) unaware of its colonialist and separatist overtones. The text proceeds to create a disparate connection between itself and the images as we come to understand that Tsafendas was a multiracial illegal immigrant whose story of mental illness and life of alienation came to an unfairly prosecuted end in a system wrought with prejudices and xenophobia.

The cultural historian T.J. Demos eloquently remarks on the processes of "moving beyond stale oppositions of fact and fiction in order to propose a new way to tell stories of subjective and geopolitical resonance."[32] I find "home" in the work of artists such as Minh-ha, Siopis, and Barrada, who through the production of non-binary dialogues seek not to categorise but to confront the ambivalent, the in-between, of black/white and the misunderstandings of classification. They use their practices as creative means in reshaping the world into one that speaks to Hall's efforts.

Narrative Thread 4. Sub/text: *Sound and the multiplicity of languages*

As part of the Blockbuster generation, I was raised on films and recorded theatrical plays that my parents borrowed from the public library. We didn't have cable television, and my parents didn't speak much English when we moved to New York from Sofia. So that meant at eight o'clock every day, their English lessons would start in the form of cinema and subtitles.

Over time, we learn to trust that text takes responsibility for our direct understanding of a sequence of events. As an added layer in *Migratory Birds Pt.* 1, I subvert the use of captions, giving one thing to the reader and another to the listener and a third to the one ignoring or unable to read the subtitles. Languages change and captions collide in an effort to create a feeling of strain not dissimilar to the experience of being in a foreign place where text and imagery do not always translate and you find yourself suspended in a state of listening to sounds and trying to make meaning.

In part, *Migratory Birds Pt. 1* pays homage to writer Yoko Tawada's short story collection *Wo Europa anfängt* (*Where Europe Begins*) (2013) and her ability to comment on the multiplicity of languages and cultures through the development of her displaced protagonists as they travel through different cities with me, as I also sit on the train reading this book on the way to Berlin, Germany, as I ready myself to take up another self, another language. Still me.

Not in part, I apply a sound-design aesthetic I have adopted from a number of Chris Marker's and Chantal Ackerman's films. "Live sound" is rooted in the principle of not cleaning the recorded sound of its imperfect tonalities. In *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080, Bruxelles*, for example, Ackerman famously uses live sound to further convey the mundane, everyday solitude of her character's apartment. Recording the actress's stillness as she sits with her forgotten coffee at the table, the silence is broken by an elevator's *bing* as it passes her floor. In my use of live sound, I take the recording of my voice and layer it over the audio in an effort to situate the listener closer to me, pulling them close through sound as the images push them away. For *Migratory Birds Pt. 1*, I recorded sound at several stations along a train ride to give the impression that the listener is constantly being displaced. Unless serving a specific purpose in a narrative or the narrative is about the sound, I favour the reuse of deconstructed recorded sound, abstracted pre-existing sounds, and the sound of silence over soundtracks intended to carry the images.

Narrative Thread 5. *The "voice" is not anecdotal, yet the volume of the voice is?*

"Emigrant: a person who leaves their own country in order to settle permanently in another; Latin emigrant- 'migrating from', from the verb emigrare*."*

"Migrant: a person who moves from one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions."

"Expat: a person who lives outside their native country." (Why is it here they do not include "especially for work"?)

"Native: a person born in a specified place or associated with a place by birth, whether subsequently resident there or not."[33]

How do we resist or push back on the dangerous narratives of these words as presented through the media and skewed through politics? How can one uplift and destigmatise the negative connotations associated with some definitions over others? Firstly, by inviting an understanding that everyone originates from somewhere and before that somewhere else, acknowledging that mobility does not come from within but, in most cases, is granted only from the outside. My freedom of mobility is a privileged one.

The "voice" in my work does not necessarily always have to be anecdotal. "Anecdotal," as in based on or inspired by personal history, rather than on research or "fact." But the necessity of having a voice, to give space to the voice of others, is based on anecdotal experiences and it accounts, therefore, for the necessity for high volume.

Re-collected (2023)
$n_1 \sin\theta_1 = n_2 \sin\theta_2$

Re-fraction is the process by which light shifts its path as it travels through a material, causing the light to bend.[34] Re-collection is the process by which memory shifts its place on traditional timelines, causing history to bend.

In perpetual movement, in places where I can see, be seen, hear, be heard, touch, and be touched. While striving to maintain a balanced position between objective observer and idiosyncratic auteur, one must effectively realise that voice and subjectivity are linked to the ability of creating a conversation with others. By not narrating the narrative through a praxis that encourages pretending to have facts over justified opinions, a discourse can open up to accommodate several different perspectives and create a connected series of utterances. Threads of thought weave together the process of material thinking, tying the form to the subject matter and informing the narrative in an attempt to mediate language and gesture to empower the viewer through its practice.

Through the use of collective consciousness/awareness/memory, I am attempting to engage the responsibility of the observer

to

look

at

the position

of

the subject.

Re-collected seeks to focus on the abstracted imagery that unfolds when returning to memories as if they were places. Recollections refract within the mind when years pass; time acts like a current, slightly shifting fragmented glimpses of details tethered to previously recorded events by only thin threads of relation. As we are all placed at different points on our individual timelines and at different angles of observation, we remember and express the varying shifts in those details of even the same event differently. No one sees what you see in your mind, just as we all see differently even when looking at the same object outside the mind. Through a process of mimesis, as described in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000) by the new media critic and curator Laura U. Marks, one can allow for the conjuring up of similar emotions as demonstrated through literature and films.[35]

To incorporate the sonic, the visual, and the spatial in readdressing alternative readings of personal histories surrounding diasporic memories of mother and child, I began by collecting audio interviews. I find everything is an experiment when working with excavating memories—the dialogue has an intermittency, filled with pauses and gaps, which can take unexpected turns. The audio recorder is limited to capturing only the audible, but sometimes within the breaks of narration, one feels that the interviewed is in an "experiential space,"[36] questioning "memory, forgetfulness, and history."[37] *Re-collected* expands on the concepts presented by philosopher Paul Ricoeur in an essay also called "Memory, Forgetfulness, and History," experimenting with the immateriality of an individual memory by asking two people to expand, in as much detail as possible, on the same charged event.

By applying transparency to the level of subjectivity in this work, I hope to also re-examine my own history, coloured by generational migration, from the exteriority of a general historical context shared by a community. There are difficulties in understanding how we situate ourselves within our own personal archives, in memory as a context but also as a concept. I set parameters by recording conversations only with individuals who have left their birth countries during a period of another kind of transition, such as the transition from infant to child or child to teenager, and placing the experience adjacent to an adult who is cognizant of the choice.

What to do, then, with this collection once it is complete? How to give presence to the voices for which there is now a recorded historiology? I could translate from Siopis by using my archive of found footage to ground the images using the voice. Fragment the recordings, further isolating just the discrepancies between the memory of the child and the memory of the mother, questioning why some memories are louder than others, the child's more detailed than the mother's. I'll attempt to pull the images like threads out of their immateriality to represent this refraction of a memory as it is bent by time, creating new images with 16 mm film. What will these gaps provide?

Another artist who works with exploring gaps and shifts in traces of public and private memories invented or altered over time is Renée Green.[38] Green is an artist with whose work I feel philosophically unbound, operating along a similar narrative thread to many of the other artists and thinkers I've referred to throughout this text. When I think of her work in relation to my own practice, I think of *Partially Buried in Three Parts* (1996–97), *Partially Buried* (1996), and *Partially Buried Continued* (1997).[39] Images under text, moved along by voice. Pictures and moving pictures, intertwining with the past as they pass by, creating a blur of mine and yours in the present. The films reflect on returning to the repressed and how as filmmakers we adopt images in our mind, making them ours for a little while. Green's films also touch on the idea of genealogy in this way of passing on, passing off, the bodily trauma located in memories. What most speaks to me is, first, the non-linear narrative, not just through one film but through all her work —everything comes around and back again in conversation, "in dialogue between themselves."[40] Secondly, Green does not allow the format of her work to be categorised by just one medium; she is a writer, photographer, filmmaker, sound artist, architect, and large-scale installation artist. Unbound.

Stray Thread.

If we are to deny categorisation according to singular, nation-bound identities, then we also needn't allow the institution or art market to place us into any other ready-made boxes. In 2023, applying for artists' grants starts to look more and more like applying for citizenship in the US: Caucasian, painter, sculptor,

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Djoana Gueorguieva, *A/current*, 2023. Naturally rusted structure. Detail

Djoana Gueorguieva, *A/current*, 2023. Handed down rusted screen number 3. Detail

African American, installation artist, video artist, Native American, Slavic, photographer, textile artist, pan-Asian, Hispanic—and you get the jest. If it is to be so, then should we not have the option to tick more than just one box?

So, then, how does a performance become a video?

дъхвъздух* to *Inherent Transfers

Although described as a three-channel video installation, I consider Zineb Sedira's *Mother Tongue* (2002) to be a performance that made its way to video. It portrays a mother and daughter against a plain background opposite one another as they exchange stories of childhood, one in Algerian, the other in French. The same daughter and her daughter now exchange words, one in French, the other in English. The following scene shows the grandmother as she speaks in Algerian to her granddaughter, who stares rather blankly, clearly not understanding. Filmed head-on, as if by a webcam, *Mother Tongue* to me can be understood as remarking on language and lineage through a very direct and to-the-point manifestation of loss and the effort to guard cultural memory through storytelling. *Inherent Transfers* (2023) is a recent work of mine that started as an idea for a performance.

Most of my ideas come while searching for sleep, only to be forgotten until later. While lying awake on my bed, made of several carpets piled atop one another in our living room, surrounded by clutter of newspapers and boxes, still unsorted from the last earthquake, I listened to my mother's breath as she slept. Her head close to mine on the bed opposite, I could hear the faint inhales and exhales clearly. In the next room, through the open door, I was able to make out another faint rhythmic sound of breath, almost harmonically following that of my mothers. My grandmother was a quieter breather than my mother, despite all the weight on her chest, yet in the stillness of the suburbs, over the occasional barking of stray dogs in the distance, the two created a lullaby.

As I lay there listening, I began to ponder the distance between the two women. Similar to my own geographical separation, my mother left home at an early age for the other side of the world. Due to economic hardship, we reunite at a scattered frequency; despite this, the closeness of us all is unparalleled. The story of how my grandmother lost her mother as a young girl slithered into my mind in a visual flash. Has generational trauma left an imprint?

The dogs started to bark again. A trail of howls, some distant, some farther away. *Oh, the breathing has quieted. Will they wake?*

No, the dogs had simmered down. The sleepers slept on.

As I listened to the two breathing, one out and the other in, unburdening one another of heavy breaths, I thought about how someone can sometimes feel so close that it feels like you're breathing in their very being, without even being conscious of the impact their proximity has on your behaviour. You adopt their physical mannerisms—a way of holding your body, a tone of voice—imprinted onto you, through generations of women.

I decided to turn this imagery into a performance. Two figures standing opposite one another, breathing in proximity. As their breath and exhalation deepen and set into a rhythm of familiarity, they begin to sway backwards and forwards on their heels, almost dancing, almost falling. At one point pulling closer with each breath, and at another pushing backwards in resistance, interlocked in a momentous sway.

The performance *дъхвъздух* (2023), which translates from Bulgarian to "breath of breath," includes a play on words that does not translate. *Inherent Transfers* resulted from the documentation of this performance in becoming: it is a multichannel short film shot on 16 mm film intercut with digital. It plays with memetics in transferring ideas of generational memory and language, conceptualising memory as a bodily function. Two sets of hands interlock in a dance as they proceed to fold a white bedsheet. A young woman sits on the sheet, sorting out good beans from the bad; a woman beats a blanket in a courtyard; another woman combs her hair as dogs bark outside. A series of inherent transfers, from mother to daughter to daughter. A current of habits ingrained in hairs. But the interweaving continues as a

train of thought develops further and further when the format doesn't fit the space.

How does a video become an installation?

How does a egg become a chicken?

A deep blue surrounding me, slime and lime-coloured tentacles, I am an octopus, I'm in the octopus reaching out wanting to touch everything be inside and outside at the same time. As I walked over a liquid floor my eyes the shapes of clementines and my throat sore from last night's performance for the opening of the Austrian Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale with MALA SIRENA, I drank in the colours of Laure Prouvost's installations in the French Pavilion. I wouldn't call her a video artist or a sculptor or a painter or just any one thing—why? Her work reaches over so many mediums, like an octopus, her beautiful silky tentacles succeed in enveloping you into her world, they slip and slide over and under you, you're in the slime, the placenta, you'll be born again, oh and now into your ear, lets tickle your brain. Her video work always asking you to "look," "look under," "look over hear" but also to listen and feel and touch with your eyes, your ears, your elbows, your toes—in other words feel, *go ahead, feel it*.

So, naturally, the videos can't sit in a white cube with nothing else. You must enter the world, not just visually but physically. Move with your body, let the odour of the work enter through your nostrils, this sometimes sour sensation of looking into a fish head's eye.

When I watch her work, it's not just a film, it's a memory, supported by the physical realm of the exhibition space, installed with complementing sculptures and textures to bring you as close as possible to the feeling of the films, to prolong the sensation of the screen while offering an escape.

This is something I search to achieve through my own exhibitions, to consider the body, the senses. To allow the films space to be their own but also to provide a room, to force the spectator closer to the screen or introduce a different kind of distance. At the very start of my master's programme, I had already planned my exhibition installation: a flooded water floor, a path of tiles spread across the space in a premediated path around the works. Each day, the tiles would be moved to a create a different path in the shallow pool covering the entire gallery, forcing the visitor to look at the work from a different angle, to take a different route, to hinder the ability to see a work that day, forced routes of mobility on precarious pathways. This was meant to place the visitor within the theme of some of the works shown. Water as separation. Currently, however, the master's exhibition has taken a different turn, due to budgets and limited permissions to flood an art space.

Water as an element of transmission,

out
of the

brain,
into the water
and
down
the drain.

Water as an element of collecting information, data like minerals, data water.

While searching for sleep. "In search for things to project on."[41] Laure Provost's installations tickle my mind; *I can come up with another way to quench my desire for water in this show*. While lying in bed with *дъхвъздух* (2023) playing out in my head: a closeup of a woman's hands as she sorts good beans from bad, a closeup of two sets of hands as they fold a white linen bedsheet, as if locked in a dance. Suddenly "pure memory"[42] sneaks in. It is the profoundness of our interior universe, where one doesn't need to wake up if they never go to sleep. Although neither science in 2023 nor philosopher Henri Bergson in 1896 know exactly how or why I suddenly recall the identical, brutalist, cube-like buildings common to Sofia's outskirts lined up like dominoes, each one with a small cement courtyard, patches of grass here and there. In the middle of the "garden" is a drying pole, made of metal two metres high and two metres wide, water dripping off a wet linen bedsheet. *A/current* (2023) is born, a piece that in turn speaks to the video work, a two-metre-high and two-and-a-half-metre-long metal piece resembling the drying poles found in the courtyards of my childhood

Image courtesy of the artist

Djoana Gueorguieva, *A/current*, 2023. Metal structures based on U-shaped structures placed in social welfare housing gardens for the purpose of drying laundry or beating rugs of dust, bed linen handed down from mother to mother, water, rubber hose, fasteners, silicon, epoxy. Installation view

garden. Endlessly dripping, *A/current* is a sculptural installation consisting of metal, which is prone to rust over the passage of time. Its slow, time-based process of ageing illustrates the transference of all things through the passing of time onto a piece of linen passed down from grandmother to mother to daughter. Cultural, familial, generational habits and traumas are reflected through the cyclical flow of the water from the source, through the pipes and down the linen and then back again. Only here the cycle is interrupted; the flaws and nuances are mentioned and referenced in the effect of the textile, as it too picks up on its environmental influences—no longer white but painted from the action and the intent of the water. It is through this process that the rust writes, imprinting a different story on the watery canvas. History never constant and ever changing, as the orange patina slowly envelops the metal, changing the structure through time.

Regathering of threads in states of unclouded pt2

in betweenness

We are back on a train. I find myself in an odd rectangular-shaped room, dim or even dark, with the exception of a series of square openings that provide a "great reserve of imagination."[43] Train rides often present me with three possible scenarios. The first resembles a "cinematic condition," as described by Barthes in "Upon Leaving the Movie Theatre" when he refers to how we enter and leave a cinema. We enter the train, excited to "take off" and find our place next to the window, followed by "the relaxation of postures; how many spectators slip into their seat as they slip into bed, coat, and feet on the seat in front of them" in idleness.[44] Once the train begins to move suddenly, "a light: the screen?"—no, it is the window that provides an array of framed moving images. The second usually follows the first in the trance-like repetition of landscapes, intermittent flickering of shapes, and diegesis passing before my eyes, visual and bodily hypnosis. I am able to exist in a space of nowhereness and everywhere, allowing my mind to slow down in serene reflection, to drowse off into a tunnel, like the narrator in Stan Douglas's film. Between sleep and awakening, my body remains aware of my surroundings. The third comes with the quick gasp of air as I resurface from the tunnel of intersensory bodily perceptions. *Where am I, what time is it, are we there?* No. Still on the train, in passing, in many places but here just for a second, the images still moving across the window, going forward. Hours to go. Here wrapped in Barthes's silk cocoon, filled with desire, I too am shut in and ready to work. I find my body in my seat, sit upright, and begin to gather all the stray threads, subthreads, red threads, and just plain threads back together.

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1 What I am inferring here is that a lot of the content was written during several train trips, although the text was not completely assembled on the train. The use of "passage" twice is wordplay: referring to a short extract from a text, a train passage, or the process of transition from one state to another. Similarly with "window of moving images," the implication is that many of the ideas for films were arrived at, while "in a state of unclouded productivity" on the train refers to either a cinema screen or the window of a train. "Window of moving image" implies either a cinema or a window on a train.

2 Stan Douglas, *Overture*, 1986, video. Available online at https://mubi.com/films/overture.

3 "Polyphonic: producing or involving many sounds or voices," as defined in *Oxford English Dictionary*.

4 See Manuel Portela, "Untranslations and Transcreations," *Text* 15 (2003): 305–20, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30227797.

5 Here I refer to several of the ideas addressed in Pascal Gielen, *No Culture, No Europe: On the Foundation of Politics* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015).

6 The ideas I'm expressing here relate not to *The Matrix* (1999) but rather to Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, The Body, in Theory: Histories of Cultural Materialism (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

7 Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

8 "Syntagmatic relations" refers to the combination of words according to the syntax rules for that language; in English: determiner + adjective + noun.

9 Deep down, I still believe that it is in large part the art world's fault that fashion imagery and advertisement were so behind. If the art world did not treat artists who worked in those fields as having "sold out," perhaps the two worlds could have aligned to use their strengths towards a "fashion system" instilled with deeper concepts and capable of reaching a wider public. The fashion brand Miu Miu has used this approach since 2011, when it started its Women's Tales: *carte blanche* opportunities for female film directors and artists, such as Miranda July, Agnès Varda, and Hiam Abbass, to tell the stories they want to tell through their own visual languages, with Miu Miu providing the current season's designs for the cast to wear.

10 "Series of shortcuts became useless"—when referring to shortcuts, I mean Photoshop shortcuts like blending, masking, and rendering skin to poreless porcelain.

11 Harun Farocki, *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, 1989, film, 1:15:00.

12 See, for example, Harun Farocki, *The Inextinguishable Fire*, 1969, film, 25:00.

13 Harun Farocki, *How to Live in the Federal Republic of Germany*, 1990, film, 83:00.

14 Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, *Vent d'Est* [Wind from the East], film script in *Weekend/Wind from the East*, by Jean-Luc Godard (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 179.

15 Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," in *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973–1983*, The Nova Scotia Series: Source Materials of the Contemporary Arts, v. 16 (Halifax, Canada: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984).

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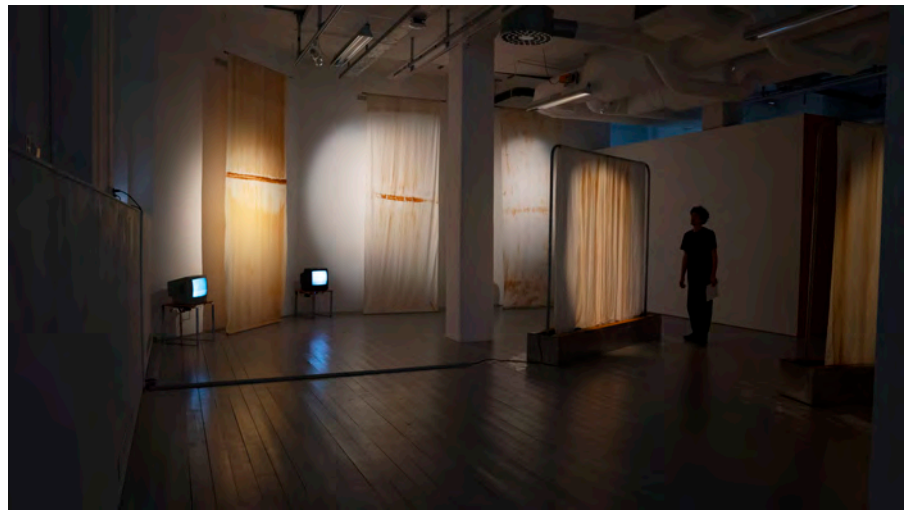

Image courtesy of the artist

Djoana Gueorguieva. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KMH1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

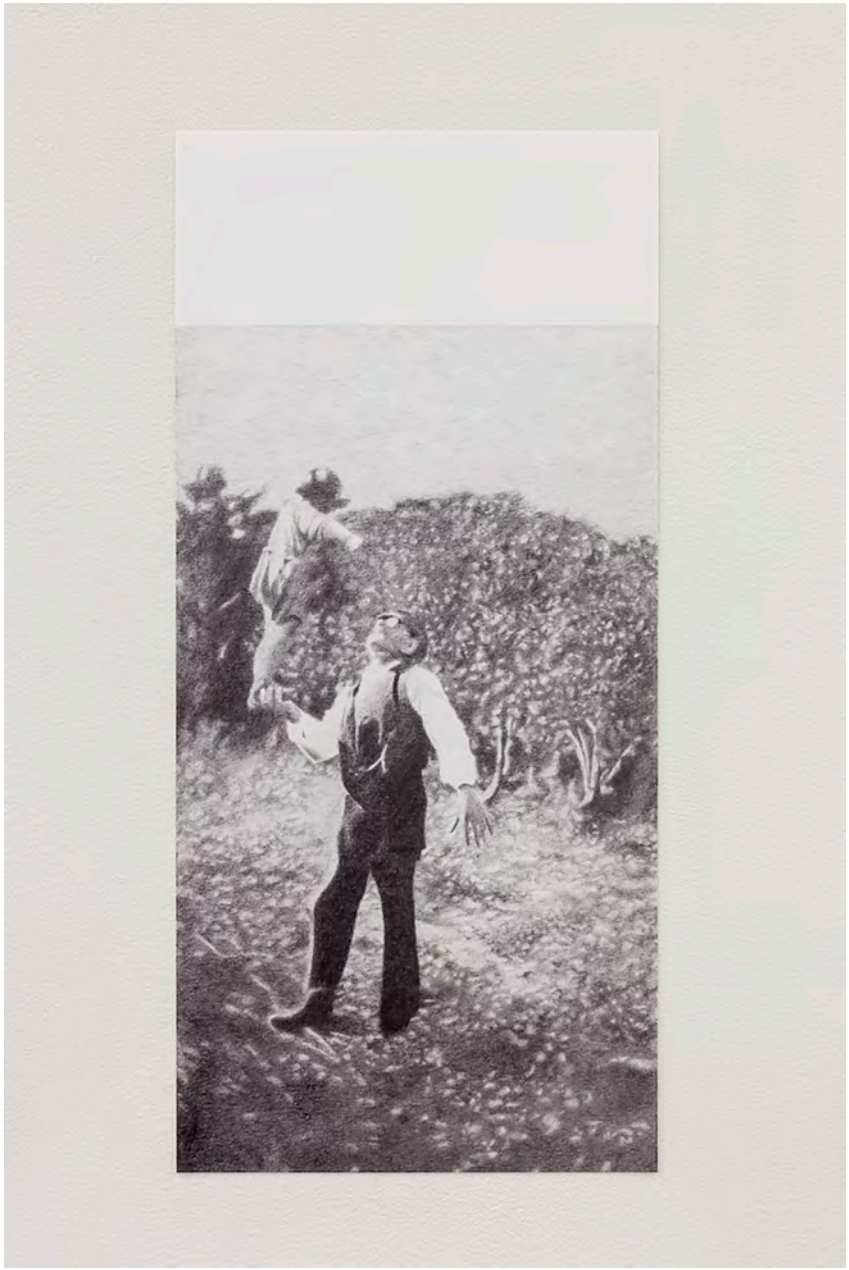

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Rebecca Jansson, *Becoming bird*, 2023. Pencil on paper, painted MDF, variable dimensions (drawing: 36 × 16,5 cm). Detail

To Encounter the Horizon

Rebecca Jansson

The Story of the Lost Colombian Bird

A few years ago, in 2017 to be precise, I made a new friend—Alejandra—an artist from Bogotá, Colombia. Our paths crossed by chance in Stockholm that autumn. I was invited to the artist-led Supermarket Art Fair to collaborate with a group of other artists at the fair.[1]

Alejandra did not attend the Supermarket Art Fair, but one of her artworks was there. Exhibited in a gallery representing South American artists was a small, portable sky that contained small laminated graphite drawings with tiny, tiny stars set amid the graphite blacking.[2] The stars were only visible when you held the small drawings up to the bright ceiling lamps. They were part of a work based on the fictional notebook of an astronomer named Julio Garavito Armero. In the notebook was a description of the architecture of an astronomical observatory, and the small graphite drawings with the stars were part of the astronomer's fictional studies of the night sky. I was deeply enchanted by her work, a fact that did not escape the gallerist, who proceeded to put me in touch with Alejandra —which led to Alejandra and I becoming digital pen pals.

At that time, in late 2017, Alejandra and I had many conversations about distance in our email correspondence. We were both fascinated by the physical distance between us—the entire ocean between our two bodies. Parallel to this, the idea to collaborate emerged, using our physical distance as a guiding concept for the development of a joint project. Through our letters, we decided that each of us would select and send a small object to the other by post. The two objects would thus travel the entire physical distance between us—something neither of us had the opportunity to do ourselves. It also felt important for there to be a reason behind our object choices. The object should be something that we hadn't been able to get out of our minds lately. A question we were not inclined to resolve or continue to work on alone.

I sent Alejandra a small stone with great potential-by-association to become a mountain along with a handwritten letter. Alejandra sent me a small stamp featuring the image of a Colombian bird, which she'd placed inside a white envelope. The bird had lingered undisturbed in her wallet for several years, forgotten, and her idea was to allow the little bird one last flight. As a way of rousing it from slumber. Unfortunately, the bird never arrived.

29 November 2017

Dearest Rebecca,

I really love the way our conversations emerge, as an echo of the geographical distance between us (do you believe distance is something that exists in between?). There are many different kinds of distances any way.

I have to tell you that I am more than embarrassed about the mail correspondence. In these three months I went a bunch of times to the post office to ask for what had happened and each time they gave me a different excuse. You'll see, here in Colombia we have the national post office (the one I used) and many other private companies (most of them foreign and really expensive). Now I gave up on them, but absolutely not on our collaboration.

I believe the bird I sent you never arrived to its destination and never will. As it will remain lost in its way to you, I would like to write these words describing it from my memory. The envelope was white, and it had a blue card in it, with few words, (those I do not remember). Attached to it, was a little stamp with a colombian bird. I believe the bird was green and had a few parts painted in yellow and blue. I do not remember the name of the bird, but I would like to tell you that in Spanish we have two words to refer to this animal: AVE y PÁJARO, (the second one I like the most). I bought this stamp once at the flee market several years ago, and put it in my wallet. I forgot it till the day I was thinking what would be the perfect thing to send you. I really

liked the idea of this old static bird having a new flight, migrating to colder places, watching different landscapes, to meet a new friend. Also I think it was beautiful to take this antique technology, the stamp, which is supposed to be on the outside of the envelope, and save it inside as a treasure. But well …

Ale.[3]

A Small Shard Can Grow into a Whole Life

It took a while for the greater significance of this experience to sink in. Several years after the bird went missing, I began working with this incident as an art project in and of itself. A person can be involved in something that, on the surface, is quite ordinary. It may not sound particularly remarkable when talked about, but nonetheless it can awaken, or unleash, and deepen something that this person can't help but ponder. In my case, the story of the lost bird can be seen as one such incident.

One way to view this incident is as a kind of encyclopedia entry. A letter was lost in the mail—which means that somewhere along the line the postal service failed in its task of delivering a letter from sender to recipient. Perhaps the letter disappeared, was stolen, or is simply wedged behind a wastebasket in a post office in Bogotá, forgotten. This idea of the missing letter, and where it might have gone, is certainly compelling to me. The incident itself could speak to issues around several interesting topics from, for instance, a political or societal perspective, since it directly relates to a country's ability to have a functioning postal service. But choosing to focus on the idea of the bird itself, as depicted on the stamp, and thinking about the journey it would have made, and perhaps had already embarked upon, and really getting into how this feels makes the experience shifts.

I'm curious about this experience. There is something about this experience, and the incident, that reaches far beyond an encyclopedia entry. Perhaps my sense of wonder about the incident of the lost bird is simply about having an essential sense of wonder at the world, which can be too readily forgotten in modernity. As for me, the importance of capturing these experiences feels like a fundamental part of being an artist. What can otherwise easily disappear, or go by unnoticed, is given space to be noticed and seen.

The Russian author and literary critic Viktor Shklovsky writes about what he calls "automated perception" and the risks of living life on an automated plane. He believes that what has become habitual eventually also becomes automated.[4] As such, phenomena pass us by as if they are veiled. We simply don't notice them, and so habituation to the outside world dulls us and takes away our ability to feel wonder. Shklovsky writes: "And so life is reckoned as nothing. … If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been."[5] In other words, automated perception closes up our souls and turns us into robots. Personally, I try not to notice my surroundings in too a habitual way. My focus is always on taking in new details, as well as consciously using what I have cultivated as my artistic eye, where the very noticing of details is key. Shklovsky's remedy for a life lived on an automated plane is, in fact, art.[6]

One writer I come to think of with regard to raising one's level of consciousness and paying attention to the details of everyday life is the French writer Patrick Modiano. Right at the start of my art project on the lost Colombian bird, my friend Mattias gave me a gift: a copy of Modiano's book *Dora Bruder*,[7] which he'd spotted at a flea market and bought for me. Modiano's book revolves around a small newspaper advertisement he found in an old daily newspaper from 1941. He discovered the advertisement roughly fifty years after the newspaper was printed, in the 1990s. The ad is short, with scant information about a young girl who went missing in Paris.

The only information the ad contains is the girl's name (Dora Bruder), a brief description of her at the time of disappearance, and her parents' address. Even so, Modiano could not let go of the ad. Taking these short lines as his starting point, he began a long and intensive search for Bruder's history; the search went on for several years. This man is who the reader accompanies throughout the course of the book. One can follow Modiano as he walks the streets of Paris, the same streets Bruder walked. And you get to follow his thoughts about where she actually went after her disappearance. What is then revealed is a story about the German occupation of Paris, as well as a story about a Jewish family during the Holocaust. And, suddenly, far greater depths in the story are revealed.

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Rebecca Jansson, *Were we birds / Var vi fåglar*, 2023. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

Ever-present in the book is Modiano's attention as well as the search based on that minor incident of finding the ad. It is easy to understand the importance of allowing yourself to be consumed—and not to mention, be amazed—by something that is otherwise easy to overlook. Not least in this particular case, where such an important history sprung from the search itself. Mattias was drawing a clear comparison between his own artistic practice, as well as mine, and Modiano's writing. On the very first page of the book, Mattias handwrote a small note to me that sums this up beautifully: "A small shard can grow into a whole life."[8]

Experiencing the World to Understand the World

In recent years, my focus as an artist has mainly been on drawing—almost exclusively pencil drawing—as a means of expression. I would like to talk about the experience of drawing, because I find it to be so important to what I, as an artist, feel is relevant for me to discuss. I also want to connect my thinking on drawing to my work with the lost Colombian bird.

To go deeper into my explanation of the experience of drawing, as well as the nature of drawing, I look to the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his essay "Eye and Mind."[9] In this essay, Merleau-Ponty discusses experience from a phenomenological perspective. That is, the explanation of experience as it is lived. In the essay he mainly references painting, which is also relevant to me as an artist who primarily works on paper with pencil, as painting and drawing have much in common. But since I'm an artist who draws, the main focus of my discussion here will be on drawing, and I will simply replace "painting" with "drawing" as I consider Merleau-Ponty's essay.

To offer a little more background and context for Merleau-Ponty's ideas, I want to go into what he writes at the very beginning of his essay. He writes that science, something we normally think of as knowledge—that is, something that tells or reveals the truth about the nature of reality—does in fact manipulate things, and does not *inhabit* reality. What he means is that science has taken a step outside reality, viewing the world from above, and thus viewing reality as an object. He argues that science simply does not engage with the experience of reality.[10]

Experience, according to Merleau-Ponty, is important when trying to understand the world. And to understand why experience is so important for that understanding, and how it is linked to art, I would like to introduce another French philosopher: Jacques Derrida. In his essay "Signature Event Context,"[11] he discusses writing in relation to "self-presence." It's not uncommon for humans to believe that we are fully self-aware. We often imagine this self-awareness to be the source of the meaning we are then able to express in speech and writing. That is, with the help of language. According to this line of thinking, meaning comes before language. What Derrida argues, however, is that it actually works the other way around. In "Signature Event Context," Derrida wants to demonstrate that writing is what gives meaning to our experience.[12] One could say that the reality is that, rather than being fully self-aware or having an understanding of ourselves, we are in fact mostly a mystery to ourselves, and we actually conceive of our reality in terms of a question rather than an answer.

Derrida's perspective—that we do not necessarily have clear and defined access to ourselves as subjects or souls, or whatever you choose to call it—can be understood as a process of trying to find out who we are. This is something that we can achieve with language, or writing. To follow this line of thinking is to see writing as something that produces answers to the question of who we are.

You can choose to see language, or writing, as a set of terms we use to understand things about ourselves and the world around. So when we try to understand ourselves, we are relying on the same language and the same words that everyone else is using to understand themselves and others. We all use the same set of terms to understand the world, as well as to communicate with and understand each other. To make it even clearer, you could say that we use a common system—language—and this also implies that we exist in a shared world.

Following Derrida's thinking on writing in relation to self-presence, we are then enigmas to ourselves in the world, which we then try to get closer to through writing. When it comes to Derrida's thinking about language, one can identify a distinction between what can be called the "inscription" and the "inscribing"—*what is written* versus *the act of writing*. This is important because this line of thought can be used to better understand Merleau-Ponty and his way of describing art. Think of it as replacing the idea of writing with the idea of art, or even drawing: as *what is drawn* and *the act of drawing*.

To Look at a Drawing Is to Be Offered a World

Merleau-Ponty wants us to look at the world through our lived experience.[13] He wants us to step away from familiar and habitual concepts, which come from the scientific way of looking at the world, in an attempt to gain a truer understanding of reality. This means turning a fresh eye on reality—how things are—before language, categorisation, and objectification come into play and influence our view of the world. Merleau-Ponty also claims that we experience the world through lived experience, through our bodies.[14] That is to say, he draws attention to the fundamental fact that we appear in the world as bodies.

He further argues that the artist can look at the world without judging it.[15] The artist—and specifically the painter, in Merleau-Ponty's view—looks at the world with fresh eyes. Using an artistic gaze when looking at the world can be seen as a way of approaching an understanding of reality, instead of our habitual way of seeing the world. Instead of seeing the world through how it is already marked, the *inscription*, as I mentioned in relation to Derrida, we can think of the world in terms of the moment of *inscribing*.

This is why I want to delve a little deeper into drawing as a medium, which in several ways is similar to painting in Merleau-Ponty's discussion. I simply want to consider what it is that distinguishes drawing from other artistic mediums. If you compare drawing to sculpture, for example, which is about physical forms—objects or an object in a room—that you can relate to and often have the opportunity to walk around with your own physical body, then we can say that drawing, in this sense, is not that. A drawing exists as a two-dimensional surface, often on a sheet of paper with, for example, graphite pigment on top, and the world exists inside this surface. To look at a drawing is to be offered, or to receive, a world. You are offered a world with objects and surfaces, just like in sculpture; but, unlike sculpture, the world of the drawing exists inside a two-dimensional surface where objects are quite simply excluded. At this point, I find it interesting to reflect on this particular definition of drawing. Of course, artists have a mandate to go against definition—which is something I'm constantly exploring in my work in drawing-as-medium. However, I'm simply curious to see if it is possible to break through the confines of the world of drawing and make it more like the medium of sculpture.

I am certainly not alone in wanting to rupture pre-existing definitions and examine what that means in my artistic practice. Even when it comes to this specific delineation—that is, examining drawing as we know it, as a two-dimensional medium—I can cite many other artists who have done the same. One I was inspired by several years ago is the Swedish artist Vanna Bowles. She often works with pencil drawings in various constellations and presents these together with three-dimensional elements that refer back to the drawn images. Animals recur in her work as a kind of fable, putting them into delicate, human situations. Bowles continually returns to one very special bird: the African grey parrot, one of the world's most intelligent birds, which also has a knack for mimicking human speech. I saw an exhibition by Bowles in Gothenburg a few years ago,[16] when I was attending a preparatory art school. What struck me about her work was how she shifts between the two dimensional and the three dimensional. Bowles profoundly influenced my understanding of where I wanted to go as an artist in terms of my personal approach to drawing.

Drawing as an Exploration of Seeing

Phenomenology tells us to go back to looking at experience.[17] Taking up this perspective makes me want to deepen my understanding of what happens with seeing in relation to drawing. Seeing is, after all, one way for the body to perceive and experience the world. Sight also differs somewhat from most other senses, as it brings you something from

a distance. Whereas touch, taste, and smell could be said, in a different way, to be dependent on proximity. You have to put something in your mouth, on your tongue, to taste it. In the same way, you need to touch something with a part of your body, such as your hand, to experience how touching that thing feels. Perhaps one could argue that smell can occur at a certain distance, but not quite in the same way as both seeing and hearing. Seeing and hearing can each give us something from a greater distance. We have the ability to hear cars on the street through an open window, even if we are several floors up in a high-rise. Similarly, we have the ability to look to the horizon or up at the clouds in the sky from this same high-rise, and the world appears infinite to us through our eyes. What an incredible experience, really—to have reality materialise like this before our eyes. All we need are the eyes in our bodies to experience the visual aspect of reality.

It is this precise focus on the use of my eyes that I experience when drawing. I feel that my eyes have become sharper over the years of my drawing practice. I see things now that I previously could not. My way of drawing is based on working from existing originals and simply translating or copying them through drawing. I use my eyes to seek out these originals, and then I use my eyes, and my hand, to translate them into pencil drawings. When I look for the originals, I'm employing a specific type of seeing and something that could be described as a form of desire. I want an image to rouse an emotion in me, and once this has happened, my seeing shifts, and I then regard the image with what could be called a "cold eye." This means that I look at my found images with a more non-evaluative or mechanical eye, a bit like how a lens looks at an image. By doing this, I'm simply trying to perceive the image as neutrally as possible so as to be able to copy it with as much fidelity to the original as possible. However, I might also switch between these different ways of seeing, even during the act of drawing. I do this to give myself the freedom to evaluate what I'm seeing and to make decisions about the image accordingly—for example, omitting certain parts of the image plane or enhancing other parts. This creates dynamism, and it becomes more interesting for me when I am able to switch between perspectives, depending on what I want to say with the drawing. The originals I work with, often old photographs, usually come from old books that I purchase at flea markets. It becomes a kind of constraint to use my eyes to search through a limited selection of sources in this way. But here I want to focus on my experience of seeing specifically in relation to the act of drawing, after the originals have been found.

I was once told that my eyes work like a scanner, meaning that I look at an image and then recreate the same image moving from one corner of the page to the opposite corner—much like how a scanner works. I find this analogy intriguing, especially in relation to the cold eye. This analogy feels like a fairly accurate description of how I experience my gaze and hand moving across the paper as I draw. I want to think further on this relationship between the eyes and the hand when it comes to drawing.

The relationship between sight and movement is something Merleau-Ponty goes into more deeply in "Eye and Mind."[18] You could say that to experience yourself as a body in the world is to experience yourself in relation to the events happening around you—events with which you engage and in which your body is used. It could be something as mundane as *seeing* your bus coming down the road, so you start *running* towards it so as to catch it in time, before it drives on. It could also be someone throwing a ball at you, which you *see*, and so your arm shoots into the air and *catches* the ball. Events happen around us all the time, and you could say that we experience our body through our ability, or inability, to do things related to these events. You may have the ability to run for the bus or raise your arm to catch the ball. But you might not be able to fit your body into a tight space.

Merleau-Ponty argues that vision and movement should not be seen as two separate acts when it comes to our experience of an event.[19] This means that in the example of the ball being thrown to you, vision (when you see the ball coming towards you) and movement (when your arm lifts to catch the ball) are one and the same act. The experience of this event does not take place in two separate parts, with vision as one part and movement as the other, but rather we experience vision and movement as if they are one and the same act. You see the ball, and without stopping to acknowledge that you have seen it and then deciding to raise your arm and catch it, you just do it. It's as if your arm shoots into the air *because* you saw the ball. Similarly, in the bus example, you could say that when you see the bus coming down the street, it's as if it sets your legs in motion. You don't have to tell your legs to run: it just happens when you see the bus. In other words, the experience does not have different stages—one visual and one motion based. Instead, perception is simultaneously visual and kinetic. We experience it as an act and an experience.

I experience vision (when I look at a picture that I am going to draw) and movement (when my hand moves the pencil across the paper and draws the picture) as one and the same experience. And it's a special experience: a kind of interplay between eye and hand as part of my understanding of what I see. My eyes register the image before me, but the movements of my hand and pencil across the paper also cause me to feel the image on a deeper level. I experience that I see it more clearly.

Thinking of the eyes as a scanner also suggests careful attention to detail. This is also important to my practice, which makes the analogy between the scanner and me almost comically apt. Of course, if you placed the originals and my drawings side by side and studied them carefully, tiny, tiny differences between them would become apparent. Such differences are present in all drawings, and sometimes they are even the result of a deliberate choice, to clarify certain details in a picture, for instance. But it's the attention to detail that I find interesting here. Not the extent to which the picture is an exact copy of its original.

The American artist Vija Celmins has had a big influence on my artistic practice, including my drawing. Our ways of drawing have something in common, which is why I'm also often compared to her. She made a name for herself by drawing starry skies, oceans with no horizon, and spider webs. There is something repetitive and methodical in Celmins's way of working, both in how she executes the drawings

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Rebecca Jansson, *On Longing*, 2023. Pencil on paper, painted MDF, glass, paint on wall, variable dimensions (drawing: 21 × 32 cm). Detail

and her choice of motifs. In an interview, she mentioned that her interest in spider webs as a motif stems from the thought of the spiders that wove them. She likens herself to the spider, which I think is a beautiful comparison. She says: "Maybe I identify with the spider. I'm the kind of person who works on something forever and then works on the same image again the next day."[20] Thinking of the slow pencil drawing that we both engage in, this analogy really resonates with me.

Speaking of analogies, Celmins also mentions the scanner when she talks about the gaze in relation to drawing. In another interview, she described the human eye as the ultimate scanner.[21] Isn't this image of the artist's gaze compelling? Especially because it can be interpreted as the artist using the *image* to see and to gain an understanding of what things in the world actually look like. However, there is a crucial difference between the human eye and the eye of the scanner. A scanner has only one eye, whereas we humans have two. That is to say, our perception is deeper and more complex than a scanner's. A scanner's vision is only on the surface, meaning what it perceives is the actual impression upon a sheet of paper, if, for example, it's looking at an image. Thus, for the scanner vision means being an image reader; it can't perceive space like a human can. I want to leave this idea of two-dimensional vision hanging for now, as later on I will go into more detail about vision in relation to spatiality and working three-dimensionally.

But regarding these thoughts about seeing, I also find it interesting to think about drawing with respect to blindness. That is, the inability to see. I'll return to Derrida for a moment, and his essay *Memoirs of the Blind*.[22] He wrote the essay as a catalogue for an art exhibition of the same name at the Louvre Museum in Paris in 1990, which revolved around drawings. In the essay, Derrida talks about seeing and blindness, using the drawings included in the exhibition as a starting point.

What struck me as I read Derrida's essay was how he describes drawing using blindness. Because even though I would describe my experience of drawing as producing a kind of super-vision in me, it's interesting to challenge the idea by considering that it could also produce blindness in artists like me, who primarily draw. One example Derrida offers of blindness in drawing is when you sit with a blank piece of paper, put your hand on the paper, hover your pencil above the page, and then draw the very first line.[23] Where do you place the pencil? This situation is about the search for a place to put what you are about to draw. Derrida suggests that here we are faced with blindness.[24] We cannot tell from the paper where to put the pencil; this action takes place in blindness, because there is nothing on the paper to guide us. Compare this to tracing, a technique I use sometimes, where a sheet of paper is placed on a light box or against a window, so as to copy the original beneath the blank sheet. In this case, when the original image shines through the paper, there are clear lines and shapes to guide you. But in the situation with the blank sheet of paper that Derrida describes, he argues that we are faced with blindness. He compares it to drawing in the dark.

According to Derrida, one does not need to see in order to draw (Swedish: *teckna*) or signify (Swedish: *beteckna*).[25] According to him, seeing is secondary to drawing. Unlike Merleau-Ponty, Derrida argues that experience does not pass through our sensory impressions to our consciousness, meaning that experience does not come first; instead, experience takes a detour via drawing or writing. Expression comes before impression, according to Derrida.[26] So it is the drawing, and the writing, that gives meaning to an experience. This is why he talks about blindness in relation to drawing—and this is the point where I'd like to go deeper regarding my own experience of drawing.

Derrida's thoughts on blindness in relation to drawing are especially interesting to me when I consider how I experience drawing. I mentioned earlier that I draw my pictures based on originals that I've found in books and magazines on the second-hand market. I want to delve into the placement of my drawings, on the paper itself but also in space, using Derrida's thoughts on blindness as a backdrop. When I find an image that I want to draw, I'm faced with a series of decisions. One such decision is the scale at which to draw the image. Often I retain the original image's scale, but on some occasions I want to expand or shrink the size. The reason for this simply comes down to what I hope to achieve and what I want the image to express or clarify. Another important decision is about the precise format of the paper, as well as where on the paper I should

place the drawing. This image placement is exciting for me to think about and work with. I take an active role in the placement of the image on the paper and the relationship of the drawing to the whiteness or emptiness of the paper. The location of the image on the sheet of paper can indicate the direction in which I want the drawing to be read. So, in my images, I often make equal use of negative space (the blank white paper) and the drawn surface.

By way of example, I'll describe a piece I exhibited in at Malmö Art Academy's Annual Exhibition in 2022: *Om du tittar noga (If You Look Carefully)* (2022).[27] The work consists of eight small-scale pencil drawings, each drawn on a sheet of white paper of various sizes. These are presented alongside a mixture of small-scale objects such as rocks, crooked sticks, and short, sharpened pencils. The piece also includes a poetry collection I found titled *Öppna er, ögon* (Open, eyes) by the Erik Blomberg.[28] Most of the drawings are displayed in white-painted box frames, which in turn hang on white-painted MDF boards mounted to the walls of the exhibition space. The MDF boards are sawn into different sizes—similar to the white paper the pencil drawings are drawn on, but much larger. Together, they create a relief-like drawing installation, which span the walls of the exhibition space, inviting the viewer to look closely at every detail in order to discover similarities and connections between all the various parts on display.

This work, the drawing installation, feels like a good example for exploring the importance of placement. While I was working on this particular piece, I felt that I was faced with three different steps, or three different situations, where placement became important. First of all, I was faced with where to draw the images on the various sheets of paper. Each small drawing presented me with a series of decisions, including the one outlined by Derrida: Where would I put pencil to paper to make the very first line?

As I mentioned, Derrida argues that in this situation we are faced with a sort of blindness.[29] I would liken this situation—the moment pencil is put to paper—to other similar situations that have become apparent to me through my process. The second situation I faced was the question of where to place the finished drawing within the frame. And the third concerned the installation of the piece as a whole in the exhibition space. That is, where I would place all the framed drawings, as well as the MDF boards and objects, on the white walls. You could say that it was about the drawing on the paper, the drawing in the frame, and finally the drawing in the space. All these steps are similar in terms of how I relate to thoughts on placement.

When I think about the importance of placement, I think about my own experience of the act of drawing. One of the drawings included in *Om du tittar noga* is a small drawing in portrait format on a piece of paper 23 x 8.5 cm. The drawing itself (that is, the actual drawn surface of the paper) is square and a modest 8.5 x 8.5 cm. I placed the square drawn image at the top of the paper, leaving the lower part of the paper blank. I did this because the image is of two hands about to punch a hole into a piece of leather using a hammer and a punch. The trajectory of the hammer in the image space is clearly downward, and the hole punch that one hand holds to the leather forms a straight vertical line—a motion I could clearly feel the power of when I thought about the blunt force of the hammer striking the punch's top. To enhance the particular sensation of the hammer strike, I chose to cut a vertical line into the blank part of the paper, below the drawn image, in line with and the same thickness as the hole punch. In other words, I extended the line made by the hole punch in the image, and extended the movement that would result from the force of the hammer hitting the punch. In this way, the blank part of the paper takes on as much, or even more, importance in terms of how I want the image to be read.

Even after I've drawn an image on paper, the drawing is rarely complete. Often the spatial installation is needed to bring the drawing to life and create its actual meaning. In the case of the drawing of the hands, the hammer, and the hole punch, I chose to place the work high up in the exhibition space, so that the line of the drawing with the hole punch and the cutout was overhead and in line with a large crack on one wall. It was as if the little drawing of the hammer and punch had with great force —like the latent force within a large building that can cause the building to move and thus fissure—made this wall crack and crackled its paint.

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Rebecca Jansson, *Border*, 2023. Pencil on paper, paint on pillar, variable dimensions (drawing: 14,2 × 21 cm)

For me, white walls are just like white paper, and this is also how I relate to them and the space at large. When I place a drawing on a wall, it's the same as placing the drawing on the sheet of paper. So, when I treat the space like a sheet of paper, it's only the scale that changes. In other words, my experience is that I draw in the room with my drawings just like how I draw the image on the paper. This is important to consider in relation to how I like to move between two-dimensional and three-dimensional seeing, as I mentioned earlier.

Derrida's assertion that we are faced with blindness when it comes to drawing, and in the very situation when we are about to start drawing, which has to do with the placement of the pencil on the paper, is interesting in connection with my own experience of drawing. Especially since my experience of placing a drawing extends beyond the moment the pencil touches the paper's surface. For Derrida, the understanding of what we want to express comes only after we have made the drawing, and that is why he talks about blindness in relation to drawing. I think this understanding can be further explained by seeing drawing as an impression that carries meaning, similar to writing.

Drawing as an Impression with Meaning

Like Derrida, I'm interested in the impression. I'm interested in both writing and drawing, both of which are foregrounded in my work on the lost Colombian bird. I'm interested in the similarities between drawing and writing, and I want to go deeper into those similarities by thinking of both drawing and writing as impressions.

First, I want to explore the relationship between spoken and written language, and chiefly perhaps the differences between the two modes of communication, based on Derrida's thinking. This is to understand more clearly how the written word actually functions in interpersonal communication and how we think about written language, in order to compare it with drawing. Usually we think of both spoken and written language as a way for us to take thoughts or images from our consciousness and pass them on to someone else's consciousness. It can be seen as a way of sharing our perspective with someone else. However, some aspects of written language are not present in spoken language, and vice versa. One clear difference relates to presence.

When speaking, and thus communicating, with another person, the sender and the receiver must have a certain presence between them in order for them to be able to talk. To talk to another person, both people need to be present in the here and now. Writing, on the other hand, has a different ability: it can expand language in terms of time and space. We can write a letter to someone today, which can be read by them tomorrow. We can also write a letter to a person in a faraway place. Such as Bogotá.

However, sometimes even spoken language has the ability to expand language in time and space. Perhaps there has been a shift, here, in how we are able to view spoken language today as compared to the era when Derrida put his thoughts down on paper. This, I would argue, has to do with digitisation. Today, we have the opportunity to communicate with another person via speech without them having to be in our here and now, like used to be required. By making voice recordings, or even video recordings with both audio and moving images, we can make the spoken word go farther than we physically can. If you record audio of yourself speaking and then upload that audio clip online, another person can listen to what you want to communicate tomorrow or a year from now. You can also reach a person on the other side of the world with what you have to say. This technology creates a kind of shift in the nature of spoken language, bringing it closer to written language in terms of presence and absence. Regardless, it can be equally interesting to follow Derrida's thoughts on the nature of written language and what it is that distinguishes it, in most cases, from spoken language.

I now want to go into how we read written language, and how we read meaning in written language. A key characteristic of written language is that what is written is a *thing* that can also be read. What is written, and the meaning of what is written, can also be read by *anyone* (who can read, of course). So it is not only the person to whom the writing is dedicated or the person who wrote it who can read and so understand the meaning of the writing. For instance, if you were to find a random written letter, missing both sender and recipient, you would still be able to read the letter and understand its content and meaning.

According to Derrida, writing "says what it says" even in the complete absence of both sender and receiver.[30] Thus, the meaning borne by the written word is not defined by the writer. One could say that while we humans use language, language does not need us. The meaning is there nonetheless. When one person writes a letter to another person—be it a love letter from ancient Greece or a letter to a friend in another country in the fall of 2017—it's not the fact that a specific person wrote the letter that gives the letter its meaning. It's rather that the person who wrote it formulated and disseminated a kind of meaning made available to them by language. In other words, writing that particular letter is a version of the meaning that appears in that particular letter. The meaning could just as easily have been expressed in another way.

To use a different example: If you were to write a letter to another person—your mother, for instance—to tell her how much she means to you, you might, at some point after the letter was written, read it again and find that it contains a meaning other than what you intended at the time of writing. It might be something you could not discern at the time of writing. Maybe you notice that the letter doesn't quite express what you thought it did, but rather actually expresses anger towards your mother—but this only becomes clear in retrospect. Derrida says that writing expresses something, whether we are aware of it or not.[31] It makes itself known to us after the language has been written.

I wonder if it's possible to think about drawing similar to how Derrida thinks about and describes written language. If I go back to myself and think about my personal experience of drawing, I feel that I cannot possibly have a full understanding of the meaning of a drawing. Even if there was a will behind what I wanted to express through a drawing, it seems naive to imagine that I would have a full understanding of the drawing's entire content. Similarly, it seems naive to believe that I would have a full understanding of myself as I am expressing myself through drawing. To see this as the meaning revealing itself only once the drawing has been drawn is to follow Derrida's thinking, and I find this idea interesting because the consequence of that thinking places so much importance on the impression. I can also say, from experience, that a drawing can contain many different simultaneous meanings, depending on who is looking at it and interpreting what they see. And, as an artist, I don't feel a need to control that meaning too much either, no matter where or how that meaning is created. My role is not to interpret the meaning of my work for anyone else. Instead, the fact that my work has the potential to be read in different ways is something I consider to be important and positive.

In the novel *Fuglane* (*The Birds*),[32] the Norwegian author Tarjei Vesaas writes about the importance of the impression to communication in particular. The novel's main character, Mattis, lives with his sister in a secluded house near a forest. One day, Mattis notices that a bird, a woodcock, has set a new course right above their house, over which it flies at night. A few days later, Mattis finds footprints and prints from a bird's beak on the ground in a ditch near the house. He sees these prints, these impressions, as targeted messages from the bird to him. Through these markings, he begins a special conversation with the bird by drawing similar prints for it on the ground in the ditch. I think this singular written language—or drawing, if you will—is such a beautiful way to describe the importance of leaving impressions for someone else to see and experience.

What about the point at which drawing turns into written language, and vice versa? How do we read a drawing versus a written text? And what is the difference between how a drawing is drawn and how writing is written, when both are done by hand with, for instance, a pencil? As part of my work on the lost Colombian bird, I made a series of works in the winter of 2023. On white sheets of paper, I drew images that remind me of the written drawing tables that the German conceptual artist Hanne Darboven started producing in the late 1960s. Darboven's drawings consist mostly of numbers; I chose to draw letters instead. On my sheets of paper, a specific letter is drawn in pencil, over and over again, as a repetition that stretches along the white paper—as if it were written. I used one of Alejandra's handwritten letters as a starting point and traced certain letters of the alphabet found in it.

The letters I chose to draw are from the modern Latin alphabet, which is the most common alphabet in use in many parts of the world. The letters I chose are those that remind me of the shape of birds. In other words, you can read the markings both as the letters they are meant to represent and as drawings with the motif of flying birds. The piece is called *Winged Migration (h, m, n, r, s, u, v, w, z)* (2023).[33]

Darboven's relationship with the written word interests me. For several years, she explored the language of mathematics through numbers drawn in tables on sheets of paper. For her, mathematical language represented a neutral language,[34] but it was also a language she used to mark time gone by, which I want to dwell on for a moment. In *Ein Jahrhundert (A Century)* (1970–71),[35] she uses numbers to represent the time span of a whole century. The work consists of 402 binders lined up in a large bookcase, as well as fourteen framed A3 sheets of paper and eighty-six framed A4 sheets hanging in a tight grid on the wall. The binders on the shelf consist of sheets of paper on which Darboven has methodically drawn calendar dates according to a subjective set of rules she used to create a system. It becomes like an arithmetic language, as she assigned different numbers to dates and then added some of these numbers together to create new numbers. These binders also contain drawn systems for various calculations of the so-called value of K, which is a mathematical concept.

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Rebecca Jansson, *The ocean has no straight lines* (detail), 2023. Pencil on paper, paint on wall, variable dimensions (drawing: ca 12,5 × 13 cm)

Darboven is an artist who, in many respects, writes time. Through the act of writing (or drawing), time is also manifested. In his *Confessions*, the Christian philosopher Saint Augustine writes about the difficulty of defining time: "If no one ask of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not."[36] The human body has no sensory organ directly connected to experiencing time. Instead, we experience time indirectly, through our ability to register a sequence of events taking place around us or by noticing changes in our environment. When we experience time, we do so by registering processes. By thinking about our experience of time in this way, we can again connect with Merleau-Ponty and his theories about our experience in the world. Several events can happen around us at the same time, but the experience of these events can also be one and the same. How does this influence our perception of time?

A work similar to Darboven's *Ein Jahrhundert (A Century)* is by the Japanese conceptual artist On Kawara: a two-volume book project entitled *One Million Years* (1999).[37] Like Darboven, Kawara used numbers to describe a span of time across years—in this case, time that has been and time that has not yet taken place. Kawara's project extends from 998,031 BC to 1,001,992 into the future—a time span of two million years.

Both Darboven and Kawara use repetition as a way to express the passage of time. By experiencing a sequence of years, we as viewers can also experience, and understand, the time represented by these numbers. This repetition interests me. By working with a form of translation, or even direct copying, a repetition of images occurs when I make a drawing of a found photograph. Like Darboven's and Kawara's ways of manifesting time through writing or drawing, I also do this through my drawing. Drawing can be seen as a series of processes that take place in the making of a drawing, and through each drawn line you can also see traces of these processes. Viewers often ask me how long it takes me to draw a picture. This question is extremely difficult to answer—perhaps not least because I am uninterested in measuring time in that way, but also because it differs so much from picture to picture. Regardless of how many actual hours it takes me to draw a picture, it's possible to see that a drawing takes a lot of time, which I find interesting. I think this is probably because we have the ability to discern the traces left behind by the process when we look at a drawing, and we can see that a human hand has worked on the surface of the paper.

In the 1970s, Darboven began to incorporate written language (i.e., language consisting of letters and words) into her drawings by using texts of authors such as the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and German poet Heinrich Heine. Although Darboven is considered a visual artist, she saw herself as a writer foremost.[38] In several of her artworks, she used her own handwriting to transcribe the written texts of the above-named authors. As a writer, Darboven applied her own system of composition, through which she repeated mainly numbers, but also words and phrases. According to the artist, she used numbers as language because numbers carry less meaning in comparison to words.[39]

It's fascinating to think about how a number or a letter carries a certain meaning. Like a picture of something can carry meaning. Which in turn implies that its meaning can also be discerned. It's even more interesting to think about how different languages are actually read, and in which ways it's also possible to use them and communicate through them. It's also interesting to think about allowing different languages to overlap and merge by both using and reading them. Such as when the image of a bird and the letter "m" are drawn with the same line shape in pencil on a sheet of paper.

To return to the question of the actual difference between written language and drawing in terms of how the hand creates these expressions, I can honestly say that I do not have an answer. But I can go deeper into my experience of drawing itself. My experience of the hand when I draw is so close to my experience of my eyes and my vision. I described earlier that I experience a kind of interplay between hand and eyes in my understanding of what I am seeing when I draw. I experience the experience of seeing and moving the hand as one and the same experience, in line with Merleau-Ponty.[40] But my hand is the part of me that is actually physically closest to what I am drawing.

When I hold a graphite pencil in my hand, it becomes part of my body—a kind of extension of my hand—and I can feel the different hardnesses and softnesses of the pencil's tip when I press it to the paper. I have also come to recognise the weight of the different pencils as well as their different tips, when it comes to, among other things, colour, thickness, and feeling. The hard pencils (i.e., those that go from H to 9H) are light. They are a little less weighty in the hand, and I often draw much more carefully with these pencils, because the tip is so thin and hard and I want the pencil lines to melt into the paper's soft surface. The pencils that go from B to 9B are a bit heavier and steadier in the hand. I often apply more pressure when putting these pencils to paper, to bring out that blackness of the B pencils.

Often it feels like my hand is thinking on its own, as if my brain disconnects when I draw, and I end up in a kind of meditative state where my hand feels like it is moving of its own accord. We can think of it as the hand moving, because I'm seeing the thing I'm going to draw. Just as the eyes follow what the hand draws. Also worth mentioning is that I always draw in a very small format, which also affects how my hand moves. My drawings tend to be between five and twenty centimetres long on each side, and I pay a lot of attention to detail within these small frames. My hand therefore moves in a limited area in which each tiny movement is equivalent to many miles in the worlds of these small drawings.

Each aspect that I have so far discussed is important to the question of why I chose drawing as my medium. Drawing is a language that, to me, is close to the written word. Drawing is also directly connected to thoughts, and it is a way of communicating via impressions, lines, darkness, and light on a limited, two-dimensional surface. In fact, I tend to see drawing as a way for me to think slowly and to think out loud.

You Can Fill a Language with Content

I mentioned that I wanted to link my thinking about drawing to my work on the lost Colombian bird. I want to do that here. I want to talk about how I specifically used drawing to create meaning based on the incident of the stamp that was lost. I want to talk about the sixteen stamps I came across about two years after the bird's disappearance. During this period, I thought a lot about the anonymity of the little bird, given that I never got to see it before it disappeared on its way to me. All I had to go on was Alejandra's description of the bird from memory, based on its colours. One day I came across an ad for sixteen stamps from a collector in the US. All the stamps were from Colombia, and all had the motif of small birds. I was overwhelmed because there was a chance that one of these stamps was like the one Alejandra had sent me.

I ordered the stamps from the American collector and again waited to be visited by not one, but sixteen, Colombian birds that would cross the Atlantic for me. When they reached me in Malmö a couple of weeks later, I could tell from Alejandra's description of her bird that some of them could fit its description. But I couldn't know for sure. The fact that Alejandra did not fully remember what the bird looked like meant that its identity could not be confirmed.

Thoughts on memory are interesting. And here, specifically: memory in relation to disappearance. I knew I wanted to talk about memory, or indeed the absence of memory—that is, oblivion. I also wanted to return to my medium—drawing—and use drawing itself as a meaning maker for a work based on these sixteen found stamps. I decided to translate all sixteen stamps into 1:1 scale pencil drawings.

The decision to draw the stamps meant that I deliberately removed all the colour from them—the only information available to help identify similarities with the bird that disappeared on its way to me. Therefore, the *act of drawing* is of direct importance, because this act of translation is what gives the work its meaning. This is not always the case, as my primary references are not always in colour. But in this particular case, the idea of colour in relation to grayscale was important. The work with the sixteen drawings of stamps is called *I believe the bird was green with a few parts painted in yellow and blue* (2022)[41]—the words Alejandra used to describe the bird to me. At once, each of the sixteen stamps from the collector have both the inherent possibility and impossibility of being identical to the stamp that disappeared.

In 2016, the American artist Zoe Leonard created several artworks based on photographs she found at her aunt's house that depicted her Polish family in the years after World War II.[42] Leonard then photographed the found photographs with her own camera—capturing the images not only as photographs but also as objects. I find the desire to remember and preserve through translation fascinating. Not least because the translation itself rarely reproduces the original as it actually was. If we are to believe Derrida, it is never possible to translate something completely; a shift in meaning always occurs when you translate one thing into something else.[43]

To go back to memory in relation to drawing, I want to look at the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and his essay "A Note on the 'Mystic Writing-Pad'" from 1925.[44] In it, he writes about drawn impressions that arise with a specific toy called a Mystic Pad, and he uses this Mystic Pad as a metaphor to talk about memory and the unconscious. The toy's basic function is familiar to me from my own childhood—a drawing board where it's possible to erase what you have drawn and restore the pad to its blank state. Freud describes the structure of the toy similar to the way he imagines our perceptual apparatus. That is, how we receive impressions from the outside world, and how memories are then created and stored in us.

The Mystic Pad that Freud describes is made up of several parts that, as a whole, make it possible for the pad to be restored and used again. The pad consists of a wax slab, and on top of the wax slab is a thin transparent sheet consisting of two layers. One layer is clear celluloid and the other is wax paper. The celluloid sheet is what you write or draw on, and it is on this sheet that the impressions appear. To erase what you have drawn, you simply lift both layers off the wax slab, thus erasing the image from these outer layers. Freud suggests that our perceptual apparatus consists of two layers, like the Mystic Pad.[45] He argues that we have an outer layer, called a protective shield, in place to reduce the strength of the excitations, or impressions, that we receive from the world around us. We also have an inner layer designed to receive these excitations or impressions. These layers can thus be likened to the Mystic Pad's celluloid sheet and wax paper.

But the similarities between us and the Mystic Pad go even further. Freud argues that the way these different layers and parts of the Mystic Pad manage, or fail, to retain impressions is also similar to the way we preserve memories.[46] When you restore the outer layers, erasing your drawing by lifting the layers off the wax slab, the drawing disappears. These drawings once removed and erased cannot be restored. However, the marks on the wax slab itself, which lies beneath the outer layers, leave enduring traces. Freud likens the traces on the wax slab to our unconscious.[47] This is where memories are created and preserved, and this process takes place in a different location, or in a different system, than perception.

The question of memory and remembering has interested and fascinated artists, philosophers, and scientists since time immemorial. The subject's enduring popularity perhaps comes as no surprise. The question of memory touches on several aspects of the human condition, something of which writers throughout the ages have also been well aware. Patrick Modiano is a good example of an author who writes about memory and traces of memories in history that have been lost in various ways. I am again reminded of his book *Dora Bruder* and the advertisement about the disappearance of Bruder that he found in an old newspaper. Here, too, we can think of the ad as a memory, and an impression, which in this case deals with the question of an individual's fate. Thinking about the impressions and traces we humans leave behind becomes interesting when you consider the way Modiano uses the streets of a city as the very traces of a person's life. To be able to go to physical locations to see where a person has been, at any point in time, is a rather dizzying thought. Imagine humans constantly leaving behind traces, or impressions, as we move through the world. Like the bird that left footprints for Mattis in Tarjei Vesaas's novel *The Birds*, which someone else can then find and experience. Perhaps one could even go so far as to say that we humans, by leaving behind impressions, are like artists walking in and sketching the world.

I find it interesting to think about drawing as a language, and how that language can be filled. To return to my work with the lost Colombian bird, I would like to say that the work, while I was making it, grew a lot—

in terms of breadth but also very much in terms of depth. This was largely due to the email correspondence between Alejandra and me. There is something monumental about thinking together. And like Modiano's *Dora Bruder*, in which a story of human fates is revealed along the way, my work reveals a conversation about the feeling of wanting to leave one's country.

Distance can be thought of in terms of geography. You can see on a map that there is an ocean between Sweden and Colombia. You can also see the borders of many countries in between, and you can calculate distance by the number of kilometres between Malmö and Bogotá. The global map is a starting point for our thinking about the world, but there are also parallel maps of our world that co-exist with the map we are familiar with. An example of this is a bird's map of the world—a map based on how birds traverse the globe.

As the Crow Flies—The Straight Line

2021-05-03

Dear Alejandra,

Today I was in my studio working for some hours. […] I started to think upon a new project and I felt very happy and inspired. I found a bunch of old postcards recently, all of them with motifs of airplanes on them. That made me think about our talks about distance. And also, the idea of flying. I remembered the postcard you sent me, with the stamp of the bird that you told me about. I really fell in love with your idea of letting the little bird travel from you in Colombia to me in Sweden, over the big ocean—as if it were flying. It was unfortunate that the postcard never arrived. Who knows where the little bird decided to fly instead?

Along with these thoughts about distance, flying, airplanes and birds I started to think about 'As the crow flies'. The measurement we have to know the shortest way between two spots, using a straight line. Isn't it beautiful that we have a measurement based on how birds move?

Many hugs, and I hope we can still keep in touch even though it's been so long.

Rebecca[48]

From an artist's perspective, the line is important. It's one of the most fundamental elements of drawing, and the idea of the drawn line constantly recurs in my practice. I find it interesting that the idea of the line brings my thoughts back to the medium of drawing itself.

But the line can also represent, or symbolise, more tangible elements in our world. I mentioned borders as an example of marking distance earlier. The idea of borders and what they might mean to people in the world, especially people who are subject to them, can be dizzying. I thought about the little bird that was ready to travel all the way across the ocean, and how it might have felt to be sending a little bird on a journey that you might have wanted to be taking, too. I decided to draw a section of the ocean on a small sheet of paper. You see the ocean from above, from a bird's-eye view, and on the small surface you see the wild ocean made up of many different currents and shapes. The paper the ocean is drawn on is cut out into an irregular shape that departs from the rectangular format that a piece of paper usually conforms to. In my opinion, we are so used to the standard rectangular format that we no longer see the four straight lines that make up the shape. By instead breaking up the rectangle and letting the lines deviate from the standard, we become more aware of these straight lines. And so the shape of the paper clearly corresponds to the drawn surface in terms of how to read the meaning of this work. The cut-out, dead-straight lines of the paper stand in contrast to the undulating lines in the drawn sea, like sharp borders. The work is called *Havet har inga räta linjer (The Ocean Has No Straight Lines)* (2023).[49]

I think about the importance of daring to pay attention to something small, something fleeting. Because if you do, there is a chance that this small thing can serve as a starting point for your thinking. And that's where I want to be going —on a continued journey of thinking, but also of language, experience, and drawing, through art.

My goal with this text was to think something through. To think about an essay written by a philosopher and try to apply it to myself and to what I do, to try to get a slightly deeper understanding of my own practice. Isn't that how philosophy is supposed to work? It's there so you can apply its thoughts to your own life

and to your own understanding of the world, to see what happens. At least that's how I relate, and want to relate, to philosophy. And this is exactly how I think a work of art can function —as something to think through. It can also function as something whose existence can give us a slightly better understanding of our own experience in the world, if we engage with the work. After all, to recall Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology one last time: you could say that experience is what we are.

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1 Supermarket Art Fair is an art fair in Stockholm that started as an alternative to the city's commercial art fair, Market. [this doesn't require a formal citation, since it's basic fact, so I have deleted it. OK?]

2 Alejandra Bonilla Restrepo, *Pocket Skies*, 2016, 10 laminated graphite drawings, 9 x 6 cm (a gift from Alejandra to Rebecca).

3 Alejandra Bonilla Restrepo, email to Rebecca Jansson, 29 November 2017. The correspondence between Alejandra and me is unedited and presented as received.

4 Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Konsten som grepp* [Section of Aesthetics] (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1994), 101.

5 Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 103. (English translation of quotation: Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood (London: Longman, 1988), 20.)

6 Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 101–103.

7 Patrick Modiano, *Dora Bruder* (Stockholm: Grate), 2014.

8 Mattias Kvick, handwritten note from 8 November 2021, in Modiano, *Dora Bruder*.

9 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 159–192.

10 Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 159.

11 Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc.* (Evanston, IL: Northwest University Press, 1972), 1–24.

12 Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 9.

13 Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 160

14 Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 160–61.

15 Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 161.

16 Vanna Bowles, *For the Greater Good*, Galleri Thomassen, Gothenburg, 11 March–2 April 2017.

18 Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 162.

19 Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 162.

20 Vija Celmins, quoted in Samantha Rippner, introduction to *The Prints of Vija Celmins*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), 30.

21 Bob Nickas, *Vija Celmins* (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 2017), 24.

22 Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

23 Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 36.

24 Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 36.

25 Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 44–45.

26 Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 7–9.

27 Rebecca Jansson, *Om du tittar noga (If You Look Carefully)*, 2022, drawing installation, various dimensions.

28 Erik Blomberg, *Öppna er, ögon: dikter* [Open, eyes: Poems] (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1962).

29 Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 44–45.

30 Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 7.

31 Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 7–9.

32 Tarjei Vesaas, *Fåglarna* [*The Birds*] (Stockholm: Lind, 2002).

33 Rebecca Jansson, *Winged Migration (h, m, n, r, s, u, v, w, z)*, 2023, pencil on paper, series of 9 A3 papers.

34 Lucy Lippard, "Hanne Darboven: Deep in Numbers," *Artforum*, October 1973, https://www.artforum.com/print/197308/hanne-darboven-deep-in-numbers-37981.

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Rebecca Jansson, *Winged Migration (h, m, n, r, s, u, v, w, z)*, 2023. Pencil on paper, 9 drawings, 70 × 100 cm each. Detail

35 Hanne Darboven, *Ein Jahrhundert (A Century)*, 1970–71, wooden shelf, ring binders, and framed sheets, 222 x 504 x 30 cm, 1970–71, in the collection of Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien.

36 Saint Augustinus, *Confessions*, book XI, chapter 14, trans. J. G. Pilkington, 397 and 400 AD, https://www.logoslibrary.org/augustine/confessions/1114.html

37 On Kawara, *One Million Years*, 1999, artist book, 15.1 x 10.9 x 4.4 cm, in the collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York.

38 Lippard, "Hanne Darboven: Deep in Numbers."

39 Lippard, "Hanne Darboven: Deep in Numbers."

40 Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 162.

41 Rebecca Jansson, *I believe the bird was green with a few parts painted in yellow and blue*, 2022, pencil on paper, series of 16 drawings in postcard format (10 x15 cm each).

42 Zoe Leonard, *New York Harbor I*, 2016, two gelatin silver prints.

43 Derrida introduced the concept of *différance* in his book *Speech and Phenomenon* (1967), which is a term associated with Derrida's philosophical theories of what he calls *deconstruction*. These theories address the relationship between written language and meaning. According to Derrida's *différance*, there is no universal, or objective, meaning; rather, meaning varies depending on the individual perspective. For example, if a group of different people read the same text, it is possible that all these people will interpret the text in different ways. How each word is read and understood can affect the final interpretation of a text. To make his point, Derrida uses written language as an argument in his texts, that is, in *how* he makes use of language. He deliberately uses words that can be interpreted in ambiguous ways and are therefore difficult to translate into other languages. Translating a word from French (Derrida's language of writing) into English, for example, means that the full meaning of the French word is lost when an equivalent word in English is chosen to replace the original French word. Therefore, many French words remain in Derrida's translated texts, along with clarifying descriptions of how those particular words can be read and interpreted. Even the concept of *différance* is a play on words in precisely this way. It is a deliberate misspelling of the French word *différence*. It plays with the fact that the French word *différer* means both "to defer" and "to differ." That the term is also misspelled means that you need to *read* the word to understand it—simply saying the word does not give the full sense of its meaning—because it is pronounced like *différence*. See Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Stockholm: Thales, 1991).

44 Sigmund Freud, "Note on the 'Mystic Writing-Pad,'" in *Collected Writings of Sigmund Freud*, vol. VII, *Neurosis and Psychosis* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 2001), 151–55.

45 Freud, "A Note on the 'Mystic Writing Pad,'" 152.

46 Freud, "A Note on the 'Mystic Writing Pad,'" 154

47 Rebecca Jansson, email to Alejandra Bonilla Restrepo, 3 March 2021.

48 Rebecca Jansson, email to Alejandra Bonilla Restrepo, 3 May 2021. The correspondence between Alejandra and me is unedited and presented as received.

49 Rebecca Jansson, *The ocean has no straight lines*, 2023, pencil on paper.

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Mette Riise, *The Less Unsustainable Reality Show*, 2023. Sand, wallpaper, tourist artifacts, postcards, fake plants, book, wood box, logo on foil, notes from diary, paper of IPCC's sixth assessment report, political reports, coffee, menu board, citrus aroma, lemons, variable dimensions. Installation view, MFA Exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

Mette Riise, *The Less Unsustainable Reality Show*, 2023. Sand, wallpaper, wood box, postcard, fake plants, citrus aroma, lemons, variable dimensions. Detail

When you're going in the wrong direction,
progress is the last thing you need[1]
Mette Riise

How do we stage a showdown with the Western world's destructive economic growth paradigm?

How can we move towards genuine development?

And how can I, through my role as a working artist, contribute to a dissolution of this production regime, in spite of the fact that I find myself situated inside a work process where what is expected of me is a finished product?

These are the questions that plague me as I sit here, in October 2022, trying to get started with the production of works for my upcoming graduation exhibition at Malmö Art Academy. Here I sit, an art producer in modern working life, in the middle of the Capitalocene, in the midst of a crisis of personal values. A crisis that has left me incapable of making a decision and unable to produce. And all this despite the fact that my production assignment has been laid out in a perfectly clear way: in a little less than nine months, I'm going to need to have created works for my graduation solo exhibition, here in Malmö, and I'm going to need to have written a text—the one you're reading right now—about my practice, so that I can complete the requirements of this education programme and officially call myself a real artist. I even know, at that, what theme —and which end of this theme—I want to grab hold of, in order to create my exhibition: I want to illuminate the concept of "sustainable development" from a post-development perspective. Does this sound like an oxymoron? I suppose so. I'm wondering about how we could create a properly sustainable society with a properly sustainable economy, and also wondering about how such a society might appear—particularly from a Western perspective. And I'm wondering about how we're going to find our way out of this Western course of exotic living that we've created and find our way, instead, towards a more authentic life.

From my point of view, the creation of this kind of sustainable course of life and sustainable society implies that we, first and foremost, square accounts with the destructive economic growth paradigm. A paradigm that, under the banner of capitalism, has armed us with "excuses" for our colonisation of human beings, nature, and other people's lands, in the name of *development*.[2]

Ordinarily, I would go about tackling an "art production assignment" like this by proceeding to draw up a consummately prepared model, which I would partition into carefully planned phases and colour coordinated within an Excel spreadsheet. The first phase is the "research phase": I open my Google Docs document and write down what topic I want to read about and deal with, and what questions I want to pose in regard to it. After doing this, moving forward with input from colleagues or through recommendations from experts in the field, I would draw up a reading list dedicated to the project. Over the course of the following months, I would enter into symbiosis with my own curiosity about the topic: meeting with people, experts, and practitioners in the field I'm examining. Along the way, my learning about the topic would give rise to new questions and new material, which at some point would suddenly generate a clear angle of approach to creating an artwork. By this means, I would be moving my way into the next phase: the "production phase." In this phase, I begin to be able to see a more or less clear form of the artwork. Is it going to be a performance? A video? An installation? A text work? What steps do I need to move through to create the artwork? What needs to be on my to-do list? Should I write a script for a performance, or should I spend more time working with the work's visual expression? Or should I start by grabbing hold of the artwork's context? The production phase is divided up into several sub-steps, in the form of deadlines, which get noted on my Excel worksheet. For example:

"21 December: Deadline for storyboard" and "5 May: The installation's visual expression has now been fixed." After this, the third and decisive phase can begin: the "execution and administration phase." Here, I install the artworks, only to take them down again sometime later, then pack up, store away, or maybe even sell them, after which more paperwork and bookkeeping can begin within a new Excel spreadsheet.

This is how I always plan out my art production, from the outset, and this is also how I, in my memory, choose to mentally archive them. However, in reality, the process does not stay confined within these frames. The further I work my way into each phase, the more it comes to light that an organic artistic working life cannot be inserted into an spreadsheet. Deadlines become blurred and merge together. Questions turn out to be overlapping. I'll find I've failed to figure in sufficient time for artist's block, and I forget that, most often, the final execution of the artworks isn't firmly fixed, anyway, until two or three days prior to the exhibition's opening (or, more accurately, until a few hours before the opening). But it still feels very comfortable and good when I, at the project's outset, am sitting and plotting my working days into perfectly stringent rectangles and colour coordinating them according to different categories. It makes me feel more secure. In this way, I build up, time after time, an illusion of control, which is then shattered by a chaotic reality, which I then mentally knit together, once again, into a memory of the process, as a perfect process of artistic production: "I can do this."

Over the past six years of art studies, this is just how my artistic practice has taken shape: I am, for all intents and purposes, imitating an office worker in the twenty-first century. This is a form of work that I see mirrored everywhere in middle-class Denmark, which is typically practised by people in high-ranking and highly paid occupations, ranging from politicians to directors to lawyers to accountants, and so on. But, at the same time, this is a form of work that not even the psychologist, the nurse, and the artist can dissociate themselves from, these days: what with all the administrative and bureaucratic screen work that needs to be done alongside all the other chores. This is also the form of work that I watched my father perform when I was growing up. And which I now see other men in suits performing. I didn't understand what was on his computer screen, but I saw his computer, his office chair, his desk, and the yellow Post-it Notes So here I am, in the year 2022, sitting in my black office chair, in front of my adjustable-height table, in front of my computer screen, and writing out to-do lists onto Post-its, as I go about arranging telephone meetings.

I think there are several reasons why I have subconsciously developed this way of working. First and foremost, I think I impersonate an office worker in order to legitimise, for myself, my own job as an artist. Nobody ever told me how I'm supposed to fill the role of artist—a kind of occupation with an unprotected title, for which there are no job postings or protocols and whose definition is constantly up for reinterpretation.[3] So instead of indulging in the chaos and the uncertainty linked up with this role, I've cast a glance at my surrounding society and impersonated what I feel could provide me with a shortcut to societal acceptance and respect: "Look at me! I also work with Excel!" Furthermore, I think that I have chosen this working style not only to legitimise my work to myself but also to legitimise my presence in society's view. To be able to speak and to understand the language of capital is advantageous to me, in social settings—for example, when I, last summer, found myself at the sixtieth birthday of a family member and a drunken friend of my uncle's wandered over to me and started drilling me on whether I, basically, was actually working or "merely being a parasite and sponging off society." Being able to refer to my job as project coordinator, project developer, idea developer, cultural producer, production manager, production assistant, and accountant renders it so that I can place myself within generally accepted frames of reference for employment that the surrounding community understands and—most important of all—appreciates.[4]

However, I am not simply miming the late-capitalist worker. I am also inserting myself into fields of other late-capitalist markets, in order to learn, as far as content goes, from their habitus, their values, and their work processes. After this observation stage, I often create performative works where I satirically twist the irony out of the market mindset's

claims about rationality, logic, and objectivity, in order to lay bare the performative power structures that hierarchise our social world. Here, methodically, as well as with respect to form, I lean closely up against Andrea Fraser. As a background for her artworks, Fraser conducts interviews as well as observes, makes notes, and writes out scripts of conversations. She then memorises these, to subsequently embody the habitus and the dialogues linked up with the given social field she is investigating.[5] In an interview, Fraser recounts that she arrived at this method through the "site-specific," a concept she describes in this way: "The idea that one should essentially start, where one is standing."[6]

That her artworks emanate from her research into the site-specific must not be understood as though she addresses herself strictly to a given field's physical context. Rather, to put it more explicitly, Fraser studies the performativity of the social relations played out as a result of patriarchy or class society and which lie at the root of the power structures in that domain. By embodying and performing a site-specific habitus, Fraser challenges, exposes, and ironises how, in particular, language, performativity, and habitus, taken together, serve to uphold social power structures—and she manages to do this without her works becoming didactic.

Similarly, for me, an utterly essential method in my practice is to address myself to site-specific power structures. Several times in the course of my career, especially when I took part in an artist-in-residence programme in the Accounting Department at Monash Business School in Melbourne in 2019, this method came to fruition. At the end of my stay at Monash, I performed a piece in the form of a surprise comedy show for the department's accountants and teachers.[7] By telling jokes, I was turning the accounting profession's logic upside down and drawing parallels to how the execution of their work roles also calls for the "subjectivity" and "creativity" that have otherwise classically been attributed to the artistic profession—while at the same time, I got them to laugh. Moreover, I also pointed out the experience-economy context in which I, as an artist, found myself standing, in this situation: a context that made it difficult for me to air the critical thinking that I really wanted to raise with my presence, "The preliminary condition for me being here and propagating 'critical economic thinking' is that I am living up to my role in the experience economy. I know that my presence here is permissible as long as I am entertaining or performing for you all," I observed. *Well, fine! If they want entertainment, I'm going to give them entertainment*, I remember thinking.

But as I sit here in the year 2022, all alone in my office-like studio, in the midst of experiencing serious artist's block and a reluctance to get rolling with my customary art production process, things don't feel entertaining in any way whatsoever. I feel that I have become trapped in the logic of the market, which I otherwise criticise so scrupulously and pointedly in my artworks. My practice feels like a psychological attempt to gain control. Control over my own playing-pawn in the economic system of which I am a part but most certainly did not choose to participate in myself. A system that feels totally outside my control. I feel that my practice is an attempt to bamboozle a system—the production regime—that I feel is bamboozling me. And I'm getting tired of feeling cheated—especially by trying to cheat the regime on its own premises.

I am feeling duped by the economic logic that acknowledges and rewards those jobs that generate the greatest financial returns and, by this means, boost economic growth —that is to say, the nation-state's GDP (gross domestic product)—while the care-centred professions, which are typically dominated by women,[8] as well as those professions, like my own, that run counter to the market logic that champions growth for the sake of growth and that most often cost the state more to invest in than they give back in returns, are regarded as less valuable. I'm tired of having to take part in an economic game where the question of what it is that's valuable has been adjudicated and answered in advance.[9] In this game, value is not innate and is not embedded in either nature or people. It's something that, through the act of working, needs to be "massaged out."

Even when I stop and look at the Danish welfare state's interest in the arts and artists, what I see is a predominantly instrumental approach to the value assigned to my profession. On the municipal level, art is employed strategically either as a means to attract and secure taxpayers or as a means to help shoulder

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Mette Riise, *The Less Unsustainable Reality Show*, 2023. Video installation: Sand, wallpaper, fake plants, lemon, menu board, citrus aroma, logo on foil, projection, bench, 11:00 min, variable dimensions. Installation view

Mette Riise, *The Less Unsustainable Reality Show*, 2023. Wallpaper, citrus aroma, menu board, fake plants, variable dimensions. Detail

welfare tasks.[10] Art at the national level is the glitter of the nation-state's picture postcard: "For art lovers, Denmark is a veritable land of milk and honey," as it says enticingly on the Visit Denmark website.[11]

So far, I have in my works aimed at thematically exposing the absurdity of these logics. For example, I once showed at the Malmö Art Museum a market analysis of "the market for future Danish museums" in the form of a performative PowerPoint-supported talk. Here, proceeding from a business-oriented point of view, I argued that Danish museums were eventually going to lose their market position to the Tivoli amusement park, unless they changed their increasingly instrumental approach to art. Similarly, I have also made flyers and performed talks concerning how one, as an artist, can draw inspiration from strategic brand-building exercises, in order to specialise one's art production and gain a larger market share. In my own works, I have accordingly indulged in the very values that I most detest about the market's logic—and the art world has been loving it. Invitation after invitation has been falling my way to deliver post-critical capitalism-examining works for new exhibitions. My work's critiques have been rewarded with more work, and my criticism of growth has been rewarded with the growth of my own artist brand. As I sit here with a ticking deadline for my graduation exhibition, I feel an invitation to dance a dance that I've been dancing before. I am becoming aware of an inner and an outer invitation to cement the "development" of my practice: *Now I am really going to have to prove how skilled an art producer I have become! I have to do this in a way that's even better than before. I must cement and must really develop my mode of expression. I will show how the years I've spent at the academy have turned me into a mature artist. I'm ready now. Ready for the market. Ready for distribution*, I can hear myself thinking. The only problem is that I've gotten tired. I'm so tired, so very tired. I can't be bothered anymore. I just don't feel up to doing it. And, most of all, I've got no clue how to outdo my previous work. Originally, I had chosen to submerge myself in art education because I wanted, quite precisely, to experiment and to learn—not to produce and compete. But I don't feel like I've been doing anything else but producing and competing for the past seven years. I've been taking part in the race, scrambling to be selected, during my bachelor-level studies, to be a participant in key exhibitions. I have been competing for scholarships and I've managed to gain admission to this master's programme. And, all the while, I have been driven by the belief that if I do my very best producing each and every artwork, each exhibition and each application, then I will be able, at the conclusion of my artistic education, to stand with the best *curriculum vitae* and the very best qualifications for being able to cope with the genuine competition for survival that awaits in post-academy life. But now that I can finally see the finish line, I've started to walk. I am feeling that, in light of this impending assignment to produce a graduation exhibition—that's yet again going to be measured and weighed—that I'm once again going to be working for the production regime that I want to break down. And I am so finished with competing—including against myself.

In *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in a Capitalist Society*, professor of political science Bertell Ollman describes the alienation that even the capitalist, according to Karl Marx, experiences as a consequence of the conditions of competition:

> The requirements of competition take as great a toll of his initiative as that of workers. He is forced to do with his product what the market demands—making it more, less or different, selling it here or there, for this price or that, and so on. Hence, he is in some respects as much under the control of his product (of what trying to make it and sell it get him to do), as it is in other respects under his control.[12]

What drives me absolutely nuts is precisely this kind of alienation: the competitive conditions of capitalism. As a modern artist, I consider myself to be an odd kind of capitalist. I am a worker, in the sense that I produce my art products (products whose materials are often produced by other workers from a long global value chain, which merely adds an extra layer of alienation to my own products), but I am also a capitalist in the sense that the surplus value of the art products I create becomes credited to me, myself, and in the sense that I own my own means of production: my creativity. These working conditions envelop me in a complex web of alienation; but the

alienation that hurts the most is the one that I feel when I am adapting my art product to the market's competition. And maybe even more so because, by virtue of the performance genre, I turn myself into the product. My relationship to my own work has gradually come to be paradoxical, to such an extent that I find it difficult to distinguish Worker-Mette from Capitalist-Mette from Product-Mette from Mette-Mette. Absurdity, is what it is.

It's as if my inner trade union movement is about to mobilise all these Mettes to mount a general strike. Not only against my own form of practice but also in the face of the market structures under which I am working. Because, can it really be that *this* is the way it is, and that *this* is how I've got to practice artistry? By sitting in my own cubicle and developing an individual artistic mode of expression, only so I can be judged on my production, so that I, in the long run, can hopefully realise my full potential: to become an international export success? And if I, in the end, get lucky enough, I might also become a genuine fairy tale of Danish growth—Olafur Eliasson, here I come!

But how many more grandiose individual material-heavy exhibitions do we really need (and particularly if they happen to be projecting the conclusion that we don't really have any need for more grandiose individual material-heavy exhibitions)? I feel that I am trapped inside a system that I have no idea how to work my way out of—in the most literal sense of the word.

Screaming inside me is a voice, crying out loud that if we're going to ensure the planet's habitability in the long run, we're most certainly going to need a paradigm shift: political, economic, personal, and especially in terms of values. This also applies to the values on which my practice is built. We need to collaborate rather than to engage in competition, to put the community in front of the individual, to scale down rather than scale up, to learn rather than perform, and to put the process before the product. "Product": the mere thought of having to produce a "product" elicits in me a sensation of shutting down. If I close my eyes and think of the word "product," I see an image of a hard, heavy object that takes shape before my inner gaze. I see squares and straight lines. I sense heaviness. I feel my-self to be all tied up. I feel like I've got to deliver an answer, something finished. At the same time, I can sense that my ego is huffing and puffing and inflating itself, as a defence mechanism. My ego is at stake because production is linked up with ownership, while, on the contrary, process is without owner. This is also reflected in our language: "I *have* a product" versus "I am *engaging* in a process." If, on the other hand, I close my eyes and think "process," I feel myself to be easy and lightweight and mild. As if I were riding on a wave, bobbing gently forward, towards something unknown. This is an open invitation. A condition that has a need for feedback in order to develop. It's alive. Organic.

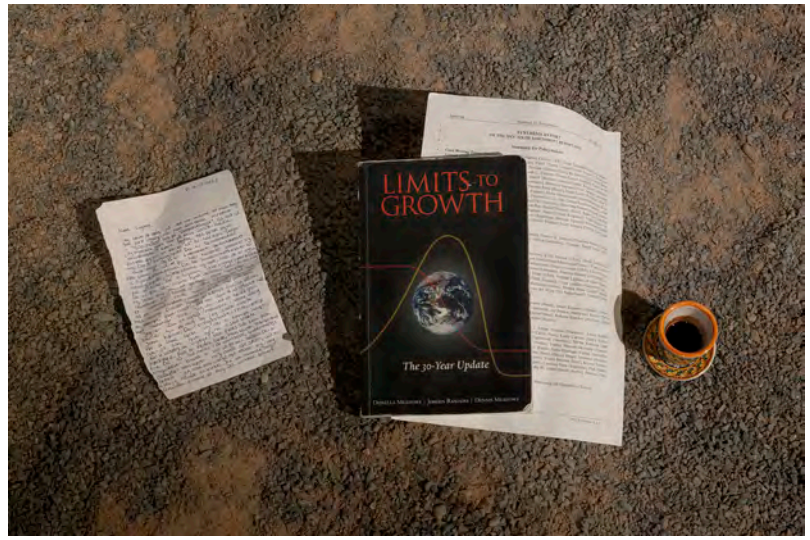
Right now, this is where I am standing, in the midst of my conflict of values. Should I once again lapse and indulge in the values that I wish to subvert and dismantle? Can one only break down a system by participating in it? Is there any alternative at all?

If there is anything that has motivated me from early on to take part in the production system, then it is fear. In my life, fear has made me highly "productive," I suppose. Many of the ideas for my previous artworks arose from a sense of rebelliousness, from a form of *mockery* of our current economic system; but, thereafter, what has propelled the execution of the work has often been fear. The fear of not being able to survive the winner-takes-all industry of the art world, in the event that my work, which comments ironically on the very same winner-takes-all mindset, was not carried out with consummate perfection. I can remember my mother saying to me, "Umm, well, but please think carefully about whether you really want to become an artist … It's really hard to make a living from doing that," back when I was about to drop out of my sociology studies to pursue my wish to be an artist. This is a sentence I have heard more than a few times, and, ever since my mother spoke those words, it has set my fears to turbo, and likewise my level of ambition. It was like pouring gasoline on the bonfire of my go-to psychological defence mechanism: close oneself off from the feelings and *work* one's way out of the problem.

After my parents' divorce, when I was eight years old, I've actually been allergic to feelings of uncertainty and any loss of control. At this

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Mette Riise, *The Less Unsustainable Talkshow*, 2023. Sand, wallpaper, wood box, tourist artifacts, citrus aroma, postcard, political reports, water, notes from diary, variable dimensions. Detail



Mette Riise, *The Less Unsustainable Reality Show*, 2023. Sand, book, tourist artifact, coffee, citrus aroma, note from diary, paper of IPCC's sixth assessment report, variable dimensions. Detail

same point in time, my father, the determinative, shirt-wearing patriarch, lost not only his marriage but also his job, a management position at Mercedes. As things would come to pass in the ensuing decade, it turned out that my father, ever so quietly, caved in and went insane from suffering these losses. In the meantime, my mother moved into a small terrace house, with my two siblings and me. She operated an acupuncture clinic in one of the house's three bedrooms, while she herself slept in the living room. "If you all should feel like you want us to go to the movies together one day, girls, then you three will just have to say so," I can remember her saying, once in my preteen years. "But unfortunately, you're going to have to pay for that yourselves." Then adding, cautiously, "We don't have so much money, after all." When I think back on what she was saying to us then, I can still feel a knot of pent-up sorrow in the pit of my stomach. A sorrow that issues not so much from a lack of going to the movies but, instead, from having to watch my mother feel herself to be inadequate in this respect. My mother has continuously and unflinchingly given my sisters and me care, love, acceptance, security, a feeling of togetherness, a roof over our heads, food on the table, and endless support after many conflict-filled visits at my father's place. That she could ever be inadequate was not a reality I would ever be willing to consider or accept—and certainly not on account of anything as ridiculously trivial as finances. I think that it's right here where a considerable portion of my rebelliousness and anger stems from. The feeling of the loss of control that's seated in sensing, as a child, one's own mother's distress gave rise to a need to dismiss our reality as something that could ever be labelled as "poor." That my mother had surrendered to this point of view, and thereby underestimated all the other value <in our lives, made me angry. This realisation sent me out into lengthy internal and external monologues about poverty as a relative concept, and about how we, as viewed by international standards, were so incredibly privileged as a family, and that it was completely unfair to compare our standard of living with that of our neighbours, who were members of the upper middle class, because it certainly didn't seem normal to me to be able to afford two cars, to be able to go on ski holidays and summer holidays every year, and to have a new kitchen built at the same time. Above and beyond this, I always noted that all these privileges didn't seem to make the parents in my friends' homes happy. On the contrary. I sincerely had a feeling that every new Invita kitchen installed in my friends' parents' homes was some kind of Band-Aid on the parents' dysfunctional relationships. I was denying—and I still deny—that an external system should hijack the whole significance of what it means to be "rich" or "poor," by exclusively tying it to our monetary system. However, although I could, intellectually, cement my mother's—and our lives'—value through rational argumentation, spurred on by anger and rebellion, this did not insulate me from the *feeling* of insecurity that came with the knowledge that if I ever were to face financial problems on some bleak day, I didn't have any familial economic safety net on which to fall back. *I've only got myself. I must, therefore, make sure that I can cope on my own.* And this is where the fear stems from. The fear that has driven my industriousness forward. The fear that has caused me to abandon myself to the same neoliberal working spirit that I, actually, through the vehicle of my vocation, want to do away with. But work is action. And action equals regaining control, I've told myself.

But today, I am looking back at the warning: "Be careful about wanting to become an artist, it's hard to live from doing that." And then I start to fume inside. Because, strictly speaking, I don't know a single person who's living from their work. I don't know one accountant who eats their numbers, one computer scientist who drinks their computer, or one hairdresser who inhales their clients. It seems, to me, as a full-blown hole-in-the-head logic, that what drives me towards production is a feeling of survival—when it's not the production itself that actually makes me survive. In reality, I live from the water I drink, from the food that I eat, and from the air that I breathe. So why should I fight for access to these things when they're already here? Why in the world do I have to pay to live on the planet that I was born on? Why should I compete in a man-made system, the market, in order to gain access, thereafter, to a fictitious resource, money, which I can subsequently exchange for genuine resources? I don't think it makes any damn sense that we should be competing for survival on a planet whose soil is rich enough to supply all of us with food, if only we would simply distribute the resources fairly enough.[13] I'm so tired of this unnecessary "premise of scarcity" that continues to drive

the Western world's economic way of thinking: the idea that human beings' cravings are unlimited and that resources are scarce.[14] Ironically enough, it is precisely this mentality that has produced the climate crisis and now created a genuine premise of "scarcity" for people living in the Global South. Could we perhaps stop, for an instant, and challenge the idea that maintains that our natural environment is a harsh battlefield for survival? Maybe we can even go so far as to imagine that nature, originally, has abundance and is in possession of enough, for all of us, and that it is we, actually, who are driving nature into a deficit?

In the text "Beyond the Original Affluent Society," the anthropologist Nurit Bird-David examines how certain hunter-gatherer societies' faith in nature's abundance and richness becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of a kind, which generates a kind of natural affluence—contrary to the Western economic assumption of scarcity. This affluence is created against the backdrop of an "economic model" that Bird-David calls the "cosmic economy of sharing." Under this model, people nurture a fundamental faith that nature will provide them with what they need. A faith that these people are also able to sustain in hard times. And as soon as nature shares these resources with them, the people allocate the resources equally among themselves. In this fashion, they believe in a "cosmic-sharing arrangement', where nature initially shares with them and they, in return, share with each other. In this model, one also adjusts one's needs according to what nature has to offer and accordingly circumvents any eventual temptation to go into debt with respect to whatever nature might not happen to have "in the bank." Bird-David describes it this way:

> They culturally construct their needs as the want of a share. Therefore, they require of their environment what they see when they see it and do not request it to produce more.
>
> … "abundance" is an assumption of their economic model … opposite to the assumption of scarcity in Western economic models. … It is consistent with their view of the natural environment as a sharing partner, which implies that as human agents appropriate their shares they secure further sharing. The assumption of scarcity is consistent with Westerners' mechanistic view of the natural environment, which implies that in the course of time, as human agents use up resources, the total stock is depleted.

The social safety net, secured in this way, promises that as long as there is food, one will always get a share of it. And if there is no food, one adjusts one's desires accordingly. The result is wealth: "I suspect … we will find that in many other ways these hunter-gatherers' economic system, premised on trust in the natural environment, does generate wealth. … That the hunter-gatherers' case is 'Think rich, be rich.'"[15]

I am thinking and wondering about what would happen to the way we arrange and adapt our lives and our society if we arranged and adapted ourselves according to such a fundamental sense of trust in nature and a sense of confidence in each other. Or, perhaps, to put it more pointedly: What would it do to my artistic practice, I wonder, if I adopted this more fundamental sense of confidence in my surroundings? Could trust be an engine for creative production in much the same way that fear previously was for me? And if I were able to establish this general attitude of trust, what would the artistic result then be? Fundamentally, you see, I still wish to be artistically productive in the sense that I want to create. I miss the feeling I had when, as a seventeen-year-old, I sat alone in my room and drew, wrote, and painted, deep into the midnight hours, while pictures, ideas, and thoughts poured out—before I allowed my artistic education to cultivate me and before I chose to enter into a production system that would eventually turn out to be a destruction system.[16]

It's now December 2022, and the world's leaders have convened at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP 15) in Montreal. They have concluded that if we fail to create considerably more room for the rehabilitation of nature, we will actualise the extinction of our own species. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres explained the situation, the world's governments are going to have to put an end to this "orgy of destruction." And even though it now appears to be some positivitiy, since we've resolved and agreed that, quite definitively, 30 percent of the world's seas and land areas are going to need protections by 2030 (if we should happen to comply with

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Mette Riise, *The Less Unsustainable Reality Show*, 2023. Sand, wall paper, tourist artifacts, postcards, notes from diary, fake plants, wood box, book, paper of IPCC's sixth assessment report, political reports, coffee, citrus aroma, variable dimensions. Installation view

the decided-upon environmental measures at all, and in time), I can still see that this approach is a continuation of the instrumentalisation of nature that has led us as far as here: nature is worthless in itself.[17] It is not worth preserving simply for its own value. It is a means towards something else—in this instance, a means to our own survival. What contempt we must have for everything "natural" and uncultivated, such that we only, and just barely, want to preserve it for as long as it relates to our own lives. But, I have to wonder: Isn't this instrumental approach to nature, which could be seen at COP 15, the same one that I have established for my own body and for my own emotional life? In a certain way, I also feel that, in terms of my work, I have brought every single square kilometre of wild nature within myself under cultivation. A necessity, in order to be able to transgress my own natural limits, so that I can sit here for eight-hour intervals and stare into a screen of blue light until I forget what time of day it is. At times, I feel that the same logic has similarly led me to draw a protective ring around the few square centimetres of my emotional landscape that have not yet been cultivated, in order preserve it. A landscape that I am preserving not for its intrinsic value but because it is useful to me. Useful in the way that I have a need, at certain times during my workday, to be able to visit this landscape, to be able to reclaim emotions and creativity that have to be employed in a new artwork. My relationship to this nature is like one of a natural capital, preserving it in order to capitalise on it. But it's a strained relationship. Because if I, during one of these visits, can reclaim ten minutes of nostalgia and self-reflection, it can be useful for writing a chapter in a film script, for example. But if, on the other hand, it gives rise to an hour of wild crying instead, it could knock me out for the rest of my working day. "Private forest!" says a sign beside the entrance. "Unauthorised traffic prohibited. Please use the designated trail systems. Open only on weekdays, between 1:00 and 4:00 pm."

So, how do I proceed from here? As I sit in my office chair, looking out over my inner cultivated as well as my uncultivated landscape, while I scratch my head and wonder about how I might go about establishing things in a different way so that new creative mutations can again germinate, and so that I can again become productive, I also hear an ideological voice inside of me that is urgently exerting itself and commanding that I turn my back on the art world to become, instead, a full-time activist, or whatever else might make the most socially positive impact. So far, my hard work hasn't brought about radical social changes, anyway, is what I'm thinking. "Yet to have enticed a revolution" is something I've actually jotted down in one of my notebooks. But instead of letting a sense of guilt make me go full throttle on full-time activism, in much the way that I used to let fear govern my allegiance to the (art) production regime, what I'm trying to do, this time around, is to stop, take a break, and ask myself: Is it possible, I wonder, that this voice could be letting itself be controlled by the very same instrumental logic that has led me to this state of impoverished exhaustion? An instrumental logic that tells me that I, or my artworks, do not have any value in themselves but are merely means towards achieving something else. But I wonder whether allegiance to this logic isn't perpetuating a continuation of the very same value system that I so wish to break down. Hopefully, it is not absolutely time, not yet, to turn my back on my creative urge and on my faith that my role as an artist can indeed possess some social value, even if it is not directly measurable. Perhaps it is an extension of my artistic role, and the lonely space in which I take control of it, that ought to be rethought. In *Pluriverse: A Post-development Dictionary*, the various authors describe how transformative solutions call for us to replace precisely this instrumental logic with a relational logic. And, right now, while I've been busy working on this text, I have started to speculate on what would happen if, instead of turning my back on my whole creative landscape, I opened the gate for others who are dedicated to the relational and gave them permission to sow seeds in my inner cultivated monoculture. What would be the result if I relinquished some control in exchange for letting others co-determine how and where my creative landscape might *develop*? This is exactly the process that I have initiated in the creation of my graduation exhibition. I want to open myself and my practice up to collaboration with other like-minded artists, activists, and theorists who are not only challenging the economic development paradigm but who also have an action-oriented horizon. I hope that this method does not require me to discard of the whole of my artistic practice but that, instead, I can allow it to be further developed or embedded in other

communities. That is to say, to activate an "upcycling" of my production of criticism and personas, along with my use of humour, enabling it to be reused in such a way that my works, and the space in which they are displayed, embody more than a place for reflection and also contain a call to action.

I had such an "art experience" myself back in August when I went to see New Red Order's exhibition *One If by Land, Two If by Sea*" at Kunsthal Charlottenborg in Copenhagen. NRO, as the members of the group also call themselves, is a "public secret society" formed by the artists Adam Khalil, Zack Khalil, and Jackson Polys. They enquire into what needs to be set in place for non-Indigenous peoples to act in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples and to expedite "Indigenous growth"—that is to say, a future for Indigenous people. At the exhibition, one piece in particular stood out for me: the video installation *Conscientious Conscripture* (2018–), which was on view in the exhibition's last room. The installation consists of a television set centred on a table covered with—in what was evidently a casually haphazard way—a red tablecloth decorated with the group's logo. The table is surrounded by art-fair banners and posters expressing sentiments like "Never settle" and "Ready to give it back?—You have the tools, we have the expertise" alongside real estate brokers' signboards presenting stories about Americans who had voluntarily, and with a sense of satisfaction, given their land back to First Nations. These signs looked so realistic that one couldn't be sure whether or not they were authentic: "… we were broaching the fraught topic of reparations, of moving past apology and into direct action," as it says on one of the signboards.

With a holistic aesthetic that calls to mind a mix of some kind of informational booth for an activist group, an advertising sign for a sales firm, and real estate marketing materials, this bewilderment tactic ensnared me in speculation about whether what I was seeing was art, parody, or activism. On a TV monitor, a commercial for NRO was being shown, mixing "personal stories" from already recruited Americans speaking about the revelation that joining NRO was for them with upbeat corporate music and stock videos of Caucasian people appropriating Indigenous cultures. The work was literally *speaking* to me, insofar as it took up the seer's position as a Caucasian person weighed down with guilt about the colonisation that they had profited from, generationally, but whose guilt made it hard for this same person to move beyond advancing an innocent critique of the status quo and into taking any real action. In this way, the artists make use, in an obviously ironic, critical, and "productive" way, of the fact (or of the prejudice) that the institutional art space is predominantly visited by a left-wing-oriented, educationally privileged, and white audience—and thus speak directly to the target group that they want to activate. "It's funny, cause it's true," I was thinking, regarding the work's sharp way of pointing at non-Indigenous folks' cultural urge towards a "return to originality." This is an impulse that can also be traced in Denmark in everything from well-intentioned "woke" statements issuing from allies on the left, to offers of costly Western meditation courses in gentrified neighbourhoods, to First Nations costumes used for Shrovetide celebrations. Longings that seem awkward, as long as they are not accompanied by any sincere action that moves people away from an imperialist lifestyle that oppresses the very people whose lifestyles are being appropriated.
How are we going to move beyond criticism or awkward symbolic longings for originality towards genuine solidarity and action? *Conscientious Conscripture* actually (might have) offered a clue about this, insofar as it presents a certain phone number, several times,[18] along with a real website that you can visit in the event you might want to join NRO as an "informant."[19] The fact that the work invites direct participation through enrolling interested people in NRO's informer programme, at the same time as the film flashes statements like "never settle" and "give it back," reminded me, as the viewer, that decolonisation is *not* a metaphor. The dedication to change is also prominent in NRO's own activities, inasmuch as, in the past, they have used their association to bring about institutional change, such as when they withheld works of art from the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit until the museum's employees' demands were met.[20]

Although *Conscientious Conscripture* was created specifically in an American context, which is not directly transferable to a Danish context, I call attention to this piece especially because its use of humour, its bewilderment tactic, and its possibly sincere recruitment attempt, followed up by the direct call to action, speak to me in terms of form. The work incites me to think about how an artistic setting between fiction and reality can potentially create a frame within which people can examine the tendencies they have that prevent them from moving from thought to action.

For the time being, I am busy speculating on how such a frame can be created, ever since a certain well-educated, privileged, and well-intentioned Belgian man contacted me recently because he had seen one of my works, the film *The Less Unsustainable Talkshow* (2021), which levels a critique at our economic growth paradigm. This man wanted to show my film to his colleagues at the European Environment Agency (EEA), an organisation that reports on biodiversity data to the European Parliament, so that the EU could potentially be moved to take action in response to the figures put forth by the agency. This man was becoming frustrated in his role as a passive reporter, and was hoping that the sheer act of showing my film at his workplace could push the EEA's employees to think more radically about how they might eventually, in their work roles, argue for more radical change from the European Union's side. However, there was one problem: the organisation was afraid of how the film's criticism of growth might reflect poorly on their own work. This sense of apprehension also reared its head in some of my conversations with this man, when he felt it necessary to point out to me how our conversations about "degrowth" were downright uncomfortable for him. This statement reminded me of the tone in NRO's recruitment film, where their "informants" describe (in words that I suppose were scripted) how a sense of guilt about colonisation weighed so very heavily on them that they, in spite of their privileges, felt restrained from taking action, but that, now, NRO had taught them that "the apocalypse is just a paradigm shift, they [Indigenous Peoples] lived through one—and so can I" and that "listening is what I see the future holding for all of us, if we'd only learn to do it, we might survive": brutal and humorous albeit true declarations that the participants had presumably never dared to say outside of an artistic context. For this reason, I suggested to my newfound acquaintance that we, instead of showing my film at his workplace, could get him, and those of his colleagues who were willing to participate, to express their inner conflicts regarding their passive work roles by reading a script aloud in a new film piece, as partially fictional characters. "Well, sure," he replied, "I guess if it's fiction—anything can happen." Suddenly, the semi-fictive universe of art could help him put words on an obstacle that had previously caused him to close up and shut down.

But now I am wondering: How am I, all by myself, going to confront my own limitations, which are given to me via my work role? I hope to be able to find, through collaboration with my new "art development partners," an answer to this question. Whether the result is going to add a new horizon of action to my work, whether it will result in the greenwashing of my own artistic practice, or whether some third possibility that cannot be set within an either/or dichotomy will eventually ensue is something that the process will have to show. Because, well, maybe it's not actually a new form of "productive art" that I'm looking to create. Maybe I am merely using this term, "productive art," as a substitute for something whose essential nature I don't really know because I am so deeply influenced by the work-related frame of reference that surrounds me. Insofar as I am seeking to create art that is "genuinely productive" or "useful," I am effectively reducing my practice to a means for achieving something else. It thereby forfeits its own value, in much the same way that we have successfully managed to rob nature and divest ourselves of value. Maybe it is not a productive practice that I am seeking to achieve but rather a *meaningful* practice?

Regardless of whether we want to reuse the words "productivity," "value," and "development" in a new paradigm that would presumably be emancipated from the West's economic conceptual apparatus, what it will require of us is that we rethink our own work roles —both within and for the collective.[21]

1 The title is a quote from Christopher Ryan, *Civilized to Death: The Price of Progress* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2020), 8.

2 This point of view can also be spotted within the framework of "post-development thinking." In the book, *Pluriverse: A Post-development Dictionary*, sociologist Wolfgang Sachs says: "While the politics of fighting poverty has been successful in some places, it has been bought at the price of even larger inequalities elsewhere; and at the price of irreparable environmental damage. … On the contrary, progress has turned out to be regress" (Wolfgang Sachs, "The Development Dictionary Revisted," in *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*, ed. Ashish Kothari et al. (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2019), 13). In the book, the "development narrative" is described as having arisen in 1949, in the wake of the colonial era. The term is considered here to be a political and rhetorical concept that enables a perpetuation of the West's imperial power.

3 The artist's role in Western art history has continuously undergone a series of dramatic changes over the course of the past few centuries, moving from the role of "artisan: to the role of "genius" through to the roles of "political revolutionary" and "creative entrepreneur."

4 This "work performance" that I am presenting can similarly be interpreted as an imitation of the late modern wage labourer. In Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt's book, *Produktionsæstetik - En feministisk arbejdskritik mellem kunst og liv* [Production aesthetics: A work critique between art and life] (Copenhagen: Laboratoriet for Æstetik & Økologi, 2022), she describes, quite precisely, how wage labour is regarded as "the dominating moral compass in the Nordic, neo-liberal and Protestant-laborious welfare state: Wage labour stands as the certification of community spirit and participation in the contemporary welfare state. Taxes that are paid by wage labour constitute a solidary contribution to the community. But only a few will allow the artist to earn money—and for this reason, the artist is obliged to make something that is 'less artistic.'" By impersonating a late-capitalist wage labourer, I feel that I am thereby sending a signal to society that I, too, am contributing.

5 Alejandro Cesarco and Rhea Anastas, introduction to *Andrea Fraser: Collected Interviews, 1990–2018* (London: Koenig Books, 2019), 26.

6 Andrea Fraser, "The Desire of Museums," interview by stART, in *Andrea Fraser: Collected Interviews*, 37.

7 My research-based approach to my practice enables me to carry out such a project. Prior to the residency programme, I had just spent eight months in the Danish stand-up comedy scene. My research-based approach often unfolds through conducting interviews and carrying out interactions and taking detours into other industries, where I accumulate artistic material or practical skills, which I subsequently transform into artworks. Methodologically, I have been inspired by other female artists who have similarly worked site-specifically and in a research-based way to undertake their investigations of the economic and institutional reality that they found themselves thrown into. Among these various women, I have been especially inspired by Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Through her performative "maintenance-= artworks" in the 1970s, she managed to successfully focus on how society had, according to her, two different systems: development and maintenance. In her manifesto, Ukeles describes how society prioritises development over maintenance, in spite of the fact that maintenance work is the life-preserving activity. Moreover, she sets her focus both on the life-preserving value generated by the unpaid and almost invisible maintenance care work carried out by women inside the home as well as on the invisible cleaning work done in public and private institutions, typically being carried out by members of the working class (which often includes migrant workers). Many of these pieces sprang forth from Ukeles's extended residency at the New York City Department of Sanitation. In so doing, she also challenged the context in which the artist appears. Similarly, I have been methodologically inspired by Andrea Fraser's performative approach to institutional critique, which took shape at the end of the twentieth century and at the outset of the twenty-first century, especially with her work *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989), where she appropriated the aesthetic appearance and rhetoric associated with the museum guide and which support the museum's legitimacy and power. Above and beyond this, an important influence on my method has been the Artist Placement Group (APG), which was established in 1966 and made a programmatic attempt to bring forth new working realities for the artist by connecting artists with business concerns and governmental units, in the hopes that the artist, as a "neutral" figure, could then create social change within these new contexts. See Claire Bishop, "Rate of Return: The Artist Placement Group," *Artforum*, October 2010, https://www.artforum.com/print/201008/rate-of-return-the-artist-placement-group-26419.

However, the piece of mine mentioned in this passage, which I created at Monash Business School, does differentiate itself from APG's ideology of the artist as a commercially and politically "neutral" figure, inasmuch as my piece, quite precisely, stages an attack on the idea of the artist's—and the accountant's—objectivity and neutrality. At the same time, in this piece, what I was pointing towards, through the ironic setup of a comedy show, was the experience-economy reality in which many contemporary artists find themselves to be situated. The question here becomes whether the modern artist can create real social change, or whether they are merely another pawn in an experience-economic game.

8 Here, my point of view leans up against ecofeminist Yayo Herrero and the feminist theorist Silvia Federici, who states that capitalist society rests on the exploitation of women and "nature." The unpaid domestic work and the low-paid care work most typically carried out by women are life-sustaining reproductive forms of work, without which capitalist society could not function. This is work that comes to benefit the capitalist class, both because it serves to reproduce the workforce and because the capitalist would otherwise have to pay for social services that help keep the worker alive, so that this worker can continue to offer their (wo)manpower. In this way, invisible domestic work and low-paid care work contribute to enabling capitalist accumulation. See Silvia Federici, "Wages for Housework," in Kothari et al., *Pluriverse*, 329–32, and Juan Tortosa, "What Is Ecofeminism?," *International Viewpoint*, 11 December 2011, https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2407.

9 This point of view is also criticised in the essay "Post-Economia" by the economist Alberto Acosta (in Kothari et al., *Pluriverse*, 280–83), who states that we have a need for a "post-economy": an economy that abandons anthropocentrism and ascribes the same inherent value to all beings, regardless of their use-value.

10 Lasse Marker and Søren Mikael Rasmussen, *Museumslandskabet: Kulturpolitikens udvikling og museernes vilkår* [The museum landscape: The development of culture politics and the terms of the museums] (Copenhagen: Ramussen og Marker, 2019), 55.

11 "Danmarks mest besøgte kunstmuseer" [Denmarks' most visited art museums], VisitDenmark, 2023, https://www.visitdenmark.dk/danmark/oplevelser/kulturoplevelser.

12 Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in a Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 154.

13 Thomas Griner Jakobsen, "Analyse: Mad nok til alle, når verdens befolkning topper" [Analysis: Food enough for everyone, when the world population peaks], *Verdens Bedste Nyheder*, 2 June 2020, https://verdensbedstenyheder.dk/nyheder/mad-nok-til-alle-naar-verdens-befolkning-topper/.

14 Gustavo Esteva, "Autonomy," in Kothari et al., *Pluriverse*, 100.

15 Nurit Bird-David et al., "Beyond 'The Original Affluent Society': A Culturalist Reformulation [and Comments and Reply]," *Current Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (1992): 34, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2743706.

16 That the production system has become synonymous with a destruction system is also a way of thinking clearly visible in Bruno Latour and Nikolaj Schultz's book, *Notat om den nye økologiske klasse* [*On the Emergence of an Ecological Class: A Memo*] (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag 2022).

17 Hjalte T. H. Kragesteen, "Verdens lande indgår historisk aftale om at redde klodens natur" [Countries of the world make historic deal to save the nature of the globe], *Altinget*, 19 December 2022, https://www.altinget.dk/udvikling/artikel/verdens-lande-indgaar-historisk-aftale-om-at-redde-klodens-natur.

18 The phone number was, though, an American telephone number.

19 "Informants" is a role that NRO set up after they got tired of being summoned, over and over, by art institutions to explain Indigenous Peoples' perspectives. By instructing non-Indigenous peoples in how to handle this educational work, NRO is now enjoying the possibility of outsourcing the training of cultural institutions. If you pay a visit to an event by NRO with the aim of becoming an "informant," you will very likely be met by the association's "proxy educator": the actor Jim Fletcher. Informants are similarly incorporated into the role of "accomplice," instead of being enlisted in the organisation as an "ally." The logic behind this is, in point of fact, that NRO firmly believes that for a genuine decolonisation process to take place, one has to commit crimes against reality. What this means is that land ought to be given back to its rightful Indigenous owners—an action that, in our present-day reality, is illegal. See Emily Allan, "How I Learned to Love the New Red Order and Stop Worrying about the Apocalypse," *Cultured*, 3 March 2021, https://www.culturedmag.com/article/2021/03/03/how-i-learned-to-love-the-new-red-order-and-stop-worrying-about-the-apocalypse.

20 Isabel Ling, "Joke's on You: New Red Order Parodies Society's Deepest Settler Desires," *Hyperallergic*, 20 July 2021, https://hyperallergic.com/662085/new-red-order-parodies-society-desires-at-artists-space/.

21 This is also discussed by Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt in *Produktionsæstetik – En feministisk arbejdskritik mellem kunst og liv* (2022), where she makes a distinction between "production aesthetics" and "reception aesthetics": "Production aesthetics is interested not in what art does for the individual person but rather in what art does for the life and the re-establishment of the collective." Schmidt, *Produktionsæstetik*, 17.

Image courtesy of the artist

Grälls Johan Kvarnström, *John Doe*, 2023. Mixed media

Wispy Clouds on a Summer Evening
Grälls Johan Kvarnström

Introduction

The second part of the text is a dialogue between Person 1 and Person 2. The dialogue mentions a number of people, who I will briefly introduce here:

Martin Kippenberger 1953–1997
German artist who in the 1980s and ’90s was the main character of the so-called Cologne scene. There he worked with and around artists such as Albert Oehlen, Werner Büttner, and Jutta Koether, among others. Kippenberger is well known for his prolific output in a variety of mediums and styles, and he often involved friends and assistants in the creation of many of the works that he produced during his short career. In Kippenberger’s case, it is sometimes difficult to separate the art from the individual, and fiction from reality. The public image of him as a hard-drinking and generally controversial figure shapes his legacy. At the same time, he was well aware of how he was perceived and made use of this, often in combination with humour, as a tool when playing the role of the artist in his art. This is evident in, for instance, how he portrays himself in his countless self-portraits.

Pablo Picasso 1881–1973
Spanish artist, perhaps best known for being one of the founders of cubism but also for working in numerous styles and expressions throughout his life.

Andy Warhol 1928–1987
American artist with an incredibly broad practice. His name has become more or less synonymous with pop art, and his screenprints depicting celebrities and consumer goods are among his best-known works.

Michael Krebber b. 1954
German artist, conceptual painter, and a prominent figure in the Cologne scene since the 1980s. His paintings can be described as laying bare the conventions and conditions surrounding the painter and their medium. Visually speaking, his paintings are often restrained, with only a few brushstrokes on otherwise untouched canvases. His practice has been described as a kind of hesitation between repetition and interruption, between having an idea and having no idea. Terms such as “dandyism” are used, both by himself and others, to describe his approach to painting.

Krebber taught at the Städelschule in Frankfurt from 2002 to 2016, significantly influencing not only his students but the wider generation of artists and painters working today.

The Beatles 1960–1970
British pop and rock group whose musical innovations and influences across a variety of genres made them one of the most influential and commercially successful musical groups in history.

Yung Lean b. 1996
Swedish artist and one of the leading figures in early cloud rap. He employs a variety of references and stylistic expressions in his work. He has completed several musical projects in other genres, but under a different name. A punky DIY attitude could be identified as a common thread in all these projects.

David Joselit
American art historian, critic, and editor of the journal *October*.

Philip Guston 1913–1980
American artist and painter. Early on he was one of the most prominent figures in abstract expressionism before abandoning it in the late 1960s in favour of figurative, narrative works. His later paintings are characterised by a limited palette, often pale pink and red, with cartoon-like imagery. The paintings often depict everyday objects or scenes, as in *Painting, Smoking, Eating* (1973) and *The Studio* (1969), the latter of which shows a hooded man in his studio, painting and smoking, in the process of completing a self-portrait. Guston's paintings featuring Ku Klux Klan motifs, such as hooded figures, have stirred some controversy in the art world, most recently in 2020 when a major museum tour was postponed.

Amy Sillman b. 1955
American artist whose paintings are often described as straddling the line between figuration and abstraction. In her work she often uses tropes from art history, especially abstract expressionism, with a humorous touch.

This lighthearted tone is also evident in her writing and lectures. Sillman has written a number of essays on painting and most recently published the book *Faux Pas* (2020), which collects several of her essays and lectures.

Isabelle Graw b. 1962
German art critic, author, and academic. She is best known for her research and writing on contemporary art and art theory. She has published a number of books on art and culture, including *High Price: Art between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (2009) and *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition* (2016). She also has been the editor of the journal *Texte zur Kunst* since the 1990s.

Sigmar Polke 1941–2010
German artist who chiefly worked with painting. During his lifetime he experimented with a variety of materials, styles, and themes. In contrast to his later work, his early work has a more political direction. During that time, he co-founded the movement Kapitalistischer Realismus—capitalist realism—with Gerhard Richter and Konrad Fischer. Polke's work from this period is often referred to as a kind of European pop art because of his use of images from the mass media as well as everyday objects, such as sausages.

During the 1980s, Polke's painting increasingly focused on the experimental; he used various chemicals and other unconventional materials such as arsenic and meteor dust, which caused chemical reactions and unexpected painterly events to occur on his canvases. In addition, he often used some form of figurative element in his paintings.

Albert Oehlen b. 1954
German artist who works with painting and in a variety of styles and materials. He is strongly associated with bad painting, which can be described in brief as an embrace of unaesthetic and amateurish painterly gestures, such as naive drawing, clumsy lines, and smeared, oversaturated colour. Oehlen is also associated with the Cologne scene, where he worked and socialised closely with Martin Kippenberger.

Wade Guyton b. 1972
American artist who works with a form of digital painting, printing on canvas using an Epson inkjet printer. He has also collaborated on projects with artists such as Kelley Walker and Stephen Prina.

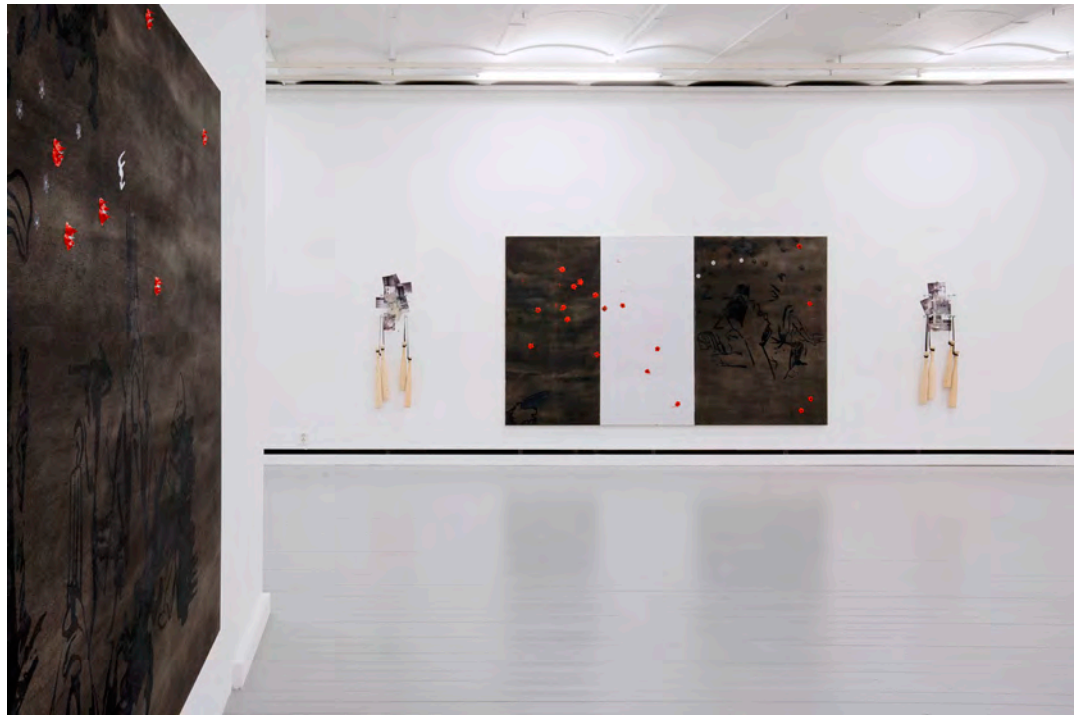
Avery Singer b. 1987
American artist known for her 3D-modelled paintings executed using computer-controlled airbrushing technology.

Isa Genzken b. 1948
German artist best known for her work with sculpture, but hugely versatile, using an abundance of materials and mediums. Her work contains references to everything from minimalism to capitalism to punk.

Rachel Harrison b. 1966
American artist who works mainly with sculpture and installation. She can be said to have a type of DIY aesthetic, in which found

Images courtesy of the artist

Grälls Johan Kvarnström, *Chicago*, 2023. Oil, acrylic and spray on canvas. Detail



Grälls Johan Kvarnström, *Chicago*, 2023. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

objects are mixed with handmade elements. Woven into this are references from art history and popular culture.

Merlin Carpenter b. 1967
British artist who works primarily with conceptual painting. Central to many of his works is a kind of questioning of the elitism, fetishism, and consumerism of art and the art world. He often presents these paintings are in theatrical installations or performance-like forms. In one of his most acclaimed works, the exhibition series *The Opening* (2007–09), all the paintings are created at the opening party. Most of these paintings consist of only sloppily written text with messages such as "Die collector scum" or "Banks are bad." Carpenter is also associated with the Cologne scene.

Reena Spaulings b. 2004
A novel, an artistic persona or pseudonym, and an art gallery in New York.

The gallery, named after both the main character of the novel and the pseudonym, was founded by Emily Sundblad and John Kelsey. They also often are linked to the artistic persona, which is otherwise meant to be an anonymous and collective creative platform. Set in a post-9/11 New York, the novel is about a supermodel and the ultimate Broadway blockbuster. The book is the work of several writers and artists, including the art collective Bernadette Corporation.

Laura Owens b. 1970
American artist working with painting. Her work is defined by a versatility that blends different expressions, gestures, and styles as well as abstraction and figuration. Her work can be described as playful, and it often includes colourful patterns, textures, or children's-book-like illustrations.

Dialogue

We have very different approaches to painting, don't we? You're what one might call a super romantic, whereas I'm not particularly romantic at all in my approach to painting. This is how I've been thinking about it, anyway. Can we talk about it?

Absolutely.

Maybe let's start with colour? Both of us generally use quite few colours in our paintings, and we often make or touch upon the monochrome. How do you choose the colours for your paintings and what is their significance?

The colours come to me, often they're connected to dreams or memories. I have a tendency to become obsessed with a certain tint or shade and will go on to make dozens of paintings using only that colour. I often consciously, and at the same time unconsciously, search for a special light in a particular colour. The tiniest shift can get an entire painting to fall into place.

Do you ever feel that one thing repeats too much or that you're making it a little too easy for yourself—picking a nice colour and then strategically scraping paint off the canvas to create that contrast that gives a beautiful sense of light? Of course, I'm not saying that I think what you do is easy—you know I look up to you as a painter. This is coming from my sense of my own making and what I permit myself as a painter. For example, my colour choices are usually linked to the underlying idea for the project. I also limit the number of colours so as to have fewer things to balance, fewer "moments of disruption" in what I consider to be important to that specific image or project. But it's also an aesthetic choice; I simply think it looks better. Colourful paintings can be unbearable. That said, I used to almost exclusively paint with colours I disliked; I saw it as a challenge, as a way of getting myself to think that the painting worked nonetheless. Nowadays I try to be more permissive, but it's not that easy, because I have this idea that you have to go against yourself, what you want and like, as a method of constantly trying to renew or surprise yourself. I may be a little jealous of your approach—when I say it out loud, my method mostly just feels stupid. In any case, I make it very difficult for myself. Then of course I'm fascinated by other artists who apply, or have

applied, a similar strategy; Kippenberger does all sorts of things, Picasso and all his different periods, Warhol, Krebber. Well, Krebber might be a bad example, he is often described as unpredictable or someone who constantly reinvents himself, but I would argue that he has a distinct manner. Then there are musical references, such as the Beatles or Yung Lean, to offer something more contemporary. I'm probably attracted to their freedom and playfulness—basically being able to do what you want, not necessarily having to do what's expected of you.

I probably only partially relate to what you're saying; everyone gets tired of their own style sometimes, but at the same time it feels like I'm, for lack of better words, only being true to myself. It would feel dishonest if I suddenly started painting figuratively again. I have spent a long time allowing myself to paint nothing at all.

But that's really exciting; I feel like I have to paint *something*, and if I don't it feels meaningless. The painting has to fill some sort of function. When I make a monochrome painting, for example, which could be said to represent the epitome of painting "without a motif" —the work is no more than itself and does not represent anything else—I make it because it is needed in the exhibition space. The fact that a painting is needed here, but as breathing space, as an interlude. You know that analogy I've made between putting together an exhibition and how an album is often structured: there should be an obvious hit, a weird or more experimental song, an interlude, and something down tempo. It's about creating a dynamic.

Does this mean you think the works should be read as a whole?

It's inevitable. They're hanging there together, and in that sense, the works constitute a whole. Then if they're taken out of their context—the exhibition—they become individual works. That's why I think it's important that the individual work also functions on its own, but at the same time it's exciting to see if it's possible to somehow emphasise that it has been taken out of its context. This makes me think of David Joselit's essay "Painting Beside Itself." He describes the network around painting and how the work constantly relates to or refers to something, that everything surrounding it matters—"Even spaghettini … ," to take the Kippenberger quotation he uses. If you accept Joselit's theory, you could say that a painting is never a discrete unit.

I haven't read that essay, of course, but it's an interesting thought. However, I don't know if I'm prepared to agree, at least not on a personal level—for me, it's all about what happens in the encounter with the painting. That the painting is like a room you get sucked into, and right there and then nothing else exists. Don't you think our different perspectives have to do with the fact that you work with series and projects, whereas I don't?

Haha, of course you haven't read that essay! Is there anything about contemporary painting that interests you? I do understand what you mean by getting sucked into the painting, however—it's a pretty amazing feeling. For me, it's more like throwing myself in and out of the room of the painting. One moment I'm completely in it, only to find myself thinking about how the artist went about it in the next, then I'll be right back in there again and suddenly start to notice that, hey, this reminds me of Polke. I have a hard time allowing myself to become fully absorbed.

Hehe, well, I guess I'm pretty uninterested in all painting after abstract expressionism. That goes for discourse, too. At the same time, reading poetry and philosophy is an important part of my practice. How do you see reading in relation to your work?

I enjoy reading, but it's not something I put to direct use in my work. It can almost be a distraction if I'm in the middle of a project. My inner images seem to cease when I read, and I can't imagine what I'm going to paint. I also avoid doing research as much as possible, so if I'm being strict with myself, I'm a pretty lazy conceptual painter. So "partly conceptual" might be a better label. However, there's an ulterior motive to this laziness—I'm more interested in what's emblematic about something rather than its theoretical or scientific basis. In general, by shooting from the hip, I think maybe I'm touching on something universal. I don't know—I've never formulated it like this before. I usually talk about it in relation to language, and you've heard that before. Anyway, I have never been interested in presenting facts of any kind. Unknowing is important. Maybe you can relate to that?

Images courtesy of the artist

Grälls Johan Kvarnström, *Operation blåtand*, 2023. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 230 × 165 cm

Yes, I am interested in painting what you can't see, and in many ways it's connected to inner images and unknowing.

It makes me think of the latest Guston book —*I Paint What I Want to See*. The title is a quotation from an interview in the book, and even though he formulates it slightly differently, the core interest is probably the same. I also like the section where he talks about enigma —how a good painting is like a mystery. I can really, romantically or not, relate to that. How it's possible to stand in front of a painting and just shake your head, feeling like you can't comprehend anything, but at the same time you can't take your eyes off it.

I just realised that there is in fact a kind of reading I can do alongside painting: the kind that's related to painting and painting discourse. Apart from the fact that it can have an inspiring effect, I think it's part of the job, to have something of an idea of how painting is discussed today. This isn't about me wanting to make paintings that fall in line with that discourse, but to be able to personally reflect on the concept of painting today, building on the thoughts of others. Unfortunately, I tend to think that much of what's out there is pretty bland or overly complicated. There are exceptions, of course. I really like the way Amy Sillman writes about painting; she approaches the subject with humour and a directness that is hard to resist. Her text on colour has become a classic. In it, she compares cobalt violet to cocaine, among other things, in terms of its price, pleasure, and durability. She also highlights the difference between how artists and theorists write about painting, or, rather, understand painting. Taking the physical weight of oil paint as an example, she argues that if any painter held in their hands a tube of cobalt violet and, say, an earth tone, they'd be able to tell the difference blindfolded.

I love cobalt violet! The pigment has such a range: from an intensely beautiful purple to something reminiscent of wispy clouds on a summer evening.

Admittedly, I've probably never even held a tube of it. If I have, it was in your studio. It's such an expensive pigment, and I'm doubtful to what extent the cost corresponds to what I actually get out of the colour. My reasoning is of course informed by my personal finances. One tube costs around 2,000 SEK, so if my situation were different, I might think otherwise. But you romanticise, or fetishise, oil paint in a completely different way than I do. There is something sexual about the way you smear, caress, mess around with the paint. Both on the canvas and yourself. Ugh, saying it makes me cringe.

I mean, you're right, there is something about the materiality and plasticity of oil paint that I find irresistible. The very act of mixing the paint is wonderful; feeling the character of the various pigments with my hand or the palette knife, how some are silky, while others are grainier. Instead of factory-made oil paint,
I often buy dry pigment that I use to mix my own oil paint. In that process, the differences in the pigments become even more apparent. You don't feel a pull to make your own paint?

Truly not, or I'll put it this way: I would have liked to try it at some point out of sheer curiosity. But I know myself far too well and I guarantee you that I'd find it too boring and time consuming. It's also not an aspect of painting that interests me. But it makes me think about the "application" of paint— I've spent way too much time thinking about this, and I can develop my thinking further, but before I do it would be interesting to hear your thoughts on application. Is it something you reflect on, or is it an automatic process?

Of course I reflect on it. Putting colour on a surface and how you do that is such a big part of what painting is about. I think it's important for the painting to bear traces of the "act of painting." Be that visible brushstrokes, chunks of paint accumulated by scraping the paint, or just messy handprints along the sides of the frame.

I suspected you'd say something like that, and I have such a hard time with that line of thinking, or at least I feel a deep ambivalence towards it. It so easily becomes mannered or a kind of painting cliché—Isabelle Graw calls this phenomenon the "vitalist fantasy" in her book *The Love of Painting*. What I find particularly difficult is how it so easily becomes a cheat sheet or a manual on how to make a good painting. You do the right thing— you vary the surfaces, allow a wash of colour

to meet something impasto. You leave traces of the action—fingerprints, brushstrokes, paint smudges, maybe leave a small spill or a dab of paint that has ended up in the "wrong" place. It bothers me that this manner should make the painting feel real, full of life, process, and artistic struggle. To me it's kind of the opposite: it feels, like, empty and calculating. It bothers me, *and* I enjoy looking at it, and maybe that bothers me even more. You can't really resist it. This has led to me going in the opposite direction, trying to limit expressive gestures, painting with restraint, flat, preferably without painterly tricks or effects. And yes, I have realised that this has its advantages; for example, the painting itself doesn't stand in the way of the narrative, something that I have been, and am, very interested in exploring in my painting. At the same time, I sometimes wonder if I'm giving the narrative a proper shot, if my restrained painting style might have the opposite effect—that the possibly insufficient visual tension makes the viewer choose not to stay with the image?

I definitely think there's a risk of that. I know how I, in a fraction of a second, can dismiss a painting that doesn't give me that tension you're talking about. And I'm saying this even though I think it's extremely important to give painting time—to give the painting a chance to open up to you. And depending on where you are, in the moment, on an emotional or personal level, the painting can draw you to different places in it. Having said that, I don't really understand why you have to paint like that? It's not exactly less clichéd, if that's what you're afraid of.

You have a point. Today, it is just as clichéd to make fun of or point out the romance around painting, the painting, and the painter. Polke already did that in the 1960s, almost sixty years ago, in that painting where "higher powers" commanded him to paint the upper right corner black. Or in how he maps out various painterly gestures in another painting. For a time he also used patterned bedsheets that he paints over, and they become like "ready-mades." However, it should be said that the painting he does on them is both quite romantic and quite painterly. This approach had a kind of revival during, say, the 1990s and 2010s. For example, Michael Krebber brought back the bedsheets, but instead of painting on them, he casually draped the exhibition poster over their edge. I think there is also a third strategy in relation to applying paint. Perhaps partly related to the one before? It's about embracing new technology, which could be said to be both exhausted and inexhaustible. Top of mind: Albert Oehlen's computer paintings from the late 1990s, Wade Guyton's inkjet-printed canvases, Avery Singer's use of 3D programs and advanced airbrushing technology. But, again, if we take Guyton as an example—in concrete terms, he is simply using an inkjet printer to print images on canvas. No hand is involved, but this vitalist fantasy can still be projected onto his work. The work still bears traces of typical painterly traits or shows an artistic process. Often it's a matter of the printing process going awry somehow and unexpected events occurring on the surface of the image. Ugh, now I feel like I'm babbling and everything's all scrambled in my head. All these references and threads get tangled up together.

For sure, that's how painting is; it's complex and I think this confusion arises largely because of the difficulty of translating a wordless language, which painting can be said to be, into speech or language. I think that's why I have a tendency, when using text in relation to my painting, to land on using poetry—as a form I think it better captures the state of the painting.

I always get mega confused when I talk about painting. It takes up so much head space, but that doesn't mean you're any good at talking about it. That's why I do my utmost to avoid writing or using text in relation to my work. Text becomes so definitive, which feels unpleasant—I'm constantly backtracking or changing my mind.

Yes, sometimes it's probably better to keep quiet and let the art speak. I also feel quite dulled by all the examples you've mentioned so far. In several of those cases, the act of painting itself goes missing—and it's painting, not image, that I am interested in.

This distinction between image and painting, which many painters want to make, has always bothered me. It feels like one of those typical "painter quotes" you learn to repeat at preparatory art schools. I think the image or subject can be at least as interesting as the painting itself. Moreover I probably feel, in part, that painting has reached the end of the road in terms of application, and so I see greater potential in focusing on the "image" itself.

How do you mean? And why don't you just take photos or create images in ways other than through painting?

Snore. I make images in lots of different ways, but I always do it from a painter's perspective. The simple answer is that I'm interested in painting—it's an incredibly old medium with tons of history, conventions, and complexity that make it incredibly exciting. If I am to develop this reasoning around the end of the road for application, we can simply divide it into three main groups in terms of approach: the Vitalist—the painter-painter; the Anti—the painter who insists on painting, but takes a distanced approach; and then the third—the Technical Optimist. Actually, maybe there should be a fourth: let's call them the "Materialist," someone who paints but does so in a different material; think about Isa Genzken or Rachel Harrison. Considering today's rapid technological development, you could say that number three is the correct strategy for now—if "coming up with something new" is the purpose of painting.

Do you really think so? For me, it's not about that at all. The "new" that I can, in this case, appreciate in a painting is about displacement: how the painting can bring you into a state or mental place you've never been before. But also how it can recall experiences or feelings that have been repressed.

I don't really have the energy to go deeper into the purpose of painting. What I think is that we are in a very exciting time where "anything goes," to quote Merlin Carpenter in the exhibition statement-letter combo to Reena Spaulings for the *Paint-It-Yourself* exhibition.

I think you've mentioned it before?

No doubt. It's an exhibition that has stuck in my mind. The exhibition itself is quite gimmicky. He hangs a couple of stretched canvases in the gallery and sets out a box of oil paints and lets the visitors at the opening paint the paintings. But it's that exhibition statement—he puts his finger on the state of painting right now. Where everything has become neutral ground and there is no longer anything to resist or react against. It's precisely because all these strategies we've talked about are now so accepted that none of them is particularly radical anymore. I truly believe something new and exciting will come out of this.

I wish that painting could be more like, say, baking bread. That what one enjoys is a good, handcrafted, well-made bread, not bread with a spectacular shape or a brand-new spice mixture.

Let's say painting were to move in that direction, becoming more of a pure craft—wouldn't art itself be transformed? Would it have the same status? And wouldn't you end up being more a designer of luxury goods?

Mmm, maybe, if so, that would be the disgusting flip side. But I also realise that I spoke a little too quickly about baking bread. It strikes me now that the whole point of recipes, which is what you usually use when baking bread, is to get the same result each time. And I can't imagine anything worse than knowing in advance exactly where a painting will end up.

Hmm, that's true—I've always thought the bread-baking analogy was a romantic platitude, but this does put it in a new light. I'd like to go back a bit and talk about Laura Owens; it still feels like she's someone we need to bring up in relation to application. You know her work, right?

The name is familiar, but she's not somebody who I follow, per se. I must have flipped through a book at your place and come to the conclusion that her painting is pretty stiff and not for me.

I'm glad you said that, because I've been wondering about that particular rigidity. I do agree that she can be accused of it, but at the same time I'm really amused by her painting. I think, compared to many of the other painters we've discussed so far, she is perhaps the least romantic. Her painting feels sort of neutral or objective.

In which way?

Like this: if you take away the rigidity and focus on the surface of the painting—because that's where it happens—then I would say that her paintings are about seeing, and about

the act of painting. I think that her paintings are filled with a kind of pedagogical example of just that. In a single painting, she can use basically all the tricks in the book—illusion, surface and depth, glazing, impasto—and she moves effortlessly between expressions, gestures, and styles, as well as abstraction and figuration. The resulting indexicality that arises in the painting is what I think can easily be perceived as rigidity.

If you compare her painting with that of someone like Michael Krebber, someone who can also be said to engage in "painting about painting," their expression and approaches are very different. Instead of being "critical and funny," Owens feels more neutral and simply seems curious about the possibilities and limitations of the medium.

That sounds nice, but the question is:
Is that enough to make the paintings good?

Well, she is good. I think you need to see the paintings in real life. By the way, it feels crazy that I just said that line—you're the one who's obsessed with the whole "experiencing painting in real life" thing versus on a screen. Anyway, there's a series of paintings by her that I like super a lot. I think she made them for an exhibition in Berlin a few years ago. The exhibition consisted of five paintings standing in the middle of the room in an offset, diagonal row. Both the fronts and backs of the paintings are painted. On the front, the painting is austere, with fragmented text painted in a way that mimics word-processing software. On the backs of the canvases, the paintings are more playful and colourful; it's slightly reminiscent of graffiti and some parts are painted as if they are blurred or pixelated. Here she really plays with the possibilities of painting; illusionism is mixed with something very concrete. She also activates the room and the viewer through the installation of the work itself. Only from the "correct" position in the room do the paintings form a coherent image or the fragmented words a coherent text.

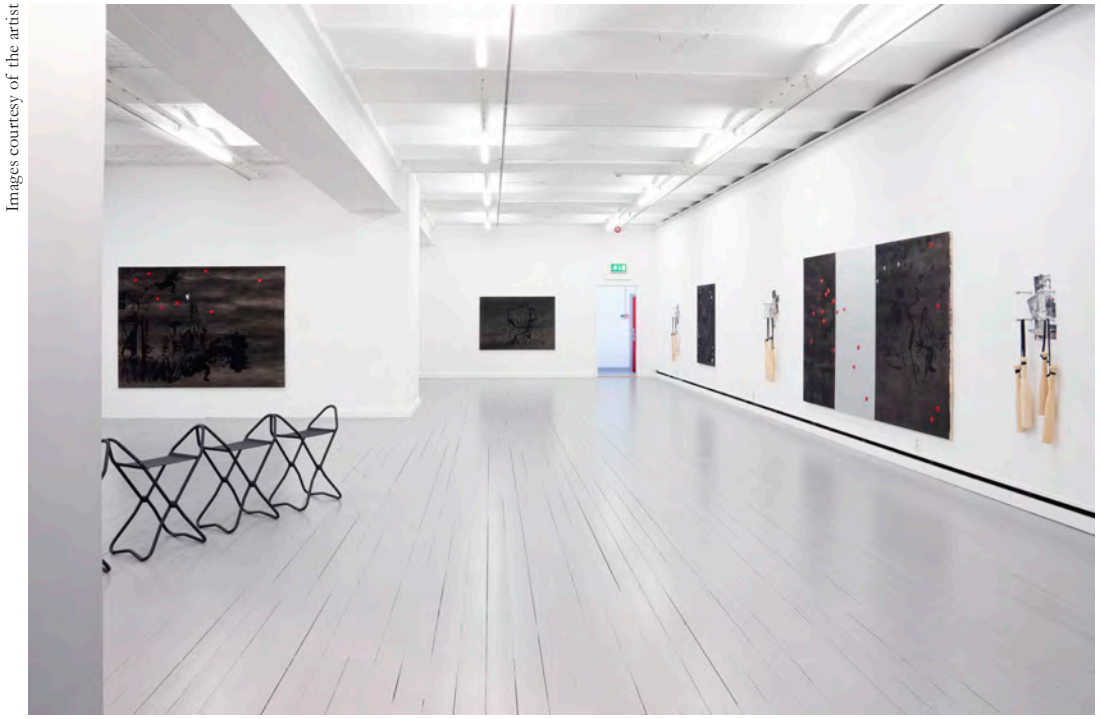
Mr. Johns

It's the fall of 2022, and I am in crisis. The project I've been working on for almost a year seems to be losing its footing. What had initially been a structured and pleasurable exploration of the narrative potential of the format of the painting has begun to fray, going off in various directions, and the parallel narrative I've been working on, the one about the crime scene, feels more and more exhausted. Nevertheless, I am determined to keep going—I am convinced there is more to get out of it.

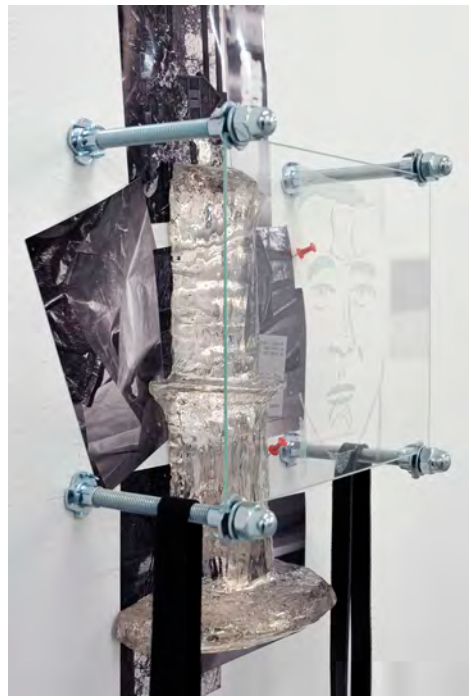
In the spring of that same year, I get bored with a painting. Resigned, I smear everything that has not yet dried, and a darkly shifting greyish colour settles across the surface of the canvas. On a whim, I squeeze a large dollop of black paint into a bowl, add solvent, and then quickly brush the mixture over the grey mess. I know from experience that at this moment I am doing nothing more than wasting paint —the painting is already beyond salvation and is headed for the trash can. Yet I stand there, slapping on more paint. There is a destructive streak in me—I want to keep being wasteful, and in my frustration destroy the painting even more. I pick up a tube of cadmium red and squeeze the paint directly onto the canvas. I squeeze out five large pointed lumps of oil paint close together. The result suggests to me a flower pushing its way out of the black sludge. There's something to it. I squeeze out more red pointed lumps, make more flowers, six in total. I give them all a white centre and wonder what that's called —the pistil? Suddenly the hopeless painting is finished. I'm pleased with it.

Fall again, and I'm thinking about the painting with the flowers. There is something about the flowers that I can't let go of, but so far I haven't been able to make anything of them either. I sit there, wanting to paint both a crime thriller and flowers. It feels hopeless; the combination is too strange, and I am too rational. Then it hits me—church paintings! I quickly google Albertus Pictor, a well-known name in Swedish medieval church painting, and his work is exactly how I remember it: his paintings are a mixture of narrative figuration and floral ornamentation. Suddenly it all seems both logical and doable. In a flash I realise that the Bible and the crime story are both stories we know or have known by heart. Not that we can necessarily recite a specific crime story, but

Images courtesy of the artist



Top: Grälls Johan Kvarnström, *MR JOHNS*, 2023. Installation view
Bottom: Grälls Johan Kvarnström, *John Doe*, 2023. Mixed media. Detail



I think that all detective stories follow more or less the same structure, and so we are familiar with the recurring key scenes. This recognition factor (?) also gives me a much better chance of succeeding at communicating a story using a wordless medium—something I imagine is a fruitless task but which I am, and have been, occupied with in recent years.

The work begins with me trying to compile a list of what these recurring key scenes are. It goes quickly, and even though I'm really quite uninterested in crime as a genre, the scenes come to me without much effort. I tell myself that it is perhaps even to the project's advantage that I am not particularly well-versed in the genre. If I had been, the references might have easily become too specific and gone over the viewer's head. At the same time, it's a relief for my impatient self; it allows me to sidestep the research and get straight to sketching.

I already know that floral ornaments in medieval churches could have a symbolic meaning, but they could also simply be decorative elements. I decide that my flowers will be purely decorative. In part, I think reusing such symbolism is pretty pointless today—most people's knowledge of the subject is zero. Moreover my interest is in the combination of narrative figuration and decoration, as I think it raises interesting questions about the function of painting today, and its relationship to ornamentation and design (and architecture).

When I consider how to make my floral ornaments, I know I want to keep using those thorny, lumpy flowers, but for it not to become tedious. And to create more of a dynamic in the painting, I think I need at least one other method of making flowers. Again, I look at Albertus Pictor's paintings, his flowers remind me of the flowers I grew up with somehow, the stencils my mother once made when I was little and used to paint the motifs on pantry doors and walls, among other things. I call her up to see if the stencils are still around—luckily they are. It feels great to be able to make use of them and incorporate them into my project, so the next time I visit my family home, I borrow some of the stencils she made. I pick out the most generic ones, the ones that emanate "flower" more than anything else. I'm afraid that otherwise there'd be a risk of the viewer easily getting caught up in identifying the various plants.

As for colours in the paintings, I decide to limit myself to three: red, black, and silver. In the past, I've had positive experiences setting such limitations; it makes the painting process more direct and leaves space for other aspects of the work. The bonus is that I end up with a coherent series of works that also emphasises its own seriality.

Black, red, and silver is kind of lame as a colour combination, but I can't help but like it. It has a boyhood bedroom aesthetic that I think is derived from action movies and rock music, and the contrast made by the flowers feels interesting to work with. There's also a harshness to the colour scale, and that's probably exactly what I think this project needs—an earnestness that balances out the otherwise droll concept of the detective and the flowers.

Silver paint also feels like an interesting choice of material as it is so different from "regular" paint. First of all, it reflects the light in a different way, that is, it shines, has a higher gloss, and possesses a reflective quality. These properties mean that it is greatly affected by its surrounding colours. While working, I notice that it brings out even the slightest unevenness or brushstrokes in the underlying layers. I also associate metallic colours with church interiors; I think of gold, or gilded details, and it makes this choice of colour feel even more appropriate for the project.

There are obvious problems with the space I'm exhibiting in. The dead grey colour of the floor worries me: I'm afraid it will dull the silver sheen in the paintings, turning it into a similarly lifeless grey. Then there's the layout of the gallery itself; it has two rooms, one large room and another that is quite small, which is a big headache. Many of the exhibitions I've seen in this space have tended to lose momentum in the small room, at least in cases where the exhibitor didn't have a clear plan for the space. Sure, the small room works great as a parallel exhibition narrative, or as a black box in which to show video, but early on I get the sense that I don't want to, or think, that either of these solutions will work for me. I could install my sculptures in the small room, but that doesn't feel optimal. Not least because I'd prefer to create more of an interplay between the paintings and the sculptures.

There are additional grey obstacles in the gallery space: in the larger room is a door that leads to the kitchen and another leading to the emergency exit and the storage room. Beyond their colour, they make the room feel smaller. The doors seem to crowd you, and the large column in the middle of the space has the same diminishing effect. This column also ruins what is otherwise the best wall in the gallery by not allowing you to get enough distance from it.

So there we have it: four distinct problems for me to work around. It's early December and I'm walking around the gallery space, thinking. I feel pretty sure that the best solution will be to close off or block the small room in some way. I consider attaching a painting the size of a door in the middle of the doorway, thus doing away with the small room. The solution seems quite fun and at the same time reasonable and convenient, as I have been working with standard formats for the past year and so already have a frame in exactly the right size.

After some consideration, however, I realise the risk of this approach. It can easily become too much about the blocked doorway and less about the story I actually want to communicate with the exhibition. I decide to turn it into a wall instead, that is, to seal the opening shut and pretend that the small room never existed. It feels like both the cleanest and the most radical solution.

I can't do anything about the grey floor, but I think the pillar in the middle of the room might solve the problem for me. If I paint the pillar silver, there will be something in the gallery space that picks up the silver colour in the paintings, hopefully making them appear less grey. Painting the column also makes it less of a spatial problem and more of a monumental sculpture. I think the colour scheme will emphasise the column's existing sculptural qualities, such as its undulating, irregular encounter with the gallery ceiling.

This intervention makes me think that perhaps I should let the architecture reflect the paintings in general. Black, red, and silver in the paintings; black, red, and silver in the gallery. The room already has a black railing, and I decide that it will be representative of the black element. The pillar, of course, becomes the silver, and then it just so happens that when I open the grey door at the far end of the gallery, there is a bright red door for the emergency exit. It all feels so clear—I will simply leave the grey door open. It also makes the room seem larger and creates a completely different sense of drama.

So the series of paintings I'm making for the exhibition are in black, red, and silver, and they contain a narrative figurative element as well as a decorative element in the form of flowers. I paint the paintings with relative restraint, no unnecessary expressive gestures, and the figuration is painted in such a way that, from a distance, it could be mistaken for a print. This print-like feeling is perhaps most evident in the cases where I work with repeating motifs, such as the interrogation scene, and it certainly brings to mind the screenprints of Andy Warhol, among others. From my perspective, repetition is about emphasising how this type of scene can recur in history.

I work largely from memory, but I incorporate references from both art history and popular culture, ranging from the artists Jan Håfström, Richard Prince, and Caspar David Friedrich to the video game *Counter-Strike*. My attempts to communicate in this wordless medium have resulted in a visual language of clichés, symbol- and cartoon-like descriptions. I think it is strongly connected to written language—as a non-specific or indeterminate description can end up being the clearest and most communicative, and this is where sign meets drawing which meets language, not to mention, parallels can be drawn with early written languages.

Based on the rules I set for the paintings, I then try to vary them as much as possible. Some will be sparse, others teeming with information.

Alongside the paintings, I make a number of sculptures for the exhibition. They can perhaps best be described as three-dimensional collages in which I work associatively with identikit or criminal profiling. My memory of the board game *Cluedo* also serves as an important point of inspiration, especially the game's aim of matching the correct perpetrator with both room and murder weapon.

All the sculptures consist of a sandblasted portrait on glass, an object made of transparent plastic, black-and-white photographs, red pushpins, and four rounders bats hanging from black leather straps. As all the above-mentioned elements can, in one way or another, be linked to criminal investigations, I allow myself a departure here in terms of the form of the collage. Here, I am instead inspired by German cuckoo clocks and "in case of emergency use hammer to break glass" instructions. This type of associative trail is also a recurring element in my work in general.

In the exhibition, I choose to install one sculpture on either side of the paintings. I associate this kind of framing with church interiors, and in my mind it makes the paintings look like altarpieces, and the sculptures with the ghostly images turn into sort of saintly figures.

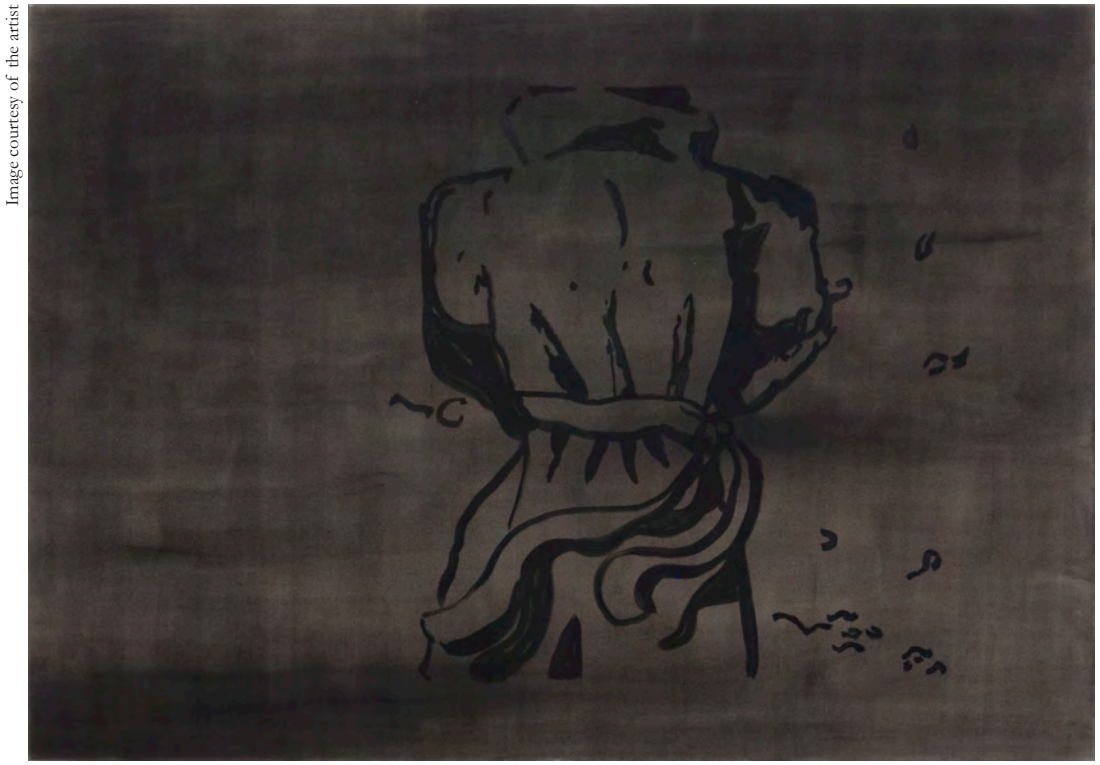
I also have had business-card-sized opening cards made for the exhibition. These are black, red, and silver, too. The back is simple, black, with a centred image of one of the red pointed lump flowers.

The silver front, on which the exhibition title *Mr. Johns* is written in black in the middle of the card, most recalls a traditional business card. Here, I take inspiration from the scene in *American Psycho* where the main character Patrick Bateman compares business cards with his colleagues, and although I don't use the same font as in the film adaptation of the novel, I do my best to imitate the layout of the card. I want my opening card to act as a clue to the narrative I am working with: "Mr. Johns" could be interpreted as either the detective or the murderer, and this could be his business card. At the same time, I cannot help but be amused by how the business card could also be interpreted as my own, and the exhibition title *Mr. Johns* could be read as a kind of anglicisation of my own name.

Even the titles of the works in the exhibition provide keys to the story. I try to give the paintings the most stereotypical crime-story titles. I believe that crime titles, like the crime genre, follow a clear template; therefore, it should be relatively easy to come up with your own. Several of the names I've come up with teeter on a fine line between reeking of a crime story and being a terrible title for a piece of art.

After the modifications I made to the exhibition space, I felt a great deal of freedom when it came to installation, and since I was the first one in my graduating class to exhibit, I had plenty of time to try out various options before having to make a decision. Of course, I took advantage of this—but early on my gut told me that the exhibition would benefit from being installed relatively austerely. That meant I had to do something out of the ordinary for me. In previous exhibitions, I have tended to install my paintings in a relatively playful way—not just hanging on the wall but, for example, tilted, laid out on the floor, overlapping, or installed in clusters. I still think this style of hanging has its plus sides, but from experience it also tends to detract from the individual merits of the works. So, in this case—where each painting acts as an important puzzle piece in the story that I am trying to communicate—the works needed to be given more space. I also wanted to aim for a certain seriousness, and the church is an important source of inspiration when I choose to put paintings together, showing them as a triptych or a diptych. This is also the case when I decided to have the sculptures frame the paintings hanging on the longer walls of the gallery. The effect was to create a corridor, or a flow, through the exhibition space, in the direction of the painting with the final scene, which I hung on the same wall as the propped-open door. Otherwise, I chose not to install the paintings, or scenes, chronologically. I wanted the viewer to gradually discover the connections between the pieces in the space, and so be forced to keep moving between the exhibited works as they tried to solve the (murder) mystery.

Image courtesy of the artist



Grälls Johan Kvarnström, *T.h.c*, 2023. Oil on canvas, 170 × 120 cm

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Rosita Kær, *Pulp*, 2023. Shoes sculpted from the pulped papers of Rosita's grandmother's (discarded and retrieved) research folders on archaeological textiles. Paper pulp, steel, variable dimensions. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

Her Eternal Slumber Cut Short

Rosita Kær

For several years now, my practice has been informed by and entangled with the practice of my grandmother Karen-Hanne Stærmose Nielsen, a weaver and textile researcher with a special interest in and knowledge of prehistoric textiles and archaeology. She used to have a large collection of textiles and textile-related objects. It was an eclectic collection, expanding in many directions at once. It contained objects, signs, symbols, and woven samples gathered throughout her life and neatly stored in her home. Both in her work and her thinking, we can see several textile logics at play simultaneously. The collection could be described as a way of giving order to loose threads: a network of disparate objects, stories, and pieces of knowledge held in place by her quite extensive indexing system, organised in numerous archive books and folders. Over the last few years, Alzheimer's disease has caused her memory to rapidly disintegrate. As her memory started unravelling, she decided to sell and give away her entire collection,[1] which I had come to think of as an external memory system—each object a material carrier of memory. My ongoing collaboration and conversation with my grandmother has fuelled my thinking and shaped my way of looking, and the dispersal of the collection furthered my interest in unearthing the memories and experiences stored in objects and materials.[2] This is one thread among many others in my work and practice. Through this essay and in my degree exhibition, I aim to bring some of these threads together, pointing to how and where they overlap, twist, and tangle.

My exhibition *Her Eternal Slumber Cut Short* relates strongly to the ideas of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his phenomenological approach to the world and our place in it. Merleau-Ponty represents a break with an earlier widespread Western philosophical tradition that had placed logic and empiricism as the dominant framework of understanding since the Enlightenment. From a contemporary phenomenological and more nuanced feminist perspective, one cannot take an uncritical approach to the ideas of Merleau-Ponty's main work, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), nor to the later *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964).[3] Nonetheless, several threads of his thinking are relevant to those I explore in my exhibition.

Merleau-Ponty writes: "The thing, and the world, are given to me along with the parts of my body, not by any 'natural geometry,' but in a living connection comparable, or rather identical, with that existing between the parts of my body itself."[4] Here, Merleau-Ponty points to spatial, sensory perception and experience as essential. Logic and collected data alone cannot explain our behaviour. He argues that thought and ascribed functionality in the things that surround us are not what impacts us as beings in the world. Things themselves have narrative and sensory value. Merleau-Ponty softens the boundary between subject and object, so that they become intrinsically connected, pointing out that humans perceive and experience with the entire body.

I deliberately built my degree exhibition around this attention to the body in space. I consider the way the pieces are displayed in the room as intrinsic to the exhibition's logic, and I see the spatial modifications I carry out as works in their own right. I'm interested in using the particular exhibition space of KHM1 Gallery at Malmö Art Academy because of its almost labyrinthine layout, which means that, as a visitor, you are continuously reminded that you have a body due to the slightly cumbersome way you must move around the exhibition space.

The layout of KHM1 means that you cannot see the whole room from any one point, as there will always be something hidden by a wall or a column. I want to deliberately use this condition in the way I choreograph movement through the exhibition. In this way, it is at once a room with a static configuration of works in dialogue with each other and an ever changing movement through it, as performed by the visitor.

In this moving through the space, one might lose track of one's location or experience going in a circle before returning to a part of the room that allows a shift in perspective, and perhaps a shift in the perception of what one has already encountered from a different point of view. A similar spatial experience is described by Merleau-Ponty:

> When I walk round my flat, the various aspects in which it presents itself to me could not possibly appear as views of one and the same thing if I did not know that each of them represents the flat seen from one spot or another, and if I were unaware of my own movements, and of my body as retaining its identity through the stages of those movements.[5]

This is the sense I hoped to create in my degree exhibition by incorporating the layout of the exhibition space into the exhibition itself, which further supports my ongoing interest in shifts of perspective and sense-making.

Soft Wall

In the middle of the KHM1 gallery, there is a T-shaped wall. It has something authoritative about it: it is firmly in the way, and cuts the space into three distinct parts. Since the beginning of my exhibition-planning process, I wanted to find a way to soften the wall and reconnect the spaces it separates. My initial idea for softening the wall came while attending a conversation between the two artists Maria Zahle and Phyllida Barlow.[6] The latter talked about her relationship to walls and her hesitancy to display works on them, exactly because of their authoritative certainty. The idea solidified when I came across documentation of an installation by Kai Althoff at the Whitney Biennial in New York in 2012,[7] where he used loosely woven, colourful but translucent textiles as the "walls" for displaying his paintings. The installation plays with breaking down the certainty and sturdiness of the walls and at the same time challenges my expectation of textile as a material. The work was made up as much by the display itself (the textile walls) as the displayed objects (the paintings). Each element expands the ways I read the others, how I relate to the paintings and to the textile. Althoff destabilised both, expanding their ambiguity.

The way I decided to go about softening the wall for my exhibition was to build a shelf that wraps around the wall in a circular movement. The inspiration for the shelf display came from the exhibition design of *Useful Household Objects under $5.00*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1938, which presented cheap, industrially produced, functional objects. A photograph of the show depicts a collection of these objects displayed on a shelf wrapping around a dividing wall. When I look at the photograph, I imagine myself in the space and the movement around the wall that the shelf invites.[8] I see the display in my exhibition both as a softening of the wall and as a subtle manipulation of the visitors' movement around the space.

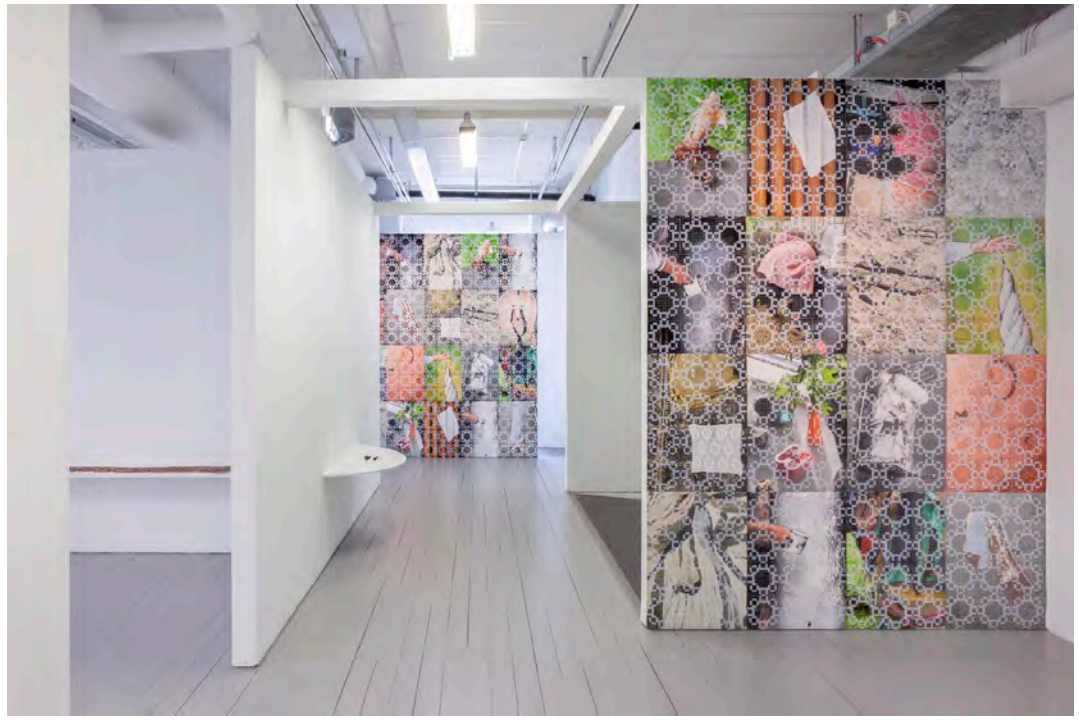
Dressed Wall

"Although she is more vulnerable and less lasting than, say, a floral-patterned tile, a person suddenly discovers she can walk through walls, cover objects with a fine layer of dust, rise out of nowhere, be air, be fire."
—Maria Stepanova[9]

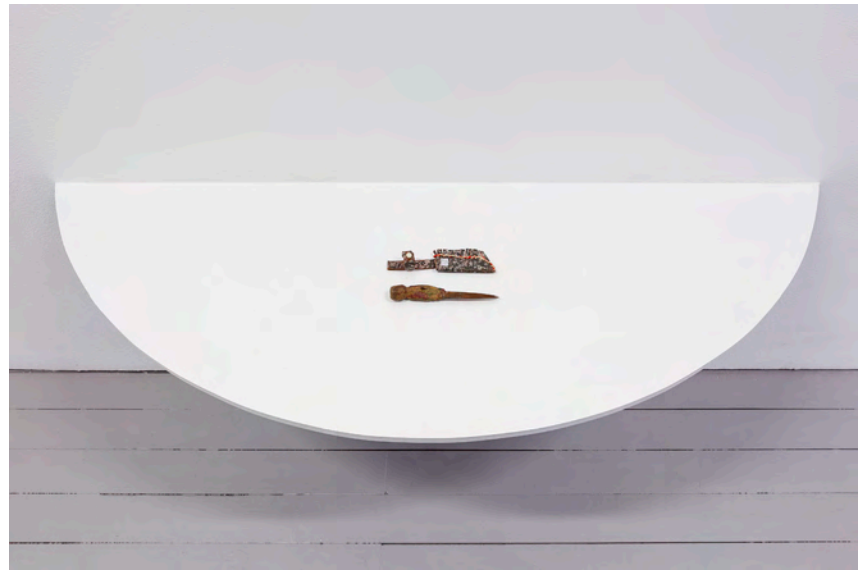
Two other walls in *Her Eternal Slumber Cut Short* were covered by a wallpaper of sorts, a kind of patchwork. It was made up of individual digital prints (55 x 75 cm) of photographs that I took or found in the process of preparing and researching my exhibition. Many of the photographs linked or pointed to other works in the show, without the collection of images being an exhaustive index or manual for the exhibition. A screenprinted pattern sat on top of the photographs, hiding certain parts while framing and enhancing others. You cannot walk through walls, as the novelist and journalist Maria Stepanova reports, but you *can* have the sensation of looking deeper into the wall due to the layering of the prints. The pattern was reworked from napkins crocheted by my great-grandmother, consisting of a repeated flower motif that continued from one print to the next, connecting all the different photographs into a single surface.

Here, I want to introduce the professor and architect Gottfried Semper and bring up his concept of *Bekleidung*,[10] which translates to "cladding," "clothing," "dress." He uses the term to describe his belief in the aesthetic, symbolic, and spiritual significance of decorative surfaces. Semper highlights the ornamental

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Rosita Kær, *Her Eternal Slumber Cut Short*, 2023. Selected process and reference images with pattern overlay. Digital and screen print on uncoated paper, variable dimensions. Installation view



Rosita Kær, *Almost No Memory*, 2022–2023. Knife modified by Rosita's grandmother in 1939 at the age of six, MDF. Detail

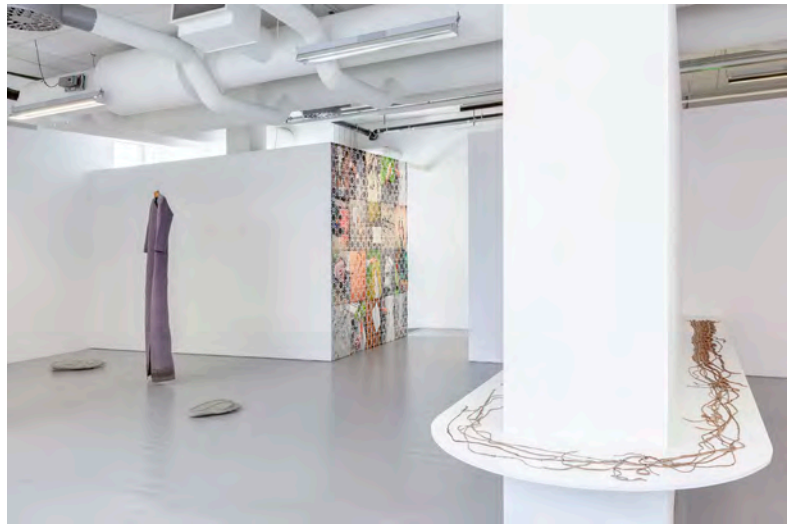


Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Rosita Kær. *Her Eternal Slumber Cut Short*, 2023. Installation view

Image courtesy of the artist

Rosita Kær, *Almost No Memory*, 2022–2023. Threads from a unravelled rag rug, originally made by Rosita's grandmother Karen-Hanne in the 1950's using her grandmother Andrea's worn out underwear, MDF. Detail

qualities of textiles, which, in his view, can be applied as a kind of mask to architectural surfaces.[11] This idea opens up a way of thinking about architecture as a theatrical or performative space, or even as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). The art and design historian Rebecca Houze points out:

> Semper's theory of architecture-as-textile was closely tied to his understanding of clothing and costume as used to transform the human body. […] Semper's *Bekleidung* connotes as well the theatrical mask. The textile-like coverings of the walls "mask" their underlying structure.[12]

By using wallpaper to mask the underlying walls in my exhibition, I wanted to point to the performative aspects of the gallery space. Most of the walls in the space, including the aforementioned T-shaped wall, have no structural purpose, but were built specifically to provide surfaces to display art on. In this way, the space is already theatrical or performative. Moreover the "soft wall" and "dressed wall" were two spatial interventions in my exhibition that pointed to both my conception of and interest in textiles in a very expanded sense—as material to think through and with, to read, wear, unravel, and reassemble.

Samples and Excavations

Another way to unpack my process and practice is to look at how I use sampling in my work, an artistic methodology explained by the art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud in his book *Postproduction*.[13] Bourriaud points out methodological similarities between the working strategies of visual artists and DJs, who both use sampling from various sources in their work. Sampling as a strategy can, for example, be traced in the work of artist Anthea Hamilton. The type of sampling Hamilton uses in her installations is tied to the material and tactile sensibility that I strive for in my own work. At the same time, her work has a layeredness and ambiguity that I relate to. In an interview, Hamilton described her works as a way of "bringing together several layers of research and condensing them into an image. You have what looks like something decorative but is in fact the surface of many different ideas."[14]

Both Bourriaud's writing and Hamilton's oeuvre resonate with my own artistic practice, as I often employ materials that have been used in everyday life and have had a function that is no longer present, worn out over time through their use and circulation. It appeals to me that the material already seems to have information stored in it, which I can use in my work. In my practice, I attempt to patiently excavate some of those layers, as if I were an archaeologist. Naturally, this is not an archaeological excavation in the traditional sense—but thinking of it in these terms provides a way of opening up the material for me. When engaging with the material, I am not only looking to uncover the past history of the material but also seeking out what future possibilities it might hold. After excavating—or perhaps a more appropriate word would be "unravelling"—I can see new patterns and parts, which can find their way into future pieces. Sometimes it seems that the unravelling enables the pattern or shape to detach from its original material and connotation, which allows me to view and place it as an independent form in new contexts.

Almost No Memory

"I have long been interested in the idea that the textile is a language that requires another type of literacy before you can hear what the textile is trying to say."
—Jessica Hemmings[15]

A central piece in my exhibition was a rag rug that I unwove, so it presents more as a collection of threads than a rug as such. Its threads are long and delicate—some up to eight metres long. The threads were placed on top of the aforementioned shelf, the one that wrapped around the wall, and revealed themselves as the viewer followed the movement of the shelf. Together, the shelf and the threads make up a work titled *Almost No Memory* (2023).[16] The threads were previously part of a rug that my grandmother wove in the 1950s. She made the rug using material from her own grandmother's worn out underwear. The threads have thus undergone a series of transformations and entered into different types of textile systems (knitted, woven, patchwork) as well as changing relationships with the body and home.

Professor of craft Jessica Hemmings puts forward the possibility of a kind of language hidden in textiles. This was a focal point

when unravelling the rag rug. I am interested in the information that is absorbed and accumulated in different materials, whether it be time, emotions, secrets, sound, activity, or otherwise. I have had the feeling for a long time that textiles are particularly absorbent when it comes to these accumulations.

My original strategy was to unravel the rug, unfold and flatten the threads, and stitch them together into a large patchwork in the style of my previous series *Rags* (2022).[17] However, these threads were of a different nature—unstable and fragile. After unravelling parts of the rug, I unfolded a portion of the coiled threads and sewed them together at one end, letting the threads hang loose and isolated at the other end. This was the beginning of a patchwork, but rather than becoming a large textile wall piece as I had imagined, the final work is perhaps more reminiscent of a landscape in disintegration. The nature of the threads meant they wouldn't be strong enough to be stretched and pinned to the wall, as in *Rags*; instead, they needed a shelf to rest on. This mode of presentation completely changes the way a visitor experiences the material. You look down on it, follow its movement from integration to disintegration, and back again. As you follow the movement of the shelf, you can read the patterns of light and dust visible on the unwoven threads.

Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, a professor of environmental arts and justice, describes the connection between Alzheimer's disease and memory:

> For a person with Alzheimer's, the diminution of the hippocampus does not eradicate memory: it eradicates the ability to create, from the immediate world, a new pathway that leads, eventually, into narrative or semantic longevity. Kinesthetic memory is the last thing to go; one can rememberthe physical acts involved in walking through a landscape in the absence of recognizing the landscape itself, naming it, telling it to others. This does not mean that there is no memory; it means that the kinds of memory that are valued and understood in the context of current social relationships of coherent, narrative self (not to mention language) are undermined.[18]

That is to say, Alzheimer's doesn't cause a total removal of memory from one day to the next. Kinaesthetic memories persist longer than other types of memory, which supports my own experience of my more recent visits with my grandmother. Although she has difficulty remembering much, different materials and sensations trigger certain memories, such as when she gets a piece of textile in her hands. There is still some, but almost no, memory …

Readymades and Titles

"Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object."
—Marcel Duchamp[19]

As art critic and cultural researcher Torben Sangild highlights in his book *Objektiv Sensibilitet* (Objective sensitivity), a readymade can be defined as "an already designed thing that usually has a general useful function, but which is presented as a work of art—either in its pure form or with few modifications."[20] Arguably the best known readymade is that of Marcel Duchamp, who transformed the everyday object of a urinal into an artwork simply by inverting it, applying a pseudonymous signature (R. Mutt), and giving the piece the title *Fountain* (1917).

My works often share the characteristics of modified readymades, as they too are recognisable everyday objects that I have changed slightly and presented within an art context. This mode of working was evident in my graduation exhibition at Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam in 2018, titled *Yes Darling, You Are a Real Woman*.[21] Here, I presented the recognisable object of a blouse in four iterations. One was a woven blouse, a reconstruction of a three-thousand-year-old garment that my grandmother had remade in the 1970s for the Museum Sønderjylland Arkæologi (Sønderjylland Archaeology Museum), in Haderslev, Denmark, employing historically exact craft traditions. The other iterations included a photo from 1936 of the original Bronze Age blouse alongside two reconstructions of the blouse I created myself, one made from woven and worn plastic material excavated from a construction site close to the exhibition space and the other made from ceramics.

Several strategies at play here pointed to the potential of the readymade. An opportunity to reconceive an object emerges when its former useful significance disappears. Sangild refers to the anthropologist and historian George Basalla's analysis of the category of "transformed useful objects." Basalla points out that the transformation generates a psychological force, due to humans' emotional attachment to everyday objects and the dissonance that arises when the object loses its function but retains a recognisable form. Basalla does not give a final conclusion on the effect of this dissonance but mentions that it might be interpreted as a discrete criticism of the commodity function of objects and of society's widespread utilitarian rationality.[22]

Another readymade strategy I use in my work is the deliberate interaction between a piece and its title. As Sangild points out, the readymade receives part of its poetic power from its title, or, rather, from the dissonant interplay between object and title, as exemplified by Duchamp's urinal being titled *Fountain*.[23] I often pull the titles of my works from the literature I explore in my research. As I read, I come across words or phrases that have a special appeal for me, such as *Yes Darling, You Are a Real Woman*. This phrase comes from *Wages Against Housework* by the political theorist Silvia Federici. When used to title an artwork or exhibition, the phrase imbues the pieces and the collection as a whole with a certain quality, offering a new space of reflection and experience.

Textile as Allegory, Convention, and Inspiration

In a section of their book *A Thousand Plateaus* titled "The Technological Model,"[24] the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari write about the distinction between various textile techniques such as weaving, knitting, felting, and patchwork. Drawing heavily on Plato's dialogue the *Statesman*,[25] in which he compares the act of weaving to the art of statesmanship, Deleuze and Guattari show great insight into artisanal principles as they employ different textile techniques as a prism through which to think about various governance models and social structures. Their approach offers a clear example of how textile structures and techniques appear in other fields of meaning production, where the association is used to explain complex concepts.

In addition to being fascinated with the ornamental qualities of textiles and their historical use within architecture, Gottfried Semper traces most human inventions, including both textiles and architecture, back to the manipulations of fibres.[26] Semper's approach to textile history becomes a statement about the fundamental historical importance of textiles and textile crafts. Western societies often hold more or less conventional notions that textiles have something to do with clothes, have something to do with women's work, have something to do with the past, and so on. In my work, it's important to perceive textiles as a resource that can be used and analysed in very different ways and to not limit the many possible layers of meaning. I do not see myself exclusively as a textile artist, but I work with many of the possibilities that textiles as material and expression can open up.

A clear example of this is the aforementioned *Rags* (2022), my series of large patchwork pieces made from an unwoven rag rug. After unweaving the rag rug, I unfolded and flattened every thread. They were short, and when unfolded, they were very irregular in shape. I was interested in tuning into a logic of the material, and letting my actions and the compositions of the patchworks be guided by it, without having a predetermined composition in mind. You could say that the patchwork pieces were built up in a rhizomatic way: as surfaces extending in all directions, without a centre, and with no clear beginning or end.

I exhibited *Rags* as wall-hung textile pieces in the 2022 Annual Exhibition at Malmö Art Academy. The works could be interpreted as very painterly and as pointing in the direction of abstract painting, which for me flattened their potential to create meaning in multiple directions. I have therefore come to see these works more as maps for further inspiration. One particular *Rags* piece—the one built up of the most irregular and colourful threads —I came to view as a kind of map that, in a way, represents my way of thinking and working quite well.

Pulp—A Point of No Return

Another work included in the *Her Eternal Slumber Cut Shor*t exhibition takes the shape of a pair of shoes. I sculpted the shoes out of pulp made from papers dug up from my grandparents' paper trash. These papers were previously

Image courtesy of the artist

Rosita Kær, *Weather Report: Collector*, 2023. Jacket constructed from found Japanese garbage net with embroidery, modified hanger, wire, variable dimensions. Installation view

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Rosita Kær, *Weather Report: Weaver, Rag Tearer*, 2022–2023. Jackets constructed from discarded awning with traces of organic residue and a scaffolding cover, modified hangers, wire, variable dimensions. Installation view

the contents of my grandmother's research folders, which contained collection records and research materials. Possibly affected by her Alzheimer's, she had emptied all the folders into the trash. I excavated them in an attempt at retaining an overview, but to no avail—the papers had lost their previous order in the research folders. The archive book had closed in on itself. The index no longer pointed to the objects in the collection in any meaningful way. All overview was lost.

I shaped the shoes as a pair of high heels that used to be part of my grandmother's wardrobe. While the paper shoes cannot be used for walking, their form is familiar and instantly recognisable. Removing their utility shifts the focus, so that the fragility of the material combined with the identifiable form becomes an example of a transformation that highlights the way we attach emotion to everyday objects. The piece also emphasises a conceptual aspect of my practice. While physically imitating a useful object without actually being one, *Pulp* (2023) is also a kind of conceptualisation, where its full potential only becomes apparent when the visitor reads the work description.

Pulp is strongly associated with the body, but here no body is present, and in the specific context the shoes refer to a body that almost doesn't exist anymore: my grandmother's. The writer and journalist Joan Didion was an inspiration for me while making the shoes. In her memoir *A Year of Magical Thinking*,[27] Didion describes having difficulty throwing her dead husband's shoes out, in case he might return and need them.

"Continuing bonds" is a concept used within death studies and bereavement theory. In an academic paper, death studies scholars Annika Jonsson and Tony Walter highlight how objects, places, and rituals can assist in sustaining continuing bonds to the deceased: "Continuing bonds refer to the varied ways in which the living continue to feel connected to significant others who have died."[28] My grandmother is not dead, but it strikes me that my continuous engagement with the materials that my grandmother collected and manipulated is, in many ways, an attempt to keep a conversation going. Now that her memory has gone, I have lost an otherwise dear and frequent collaborator and conversation partner. Perhaps I find that in repurposing her work, I am in direct dialogue with her. A dialogue that can be seen as a continuous oscillation between loss and restoration, care and destruction.

The shoes become a placeholder for an archival overview that no longer exists, an index or summary that previously held a collection together. A collection whose components are now sold and scattered. To me, this marks both a loss and a new beginning, and certainly a point of no return.

Weather Report (Weaver, Archaeologist, Collector, Rag Tearer)

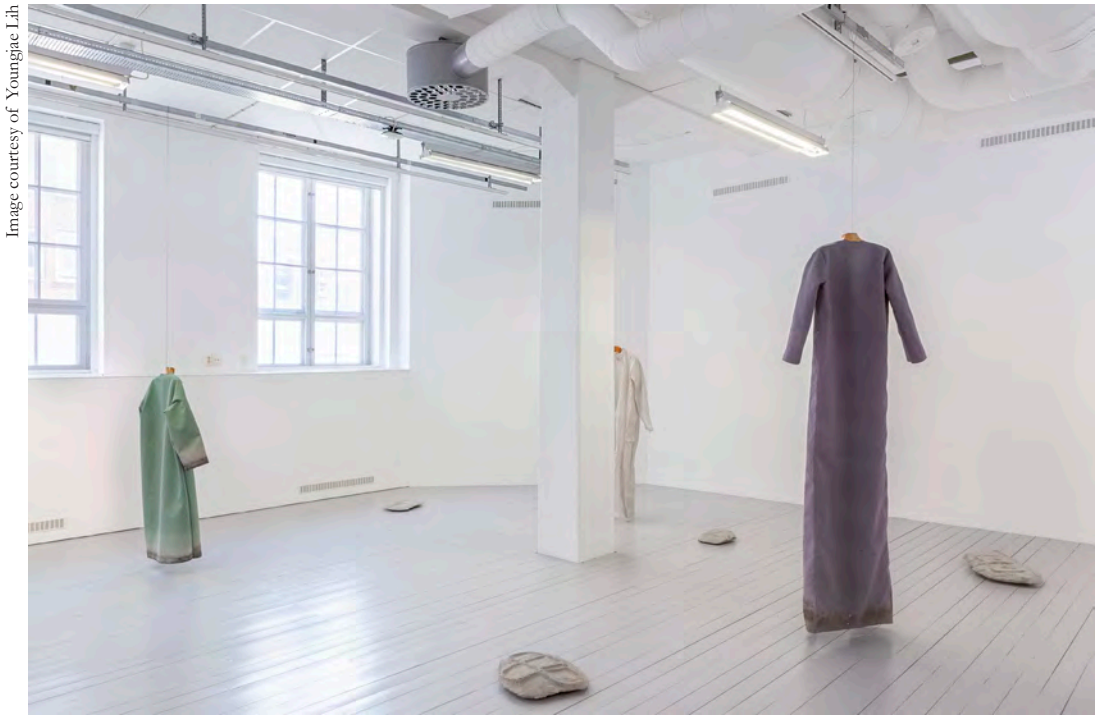
A work of mine that explores a different aspect of how textiles store information is *Weather Report* (2022–23), which consists of four jackets made from discarded industrial textiles such as old awnings, scaffolding covers, and a plastic garbage net. I made two of the jackets from awnings, whose material was originally one colour—purple and green, respectively—but, after being weathered for many years, the fabric now has a gradient, going from a darker to a lighter shade, as well as featuring traces of organic residue.

I often work with materials that have been marked by their previous functions and have lost their place as utility objects. The awnings are very much an example of this, as they visually store the activities that took place around them and point to how the weather is also part of the material world that it leaves a mark on.

The first jacket was produced for a performance that I designed the costumes for in the summer of 2022.[29] Therefore, its dimensions match the performer's body. I was interested in playing with the idea that the information stored in the material could somehow be absorbed by the performer—through her body wearing the jacket—and likewise that the performer wearing it, moving around in it, singing in it, could in turn add to the layers of information stored in the jacket.

The second jacket is much longer than a human body. Here, I let the material itself determine the length of the jacket, so that the entire gradient from dark to light caused by the weather conditions is visible. At the same time, the length of the jacket plays with the dissonance that can occur when a modification

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Rosita Kær, *Her Eternal Slumber Cut Short*, 2023. Installation view

Image courtesy of the artist

Rosita Kær, *Placeholders*, 2023. Concrete cast of engraving made by children in the dirt floor of a playground in Copenhagen, variable dimensions

and a displacement of function takes place, as I touched upon earlier in this essay.

The jackets hang from slightly modified clothes hangers in the exhibition space. I wanted a certain casualness in their presentation, which marks the jackets as garments to be worn, relating to the body in both shape and display, and hints at the possibility of immediate use.

To me, *Weather Report* represents a movement away from works that are directly related to my grandmother: they have no direct material overlap and I have not unravelled or reworked pieces created by her. Nonetheless, the jackets represent a tactile sensibility that has been shaped by our collaboration and that still strongly informs the way I look at my surroundings —through the eyes of a weaver, archaeologist, collector, and rag tearer.

Her Eternal Slumber Cut Short

From early on in the process of making my master's exhibition, I knew that the title of the show would be *Her Eternal Slumber Cut Short*. I've had the sentence in the back of my mind as I produced the works, from the moment I started unravelling the rag rug. To me, the title points both to a continuous movement and a rupture—something cut short.

During a visit to my grandmother's, she handed me a bag of nothing. Or, rather, she handed me a see-through plastic bag containing various clippings from magazines and newspapers, as well as a sock repaired so many times that the original material was almost entirely replaced. On a sticky note attached to the bag, she had written "*Ingenting*," which translates from Danish to "Nothing." One of the clippings, a page torn from a magazine, featured a photograph of two archaeologists pouring water from coffee cups onto a frozen prehistoric grave, in order to slowly melt the ice without damaging the grave's contents. "I was so impatient," one of the women uttered, according to the image caption. On the other side of the torn page, in the middle of a paragraph describing the archaeological excavation, I stumbled across the sentence: *Her eternal slumber cut short*.

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1 In 2018, a sales exhibition of Karen-Hanne Stærmose Nielsen's private collection of textiles and textile-related objects took place. I organised and curated the exhibition, held at Ågalleriet, in Frederiksværk, Denmark, in collaboration with my grandmother.

2 Rosita Kær, *A Collector Sells Out* (Copenhagen: Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology, 2020).

3 Feminist scholars have both deployed and criticised this view of bodies. See, most famously, Luce Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993), in which she shows (among other things) that Merleau-Ponty's sensing body is, problematically, always already individuated (and male). I borrow this note from Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "Landscape, Memory, and Forgetting: Thinking Through (My Mother's) Body and Place," in *Material Feminisms*, ed, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 285.

4 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith. (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 237.

5 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 235.

6 The public conversation took place as part of Zahle's exhibition *No Stranger or Lover to Me* at Rønnebæksholm, in Næstved, Denmark, on 12 March 2023.

7 Dan Fox, "Whitney Biennial 2012" (review), *Frieze*, 1 September 2012, https://www.frieze.com/article/whitney-biennial-2012.

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9 Maria Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, trans. Sasha Dugdale (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021), 220.

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16 I borrow this title from Lydia Davis's short story "Almost No Memory," available in *The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

17 Rosita Kær, *Rags*, 2022, series of four textile pieces shown at the 2022 Annual Exhibition at Malmö Art Academy.

18 Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "Landscape, Memory, and Forgetting: Thinking Through (My Mother's) Body and Place," in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 274–75.

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21 Rosita Kær, *Yes Darling, You Are a Real Woman*, 2018, installation at the 2018 Graduation Show at Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam.

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23 Sangild, *Objektiv Sensibilitet*, 32.

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26 Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2016), 43.

27 Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012).

28 Annika Jonsson and Tony Walter, "Continuing Bonds and Place," *Death Studies* 41, no. 7 (August 2017): 407.

29 FLOKFOLK, *SALT*, 2022 performance as part of Kulturhavn Festival 2022, Copenhagen.

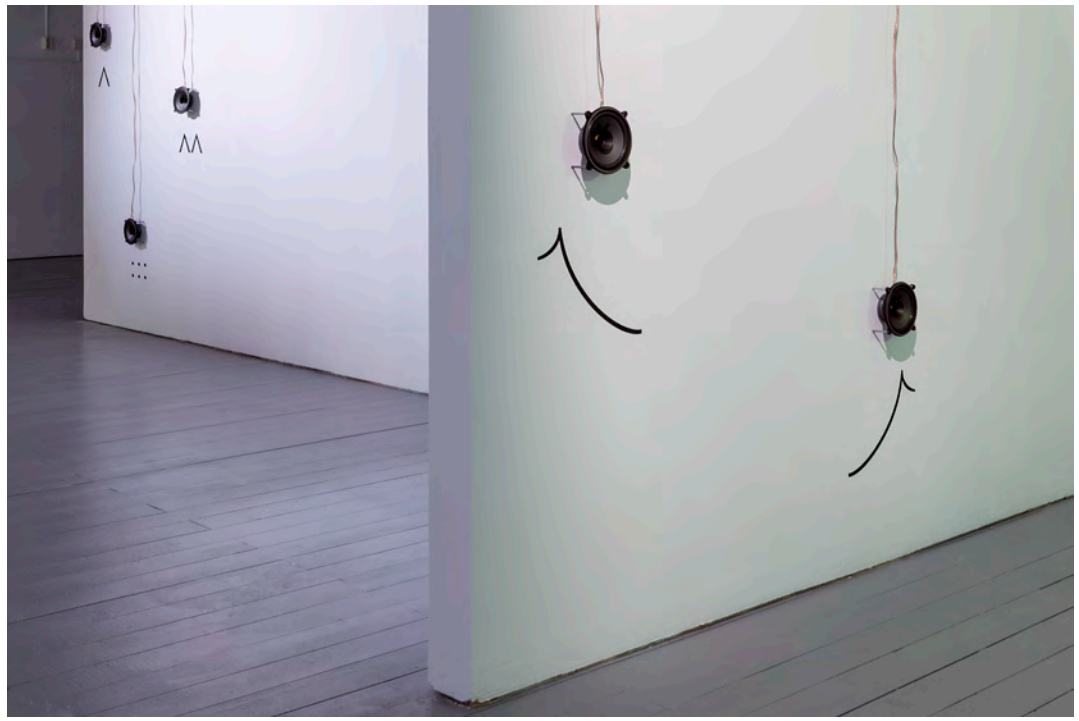


Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Clara Mosconi, *Paralingual Index no. 1*, 2023. Speaker unit, cable, vinyl.
32-channel sound installation, 16:45 min

Una voce adesso
or
A voice right now

Clara Mosconi

"My language doesn't have a dominant language. Having many languages is like having many selves. My language often feels dispersed. She hesitates before she speaks."
—Mirene Arsanios[1]

It's with a Danish mother and an Italian father that I grew up. I've got two siblings. My sister is nine years older than me, and she's got a different mother than my brother and I have. My sister was born in Italy. Naturally, Italian became her mother tongue and Danish took second place. When she turned four, my father and our sister's mother divorced, and my sister and her mother moved back to Denmark. My sister started to attend a Danish kindergarten. Later on, she went to elementary school, with the consequence that Danish quickly became her first language. Although my sister's fluency in Italian has faded over the years, she often surprises me when a situation might somehow compel her to speak Italian. It seems as though the language arises on its own steam, and always at the correct time and place.

My brother is only two years older than me, and we share a similar upbringing. We grew up together in a small suburban town in the middle of Sjælland. Our father owns an Italian restaurant in the centre of town. Seeing as the restaurant generated the only income for our household, my father was always working. It was only seldom that we saw him at home. On the other hand, we spent a great deal of time with our Danish mother. Danish is our mother tongue, and Italian has always been there, but in an incredibly undefined way.

After finishing high school, my brother jumped on the very first flight to Italy. We were all surprised. Back then, he didn't talk much. He was absolutely shy, but I also think that he simply enjoyed the silence. He moved in with Nonna Rosa and Zia Silvana, our paternal grandmother and father's sister, in the big pink house on top of the hill in Mondaino, and he took a job in the local factory, where he glued rhinestones onto different types of accessories for large fashion houses. While he sat around the large table, the hours crawled by at a snail's pace, and there wasn't much else for him to do than to try and converse with his colleagues. He quickly made good friends. His colleagues came from all over the world, but Italian became their common language. While he was driving home after putting in a long day at the factory, Zia and Nonna were busy making dinner. A new table around which to converse presented itself before him. When I visited my brother, a month and a half after he had moved to Italy, he was already fluent in the language. I had never heard him utter a single word in Italian, and suddenly he was speaking it like he never had before.

My relationship with Italian behaves in an almost mythical way. To be perfectly honest, whether or not I ever spoke Italian isn't entirely clear to me. As a child, bolstered with uncompromising self-confidence, I was convinced that I could speak the language. I can clearly remember how I demonstrated (*performed*) my Italian, in order to impress the other kids at school when, every autumn, I would return after spending another long summer in Italy. Convincingly, I rolled my r's, coloured and conducted the pitch, and softened my double consonants. *Perfetto*. I wasn't the least bit conscious about the well-orchestrated performance at that time, but I was absolutely certain about what my ears had heard, and I was the master of imitation.

Recently, I asked my mother what she remembers about my Italian as a child, and she told me about one very specific memory. She was observing me sitting at the dining table in the kitchen inside

the pink house in Italy. I was busy drawing a picture, and Nonna, who was otherwise busy with cooking, stopped behind me to see what I was busy drawing. I jovially explained to Nonna what I had drawn. She looked on and nodded in appreciation of my explanation. She asked questions and she pointed her finger, and I responded and explained. My mother remembered my language as a blend of actual Italian and a lot of Italianesque sounds. Our communication took place somewhere between our languages, and a connection was being nourished.

Whether my Italian-sounding language was governed by any system is something I'm decidedly less sure about. However, the sounds came forth with an intention. Clearly, I was delivering a message, convinced that the language was dwelling inside me, somewhere, and I had confidence that the sounds and words that were supposed to communicate for me would eventually spill out.

As time went by and I got older, and generally more and more bashful, my "Italian" actually faded. The summers grew longer. I fell silent. And a growing shame about my lost language came to the fore. I took over my brother's silence. The fear of making a mistake sat inside me, and I wouldn't hold a single Italian word in my mouth. My identity came to be embraced by a wordlessness, and things didn't have any words: no language was connected to them. Instead, they were merely sounds emitted from the mouths of others. I perceived everything in a wordless state of being, in parallel with a language that I couldn't attain on the same terms as could the rest of my family. Things were sounds, waves, particles. They were nameless, I was wordless.

And at the same time, language was as clear as water. I heard right through the words, without getting captured by metaphors and heavy meanings that were closely attached to what was being spoken. Instead, it was pure, sonic aesthetics. Sounds I had been listening to ever since I was a child. Sounds that had forms and colours: temperaments without literal meaning.

What Is the Word

In many ways, it was quite a relief to exist in that condition. A displacement of myself, as if I, the subject, had been placed somewhere outside myself. Or maybe it was the acceptance of my non-verbal presence. A new configuration of what it means to communicate.

The poems that Samuel Beckett wrote while he was suffering from temporary aphasia give me this same feeling of relief. The word "aphasia" is derived from the ancient *Greek afasia: a-* ("not") + *fasis* ("speech"); accordingly, it signifies "without speech." Aphasia can be defined as losing one's ability to produce or understand language, whether partially or totally, or as a diminished ability to understand written or spoken language, as a result of some disease or injury of the networks and centres in the brain that control language. Beckett temporarily lost his language, possibly as a result of a stroke. Slowly, however, he regained his ability to speak, and one of the last poems he published, "Comment Dire," or, in its English version, "What Is the Word," altogether consciously makes use of what is sometimes an interminable search for the words:

folly -
folly for to -
for to -
what is the word -
folly from this -
all this -
folly from all this -[2]

There's a straightforwardness in the poem. A transparency and honesty that allow me to see clearly. His stutter aggressively chops the sentences into words in their own right, and they repeat until they are divested of all meaning and I lose my sense of direction and any sense of location in the sounds. The poem moves away from, or resists, any clear narrative, where subject and object are clearly defined. The boundaries between an apprehending subject and a defined object are blurred; but, at the same time, I can hear Beckett's voice more clearly than ever before.

It was in the spring of 2022 that I chanced to meet Imogen Stidworthy's work for the first time. With every page that I turned, a deep fascination came to life. I took her doctoral thesis, "Voicing on the Borders of Language,"[3] from 2020, with me to Berlin, where I planned to spend the month of May. As a result of doing this, I didn't leave the apartment much at all. During my sojourn to Berlin, my thinking only became more swaddled up in the thoughts that Stidworthy presents. I read about her work with non-verbal forms of communication, and I was stirred by her insistence on mapping out the production that takes place in the convergence between different forms of language.

Stidworthy is a multimedia artist and scholar who works with language through video, sound, and installation. "Voicing on the Borders of Language" aims its focus on the production between verbal and non-verbal communication forms, and one of the core concepts she turns to is "rub-up." Stidworthy coined this idea, and she uses it to approach the field of communication that is situated outside language. For many years, she has worked with the ideas of three experts in non-verbal communication: Fernand Deligny, Iris Johansson, and Phoebe Caldwell, all of whom make their appearance in the thesis. Their three different positions allow Stidworthy to observe and become involved in their ongoing discussion and work with non-verbal people. Stidworthy employs a "meta-cinematic" grip, where the camera functions as a third person in one-on-one encounters.

Stidworthy strikes up and awakens a fundamental point of interest for me in that she pays special attention to what many would call "miscommunication" or "lost" communication. That is to say, when we do not understand each other, when there's poor contact or no contact at all.

Fundamental to my own artistic practice is an interest in giving voice to the language and the communication that sits in parallel to whatever our mother tongue might be: in other words, our second and sometimes our third and fourth languages. I have been trying, for quite some time, to work my way into a strategy of mapping out a "paralinguistic" language—a concept inspired by the philosopher Mladen Dolar and his thoughts about the *postlinguistic* language.[4] In my ongoing research, I've been working specifically with the premise that paralinguistic language in reality reveals much more about us than our attempts to find the correct words, often in a distressful hour of need. Such attempts are typically filled with hierarchies and steered by power based on one's knowledge and one's need to use language, all according to who you might be and where you hail from. *Umm, fff, mhmm*, and eh are valuable, as is our breathing, of course, and our lack of control over them reveals certain things about us, along with our voice; this is something that the philosopher Adriana Cavarero has written a rather fantastic book about.[5]

Cavarero's *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, published in 2005, seeks to unfold how we think about the voice. She lays down the gauntlet before what she calls the "philosophical tradition," which she believes ignores not only a uniqueness in the voice but uniqueness in general, which, according to the philosophical tradition, has been epistemologically unravelling, with speech being programmatically separated from the speaker. On the other hand, speech has found a new home in thought.

Cavarero, on the other hand, believes that eliminating the voice's corporeality is, first and foremost, tantamount to eliminating the "other." The voice is a unique human characteristic and an important aspect in the act of relating to one another and the world. It's through our speech and through the uniqueness in our voices that we show ourselves.[6]

"… det var Peter, han gik i klasse med Anders på datalogi"

The above is the title of one of my performance pieces. This work builds rather concretely on my work with paralinguistic language, which first found expression in the sound installation Postlingvistisk tale (ehhh, f, sn, mm, euhe) *(Postlinguistic speech), from 2020. These two works—Postlingvistisk tale (ehhh, f, sn, mm, euhe)* and *"… det var Peter, han gik i klasse med Anders på datalogi"* ("… it was Peter, he took a data communications class with Anders", 2021)—and their almost opposing titles are based on the same sound material, but they treat this material in two different ways. The sound material consists of a series of conversations I had in the autumn of 2020 whose point of departure was a question that I asked all the involved participants in advance: *How do you feel limited in your language?* The question might sound presumptuous, but it was based on preliminary conversations I had with the people who wound up taking part. This all happened during the COVID-19

pandemic. For this reason, it was the people who are closest to me who participated. Our conversations revolved around the matter of how language was disappearing at that time in step with the fact that it wasn't being actively used and challenged. That we were all spending so much time alone, with our own thoughts, as a result of the lockdown, so that when we started to communicate these thoughts outwardly, it was a tail without end. This certainly gave rise to a sense of sorrow—as though we had lost something of ourselves. But through conversations where we managed to challenge the premise that our language had been fading as a consequence of isolation, we found a sense of fellowship around our "premature" language, which could even be turned into an advantage, in many ways. It offered a freedom, in that we were letting go of our expectations of the spoken language. What came into being in the course of the conversations was instead another kind of connectedness. A common standpoint and a way of playing with sounds, words, and syntax, which came to take on new meaning in our ears and in our lives.

I made sound recordings of all the conversations, listened through them countless times, and spent hours transcribing what was said. I was left with an endlessly long document of voices, where I had noted every single utterance issuing from each of my interlocutors' voices; in a purely visual sense, these notations take up a large part of the document. *Uhhmmm, d-d-it, nnnp-[long exhalation], hahhaha, and *sneeze** dominates the established words in each line. I fell in love with this visual textual landscape that fills the pages. At the same time, I was trying to remain as objective as possible, as I was previously trained when transcribing to do the interviewed party a favour by omitting just these observations, "because it appears unprofessional and hesitant."[7]

"but in a way, it was also my fault in, [long inhalation], or no, not my fault, no, that we, we weren't speaking Italian at home, you know? Because it was so, became so, so good, f-f-[short sharp exhalations], you know? And I felt comfortable and I could find words [long pause] and, ummm, so it was—it was, [pause] a good period."[8]

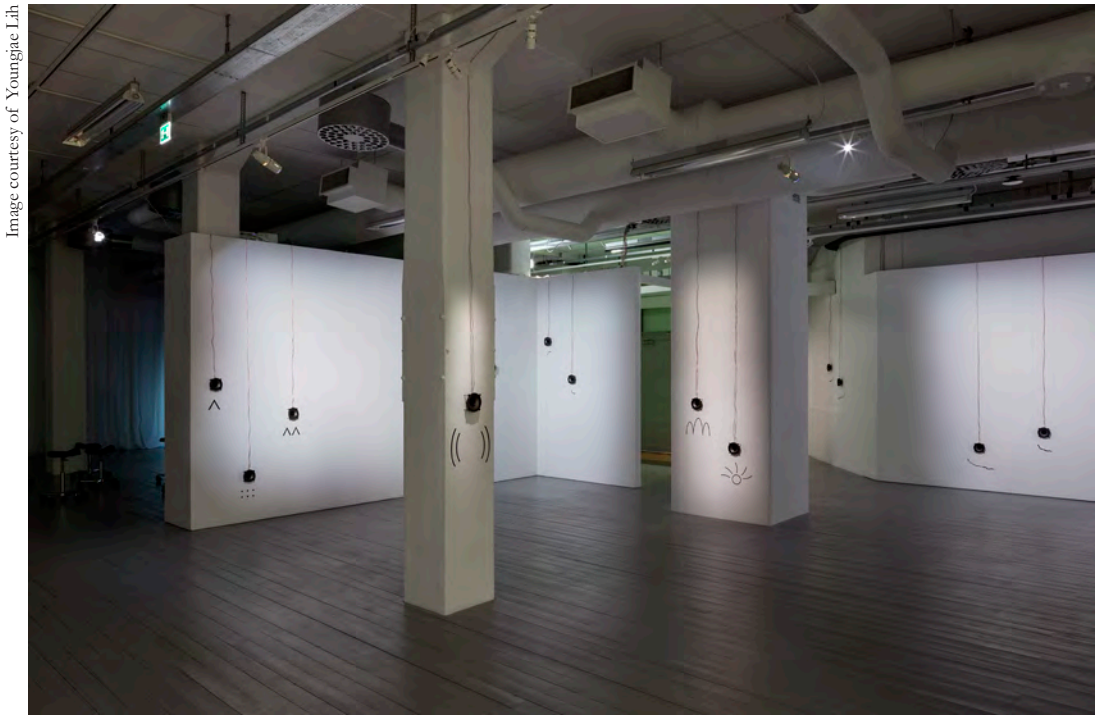
Initially, the transcription looked the way it does in the quotation above. In a moral conflict, I chose to remove the paralinguistic language notes in the transcription, and instead leave empty spaces in the text—both a form of registration and an ode to the loss around which the conversations revolved. I otherwise handled the material in an unostentatious way: reshuffling the narratives, cutting and pasting, and putting together a newly composed narrative that collates the tales from the five people, who have incredibly different backgrounds, different life experiences, and, not least of all, very different relationships to the Danish language.

What I ended up with is a text that both imitates a monologue, inasmuch as I took my own voice out of the equation, but which also poses questions. A text that started out in the mode of a classic dramaturgy but which ruptures expectations when the plot is interrupted, out of the blue, or when the tone changes, suddenly. A narrative that is difficult to lean back into, as a listener, but which maybe also keeps us on our toes, which leaves pauses and an expectation of a message in the empty fields—imitating a censored text, perhaps.

"Well well , it's not easy in that way, I think it's easier to learn Italian, speak Italian just like Philip did when he went down there, after high school there, when he couldn't speak any Italian, , when he came home four months later , not quite four months later, when he could only speak and , but , "[9]

I would still like to assign a role to the empty fields' paralinguistic language, but rather than being mediated through text, they deserved their own place. For this reason, I initiated something that was a more or less equally time-consuming process, which was based on editing the sound material in such a way that I removed all language and left only the paralinguistic language standing. Each audio track represents one person, and when I spliced and stacked all the tracks together, I was left with a soundscape that quivers with anticipation. It sounds like the various voices are trying to have a conversation but never quite make it that far.

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Clara Mosconi, *Paralingual Index no. 1*, 2023. 32-channel sound installation, 16:45 min.
Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

To these many narratives and voices, the performance added a body. I printed the intertwined narrative on a long roll of paper, in order to point toward an infinity in the narratives and the conversations that could, in principle, continue on and on.

The performance *"… det var Peter, han gik i klasse med Anders på datalogi"* lasted twenty minutes, and in the course of that time interval, the roll managed to unfurl itself across the floor around me. I read aloud, as though it were a script that I didn't know. Every time I encountered an empty place in the text, I paused and waited for the audio with the paralinguistic text to complete the sentence for me. The soundtrack and the text scroll had a push-pull relationship going on, where the voices from the soundtracks interrupted my speech. Sometimes, the audio took over completely without me getting a word in edgewise. Other times, I insisted on finishing my sentence, which entailed that we were all speaking at one and the same time. The internal power struggles between the non-verbal sounds and the sentences in the script suddenly disclosed a hierarchy.

Breakup and Redemption

Making this work connected me to the practice of Susan Howe. At the time I started searching for Howe, she was introduced to me, first and foremost, as a poet. A postmodernist language poet, that is. What this implies is that she challenges language's prevailing categories and rules. I'm thinking here particularly of her cut-up texts and of the autonomy that prevails in her poems.[10] She treats the text as a three-dimensional material, sculpturally, and accordingly also challenges its typical format. Her texts spring about and dance on the pages. They are placed in layers. They break in the middle of the words. They lean a little to one side, and then to the other. They take on the form of something I think I know, until I don't know them anymore. The letters stack on top of each other, so that they form shadows and grow out from the page's third axis.

In 2011, Howe and the composer David Grubbs perform their piece *Frolic Architecture* in the Thompson Room at the Baker Center, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I watch it again on YouTube.[11] In the video, Grubbs and Howe are sitting down, behind a table. They both have manuscripts in front of them. There's stillness and darkness in this room, with a desk lamp to illuminate the manuscripts, as the only source of light. A brief sound comes forth. Whether this sound issues from the audience or whether it is intentional is unclear. Then another one. The sounds become intensified and progressively longer, until I can recognise them as fragments of a voice. Grubbs turns a page in his manuscript, vertically, starting from the bottom of the page and moving upwards. Howe's voice blends frictionlessly, and the sounds start to grow into words, which subsequently grow into sentences. I manage to rest my ears in the consummately formed and poetic sentences. Right until they are broken up again, chopped up, and the breaks are repeated again and again. Howe turns a page in her manuscript, horizontally, starting from the right and moving left. The soundtrack grows, and the voice that Grubbs is controlling from his computer sounds identical to Howe's voice, and yet it sounds completely alien.

Grubbs uses the same method as Howe, in his way of handling the voice: namely, as a cut-up material. In keeping with the basic premise of *musique concrète*, the speaking voice accordingly becomes an acoustic volume and a part of a fundamental body of material that can be treated solely on the basis of its sonic aesthetics. Meaning is suspended. The words no longer exist—at least not in the form that we know them—and my ears are being challenged, in a constant breakup and redemption of the work. When I look at Howe's texts, I am confronted first and foremost with a methodology. When her voice performs the poems, an intimacy is introduced that I do not experience when I look at the texts' design alone.

Systematising the Uncontrolled: The Index, the Conversation, and Performativity

I have worked out a series of symbols that I call the "paralinguistic index." These symbols mark the paralinguistic sounds in our language, and they offer me a way to work with the fields in my transcripts that I otherwise left blank. The index is an implement that precisely transcribes the sounds that the voice automatically makes—the uncontrolled language for which we have no rules and systems. The symbols are intuitive in their design, and they refer to the sounds' performative aspect, that is to say, to how the sounds relate to the body.

- . Pause
- • Long pause
- Smacking of the lips
- Audible swallowing
- (( )) Audible gesture, movement of the body
- Inhalation—short and long
- Exhalation—short and long
- Soft or interrupted inhalation—short and long

The index depends on sound. It doesn't need any words, but the voice is essential. A transcription of the sounds thus describes, to a far greater extent, the person who is speaking than it does what is being said. For this reason, the transcription is always going to be personal and closely linked to the speaker, and maybe will also elicit an image of a state of mind, a human being, more than it will convey a message for interpretation.

The index is dependent on a conversational situation. It cannot be applied to a monologue or other rehearsed speech, as it touches on a certain kind of spontaneity: a dialogue between a speaker and a listener, by turns, a sender and a receiver: of blood, desires, and longings. And if we allow the sender and the receiver to speak two different languages, without sharing a second or third language, the conversation becomes dependent on everything *but* words, and the friction between the two languages becomes intensified.

It is inside that space that we are inclined to let it lie. Judging the conversation to be dead and the communication to be abortive. However, keeping pace with the disappearance of the words—and as the friction is heightened—something else arises in our attempts to deal with unfamiliar forms of communication. Language makes its way out to the edge of what we know it as but reveals itself in other new ways, compelling us to lead ourselves and the voice into territory that we are not accustomed to.

A considerable part of this communication is found in gestures, facial expressions, and other visible, physical movements. The extent to which we use our bodies to communicate, and the ways in which we do this, are culturally determined. The paralinguistic index does not take this into account but deals exclusively with that facet of communication that we use our voices to carry further.

When it comes to using the index, the voice and sounds are therefore essential. As we move out into the territory where we no longer rest on our acquired languages and our usual ways of communicating, and instead move out towards what Stidworthy calls rub-up,[13] the voice provides involuntary information. According to Cavarero, the voice reveals itself in all its uniqueness, and it is by this means that we

show ourselves to one another. The voice becomes an opening to the other, an invocation, and an invitation for you to show yourself to me.

The index is also a digitised typography, a font, which can be installed on a computer and used on a keyboard. I developed this font so that I could more easily use the characters in my transcription work but also for the purpose of turning it into a freely available tool for others who might find some meaning in producing a transcription of this communication that otherwise has not been available to them. I believe that the index can be a way of opening up a communication. The font is available to everyone, and it can be accessed and downloaded at www.claramosconi.com/paralingual-index/.

Application Methods

Through developing this body of work, I have been making use of conversations that I conduct in Danish as well as those in Italian, for which I have had an interpreter (my father) on hand. In their expression and their dynamics, the resulting transcriptions vary widely, and these differences depend wholly on whether I am transcribing the conversation as a text, in its entirety, or "live" as sound.

When I transcribe in Italian, I enjoy a certain advantage in the sense that I do not know or understand all the words. That is to say, I am listening automatically for recognisable markers in the communication that I can grab hold of. However, the paralinguistic index also reveals itself to be incomplete; this is something I was actually counting on, inasmuch as I am missing characters—or perhaps it is rather that the characters' individual categories are too narrow. Italian has a completely different kind of play with vowels and consonants, and especially with the interviewee with whom I have been working. Here, one could use the symbol ⋮ from the index, indicating the prolonging of an utterance, or one could create a more generalising kind of symbol to indicate that a certain vowel or consonant is being fiddled with. However, in a purely communicative sense, the vowels and consonants in the Italian language make their appearances in markedly different ways, and an extra rolling r feels incredibly far away from a soft double consonant—also in relation to how they are produced by the body.

One can use the index to transcribe and present a recording "live"; this is to be understood in the sense that the transcription is related to the audio file's timeline. This method is independent of an already existing text or language, and therefore it is also independent of communicating in the same language. The characters are inserted, or they are marked, on the timeline in the moment they occur. One can, in much the same way, carry out the method for the transcription process intuitively and spontaneously by making the requisite markings while simultaneously listening to the recorded sound file. The obvious way to present and to work with this would be in a video-editing program, which visually renders the sound's oscillations as an aid and which allows symbols to be inserted right into the image. The result is that the characters turn up on the screen at the same time that the paralinguistic language emerges in the sound, simulating subtitles on TV.

It's also possible to use the index with the original transcribed text and its related sound file. Here, the original text is transcribed on top of it at the same time that it's being listened to. The blank spaces already found in transcription become filled in. Moreover, a number of symbols get added in the form of exhalations ⌒⁀⌒⁀⌒ and inhalations ⌣‿⌣‿⌣ along with those that lie on top of the existing words. Here, the translation is consequently related to the format that we know and normally relate ourselves to: a reading direction moving from left to right, and from top to bottom—the same time-related issue. The transcriber is then free to retain the original text and allow the symbols to abound on top of the existing text, as an addition or an extension of the already prevailing language. Or the transcriber can dispose of the original text and focus instead on making the new transcription of the paralinguistic language. The result thereby becomes a configuration of the recognisable layout of a page, albeit with unknown symbols that move their way down over the page, in what I experience as a random and free movement. I also read the paralinguistic transcription as a graphic score, as a script that can be interpreted in the same way that Susan Howe's voice, in the most wonderful mode, reads and interprets her own text works. My graphic scores emerge something like:[14]

I came yes, when I moved here yes, og there I was, it was in '79, so I was 22, and it was there that I moved to, when I moved here I couldn't understand anything at all, as a matter of fact, I can remember the impression I had of language, the, immediately after I had arrived, that is was completely … Away from what I knew. I have, you might say, I

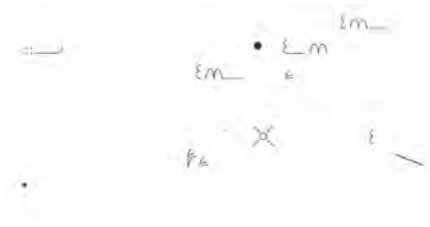
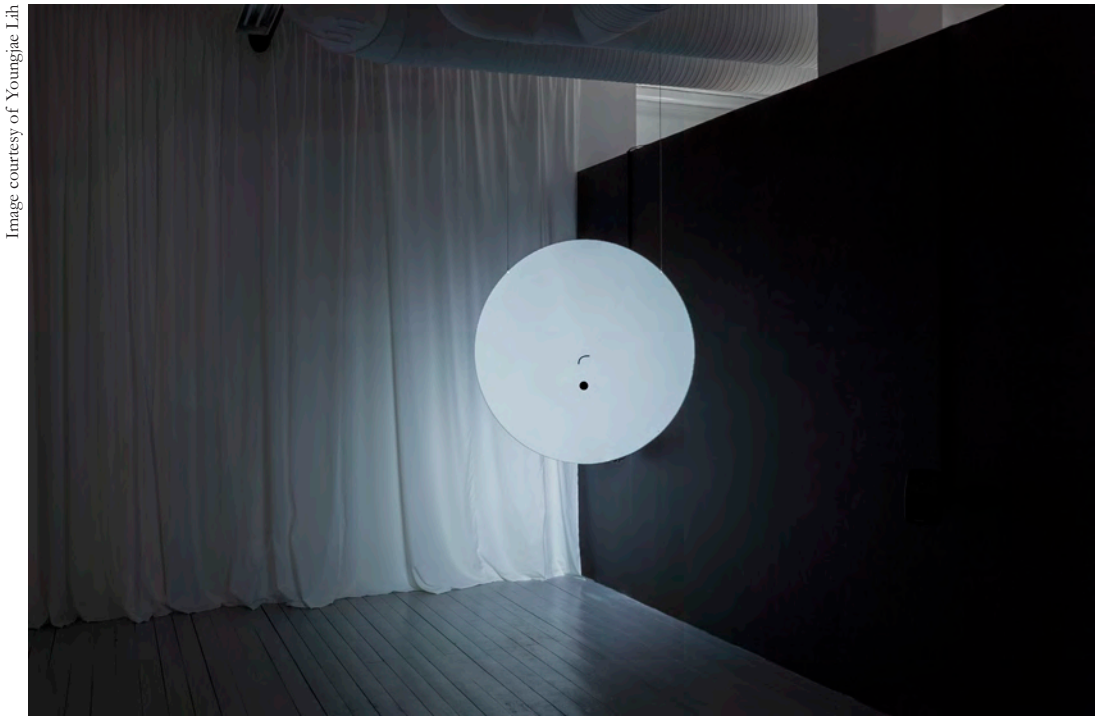


Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Clara Mosconi, *A voice means this: throat, chest, feelings*, 2023. Plexiglas, wire, curtain. Video installation, 25:59 min

The index is like getting a new tool in your hands. I imagine that, over time, the body will learn to make use of it—both how it should "lie in the hand" and how one can elicit the best possible effect from it. It becomes like an imprint, a sign on the body, when a tool moves its way into one's repertoire and the subconscious adopts it. In the same way, the font has made a dent in my body—a silent marking out—keeping pace with the fact that I've come to know the symbols and have coupled them to the uncontrolled sounds that the voice produces. This is a slow process of getting used to and learning how to make use of the font, and maybe especially because it mimics something that we know. A process that also takes place as time goes by, and a process about which I am curious to feel migrating its way into my body.

The Voice's Uniqueness

"A voice means this: there is a living person, throat, chest, feelings, who sends into the air this voice, different from all other voices."
—Italo Calvino, *A King Listens*[15]

It has been said that a mere 20 percent of an interpreted message lies in the words that are spoken. The other 80 percent of the message is found in the voice's texture, sound, pitch, rhythm, and tone. The voice is an immaterial albeit extremely material sign of the person that is using the voice to speak. It is not an isolated unit inside the body, or a pre-programmed organ in itself, but rather a phenomenon that activates the whole body: our lungs, our throat, our mouth, our ears, and our brain. It is a communication tool that we use in order to communicate what we want to say, but it happens, anyway, that it sometimes escapes from language, and uncontrolled sounds manage to slip out. The body reveals itself, clearly and distinctly, just as the voice's infrastructure reflects the speaker's condition of health, upbringing, education, geographical frame, cultural frame and tradition, gender identity, emotional state, self-confidence, and so on. The voice announces a subject, me, and informs and forms the subject that I present myself as.

Cavarero pits herself against the traditional philosophical view of the voice. If we move all the way back to before our Common Era, we come across Plato, who argues that we do not need the voice at all. Thinking was the soul's advantage, and the soul was satisfied by the metaphorical voice alone. The voice, and the act of talking, are merely thought being spoken aloud. This is not unlike what Socrates says in the *Philebus*: "The sound which passes through the lips, whether of an individual or of all men, is one and yet infinite."[16] The idea about the voice as one single thing, belonging to the same category of sounds that are, quite simply, emitted from the mouths of anybody and everybody was the prevailing philosophical conviction. This conviction certainly cast a certain anonymity over the person who happens to be speaking and completely spirits away the relationality that I think the voice possesses and which fashions the basis for my thinking and my work. Cavarero is not the first to consider the voice and the act of talking as important aspects of being in the world and relating to other bodies. She looks back at the early twentieth-century philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, who strikes at the very core of the question of the voice's relationality long before she managed to do this. Cavarero writes, quoting Rosenzweig:

> In short, thought is as solitary as speech is relational. Speaking "lives above all through the lives of others, whether they are the listener of a narration, the interlocutor of a dialogue or the member of a chorus." There is a dependence on others that passes through a plural connection of mouths and ears.[17]

The ancient Greeks' philosophical concept of *logos* stems from the verb *legein*, which signifies the act of "speaking," "gathering," "putting things in order," and "connecting." In its original meaning, *logos* refers to the very act of speaking—of connecting words. Philosophical logocentrism is, quite precisely, interested in the ordered succession that governs the connection of words, or language, as a system of meaning (signification). In the same vein, the voice is reduced to an acoustic signifier (designated) that is dependent on the significant, and this robs the voice of any kind of autonomy whatsoever.

Phenomenologically speaking, the act of speaking maintains an autonomous status, which brings to light the mouth's and the ears' relationality. The act of speaking is always the act of speaking to somebody or something. The act of speaking always implies an interlacement with others, an opening toward the other, and requires a reciprocal reprisal, either in the form of a mouth that answers or a listening ear.

In his *Poetics* (ca. 335 BC),[18] Aristotle describes that sounds emitted by the human being's vocal apparatus are all different, just as all the letters of the alphabet are. He defines them as inseparable sounds and further specifies that they vary in relation to the individual mouth's design and the region where the sounds are being spoken. Their categorisation depends entirely on whether they are long or short, whether they are aspirated or not, and whether they have an acute, grave, or intermediate accent. Through the conjunction of these sounds, we get syllables, and through the combining of syllables, we attain nouns and verbs.[19] I am tempted to say that, for Aristotle, language, in so many ways, takes its point of departure from the uniqueness of the individual voice—in other words, it is from the voice that language springs, and not from thought, as Plato argues.

If we circulate our way back to Cavarero, we understand that the voice communicates the speaker's uniqueness and is recognisable to those who are being spoken to. The voice, accordingly, is inextricably linked to the individual's identity, to the very uniqueness of being, in all its materiality and corporeality, and the voice supports, in this way, *having* subjectivity.

Cavarero uses the example of a wordless conversation between a mother and her infant is an example that. The mother is the person who, for the child, brings the "pure" voice into speech:

> Instead of transmitting speech to the infant as something that can be taught and learned—a system, a language—the maternal voice transmits to speech the primary sense of the vocalic, the sonorous self-expression of uniqueness and relation, the self-invocation of embodied singularities through a spontaneous resonance.[20]

A language between a mother and her infant gives rise to a connection that lies beyond rational understanding and to the opening towards the other, in its purest form, by which we show ourselves to one another. A language that is stripped of semantics, a language that represents itself as a pure, infantile voice, which is not yet a language. Maybe this nonverbal communication places itself on the periphery of language, somewhere within the realm of Stidworthy's rub-up.

In extension of this, I would like to cite the linguist Jean-Jacques Lecercle, in his work on nonsense, or *délire*: "The abstraction of language is based on the material expression of oral drives."[21] In so saying, Lecercle points to the fact that language functions according to an inherent "corporeality" that always trends towards enhanced fluency and lunacy.

The Uncontrolled Voice

My predilection for overlooked, misunderstood parts of our language naturally leads me towards introducing the uncontrolled voice as a broader concept.

In much the same way that our paralinguistic language is considered to be miscommunication, I feel that it's important to turn my attention to the uncontrolled voice, in a more general sense: the uncontrolled voice that expresses itself through what we sometimes categorise as *gibberish* or nonsense; that point where meaning breaks off, and we're suddenly out there in water that's over our heads. Where our clear line of communication ends, and we wind up someplace that might start to feel awkward, where the sender-voice becomes embarrassed and the receiver-ear doesn't know what to take away, or how to respond. Rationality and productivity come to be compromised. For many good reasons, we prefer to keep gibberish on the periphery of communication. But even when we're guided by the best intentions and we thought we knew just what we wanted to communicate, gibberish supervenes, anyway: our speech gets tongue-tied, our mouths get all dry, and nervousness steals upon us. All of a sudden, the words just don't want to come out, and they jump rhythmically over the lips in an uncontrolled stutter.

Throughout history, a large number of artists and poets have interpreted these human slips and knots of the tongue in different ways. Instead of dismissing gibberish as meaningless, these artists and poets bring it to the fore and into the light, in order to point to an underlying poetry, a kind of gift within language to which our rational minds don't have access, but which our voices can produce entirely outside our

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Clara Mosconi, *Paralingual Index no. 1*, 2023. 32-channel sound installation, 16:45 min.
Installation view

distances, and certainties. A clearly defined object outside ourselves, where the auditory engagement compels us to step out from our comfort zone and place ourselves in a curiously open stance, in relation to the world. The act of listening discovers and generates that which is heard. The act of listening unfolds in the present moment and is the opposite of the desired objectivity in the act of seeing.

This line of thought is not at all far from what artist and theorist Brandon LaBelle proposes in his book *Sonic Agency* (2018), where he examines whether sound can be an instrument for putting up resistance to a world where the visual dominates. A world where the heavy focus on the visual dissuades and prevents us from accessing deeper signals and human potentials. LaBelle works with the concept of "sonic agency" as a framework from which one can operate in the world—a condition that activates the ears and situates itself in a mode of listening to precisely those things that we screw up our eyes to see, hoping we won't blink and miss sight of, on account of the heavy focus on the visual.[27]

Voegelin describes the act of listening as an "interactivity," which produces and invents that which is heard. It activates our "sonic being," which plays a part in strengthening our worldly contact. This interactivity approaches what LaBelle describes as "worldly contact": a contact with the world and with each other that is reinforced by our sonic being—a position where we are in contact with the world through the act of listening. Voegelin writes: "The listener is entwined with the heard. His sense of the world and of himself is constituted in this bond. The understanding gained is a knowing of the moment as a sensory event that involves the listener and the sound in a reciprocal inventive production."[28]

In other words, there's no gap between the listener and the heard: "In listening I am in sound."[29] And the gap between the heard and the person who is listening is abrogated —either I'm hearing it, or I'm not, and what I'm hearing is what I'm perceiving.

The Unseen Painting and the Dynamic Voice

Voegelin borrows the concept of "being honeyed" from philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work *The World of Perception* (2004; first delivered in 1948) to explain sound's reciprocity, which stems from the phenomenology of perception—a world that is perceived rather than known.[30]

In 1948, Merleau-Ponty created a series of radio broadcasts under the collective title *Causeries*. The series took the form of seven audio lectures on the "development of ideas" as part of *Heure de culture français* (The French culture hour), which was broadcast on Saturdays. Sometime later on, Éditions du Seuil published this series as a text, initially in French in 2002 and, later on, in an English translation. The original sound recordings are held at the Institut national de l'audiovisuel in Paris.

Unfortunately, I do not have access to the archive, but thanks to UbuWeb,[31] I have been able to access three episodes of Merleau-Ponty's *Causeries*.[32] In the course of these broadcasts, the philosopher describes, among other things, a certain painting by Paul Cézanne. Through his words, Merleau-Ponty brings the painting is to life. This unseen painting, which I have resisted the temptation to seek out and bring before my sight, now moves around inside me like a dynamic voice: his eyes that are looking at the painting and the landscape that winds up in a tale about Cézanne's incessant and unremitting brushstrokes, which paints the perspective, clearly, in countless layers and that leave Merleau-Ponty someplace where his voice suddenly stops and plummets into the depths of doubt as he speaks, as he keeps on talking about how painters at that time suspended the rules about perspective and insisted, instead, on re-experiencing the landscape as something experienced in the present moment, rather than painting it clearly in the usual—and what was at that point considered the *correct*—way.

What brings the work to life in me is not Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of the painting but rather the voice that streams through the speakers. I experience the painting, in all that complexity, rather than appreciate it as fact. The unseen painting springs forth from Merleau-Ponty's voice and reveals the complexity embedded within the painting's intersubjectivity. The text as voice is the bodily fragment of the sound, and the message that the voice wants to disseminate takes on its body and meets mine, in a spot situated somewhere between us. The painting lives on, outside its physical delimitation.

control. In a dramatic way, it is precisely this potential—these intermediate spaces and this specific rub-up—that these artists and poets interpret in their works.

One example is sound poetry, which amalgamates a form of semantics with a musicality that consists primarily of rhythm, thus carrying language's phonetics into the foreground. Sound poetry has threads in many other branches of literary, artistic, and musical tradition, but it is said to have found its form, as what we call "sound poetry," sometime in the twentieth century. The Futurists and the Dadaists are often identified as the pioneers who created the first examples and developed categories of sound poetry that refer to the poems' performativity.

Sound poetry eventually evolved into concrete poetry, and, likewise, when the tape recorder came onto the scene, the tradition that we know as *musique concrète*, or concrete music, was created. The theoretical basis for *musique concrète* as a compositional practice was developed by the composer Pierre Schaeffer in the early 1940s. One Danish composer who took inspiration from Schaeffer was Else Marie Pade. She collaborated with Schaeffer and the controversial German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, and she played a pivotal role in developing musique concrète. She was, to boot, a woman working in a male-dominated field, and was actually the first Danish composer at all to work in the field of *musique concrète*. It was only at a relatively late point in her career that Pade managed to gain recognition for her efforts, which continue, in any event, to earn praise.

Pade would speak about her upbringing[22] during which she spent a great deal of time lying in bed due to suffering bouts of pyelonephritis. With a protective mother, and without much else to do while bedridden other than listen to the sounds in the room, to the city, and to the stream of life happening outside her window, Pade created what she called "aural pictures." Visualisations, of a kind, of what she was hearing.

Musique concrète works with acousmatic[23] sound as a compositional material. Without paying any heed to the sound's origin or the object to which the sound might be attached, the composer treats the sounds in way that is much more free. This results in sounds being put together in novel ways, and in the mid-twentieth century the aural landscape transformed in a direction that moved away from what was known beforehand. *Musique concrète* challenged the premise that sound is always *the sound of something* and renegotiated the world as we hear it through our ears.

Notwithstanding Pade's challenging upbringing, her experiences furnished her with a special relationship to sound and with an extraordinary talent for listening in the present moment. *Musique concrète* can actually teach us a lot about listening, and accordingly it has become particularly relevant to my work, which is so closely linked to sound. With this mention of *musique concrète*, I'm also returning to the beginning of my text. Once again, I can again revolve around the placement of the subject, around an understanding that has been displaced and that's difficult to place.

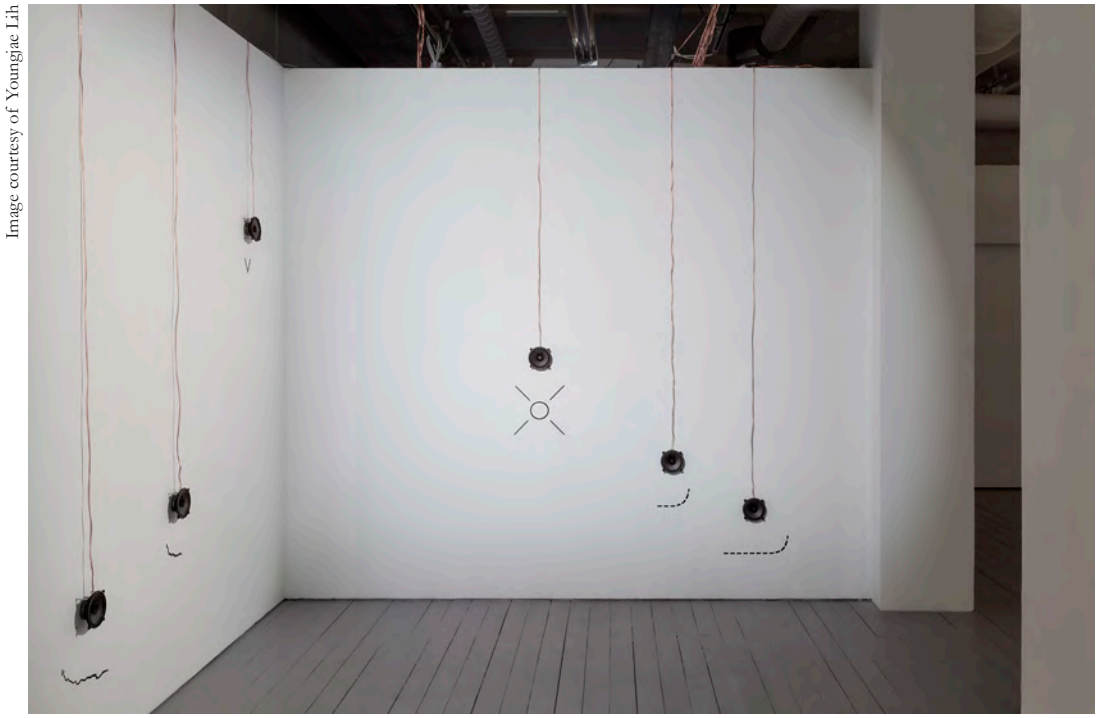
I'm tempted to recreate logics and systems in the language that arises in the uncontrolled relational voice, which is in dialogue with another ear and another voice. If we can get back to my paralinguistic index, it becomes a tool that also calls for ears and voices.

With Your Ears to the World

In much the same way that *musique concrète* confronts us with the filters through which we perceive the world, the act of listening possesses the same potential, according to the professor of sound Salomé Voegelin. Heavily inspired by Schaeffer's ideas about "acousmatics" (developed in 1966),[24] Voegelin, in her Listening to Noise and Silence (2010),[25] describes the act of listening as a task that consists of trying to suspend all biases surrounding genre, category, purpose, and historical context in order to approach a way of listening on the premises of the heard material. The act of listening comes to be a practice consisting of listening in the present moment, producing a kind of fusion of the subject and the object, where the distance between the two becomes blurred.

The act of listening presents a challenge to the human urge to know, or as the priest and thinker Michel de Certeau points out: "The desire for the godlike view, the gnostic drive for total knowledge."[26] This is a desire that we carry out and consummate especially through our eyes—it's the sense of sight that presents us with mappings, demarcations,

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Clara Mosconi, *Paralingual Index no. 1*, 2023. Speaker unit, cable, vinyl.
32-channel sound installation, 16:45 min

Merleau-Ponty experiences the painting through the eyes that see, and he describes the visual perception by virtue of how he speaks about the phenomenology of visual perception. In other words, he experiences the painting on the premises of the visual. Sound evades the visual's embrace and does not describe but rather produces the currently available object or phenomenon in relation to the person who is listening.

Honey-Smeared Hands

"Honey is a slow moving liquid; while it undoubtedly has a certain consistency and allows itself to be grasped, it soon creeps slyly from the fingers and returns to where it started from. It comes apart as soon as it has been given a particular shape, and what is more, it reverses the roles, by grasping the hands of whomever would take hold of it."
—Maurice Merleau-Ponty[33]

"Being honeyed" articulates the reciprocity that Merleau-Ponty describes as phenomenological intersubjectivity. Honey cannot be perceived from a remote position but only through my own honey-smeared hands, as a complex phenomenon without a specific form but with a demanding nature.

At the outset of 2023, I turned up for an improvisation session with the vocalist and artist Francesca Burattelli, who, among other things, works performatively with her voice in the field between speech and song. I reached out to Burattelli a few months before this meeting, expressing a desire for a collaboration that would ostensibly work towards a vocal interpretation of the symbols from my paralinguistic index.

Ever since we opened the collaboration, an endless stream of peculiar sounds have been ringing out between us: play and laughter have been the result, but countless stories have also been shared. Because the sounds around the words, the paralinguistic language, carry with them stories, feelings and relationships, dialects and generations of inherited language—some of which we share between us, others that are new and which ring out differently than the soundscape that either of us grew up with.

From Burattelli's voice, the symbols from the index are growing out from the paper. They are finding their way of the mouth and into bodies and ears—this polyphonic relationality of mouths and ears. In the index, these sounds are represented by a symbol that carries a specific description—an attempt to approach a form of neutrality that the majority of people might be able to recognise. They are static, standardised, and embedded in a system. Burattelli repeats the sounds, over and over again. Having been peeled free of metaphors and meanings, the words are repeated in an investigative game, in the manner of childlike curiosity. The more times they are repeated, the faster the sounds run like honey down my fingers—they do not cohere anymore: the honey is everywhere.

It is in Burattelli's voice that this wily capacity, this honey, becomes modelled in my listening. These mercurial and complex utterances reveal my own uncertain entanglement in the honey. It is simultaneously a conclusion and an opening.

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1 Mirene Arsanios, *Notes on Mother Tongues: Colonialism, Class, and Giving What You Don't Have* (New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2020)

2 Samuel Beckett, "What Is the Word," 1990, Samuel Beckett On-Line Resources and Links Pages, http://www.samuel-beckett.net/whatistheword.html.

3 Imogen Stidworthy, "Voicing on the Borders of Language" (PhD diss., Lund University, 2020).

4 Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

5 Adriana Cavarero. *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005)

6 Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 42.

7 For a certain period of time, I worked in the art editorial department for the culture magazine VINK, where I often wrote portraits and conducted interviews. Here I was instructed in, among other things, how to conduct interviews as well as how to carry out the subsequent steps. My impression was that there is an objectivity sought in the transcription, which nevertheless was supposed to be trimmed of filler words, "mistakes," and other utterances that might reflect badly on the interviewed party.

8 Clara Mosconi, *Postlingvistisk tale (ehhh, f, sn, mm, euhe)*, 2020, text work, one part of my eponymous sound installation is presented in 2021 in Malmo.

9 Mosconi, *Postlingvistisk tale (ehhh, f, sn, mm, euhe)*.

10 Susan Howe, *Debths* (New York: New Directions, 2017).

11 Susan Howe and David Grubbs, "ARCHITECTURE: A Performance by Susan Howe and David Grubbs—Woodberry Poetry Room," YouTube video, 1:02:49, posted by Harvard University, 26 January 2012, https://youtu.be/xR6cfDFTL8Q.

12 Extract from the paralinguistic index.

13 Stidworthy, "Voicing on the Borders of Language," 15.

14 Example of a transcription of a recorded conversation using the paralinguistic index. In this example, on the left side, the paralinguistic transcription is displayed on top of the original. On the right side, we see the paralinguistic transcription alone.

15 Italo Calvino, *Under the Jaguar Sun* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988).

16 Plato, "Philebus," in *The Completed Works* (Los Angeles: Basilicus, 2015), 433.

17 Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 174, quoting Franz Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000).

18 Aristotle, *Poetics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968).

19 Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 53.

20 Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 180.

21 Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy through the Looking-Glass* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 8.

22 Henrik Marstal, *Danske komponister 3—Else Marie Pade* [Danish composers 3—Else Marie Pade] (Copenhagen: Forlaget Multivers, 2020).

23 See next footnote.

24 In 1955, Schaeffer and the novelist Jérôme Peignot were the first to use the expression "acousmatic" for the purpose of defining the experience of listening to *musique concrète*. In his publication from 1966, *Traité des objets musicaux*, Schaeffer defines the term this way: "*Acousmatic*, adjective: refers to a sound that one hears without seeing the causes behind it." Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux* [*Treatise on Musical Objects*] (Paris: Le Seuil, 1966).

25 Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

26 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

27 Brandon LaBelle, *Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance* (London: Goldsmiths Press, 2018)

28 Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 5.

29 Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 5.

30 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2004), 46.

31 UbuWeb is an online archive that was set up in 1996 and is a pirate shadow library consisting of hundreds of thousands of free-of-charge avant-garde artefacts, which users can download.

32 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Causeries: La Pensée et l'Art Contemporain" [Talks: Thought and contemporary art] radio broadcast, *Heure de culture français* [The French culture hour], RDF, originally aired 9 October 1948, accessed at https://www.ubu.com/sound/merleau.html.

33 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, 46.

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Maia Torp Neergaard, *Through This Window I work*, 2023. Buttermilk on glass.
Installation view, *Prepositions about Home*, MFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

On Choosing Other Paths

Maia Torp Neergaard

Inside me, a storm is raging. It has always been there. I am walking by the sea, and learning more about it than I ever have before. I can walk in towards land, where the storm is abating, but I am always drawn out towards the water again. It is there that I feel most alive.

*

"In seeing the stranger, we are most certainly seeing someone; in some cases, we are seeing ourselves."
—Sara Ahmed[1]

I am interested in people. In all people.

My work is directly influenced by having grown up in a time and in a part of the world where, to a much greater extent than the community, it is the individual that has permeated the discourse. I come from Denmark; at a time when people are moving—and fleeing—because of crises and wars, my country has in recent years chosen to close up even more tightly than before. To shut its door and draw the curtains. My practice revolves around translating that which I have spent my entire youth being angry at, being sorry about and frustrated with. I have rushed out to all the demonstrations against inequality, in order to use my body as a supportive pillar, and I have been walking with my head held high, proudly and fearlessly, through the various marches, because here there was a larger body that was fighting for one and the same thing: community. My anger and frustration have dispatched me to many places. But I have always wound up in the garden. Here, I can concentrate on tangible dimensions—for the purpose of creating a place where plants, microorganisms, and animals can coexist. The work in the garden keeps on growing right into my films. I make them in order to create space, to examine nuances and how we carry on in relation to each other: to examine how we live together.

My films have to do with consideration.

In her book, *The Human Condition*, the German American political thinker Hannah Arendt emphasises that whenever we talk about human beings, we are talking about people—plurality is a prerequisite for the human:

> Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition of plurality are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically *the* condition—not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*—of all political life. Thus the language of the Romans, perhaps the most political people we have known, used the words "to live" and "to be among men" (*inter homines esse*) or "to die" and "to cease to be among men" (*inter homines esse desinere*) as synonyms.[2]

The very fact that we are different but also, simultaneously, all the same—in terms of all of us being human—entails that we can take action. This plurality idea is an essential aspect of my thinking about human beings' sense of community and about the similarities between people. Out of necessity, I have been moving into the community that Arendt speaks about. A humane necessity that involves treating all people equally.

The garden can be regarded as a private space, which is, according to Arendt, the prerequisite for public life. Here, forces gather together in order to move out into the collective and take action. All people have a need for food, and in all regions of the world we produce this food in gardens and through farming. In the garden, we are connected. We are connected to the soil that we stand upon, and the soil connects us to one another. Arendt divides

up the human being's movement pattern and parcels it out mainly between the private and the public. The private sphere is the home; for me, that place is most especially the garden. It's from the garden that I move on to the next demonstration. Without a safe home, it's not possible for a person to proceed into community life: here, where real individuality comes into being in the meeting with others.

I was born and raised in Denmark. In 2010, when I was seventeen years old, the Danish Parliament resolved to introduce what they called a "ghetto list." In 2018, this was renamed the "parallel society list":

> A parallel society is understood to be a general residential area with at least 1,000 residents, where the percentage of migrants and descendants from non-Western countries is higher than 50 percent, and where at least two of following four criteria must be fulfilled
>
> 1. The percentage of residents aged 18–64 who are not connected to the labour market or to an educational system is higher than 40 percent, calculated as an average over the past 2 years.
>
> 2. The proportion of residents who have been convicted of a violation of the Penal Code, the Weapons Act, or the Act on Euphoriant Substances is more than 3 times as high as the national average, calculated as an average over the past 2 years.
>
> 3. The percentage of residents aged 30–59 who only have a primary school education exceeds 60 percent.
>
> 4. The average gross income for people living in the area, aged 15–64, who are liable to pay taxes (excluding those who are following a programme of education) amounts to less than 55 percent of the average gross income for the same group in the region.[3]

The government-issued publication *Ét Danmark uden parallelsamfund – ingen ghettoer i 2030* (One Denmark without parallel societies—No ghettos in 2030) elucidates the basis for the list and offers an account of what the government views as the ideal for Denmark and, moreover, reports on the sense of alarm about what they regard as being a negative development in the country. It states:

> The government wants a coherent Denmark: a Denmark that builds on democratic values like freedom and the rule of law. Equality and broad-mindedness. Tolerance and equal opportunity. A Denmark where everybody plays an active role.
>
> […] In the past 40 years, Denmark's ethnic composition has changed significantly. In 1980, we were 5.1 million people in Denmark. Today, we are close to 5.8 million. The growth in the population comes from outside. Both immigrants and the descendants of immigrants. The greater part of the new Danes have a non-Western background.
>
> […] There are too many who are not taking an active part. Parallel societies have been emerging among people with non-Western backgrounds. Far too many immigrants and descendants of immigrants have wound up having no connection to the surrounding society. Without any education. Without jobs. And without being able to speak Danish fluently enough.[4]

In this passage, which introduces the supporting argument for the parallel society list, the government is effectively inserting an equal sign between these "arising parallel societies" and an upswing in the incidence of "non-Western" immigration in Denmark. Implying that there is something inherently wrong with the "parallel societies" and coupling this with the increase in immigration. Both factors pose impediments to realising the ideal society that the government dreams of. For this reason, the government is launching measures that could potentially lift the "parallel societies" out from the negative status they have wound up in. The report continues:

> There is only one way. The ghettos have to be done away with, completely. The parallel societies must be dismantled. And we must ensure that new ones will not arise. The very formidable task of integration must be grappled with, once and for all, a task that has to do with a group of immigrants and descendants who have not adopted Danish values and who are isolating themselves in parallel societies. Denmark must continue being Denmark. In the places where we have acquired parallel societies, Denmark must become Denmark again.[5]

If a given area remains on the list for more than four years, then the percentage of general subsidised family housing will be reduced to 40 percent.[6] The housing company in the area will demolish homes and common areas, sell public housing (i.e., rental apartments), and build private apartments. One of the consequences of these measures will be that some 11,000 citizens in Denmark will have been forcibly moved by the year 2030.

> *Many different people will come to Tingbjerg now. What one has wanted with this 'ghetto list' or 'parallel society package' has been to get people here with a better 'habitus' or whatever you can call it. That is what they're trying to do. We hope we can continue this way of almost everybody knowing each other here but with the new people coming, I'm dreading that it will change. The new people have to settle in of course but I'm dreading that people living near me will make their own kind of neighbourhood as I don't know where they are from. Do they come from a neighbourhood where you don't talk with each other? Or a place where there is a community?*
>
> From the film *My Next Door Neighbours*

Furthermore, other measures apply in these areas, such as harsher penalties, compulsory day care, and sanctions against poorly performing primary schools.

My project revolves around Tingbjerg, a suburb of Copenhagen, which was on the "ghetto" then "parallel society" list starting in 2010. Last year, Tingbjerg was removed from the list. Because the law is still in force, though, this area could wind up back on the list, and the citizens, furthermore, still must contend with the accumulated years of stigmatisation of their area and must also come to terms with the construction of new buildings and a concomitant doubling of inhabitants, along with the demolishing of green common spaces: measures that are part and parcel of the parallel society list.

In Tingbjerg, playgrounds and green communal areas are being torn down to make room for new owner-occupied apartments. The repaving and rearranging of these areas will ostensibly influence "Danes" (this term frequently comes into play when speaking about "foreigners" contra "Danes" in the Danish media, and in general) to move into the area. When there is talk of parallel societies, it is implicit that places like Tingbjerg represent the "bad" parallel: there, where it is unsafe to be; there, where people are not doing well; there, where society is not in good shape. I live only two kilometres away from Tingbjerg. When it comes to what adjectives people choose when discussing parallel societies, I can assume that I am living in the "good" parallel, seeing as my area is not evaluated annually on the basis of ethnicity. Is there a right way and a wrong way of living in Denmark?

In Euclidean space, "parallel" lines are specifically defined as two lines that will never meet. In order to set up a parallel situation, it takes two. This poses a contrast to the rhizome, which is a network of multiplicity.

The French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari and the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze write about the rhizome as an entity whose beginning and end are non-existent.[7] It is an entity that differs from the tree, which is merely one single plant; the rhizome, on the other hand, is a multifarious network. The rhizome creates new possibilities right where it happens to be, while simultaneously moving its way towards other areas in order to find new connections. Guattari and Deleuze explain:

> A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is

> the conjunction, "and … and … and …" This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be." Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions.[8]

In the strategy on parallel societies, Denmark is perceived as the tree mentioned in the previous reference: "Denmark must continue being Denmark. In the places where we have acquired parallel societies, Denmark must become Denmark again." That is to say, Denmark is perceived as something essential rather than as something in development or something in the making. Rhizomatic thought explores the idea of laying the groundwork for society on a foundation of heterogeneity rather than on one of homogeneity. Danishness must be allowed to be a heterogeneity, which will arise in the convergence among different "Danishnesses." This way of thinking makes room for other ways of looking at life and other ways of looking at people. We have constructed the concepts, the systems, and the societies, and because it is we who have created them, we can also change them and break them down.

Once, when my mother was a child and on a fieldtrip with her kindergarten, the class passed by the area where her grandmother lived. My mother exclaimed with delight: "My grandmother lives in there, shouldn't we go inside and say hello?," to which the other children replied, "No, no way, we really don't want to go in there." This is a story that my mother refers to as a landmark event in her life. Before that episode, she had not regarded her father's childhood home as anything negative. Even though three people were living in only one room, without any running water, with a kitchen shared with others and a loo out in the backyard. There are differences among people; that is what she learned. Although I first learned about this episode a few years ago, when I was making a film about the last period of my mother's life as a teacher,[9] I have always known about this side of her. Through her upbringing, through her way of treating others, and through her indignation. What I aim for with my films is for them to make their effect in much the same way. For almost forty years, my mother worked with children who experienced difficulties with learning, in a host of different ways. With calmness and a great deal of patience, she was trying

I'm happy to live here because I love Tingbjerg. It wasn't good with war…
I experienced three wars, with Iran, Kuwait and with Daeesh. Now…
it's more calm and quiet. I love Denmark.

From the film *My Next Door Neighbours*

This way of thinking could change the narrative around the person who has been forced to flee and come to a new country in response to a given problem, and could serve to alter the counter-narrative around the person as a resource. Abandoning the idea of narrative/counter-narrative would be a way of following the rhizome—and, in this way, a way of stepping out onto a third path and examining the grey zones that might very well lead to still other ways of looking at how we are together and how we live together. How can we allow the parallels to meet in the appreciation of differences, and how can we let them coexist, alongside one another, and not as parallels?

to bring them into a community. When I first started going to demonstrations, my mother taught me the phrase "El pueblo unido jamás será vencido."[10] My work is influenced by this notion of inclusion, and I am influenced by artists and thinkers who work with and seek new pathways within this field of thought. Like the American artist and sound theorist Brandon LaBelle, who speaks about his experience of finding his "elected family" when he, as a teenager, started his first band. He speaks about these communities as groups that can challenge the social order and create other ways of dealing with matters, together. LaBelle works site-specifically with different groups of people, and especially on developing places to meet and ways of listening, as political action.

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Maia Torp Neergaard, *Looking Through*, 2023. Cheesecloth. Installation view

Maia Torp Neergaard. *From the Conversation (Reading Corner)*, 2023. Various books from her research. Installation view

The German sculptor and graphic artist Käthe Kollwitz lost her youngest son, Peter, in World War I, and she used her practice to speak out against war and poverty. She created sculptures and drawings that speak about the destitution that people were experiencing in her day and at the same time about the sense of fellowship these people managed to build together, working for a different and a more equal and just world.

I am homesick. The weather and culture doesn't suit me. But my children are very happy about living here. One could call me new, I haven't settled in properly. Somali and Danish culture are two very different cultures, it's difficult for me to feel a part of society. Many politicians speak a lot about Muslims, they say bad things and speak negatively about other people's cultures. I don't like that they constantly attack other people's values. I live here, of course, but I'm not content.

From the film *My Next Door Neighbours*

The Lithuanian avant-garde filmmaker, poet, and artist Jonas Mekas fled from war. This attempt to escape the circumstances surrounding him eventually led him and his brother Adolfas, in 1944, to a German concentration camp, from which they eventually managed to escape. Subsequently, they fled to New York, where Mekas settled and became a filmmaker. In his incessant and everlasting filming of what he called "glimpses of paradise," he introduced and developed the diary-film form. His way of making films shows me how complex life is. Along with the joy, the light, and the people, there is also sorrow, hopelessness, and melancholy. These feelings are inside all of us, even if they stem from different individual experiences. This serves to level the field and make us equal.

These different experiences exist, meet, collide, coexist, visibly and invisibly, everywhere. Among other places, on the bus. On the bus, we need to make a number of choices—consciously and unconsciously. Every single one of these choices bears some consequence on some other person. Where will you choose to sit? Choosing to sit next to somebody, even when there are several empty seats, is to choose to court a potential non-specific disquietude. To choose to let go of one's expectations and one's biases and give another person the benefit of the doubt. If you choose to glance at each other, however briefly, to acknowledge one another. Nodding to each other, when it is time to get off the bus again. This might have to do with the acceptance that we are different. To sit down next to a stranger on the bus is to accept that this is okay. Even though you and I are different, we are still equal, and we've still got to get somewhere. Where are you going? I am working to capture the nuances. I believe that we are just as equal as we are dissimilar. In the word "dissimilarity", "similarity" is contained.

It was there on the bus that I came upon the idea for the work *Gennem det vindue arbejder jeg* (Through This Window I Work, 2023). The window that I was sitting next was all steamed up and misty. Instinctively, I wiped away a small area of condensation, using my hand, so I could see out through the glass. Or to look in, as I do into the communities about which I make films, in much the same way that the Vietnamese film director and postcolonial theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha does. In her first film, *Reassemblage* (1982), Minh-ha says, "I do not intend to speak about, just speak nearby" about a group of people in Senegal.[11] Minh-ha places a question mark beside the problem of how it is possible to "speak nearby." As an example, she cites her most recent film, *What about China?* (2022).[12] Even if China shares some cultural similarities with Vietnam, from which Minh-ha hails, this in itself does not qualify her to speak *about* China. Rather, she can examine how the film can position itself in relation to China or how the self is related to the other, through this form of expression —the film. Minh-ha speaks about being interested in working towards new ways of seeing

and being in the world rather than bringing forth new objects into the world. New ways of perceiving the world.

I am in the same boat as Minh-ha, because I am a neighbour to Tingbjerg. But I do not live there. In other words, I will never be able to familiarise myself with what it is like to live in a stigmatised area, an area from which I can be forcibly moved solely because of the country my parents came from. I am using my agency of action, my agency as a concerned Danish citizen, to work around Tingbjerg, and I am thinking about the choices that I make in relation to the cinematic work that I am filming right now, which feels something like swimming in the deep dark sea.

With Minh-ha's words in my mind and also spurred on by Hannah Arendt's explanation that, immanently, our birth constitutes an opportunity to take action, I come to think about the themes that I am working with. The sensitivity of the themes and my own sensitivity paralyse me. I am waiting. I am doubting. I am hesitating.

In Arendt's terms, all three of these verbs amount to a non-action. Nevertheless, for me, they collectively constitute an activity that is essential to the project. It is a protracted slowness and a deliberation that partly make it possible for me to move into difficult topics. My films are typically a window peering into communities where a minority group succeeds in making a home, a world where they can be together, where they can be themselves. They are communally united in their struggle for the right to be. To live somewhere in peace without becoming stigmatised. The right to live.

For *Al-Nisā'* (The women, 2021), I was invited into a community of Syrian women who had gathered together in a workshop centred on female Arabic-speaking role models in Berlin.[13] Since the workshop was held in Arabic, a language that I do not understand, I employed my own attentiveness in a different way when making this film. I looked on and watched how the women worked together, listened to each other, and looked at each other. It turned into a film about an atmosphere among a group of people who were readying themselves to take action. In *Al-Nisā'*, it is the women who are training themselves to move from the private sphere and venture forth into the public sphere, out into the collective, in order to take action.

The Indian literary theorist and author Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes:

> Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as "speaking for," as in politics, and representation as "re-presentation," as in art or philosophy. Since theory is also only "action," the theoretician does not represent (speak for) the oppressed group. Indeed, the subject is not seen as a representative consciousness (one representing reality adequately). These two senses of representation—within state formation and the law, on the one hand, and in subject-predication, on the other—are related but irreducibly discontinuous. To cover over the discontinuity with an analogy that is presented as a proof reflects again a paradoxical subject-privileging. Because "the person who speaks and acts … is always a multiplicity," no "theorizing intellectual … [or] party or … union" can represent "those who act and struggle." Are those who act and *struggle* mute, as opposed to those who act and *speak*?[14]

The apartment buildings are formed as an L, two L's forming one rectangle with a playground in the middle. Parents have always been able to see their children out playing. But now a building has been built in the middle of this rectangle, now you can look directly into someone's home—that is not exactly what one wishes for.

From the film *My Next Door Neighbours*

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Maia Torp Neergaard, *My Next Door Neighbours*, 2023. 16 mm b/w, hand developed and edited, digitized, 18:07 min. Installation view

In my project centred on Tingbjerg, I meet Danes describe how they do not feel at home in Denmark, although they have lived in this country for more than twenty years. Their explanation is that the Danish media image projects a stigmatised image of both Tingbjerg and Muslims, in which they simply cannot recognise themselves. They speak about a discourse where, when a few people commit crimes in Tingbjerg, blame is cast upon the whole area and upon religion. These people are, in Spivak's words, "those who act and struggle," and by perpetuating that way of speaking about people, Spivak's questions about silence come true. If Danish society continues with this manner of stigmatisation, we are going to destroy the possibility for a group of people to act and, to put it in the terms of Arendt's thinking, we will destroy their ability to take part in society as citizens.

The implications of this stigmatisation can be seen especially clearly in how minority citizens are represented in the Danish news media. The 2022 report *Dem vi (stadig) taler om* (Those who we are (still) talking about) shows that even though 14 percent of Denmark's population is made up of immigrants and descendants of immigrants, they are represented in only 3.5 percent of news stories; this marks a decline from what was revealed in the previous survey, where minority citizens made up 12.3 percent of population and were represented in 4 percent of news stories.[15] Furthermore, the Danish lawyer Niels-Erik Hansen states:

> From 1980 to 2019, the percentage of citizens who are situated outside of democratic influence has risen from 2 percent to 9.6 percent. Almost one out of ten citizens cannot vote in general elections and cannot come to influence, by this means, the course of development in the country they are living in.[16]

Regarding the government's initiative to hand out double sentences for crimes committed by people living in the areas on the parallel society list, the Danish law scholar and political activist Eva Smith says:

> This is completely wrong. Introducing these rules is very dangerous. Ethnic minorities can only perceive it as something only applicable to them. If we want to integrate them into society, especially those who are born here, it is no good making a lot of rules that push them away from us. Where we say: "You don't count as much as we do."[17]

Last November, as a result of the implementation of the parallel society list, the Eastern High Court in Denmark decided that the European Union's Court of Justice has to rule on "whether categorising residential areas on the basis of the residents' 'non-Western' origins constitutes illegal discrimination."[18]

In January 2023, Tingbjerg School was mentioned in the Danish news media, when a survey brought to light that the number of young people pursuing either a high school education or a technical or vocational course after completing the final year of primary education at the school rose from 62.8 percent in 2016–17 to 97 percent in 2020–21. Which means that this school lies well above the national average of 85.9 percent. The school's principal, Marco Damgaard, stated:

> We were thinking about the youngsters in much more dire terms than what actually proved to be the case. There is no excuse for this. The survey provided us with a fervent platform to make changes in how we view the situation and caused us to declare: We have got to prove that we can, and that we will, and that we certainly do have some talented children and youngsters. This became our shared mission.[19]

I am thinking again about how we speak about each other. About what consequence it has when we have a sense of confidence in people, and when we give ourselves time to talk *with* them about what their circumstances are instead of talking *about* them.

I work with analogue film in order to be closer to the material. It is bodily and intuitive and requires a great deal of confidence in myself for it to succeed. It requires time. Nothing about it is automatic. From putting the film roll inside the camera, to exposing the film, to developing it, to drying it, to cutting it by hand. It is liberating. I like getting to know a given material. Getting to know a process, and bringing it to a conclusion. It is in the contrast between turning up the radiator when I am at home,

I think we've come a little too close to each other. It's different if you know each other but it's still important to have one's own private space when you are home. So I feel this is a bit problematic, I think a lot less sunlight will enter our apartments if we close the curtains.
I also think that this will keep us closing the curtains, it will look like we are moreseparated. Strangers will come and live here now. But we'll see, what will happen …

From the film *My Next Door Neighbours*

in the city, and collecting firewood, chopping it up, putting it in the wood-burning stove, and lighting it up when I am in the countryside. The wood-burning stove generates a slow heat, albeit a heat that warms me all the way to my core. It's got something to do with the "long run": it is more searching and thorough. The analogue Bolex camera, which is the camera that most often film with, is heavy. Everything is manual. The viewfinder is small. Filming with this camera demands something of me. Nothing comes naturally. But, then again, everything comes naturally. It is, for me, a holistic type of work, like working with the soil. The work that I am giving to the earth comes back. The filmstrip was manufactured by a few people, in some place; it was made just so that, when I let light into the camera and, depending on how I have adjusted and pointed the camera, I can capture images out in the world. Going into the darkroom with the just exposed roll of film constitutes a grateful gesture. Things can easily go wrong. But if I concentrate, often singing while doing so, and if I mix up the chemicals correctly, I can get a very large gift in return: images of the world that I move around in and that absorb me. By looking at the pictures a certain amount of time after seeing them through the camera, I discover new things that I did not know I was fascinated by or that I was wondering about. Maybe this comes from being together with the people whom I am examining and in whom I am interested. I enjoy being together with them, and when they emerge, right there on the filmstrip, it is as if I am together with them again. Something like receiving a letter. With my work, I am writing back to them. The time that it takes to write to the recipient is time spent with that person. It is a slower time, a time without disturbances, a time with thoughtfulness.

For the purpose of touching upon the concerns that Aqsa, one of the voices we hear in my film, expressed to me when I spoke with her in Tingbjerg, I installed curtains in my graduation exhibition. Aqsa told me that, now, she and her family can see directly into their new neighbours' homes, due to the fact that more and more apartments are being erected and the buildings are being built closer together. As a result, the residents want to draw their curtains, in an attempt to shield their private lives. This also means there will be less light coming into the people's apartments. Areas where more and more people shut their curtains foster a higher degree of insecurity. This means, then, that the parallel society list is intervening in that which Arendt refers to as the "private": physically, in the sense that buildings are being built closer and closer together and subsequently diminishing people's ability to enjoy their private life; and psychologically, in the feeling of stigmatisation associated with being an inhabitant of Tingbjerg or some other area that is listed, or once was listed, on the parallel society list.

I am asking about whether, and to what extent, we can live in a society where one part of the population is treated differently than the others.

Via the United Kingdom's *Macpherson Report*, from 1999, the British Australian feminist writer and independent scholar Sara Ahmed speaks about a definition of institutional racism:[20]

> To quote from the report, institutional racism amounts to "the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people."[21]

One of the central quotations that I carry around with me was spoken by Ibrahim El-Hassan, a political science student,

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Maia Torp Neergaard, *My Next Door Neighbours*, 2023. 16 mm b/w, hand developed and edited, digitized, 18:07 min. Installation view

Maia Torp Neergaard, *Through This Window I Work*, 2023. Buttermilk on glass. Detail

actor, and activist who grew up in the Vollsmose quarter of Odense, on Funen. Vollsmose is an urban enclave that continues to be included on the parallel society list. El-Hassan says:

> I find that it's very difficult for me to bear the thought that regardless of what large public housing area I choose to reside in, that I, potentially speaking, can turn the areas into parallel societies, solely on the basis of my ethnicity … and then it really doesn't matter whether or not I have successfully completed a course of education from the university, whether or not I am paying the highest tax rate, or whatever else there might be of mitigating factors. No, it is only my ethnicity that can determine that.[22]

Structural racism is invisible to the citizen who does not open their eyes to what it is. I am working to make the invisible visible. If everybody were equal, I would not need to be writing this text.

Swedish poet, novelist, and scholar Mara Lee writes:

> With this example I want to show
> how the body is crucial in the production
> of meaning. That bodies create meaning.
> That our bodies not only are difference
> but make a difference. Also in writing.
> If the reader dares
> to acknowledge
> this difference they will also be rewarded
> with a richer reading experience
> even if
> it is less
> pleasant.[23]

Lee offers us the chance to choose, if we dare. It is not easy to do this, but as Ahmed writes:

> We can see the path as a trace of past journeys. The path is made out of footprints—traces of feet that "tread" and that in "treading" create a line on the ground. When people stop treading the path may disappear. And when we see the line of the path before us, we tend to walk upon it, as a path "clears" the way. So we walk on the path as it is before us, but it is only before us as an effect of being walked upon. … Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created.[24]

So, then, there is an opportunity for other stories, if we diligently try to tread paths that have not been treaded before.

I am writing for a different future. For my nieces. For my friends' children. For everybody's children. According to Arendt, the birth of a new human being is tantamount to a beginning and offers an opportunity for action. The children in my vicinity live inside of socio-economically advantaged and almost exclusively white homes. Homes that make it easier for them—than for many others—to be able to get on in the world, to be able to feel safe. I am writing for them, because I do not believe that they will truly be able to live a full and healthy life if this way of speaking about other people—about their neighbours—continues.

I contend that all people are equal.

I have got to voice this claim, because I am living in a country where this is not the case. I must assert this, because I believe that this kind of differential treatment has a deleterious effect on everybody who lives in Denmark, as well as on the future children who will grow up here. I maintain that a sustainable life presupposes a view of humanity where we make room for each other. Where we accept that we do not need to be the same in order to be able to live together.

Maybe a multitudinous world is possible. One that is possible to change jointly with others. Believing in another path is what the character Mahdokht does in the novel *Women without Men*, by the Iranian writer Shahrnush Parsipur. After having lived in an oppressive society for her whole life, Mahdokht chooses a different path:

> She could plant herself in the ground.
>
> "I'm not a seed, I am a tree. I must plant myself." … Mahdokht decided to stay in the garden and plant herself in the beginning of winter. … Perhaps she would turn into a tree. She wanted to grow on the riverbank with leaves greener than the slime, and fight the battle of shades of green in the pool. If she became a tree, she would sprout new leaves.[25]

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7 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

8 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateau*, 27.

9 Maia Torp Neergaard, *Vi, der læser* [We who read], 2021, two-channel installation, digital colour video, 11:00.

10 "The people united, will never be defeated." This was the "battle-cry anthem" accompanying Salvador Allende's presidential campaign in Chile in 1970, subsequently sung in political demonstrations all over the world.

11 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Reassemblage*, 1982, 16mm DVD, colour, 40:00.

12 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *What about China?*, 2022, video DVD, colour, 2:15:00. See Trinh T. Minh-ha, interview by Shivani Radhakrishnan, *Bomb*, 18 June 2022, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/trinh-t-minh-ha/.

13 Maia Torp Neergaard, *Al-Nisa'* [The women], 2021, 16 mm, black and white, 17:00.

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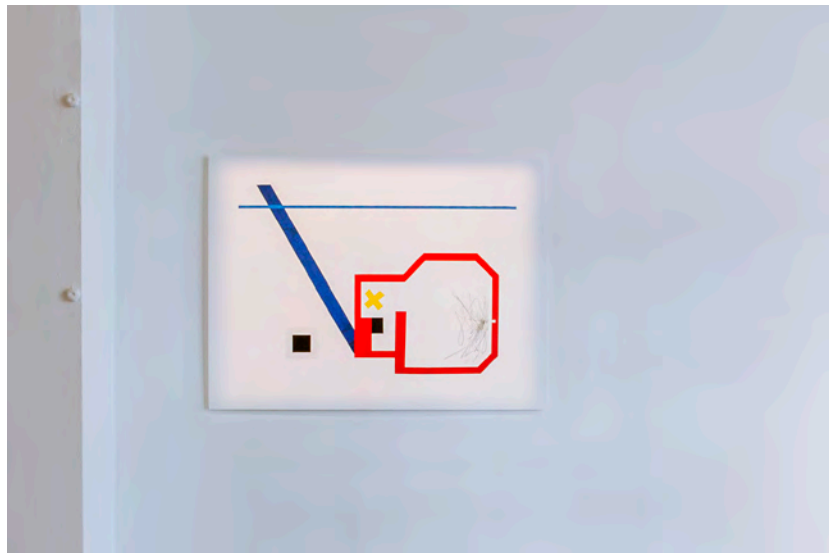
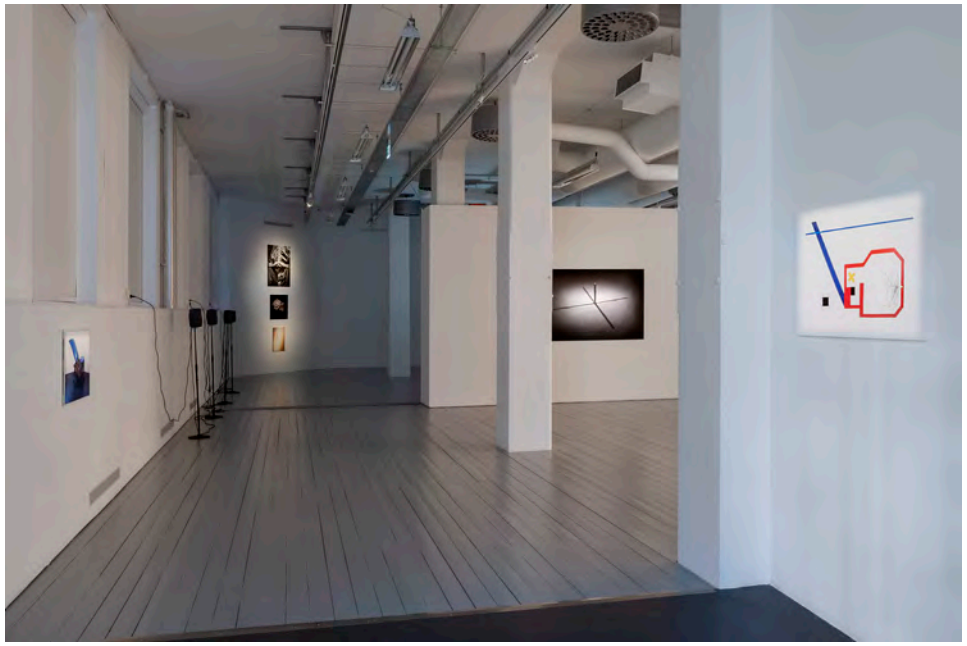


Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Top: Beatriz Neto, *Plato's Cave Model*, 2023. Graphite on inkjet print on Epson Enhanced Matte Photo Paper 260g, 60 × 80 cm
Bottom: Beatriz Neto, *Third Eye*, 2023. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

THIRD EYE: on the dusty paths[1]

Beatriz Neto

I grew up in Lisbon, in an apartment block between the Church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Fátima and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Museum. I have since realised this geographic location profoundly affected my perspective on art. Between mandatory Sunday mass because of my Catholic upbringing and sporadic monthly trips to the contemporary art exhibitions at Gulbenkian, I began to perceive the transcendental component of art. At twelve, I turned my back on the catechesis and its answers to the fascinating questions about death, eternity, and heaven. However, when visiting Gulbenkian, I found refreshing and boundless explorations of these subjects, not coloured by the same tradition, moral codes, and interpretations of historical facts I was used to. This awakened in me a deep interest in art, history, and philosophy through which I could build my own lens to look at the world and leave behind the one given to me through my religious upbringing.

My body of work thus far has been defined, marked, and shaped by the geographical places I have been. In my artistic practice, I attach each project to a site or a group of related areas in space as well as a time frame, exploring the different physical and spiritual aspects of these places and, most importantly, their cultural, ideological, political, and philosophical reverberations.

My first artwork started at home, in an empty, "haunted" underground car garage—*Tabula Rasa* (2019).[2] Then I explored the gap in the Portuguese-Spanish border zone related to the town of Olivença—*38.8415045024,-7.077379329 / 38.4295985372,-7.30221314393* (2019).[3] Later, I crossed the border and flew to the Balkan country of Montenegro and explored my fascination with a mountainous monument—*Before It All* (2020).[4] Finally, I moved to Malmö to further my artistic studies in 2021.

In the last year of my bachelor's degree, I went to Cetinje, the former royal capital of Montenegro, on an exchange program. This experience had a more profound impact on my personal and artistic life than I imagined it would. It was the first time I was in Southeastern Europe, particularly in a country outside the European Union and what we commonly call "the West." The Eastern Orthodox Church has played a prominent role in its history and culture. During my six-month stay, I visited the Monastery of Saint Peter of Cetinje, among other religious places, full of orthodox icons, still holding fast to traditions that date back to the early days of Christianity. Although it was a sombre and introspective experience, I was intrigued by these feelings. And ever since my time in Montenegro, I have developed a deep fascination for Eastern Orthodox iconography and its powerful visual aesthetic identity, mystical presence, and social and cultural importance. Considered to be "windows into heaven," the icons are believed to convey the presence of the divine through their imagery. They are also often given as gifts or inherited within families and displayed in homes and churches as a sign of faith and devotion.

Upon returning home, incessant news regarding the rich and powerful embarking on the touristification and colonisation of space made me realise how space exploration seems to be presented today as a way to redeem humanity and open the way to salvation and eternal life. A way to elevate us to a new dimension, as if Mars was a modern-day, real-life "promised land." The billionaires that finance these endeavours are portrayed as messiahs leading humanity towards enlightenment and evolution.

This realisation gave rise to my master's exhibition, *Third Eye*. It is a journey through the effects of space exploration, which reflects on the mind and spirit of astronauts, cosmonauts, and others. I examine the spiritual potential of the quest for the unfathomable in space-time, inspired by visual and oral reports of those that have embarked on this search, while applying the filter of conceptual constructs of suprematist inspiration.

I rely on photographic language to map and document structures, spaces, and artefacts related to space exploration that, when rearranged and exhibited under a "new order," allow me to question the "natural order of things" as we know it, to question what we really seek in the depths of outer space and what each person projects onto the infinite potential of the void.

Third Eye comes from a desire to escape and a crisis of faith.

Einstein's Chair

It is a small, simple image, part of a purely documentary, objective, and descriptive matrix. It is an old observation chair known as "Einstein's Chair," located in the Old Observatory of Leiden University in the Netherlands. Dating from the nineteenth century, it was the eponymous physicist's usual seat when he visited his friend, mathematician and astronomer Willem de Sitter, to discuss the consequences of the general theory of relativity for the universe. Although Albert Einstein was not an astronomer, nor did he professionally observe the skies, he was still interested in the observatory's instruments and what could be studied through them. He first visited Leiden in 1911 at the invitation of some students. He became particularly fond of the city, calling it "that delightful piece of land on this barren planet."[5] In 1916, he sought refuge there when fleeing Berlin during the First World War.

Photographing this old observation chair was quick and thoughtless; I was not allowed that much time to capture it. However, looking at it now, with its blue leather seat adjusted by a dark wooden wheel, this chair very clearly references the act of contemplation of the heavens through its reclining resting pose. Moreover, it manifests many of the ideas I am interested in, which are developed through this project. Therefore, it made sense to introduce *Einstein's Chair*[6] as the first work in my exhibition.

Starship

"Service to Earth orbit, Moon, Mars and beyond"[7] is how American aerospace company SpaceX, created by Elon Musk, introduces Starship on its webpage. SpaceX's Starship—which includes the Starship spacecraft and Super Heavy rocket—is designed to transport humans and cargo to various destinations, including, most famously, Mars. The Starship is being developed as part of SpaceX's long-term goal of colonising the red planet, and the company has stated that it plans to send the first humans to Mars as early as 2024. "Starship will be the world's most powerful launch vehicle ever developed, capable of carrying up to 150 metric tonnes fully reusable and 250 metric tonnes expendable."[8]

Starship takes centre stage in my photo diptych *Extraordinary Machine*. The Starship images are two of a small number in black and white, and while the rest mostly thrive on colour and light, these two thrive on shadow. An elementary yet dramatic image, the 1:375 scale Starship model creates a cross-shaped shadow. Additionally, as I contemplate my work, I see a clock, a lighthouse, a cathedral, a temple, or a knife in its shadows. The second half of the diptych is a negative of the original image, which turns the image into a ghost-like, haunted version of the spacecraft. The images are characterised by a unique cinematic quality. They have an introspective and ambivalent appearance. They seem to be suspended in time, in a virtual and mental space. They are profoundly dialectical images because they oscillate between their values as representations and meta-representations. They exist between the task of reproducing something specific in a descriptive way and that of representing its projective and speculative potential, the possibility of recreating appearances and activating the generative power of images.

The colonisation of Mars is sold to us by companies such as SpaceX as if Mars was the next promised land. As if space and heaven were congeners, a spiritual realm of peace and justice that is promised to those who believe, promised by divine or spiritual authority. But for whom? How much will salvation cost? The idea of salvation often comes with a heavy religious connotation, and the crosses in the images certainly reflect that. It is as if Starship belonged to a mystical realm with a messianic purpose, to redeem humanity and open the way to salvation and eternal life.

Coming from Portugal, a colonising country until 1974, I recognise a similar mentality when we discuss the conquest of the heavens and the possibility of colonisation. The Portuguese colonial war started in 1961, the beginning of a decade that saw a sequence of events and efforts related to space exploration—including Yuri Gagarin's first space flight, also in 1961, and Apollo 11's 1969 Moon landing.

This series of events radically changed our understanding of the universe. Symptomatically or not, it was during this time, and more specifically in 1967, that Michel Foucault presented his essay "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," in which he stated, "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, in the epoch of near and far, of the side by side, of the dispersed."[9] What fascinates me in this essay, especially when paralleled with my diptych *Extraordinary Machine*,[10] is its end, in the sixth principle of heterotopias. A heterotopia refers to a physical space that possesses complex layers of significance or connections to other locations beyond what is immediately apparent. This term generally implies that such spaces are either an embodiment or an approximation of a utopia or a parallel realm, like a penitentiary, that holds unwanted bodies to enable the creation of an actual utopian environment. In its last principle, Foucault states that the function of a heterotopia has two opposite poles: the heterotopia of illusion, which creates an illusional space that exposes every real space, and the heterotopia of compensation. Particularly, I am more interested in the heterotopia of compensation—which is related to colonisation—to "create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled."[11] While Foucault was referring to terrestrial colonisation, as spacecraft technology is progressing and the possibility of interplanetary colonisation becomes plausible, the parallel seems justified. The "level of perfection" in the colonies that Foucault mentions as monitored and regulated at every turn leads me to question whether this is an unavoidable reality in a space environment.

In the last paragraph, Foucault concludes with a short play on the idea of a boat that serves as a "heterotopia par excellence,"[12] exploring the necessity of these emplacements in modern societies that, despite their apparent pleasures, allow no freedom for movement or imagination. At this point, though, I question whether the heterotopian ship—Starship—will enable us to flee the prison of modernity or whether it will merely serve to render it more difficult to see. Therefore, the dual nature of *Extraordinary Machine* is revealed as an ironic title, and I am left wondering about real salvation.

International Space Station

Continuously occupied since 2 November 2000, the International Space Station (ISS) is extraordinarily significant for developing technology and science. The data collected on board has helped advance everything from climate change studies to dark-matter research. It also serves as evidence for human adaptation to an entirely new environment. The ISS is the largest artificial object in the solar system and the largest satellite in low Earth orbit, regularly visible to the naked eye from Earth's surface. It circles the planet in roughly ninety minutes, completing fifteen and a half orbits per day. The ISS project has involved five space agencies, twenty-five nations, countless private contractors, and at least 240 visitors from nineteen countries (among them scientists, military officers, and even a few tourists). It is arguably the most complex and expensive building project ever undertaken by humans.

Originally planned to be decommissioned after fifteen years, the space station is long past its original due date. Despite mounting safety concerns, NASA has decided to extend the lifespan of the space station until 2030. In January 2022, NASA administrator Bill Nelson stated, "The International Space Station is a beacon of peaceful international scientific collaboration and for more than 20 years has returned enormous scientific, educational, and technological developments to benefit humanity. I'm pleased that the Biden-Harris Administration has committed to continuing station operations through 2030."[13] Although the space station has served humanity well, it seems it cannot continue forever.

Its lifetime is coming to an end. The realisation of the finitude of this massive project, born only seven months before I was, led me to reflect on the orbital station as a symbol for a utopian idea of what space could be and its future endeavours. *Birdland (ISS)*[14] is a work that I saw as a stripped-down version of the complexity of this object in space-time. Isolated, it is a minimal and abstract construction of the overall structure of the ISS in vertical and horizontal red lines on a deep blue background.

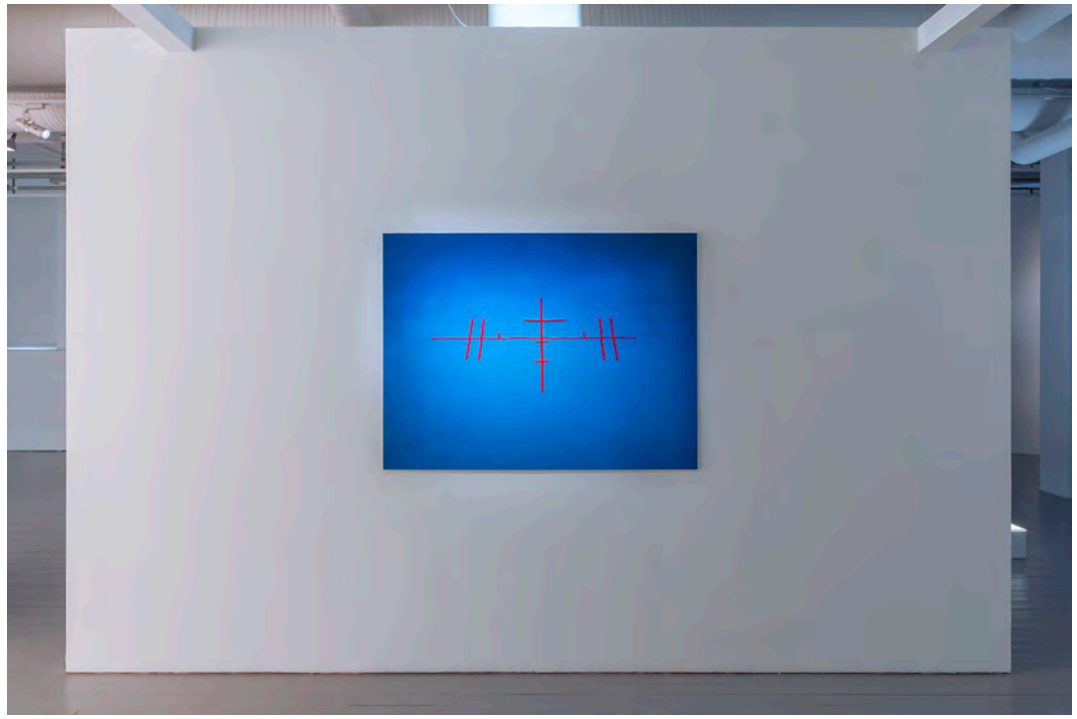


Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Beatriz Neto, *Birdland (ISS)*, 2023. Inkjet print on Epson Enhanced Matte Photo Paper 260g, 110 × 146 cm. Installation view

As I conceptualised the work, I collected an extensive catalogue of data and imagery. Thousands of images of spacecraft, test centres, space simulators, training centres, and rocket launches orbited in my mind. When looking at photographs of Edgar Martins's 2014 project, *The Rehearsal of Space and the Poetic Impossibility to Manage the Infinite*,[15] all this information that I acquired melded with his images into geometrical, colourful paintings, reminiscent of Kazimir Malevich's suprematist paintings.

Out of this revelation, I developed a new language in my practice, which is very much present in *Birdland (ISS)*. Orthogonal red lines are created with coloured duct tape. This small detail can be spotted throughout some of Martins's images, as floor and wall markings for the positioning of technological equipment, just like in a theatre stage for an actor or dancer's position. Duct tape is commonly used in situations that require strong and flexible sticky tape. Thus, it has also been used in spaceflight for various purposes, such as securing loose objects and repairing equipment. In fact, it has been referred to as the "handyman's secret weapon" in space, and according to NASA engineer Jerry Woodfill, it has been carried on board every mission since the early Gemini program (1961–66).[16]

Interviewer: And duct tape works in the vacuum of space as well as it does here?
Walker: Oh, yes. Yes, it does. It sticks.
—Charles D. Walker, describing duct tape's use on STS-51-D[17]

Regarding the slow death of the ISS, astronauts have used duct tape to fix a torn solar panel, for example, and to attach a GoPro camera to the outside of the station. However, it is typically used only temporarily until a more permanent solution can be implemented. While maintenance and upgrades to these systems happen all the time, the degradation of the station's structure will limit its time in orbit.

I began to create some abstract drawings with the tape associated with space exploration and all its simulating equipment, marking the white square cyclorama background with this material and then photographing all of it—just like I did with *Birdland (ISS)*. Photography has been the base of my creative thinking since I started my artistic education. One of the aspects of this medium that interests me is that it plays a decisive role in our perception of time, allowing us to capture, document, and manipulate its passage in a unique and meaningful way. And, in this case, so too does the use of duct tape in my work. As a temporary marker or fix, with the tape outline drawing of ISS, I have created the illusion of timelessness as a photograph, like I am trying to extend its lifespan. *Birdland (ISS)* and other images I am developing are characterised by absolute simplicity. They obey a rigorous and calculated formal architecture. I intend for the viewer's perception to be guided by the orthogonal framings that form the flat geometry I envisioned. It is significant, silent, and pictorial. It gives off a feeling of emptiness. The static aerial shot of the orbital station references a combination of some of Malevich's *Suprematist Compositions: Airplane in Flight* (1915), *Supremus no. 56* (1916), and *Mystic Suprematism (Red Cross on Black Circle)* (1920–22). I experience Malevich's works as a cosmic stage where I see the square canvas disassembled into rectangles or trapeziums, becoming a constellation of shapes that remain suspended in a single plane. *Airplane in Flight*, as its title indicates, is not abstract, but refers to the "mythology of flight" in early twentieth-century Russian art—a mythology that coincided with the actual advent of powered flight. In Malevich's work, vision in flight marks a vital step forward in the suprematist consciousness and explains how objects are emancipated from their weight. After that, "the intersidereal dust of the non-objective fourth dimension combines with the concept of spatial relativity in a pure notion of infinity."[18]

Here lies part of my fascination with Malevich and suprematism—the bird's eye perspective—*Supremus no. 56* seems to be a sort of aerial view, possibly of a town plan, as the artist was interested in aerial photography. Armed with this knowledge, I might even be encouraged to interpret this image as a landscape, pictured from the "heavens above," as it were. Moreover, *The Environment ("Reality"), which stimulates the Suprematist* photos, published in 1927, in *The Non-Objective World* manifesto, give an idea of what Malevich was possibly attempting to convey in *Supremus no. 56*. Also, as he exclaims to other suprematist artists, "Follow me, comrade aviators."[19]

On the other hand, Malevich's cross paintings also fascinate me. Although my *Birdland (ISS)* composition is reminiscent of ISS structure, its form is full of orthogonal lines, which are indeed crosses. Starting in 1915, the cruciform motif became one of the basic components, along with the square and the circle, of the new suprematist art Malevich envisioned. The Russian Orthodox cross in this work is emblematic of the moment in which suprematism's spiritual aspects became formally tied to religious painting. In Malevich's complex symbolic system, a red cross on top of a black circle raises the metaphysical question of the disconnection of bodily experience from spiritual aspiration.

Birdland (ISS) was the first reference to the cross element in my developing MFA exhibition. Overall, the ethereal and mystical atmosphere I see in the photograph is carried by the impossibility of its aerial view under terrestrial circumstances, with its slight inclination that gives an idea of ascendance. Perhaps it is the station's "last breath," which will culminate in its plunging into the Pacific Ocean—Point Nemo—by 2031. It is likewise carried by its religious cross motif, which is enhanced by the subtle presence of an external (flash)light at the centre of the photograph over its ocean-blue background. There is no narrative, no before and after. In *Birdland (ISS)*, the International Space Station is eternal.

Zvezda

The third module of the ISS, the Russian service module Zvezda was assembled in 2000, four months before the ISS was inhabited. From its inception, cultural items such as paintings, photographs, flags, and patches have been displayed by the crew on the aft end of Zvezda, the Russian service module of the International Space Station (ISS), which housed the only two permanent crew quarters until 2008. The significance of this location was made clear during Expedition 1, when a religious icon was placed at the centre of the highest point of the aft wall. Many of the objects on display are explicitly religious and pertain

to Russian Orthodox beliefs, which contrasts with the American, European, and Japanese modules where no such religious items have been spotted, apart from festive Christmas decorations. This has made Zvezda particularly intriguing.

With the resurgence of the Orthodox Church in Russian life following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is theorised that the icons and other religious paraphernalia may represent an institutional effort to display a new Russian identity marked by Christianity. At a certain point, a ribbon from Russia's highest military award (Order of Saint George) was also seen among the other imagery, which for Alice Gorman, space archaeologist and heritage consultant, seems to suggest a symbolic link.[20] However, photographs from various expeditions indicate that the religious items have disappeared, have been reorganised, or were largely reduced, suggesting that some crew members may be less religious or non-religious.

At the same time, in addition to the religious items, images of Russian space heroes have been present since early on. These include photos of Yuri Gagarin, the first human in space; Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, the Russian founding father of modern astronautics; and Sergei Korolev, the original director of the Soviet space program. The cosmonauts' placement of these images of historical figures next to the religious items imbues them with spiritual significance despite their secular nature.

The items are frequently displayed in a niche directly over a portal leading to a Soyuz capsule, which is, in a sense, the front door of the ISS. Once again, Alice Gorman suggests that the Russian crew visually lays claim to a significant space heritage by displaying these portraits in such a prominent position.[21] She adds that as Zvezda is frequently used for video conferences with Earth audiences, these images are also placed in a location that makes them visible beyond the ISS. This highlights the fact that while the ISS is "international" in many ways, it is not immune to distinctly national displays.[22]

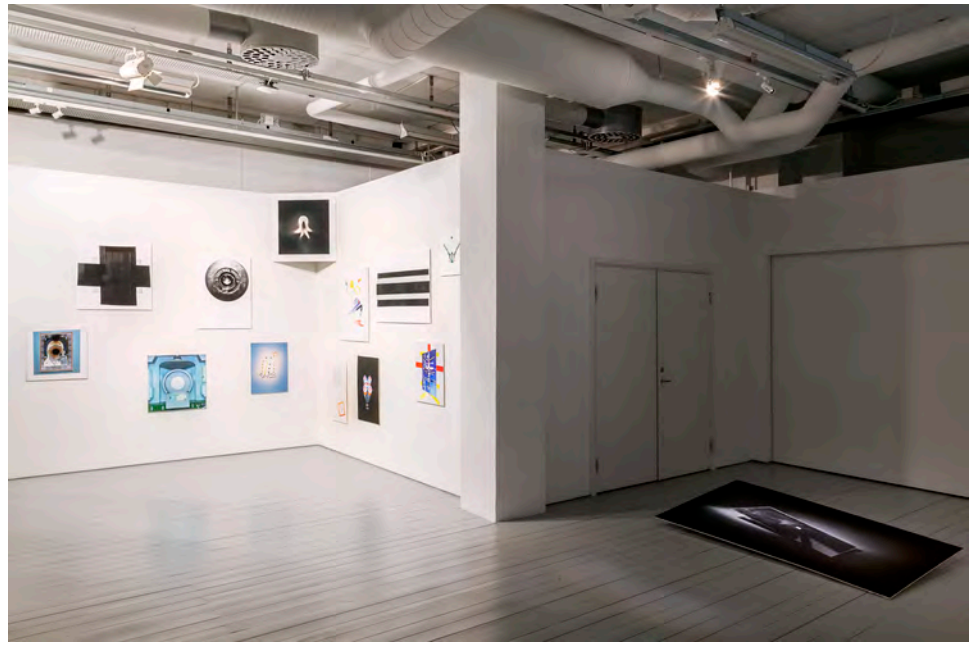
The niche over the Soyuz capsule portal is, in my eyes, an altarpiece. At the ESA's visitor centre, Space Expo, in Noordwijk in the Netherlands, I was confronted with a jarring sight when entering a life-size model of Zvezda. In front of the entrance was a reproduction of the Russian Orthodox icon of Our Lady of Kazan, housed in an aseptic, calculated, cold environment: a territory foreign to the terrestrial one, a reproduction of a home away from home for cosmonauts and astronauts. Before that moment, the idea of encountering a religious icon in a spacecraft had never crossed my mind, given that icons are typically associated with the sanctity of people's homes or places of worship. Moreover, the sight of the ancient-looking artefact amidst a futuristic setting was quite striking to behold. This collection of icons in Zvezda and their placement brought me back to Malevich and the original placement of his iconic *Black Square* painting in *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Painting 0.10* (1915–16) at Nadjeschda Dobychina Gallery in St Petersburg, formally known as Petrograd. The painting was placed in an area of the gallery usually reserved for religious icons. When looking at the only photograph that seems to be available of the show, I interpret the display of the works presented based on *Black Square*'s placement as an icon. Thus, I see this installation of paintings as a sort of altarpiece as well.

Based on these observations, I started to develop an installation work in which these two spaces and timelines collide—*Zvezda Altarpiece (0.10 Memorial)*.[23] In Russian, "Zvezda" means "star," so an alternative title would be "Star Altarpiece," which emphasises the cosmic dimension that is present within the work. I follow a similar display plan to the one seen in the well-known photograph from the *0.10* exhibition in my own show. Some of the icons, photographs, and symbols that appear regularly in ISS expeditions will appear, such as the already mentioned Our Lady of Kazan—which I photographed; once again, a circular external (flash)light enters the work as an element with its own identity, rather than a mere artefact created by the act of photographing. The flashlight invades with an enormous coldness, placing itself on the face of the Virgin.

Most of the images that constitute this installation seemingly reference the geometric forms that Malevich declared as the "contrasting suprematist elements"—the square, the cross, and the circle—in a photographic composition approach. This is also true of other works throughout the exhibition, which are, in some ways, more clearly visible than the others. Some

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Beatriz Neto, *Malevich Casket (side view)*, 2023. Inkjet print on Epson Enhanced Matte Photo Paper 260g, 70 × 100 cm. Detail



Beatriz Neto, *Third Eye*, 2023. Installation view

of the photographs contributing to the *Zvezda Altarpiece* are reinterpretations of Malevich's *Black Cross* from 1915, the black rectangle painting present in the exhibition and infamous Black Square (1915). In my works, I used black duct tape and the same compositional approach, although referring to the geometrical shapes of the cross and rectangle as Malevich's suprematist casket—front view and side view—respectively. Meanwhile, the square turned into a photograph of a Soyuz rocket penetrating the atmosphere, which presented itself with the ethereal quality of an icon, much like an angel figure. The choice of embracing Malevich's deathbed was a way for me to touch on Christian ideas of death and of salvation once again, reinforcing the idea of heaven and outer space as congeners. Thus, placing, in this altarpiece, Malevich on the same level as space heroes like Yuri Gagarin or saints like Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors (typically dressed in crosses), I am offering him a new spiritual elevation, as if suprematism was too its own religion.

However, not all elements of my installation correspond to suprematist ideas. Some are meant to bring the viewer closer to those who have experienced space exploration itself, mainly those who have had something close to a spiritual experience of some kind. One of these critical elements is the transcript of testimonies that astronauts and cosmonauts gave in interviews that I have collected. One of these historical figures, prominently represented aboard Zvezda, next to the holy icons, has reached an almost religious stature of devotion due to his being the first human to enter space—Yuri Gagarin.

"Trembling with excitement, I watched a world so new and unknown to me, trying to see and remember everything. Astonishingly bright cold stars could be seen through the windows. They were still far away —oh, how far away—but in orbit, they seemed closer than the Earth. But the point was not the distance (my distance from the Earth was but a drop in the ocean compared to the light-years separating us from the stars) but the principle. Man had overcome the force of Earth's gravity and gone out into space."[24]

These are some of the numerous elements that constitute the *Zvezda Altarpiece*, twelve out of the original twenty-one—my own suprematist interpretation of the Zvezda niche displays of orthodox religious beliefs in space, using the *0.10* exhibition display strategy. I want to isolate and get closer to the subjects so they can be perceived and appreciated in detail, leading our contemplation to their shapes, colours, texture, surface, and tonality. In this manner, the subject appears compressed in the image, accentuating the viewer's attention on the graphic and plastic qualities of the images, while, at the same time, the proximity gives the image a tactile quality. All this displacement towards variables that are properly visual makes the relationship with the object potentially disconcerting and projective. In addition, our view of these spacecraft, space stations, rockets, and other objects is heavily coloured by images from science itself and the endless references that come from pop culture, cinema, literature, and even art. In this context, I feel that my work as an artist also comes from the ability to mobilise a cross-referential sort of puzzle game potentiated by the images to incite unexpected and illogical connections resulting in a perceptive epiphany on other understandings of reality.

The Return of the Prodigal Son

Depicting the moment of the prodigal son's return to his father as told in the New Testament parable, Rembrandt's 1669 *The Return of the Prodigal Son* was acquired by St Petersburg's Hermitage Museum over 250 years ago and has been haunting the imagination of Russian visual artists for centuries. In his 1972 metaphysical sci-fi film, *Solaris*, Andrei Tarkovsky returns his cosmonaut protagonist, Kris Kelvin, from the "far country" of outer space to the door of his childhood house, where he is embraced by his father in a pose reminiscent of Rembrandt's abovementioned painting. However, we then learn that physiologist Kris remains out in space, light years from Earth, on an island in the ocean of the planet Solaris. Tarkovsky's moving image of the ultimate reunion with both parents and the planet Earth turns out, in fact, to be only a memory, a dream, a simulation.

At the end of the story, when Kris is seemingly back on Earth, and the early scenes of the film appear to be repeating, as if being played in a loop, the central musical theme, "Listen to Bach (The Earth)," starts to fade. An eerie sound then begins to play. While watching the film for the first time, I remember the baffling feeling I experienced during this scene, while the music's intensity increased as the scene progressed. As a viewer, you can tell there is a dissonance between the image and the soundtrack. It is uncomfortable. "Dream" is the name of this electronic musical piece, which helps to unlock the ending's meaning. The moment the son falls on his knees in front of his father, Tarkovsky reveals, by moving the camera away from the characters, that this vision of the return to Earth is just another simulation created by the Solaris Ocean—a projection from Kris's mind. For me, it is a tragic ending. This scene and its soundtrack mark a turning point in the film, eliciting a psychological horror-like quality. The haunted nature of *Solaris*'s ending inspired me. I rewatched the movie many times, and the "Dream" sound piece always spoke to me.

Music and sound have always played an essential role in my creative process. This invisible art form is mainly present in constructing an atmosphere and universe where my works live inside my mind. I usually take inspiration from popular and classical music, sound effects throughout different forms of media, and nature or mechanical sounds. From popular music particularly, I use lyrics or song titles to draw simple concepts for my works; other times, I look at a song's sonority to convey a feeling. Through this process, a sound library starts to take shape, combining my own sound recordings, excerpts, and clippings of songs from famous musical artists or composers, and small sonic details from findings on the internet.

In several of my works, I leverage this sound library to create soundscapes that paint a picture of where the remaining components of the project exist. Sound behaves like a backdrop, a complex scenery that integrates the more visual elements often prominent in my projects, much like a sonic landscape. These soundscapes take inspiration from Romantic paintings, in which the landscape is the focus, presenting stark contrasts, drama, tragedy, or melancholy and usually conveying a sense of spirituality or the sublime. For example, one of the works I displayed in my previous solo exhibition, *Before It All*,[25] was *The Great Day of His Wrath*,[26] a multi-channel audio installation soundscape of a thunderstorm, particularly the microclimate of the city of Cetinje, in Montenegro, inspired by John Martin's 1851 painting of the same name. It wasn't just an audio recording, but a separate construct that endowed meaning to the sculptures that complimented it.

Following the same principle of and enthusiasm for that work, I developed a sound piece named after Rembrandt's previously mentioned painting—*The Return of the Prodigal Son (Master's Voice)*.[27] However, in this case, the reference is not a Romantic painting, but the end scene of *Solaris*, which references the 1669 painting by the baroque master.

The process for creating this piece was similar to the one used for *The Great Day of His Wrath*. In this current work, the speakers are scattered around the exhibition space, so that the sound can be heard in the surrounding area. This sound piece is a thread that interconnects the visual aspects of the exhibition. I used "Dream," by Eduard Artemyev, *Solaris*'s soundtrack composer, as the basis the rest of the work. In addition, there are two other sound references hidden in this soundscape. First, I included sound effects from my favourite childhood video game, the life simulator *Sims 2*. For me, this game was a safe virtual world to escape from reality, paralleling Kris Kelvin's simulated childhood memories on his island in *Solaris*. In another layer, I incorporated a popular Soviet and Russian mass song composed in 1960 by Oscar Feltsman, with lyrics by Vladimir Voinovich, entitled *14 Minutes Until Start*. It is a song about a wanderlust for future human space travel, written to commemorate the Vostok 1 mission that would put the first man in space.

Completing the collage of sounds, besides other smaller sound inserts, I introduced some spoken word elements in Russian. "Off we go!", from Yuri Gagarin's Vostok 1 launch, are the first words the audience would hear, which begins the sound piece's sonic journey. The atmospheric sounds are interspersed with lines from Kris Kelvin and Rita Nurskamov (the first eyewitness of Gagarin's arrival on Earth).

"Granny was making the holes and I was throwing the potatoes. I looked around and saw something orange and beautiful. I didn't know what it was. It was coming towards us. Granny was frightened. She grabbed my hand and we wanted to run back to the house. He said: 'Ladies, stop! I'm one of our guys!' I said 'Granny, stop! He's speaking Russian. He is probably human.' He smiled. And he had such a kind voice. Granny asked, 'Where are you from? How did you get here?' He said, 'I came on a ship.' She said, 'There's no sea near here. What ship?' He replied, 'I came from the sky.'"[28]

I was looking for a way to merge the historic event of Yuri Gagarin's journey with the fictional world of Kris Kelvin in Solaris: the former, who returns to Earth, and the latter, who stays in space. However, I could say I am also paralleling the real and the fictional. *The Return of the Prodigal Son (Master's Voice)* seems to be an anachronic combination of sounds, it is guided by its title, from a story with a timeless message of hope and redemption, which I believe goes beyond the limits of its Christian roots; it is very human in its nature, focusing on the idea of returning to where you belong, confronting reality, and stepping out of the simulation.

"Not knowing is what makes us immortal. Do I have the right to miss the chance—even if imaginary—to come into contact with the ocean to which my race is striving to throw a thread of understanding? Shall I stay here? Among the things and objects we both touched and which I still remember, our breathing, but for what purpose? The only thing left for me is to wait. Wait for what? I don't know. New miracles?"[29]

The Overview Effect

Coined by Frank White, author, space philosopher, and consultant, the term "Overview Effect" has gained notoriety for explaining a very human condition attached to the space travel experience when viewing the Earth from afar. White's seminal book, *The Overview Effect: Space Exploration* and Human Evolution, found its way into the hands, minds, and consciousness of readers in 1987.

"The Overview Effect is a shift in worldview reported by astronauts and cosmonauts during spaceflight, often while viewing the Earth from orbit, in transit between the Earth and the Moon, or from the lunar surface. It refers to the experience of seeing firsthand the reality that the Earth is in space, a tiny, fragile ball of life, 'hanging in the void,' shielded and nourished by a paper-thin atmosphere. The experience often transforms astronauts' perspective on the planet and humanity's place in the universe. Some common aspects of it are a feeling of awe, a profound understanding of the interconnection of all life, and a renewed sense of responsibility for taking care of the environment."[30]

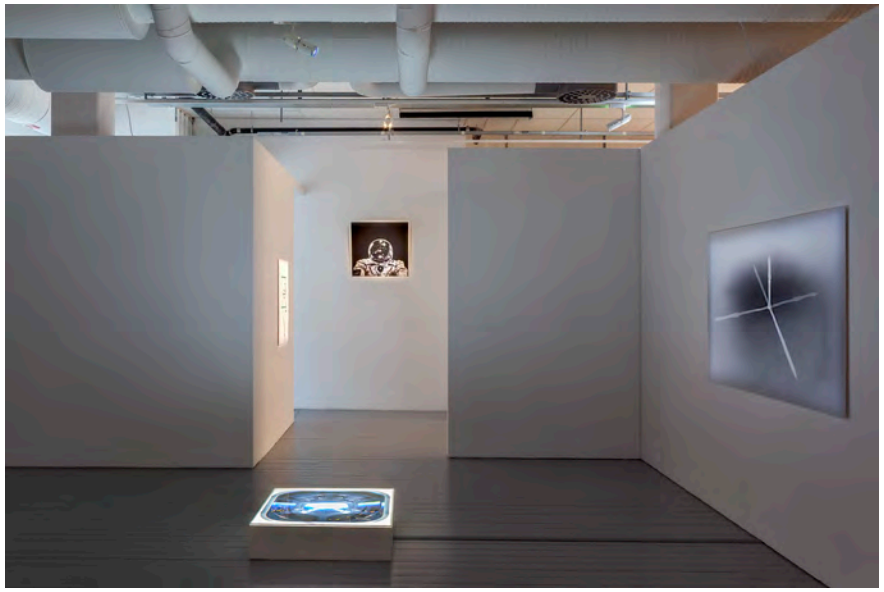


Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Beatriz Neto, *Third Eye*, 2023. Installation view

I have no way of explaining the Overview Effect in my own words, as I have never experienced it myself. I have read astronauts' and cosmonauts' statements on their own overview experiences, and I have seen photographs and videos of the Earth shot by them. However, I am looking at a reproduction of reality, not reality itself. I might marvel at these images, but I am not reacting to reality or the big picture, just photographs. The closest that most people, including myself, get to experiencing a mild version of the phenomenon is by looking out the window of an airplane mid-flight, if we are lucky enough to have a clear and cloudless view.

"It doesn't matter if you look out the window one time or multiple times in terms of how impressive it is. It hits you just as strongly."
—Space Shuttle and ISS astronaut Nicole Stott[31]

In the aftermath of the lunar landings, both the Soviet Union and the United States began to build space stations. This brought a new dimension into the experience of the Overview Effect: time.[32] With the long-duration ISS flights, astronauts and cosmonauts have more time than ever to look at the Earth and the surrounding universe, even if they are still working a full schedule. Moreover, since 2010, with the assembling of the Cupola module by NASA and ESA, there has been an optimal spot for so-called "Earthgazing," offering a 360-degree view, far better than anything available in the past.[33]

My work *Third Eye*[34] is a small square light box representative of a simplified model of the view from inside the Cupola. The image of its simulated view is the Earth at night—both the northern lights and the electric-light grid of cities are visible—signs of human activity on Earth and a pure phenomenon of nature.

At the station, the only windows opening to outer space are in the Cupola—six side windows and a direct nadir-viewing window. I wanted to reference the position of the astronauts relative to Earth, the top-to-bottom perspective from which they look at it. The observation module is thus shown at ground level. Its placement is significant because, as a viewer, when looking at this work, you embody the astronaut's point of view inside the orbital station, even though you are not in a weightless environment. On the other hand, with this approach, my intent was to transform the exhibition space—conceptually, it opens up possibilities in our imagination for what may lie beneath or beyond this image; as the work/image of the Cupola and the ideas it generates in the viewer extend the exhibition space beyond what I can possibly see, it works much like a trapdoor or, more aptly, a portal in space-time that could potentially unravel the unfathomable. These paradoxes between the real and the virtual, visible and invisible, play a decisive role in a body of work in which representations of spaces and objects act as starting points. They are like openings that allow for all sorts of interactions. There are many images behind this one image that can invoke different concepts, perceptions, and affections—it functions as a screen image in this way.

Visually, this is what I associate with the Overview Effect, which I see as an enlightened experience that only a few are lucky enough to have. Hence this impact on astronauts' and cosmonauts' worldviews, because it provides perception beyond ordinary human sight from within the boundaries of Earth. It is a simple but essential realisation: mental processes and views of life cannot be separated from a physical location. Our "worldview" as a conceptual framework depends quite literally on our view of the world from a physical place in the universe. When our place in the universe changes, so does our worldview.[35] Therefore, the Cupola is the observatory of the orbital station, where a mix of wonder, fear, and a sense of the ungraspable or the transcendent can be felt. In my work, as I see it, the Cupola is a (third) eye-opener. Found in many spiritual belief systems, the concept of the third eye refers to the gate that leads to the inner realms and spaces of higher consciousness, often symbolising a state of enlightenment—hence the title of my exhibition and this work, *Third Eye*.

On the other hand, reflecting on the overview phenomenon, I realised that in classical Western philosophical terms, it is like the ultimate cave allegory experience from Plato's *Republic, Book VII*. From this point of view, leaving the planet Earth is similar to leaving a cave where someone has lived all their life, seeing only shadows of reality. As the astronaut goes out, "the light of the sun"—as in the orbital aerial view of Earth in the vacuum of space—would "hurt the eyes," and to escape, the astronaut would turn away

from the view, as some have reported having done, because of how overwhelmingly impactful it is. Slowly, the eyes adjust and are able to see the forms of reality itself, experiencing a shift in worldview, much like the cave prisoner. Regardless of coming back to the cave, to Earth itself, to share their experience, no one can understand what they went through.

Continuing with the new language I developed previously with *Birdland (ISS)* and as a nod to this analogy between the Overview Effect and the cave allegory, I use red, blue, yellow, white, and black duct tape to create a minimal and linear model version of Plato's cave on a white background, finalised in the form of a photograph. As a reference, I used João Maria Gusmão and Pedro Paiva's patinated bronze sculpture *Plato's cave model*, from 2018 (when their collaboration ended), for my own *Plato's Cave Model*[36] work. I witnessed the referenced sculpture at Gusmão and Paiva's 2021 anthological exhibition *Torçolho*,[37] at Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art in Porto, where it evidenced how they often parallel the camera obscura with the allegory of the cave when it comes to the fabrication of (distorted) images of reality.

In an interview with Eugene Cernan about his overview experience, Frank White adds that one of the things his research has shown is that the problem is not that the astronauts are not articulate about their experiences, but rather that we have no context for hearing what the astronaut is saying.[38] To this, Cernan later replied that he travelled around that same world after the Apollo 17 flight to share his experiences with others, and "the native folks in West Africa, for example, seemingly out of touch, were enthralled and wanted to know what it looked like, what it felt like when you looked back. They somehow wanted to be there through us. People can relate to feelings but not very well to technology. And through us, they vicariously experienced what they might have seen or been moved to believe."[39]

Mystic Suprematism (reinvented)

A powerful presentation of Malevich's art at its most intricate and iconoclastic, *Mystic Suprematism (Black Cross on Red Oval)* was painted in 1920–22, immediately after the Russian Revolution. In the five years after the publication of his suprematist manifesto in 1915, Malevich had refined his philosophies. He had also perfected his artistic expression, removing many of the more painterly colours and shapes that dominated his earlier suprematist compositions. Malevich's paintings of this era were uncompromising in their disregard for religious, cultural, and political precedents. This shift is best illustrated by the *Black Cross on Red Oval* painting, a bold and simple composition that evokes a sense of spiritual transcendence, featuring, as the title suggests, a black cruciform and a red oval painted against a backdrop of a white abyss.

The strong presence of this black cross has always impacted my understanding and interpretation of the suprematism movement. These are not delicate thin lines, but potent and visually heavy. The uncanny feeling I get from this painting led me to incorporate it into my final work in the exhibition—*Mystic Suprematism (reinvented)*.[40] A triptych of three photographs, forming a vertical line in a descending scale, the work presents three visually distinct yet complementary subjects and aesthetics.

Firstly, the largest and uppermost element is a black-and-white photograph, entitled *Knight [Apollo 13]*,[41] of the in-flight coverall garment chamber suit of Fred Haise, the Lunar Module Pilot on the aborted Apollo 13 lunar mission in 1970. The particularity of this photograph is the design of the seam in the waistline section of the suit, which, from the way I captured it, forms a cross of salvation similar to the cross in *Extraordinary Machine*. The detail can be considered as a way to provide a plastic appearance to the object but also as the possibility of composing an image of a flat surface, a closed image without depth or horizon. Furthermore, borrowing from both the basic suprematists' formal elements and religious iconography, visually and conceptually, together with the highly contrasted theatrical lighting setting, gives the image a dramatic mystical and spiritual aura. Moreover, its heaviness is accentuated due to the nature of the lunar mission this suit refers to.

The Apollo 13 mission was intended to be the third manned mission to land on the Moon, but on the third day of the mission, a catastrophic explosion in one of the spacecraft's oxygen tanks forced the mission to be aborted. The crew lost most of their supplies, thus forcing them to abandon their plans to land on the Moon and focus instead on survival. As the square carbon dioxide filters from the command module had failed, they had to be modified to fit round receptacles in the lunar module, which was then used as a "lifeboat" after the explosion. The unscripted solution was to use duct tape and other items on board Apollo 13, improvising a device dubbed "the mailbox," guided by their mission controllers. The lunar module's carbon dioxide scrubbers started working again, saving the lives of the three astronauts on board. As NASA engineer Jerry Woodfill said, the astronauts had to figure out how to prevent leaking and concluded with: "Of course … the solution to every conceivable knotty problem has got to be duct tape! And so it was."[42]

This story and its resolution make the work in my MFA exhibition come full circle. As a run-of-the-mill type of material but full of creative possibilities, duct tape is a democratic, common, and recognizable material. It is able to fix things, but not permanently. Inspired by suprematism and the tape's universal nature, I developed in my artistic practice an abstract pictorial language fuelled by my existential, spiritual, and humanistic interrogations on space exploration. The *Knight (Apollo 13)* photograph and its cross are a reminder of human fragility in space-time, of our small place "hanging in the void."

The middle square photograph, *Untitled*,[43] of my *Mystic Suprematism (reinvented)* triptych is of a real piece of an iron meteorite floating on an empty black background. I witnessed this piece of meteorite at Noordwijk's Space Expo. It belongs to Campo del Cielo—a grouping of iron meteorites found about 1000 km northwest of Buenos Aires, between the provinces of Santiago del Estero and Chaco in Argentina. The estimated age of its craters on the land ranges from four to five thousand years.

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Beatriz Neto, *Mystic Suprematism (reinvented)*, 2023. Inkjet prints on Epson Enhanced Matte Photo Paper 260g, various dimensions. Installation view

Although the first documented mention of the meteorites was in 1576, the Indigenous people residing in the region were already familiar with their existence. Campo del Cielo has provided researchers with a wealth of information about the early solar system, as the age of the meteorites, estimated to be 4.5 billion years old, makes them valuable in understanding the development and evolution of the solar system and the formation of the planets. This image is a marker—a time marker of another time marker. The photograph is the result of current observation for my MFA project, made possible through contemporary photographic technology and materialised this year, of an object from a past so distant that it exceeds our human comprehension and harkens back to the very beginnings of our planet's existence. It is this extension of the known timeline beyond our ordinary temporal limitations that makes me think about our current observational position in space and time, as well as history.

The bottom photograph, *Mystic Suprematism (reinvented)*,[44] which baptises the triptych, is the one that references Malevich's *Black Cross on Red Oval* painting. Utilising once again black duct tape, I recreated the same black cross, but inverted, over a white background; the painted red oval is replaced with a strong and warm oval flashlight over the cross.

The choice of inverting the cross is a reference to Saint Peter, the Apostle, as he was crucified upside down. This belief is based on early Christian writings, which describe Peter's crucifixion as a form of martyrdom. Ever since, the inverted cross has also become a symbol of the keeper of the gates of heaven. Furthermore, the reappearance of this external light acts on the photographed subject as pathfinder reinforcing the power of light—as it is used as a symbol of spiritual energy and enlightenment. In reinventing *Mystic Suprematism* as a photograph, it made sense to apply the language of photography in a contemporary way. As in this image, the cross and the mandorla-shaped light are one with time.

Lastly, in terms of the triptych composition arrangement, the three photos that compose *Mystic Suprematism (reinvented)* are placed as if they were on a return trip back to the bounds of Earth. The descending scale is a contrasting perspective to the one *Einstein's Chair* suggests at the start of my exhibition.

References (beyond *Third Eye*)

Sun Tunnels (1976) is perhaps one of Nancy Holt's best-known works and one of the most defining moments in land art. Located in the Great Basin Desert in Utah, it consists of four large concrete pipes arranged in a cross shape, positioned precisely to frame the sun as it rises and sets during the summer and winter solstices. Small holes are configured in the concrete to cast projections of constellations along the tunnel interiors. Around the same time, Robert Morris created his Observatory (1971/77) in the Dutch province of Flevoland. Along with Robert Smithson's 1971 *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* in Emmen, it is one of two works of art created for *Sonsbeek Buiten de Perken* that are still intact. *Observatory* is at once a clock, a calendar, and a temple, strongly inspired by astronomical observatories of the Neolithic Age, such as Stonehenge. It explores similar ideas on cyclic time, and through its stone and metal "visors," one can likewise witness the shortest and longest days of the year.

The conceptual relevance of locations and the reference to ancient forms of perceiving and marking time present in these works has always had a great impact on my practice, as conceptually, I borrow heavily from these artists. As previously mentioned, my work relates to specific sites and grows from a particular point in time and space. Besides internet research, reading books, and looking through archives, I investigate in part through exploring and wandering through different places. I collect material or document in the form of video, photographs, and sound, very much like conceptual and land artists do. What's more, as part of my creative and research process, sometimes I visit these same earthworks or the ancient structures that inspire them, which is a very comforting spiritual experience. In fact, I recently visited Robert Morris's *Observatory* in the Netherlands as part of my research for *Third Eye,* which felt like a pilgrimage due to the nature of the project.

I have a particular fondness for Richard Long's walks and his *A Line Made by Walking* (1967). A walk is an abstraction, an idea. It's a special kind of journey through time and space, as you take it to stretch your mind as well as your legs. The photograph of his 1967 line is an image that contains a lived experience; it became the archetype for his future works, which vary from

photographic record to map—due to scale—or simple text works. His walks are, above all, a human mark on Earth, an affirmation of his human scale and senses. It is this particular quality that fascinates me in his oeuvre, how he related to land, space, and time, which he claimed to be the fourth dimension in his work.[45] In America, due to political and environmental factors, landscapes were created and altered on monumental scales, with the movement of large volumes of earth and materials, leaving traces of human activity; in England, on the other hand, Richard Long left his mark simply by walking, leaving an ephemeral trace. He preferred the idea of using land without owning it. Regardless of American influences, Long had a more conceptual approach, aware that the concept was fundamental but never ignoring the physical component. To me, that is possibly land art at its best, and it inspired me to reflect on and map my location in the world, on the locus of the border between the domination of land and its continuation, raising the question of how much we control space and how much it controls us.

The lonely nature of Richard Long's walks through the landscape brings a unique interconnectedness, "the moment of the experience."[46] It brings a feeling of sublimity, which Long himself affirms; he was interested in experiencing beautiful and powerful places such as Kilimanjaro and using them in his work.[47] And it is this concept of the sublime that leads me to its presence in Romanticism.

While it is rare to see Romanticism mixed with conceptual art in art historical writing, conceptualism has been long misunderstood as a necessarily dry affair.[48] Even Sol LeWitt famously stated in his 1968 *Sentences on Conceptual Art* that "conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach."[49] And although my works mostly follow a simple and conceptual aesthetic, borrowing from the legacy of previously mentioned artists and movements, I am also interested in some ideas present in Romanticism, which contribute to its most enduring legacies.

The idea of the sublime as an experience of shock and awe and as a destabilising force, as Edmund Burke described, which inspired numerous Romantic painters, captivates me as well. This experience has inspired several of my works, including *A Recreation of the Miracle of the Sun by a Sinner*,[50] and, most recently, *Third Eye*. It is also something I have consciously experienced myself while in Montenegro. I am not interested in its ordinary relation to the concept of beauty, but in the physiological effects of sublimity that Edmund Burke explored in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.[51] In this "sensation of the infinite"—when we are confronted with something that is vast, overwhelming, or seemingly boundless—we experience a sense of awe and wonder that can be both exhilarating and terrifying. This feeling of the infinite can be overwhelming and can produce a physical response, such as a rapid heartbeat or a feeling of breathlessness. When we are confronted with something that is terrifying, we may experience a sense of physical trembling or shaking. Burke suggests that this trembling is a response to the body's attempt to maintain its equilibrium and composure in the face of overwhelming stimuli.

The act of contemplation and experiencing this phenomenon, or at least something related to it, is important to my creative process. Feeling small and insignificant in the face of a mountain, a monument, an artwork, or outer space in such a way that it forces me to adjust my perspective concerning the world around me is not something I run away from. This is something I look for in my projects when I conceptually deal with subjects on a monumental scale. For that very reason, it is what psychologically attracts me to certain themes that I consider relevant in contemporary times, such as the Overview Effect in *Third Eye*. In this way, I seek to explore the intellectual, physical, metaphysical, aesthetic, spiritual, and philosophical potential of works through the sublime.

On the other hand, the assertion of nationalism as one of Romanticism's key ideas and most lasting legacies also interests me. It became a central theme in Romantic art and political thought. From the beginning, nationalism was an essential vehicle of Romantic expression, meaning, and purpose; this is evident in the movement's focus on developing national languages, folklore, and the initiatives to redraw Europe's map and that called for self-determination. In the nineteenth century, nationalism was seen as one of the most critical functions for medieval references. It played a central role in spreading these ideas in Europe, which then took a darker turn with the political and social

changes that took place during the first half of the twentieth century. In the aftermath of World War I, many new nation-states were formed due to the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. These new states were often based on ethnic and linguistic divisions, and they were created to promote national self-determination. The war's devastation left people disillusioned with their current political systems, which led to an emphasised nationalism in fascist regimes.

My fascination with the origins of nationalism stems from its relationship to understanding the roots of a culture and a place and where people trace them on the map, as well as all the stories and myths that come with that. This is something that I explored in my 2019 work about the Portuguese border, *38.8415045024,-7.077379329 / 38.4295985372,-7.30221314393*.[52] The idea that Portugal has the longest and most well-defined border in the world is, in fact, not entirely accurate. Since the nineteenth century, there has been a gap in the border because of a territorial dispute over Olivença; its border is not visible on military maps and ninety-seven border markers are missing from the border nearest to Olivença. Conceptually, in my practice, the presence of Romanticism works as a way for me to make temporal connections between decades, years, and different periods. Therefore, the period of the Romantic movement is essential to me. Because I am interested in the origin of many modern historical and political events, I am eager to explore back to the Romantics. It seems as if the nostalgia for a bucolic past is something I sometimes hide in my works.

The Gothic Revival in architecture, which was spurred by the Romantics, is significant to my conceptual framework in terms of temporality. These medieval revivalist ideas remind me once again of the circularity of time, which looks almost like empirical evidence of the concept of eternal recurrence. This concept is explored in a video work *Untitled (N'en finit plus)*, from 2011, by the artist João Onofre. In it, a young teenage girl sings Petula Clark's song "La nuit n'en finit plus" a capella in a huge hole that appears to be in a garden. Edited in a loop, the video repeats an impossible circular movement of the camera around the character, who sings Clark's song about insomnia and the infinite night. The young singer seems to be in an immense grave, and the youthful nature of Clark's ballad about insomnia becomes a gothic melody.

Mostly known for his conceptual video work and its performative aspects, Onofre's work emphasises duration, circularity, and repetition. These are a central part of his work, along with the idea of finitude, failure, and error being inherent in life and, consequently, in artistic creation. His artworks have been a significant presence in my unconscious creative mind. I attribute my own use of the loop effect in video and sound work (and even us-ing its circularity when conceptualising a whole project or exhibition) to the many ways in which Onofre treats time—that is, with a certain romantic irony, filtered by an analytical distancing of dry conceptualism, but without losing a poetic touch. Onofre's 2009 video work *Untitled (Leveling a spirit-level in free fall feat. Dorit Chrysler's BBGV Dub)* presents itself as a metaphor for the finitude or failure of the human condition. In the video, there is a European champion athlete in freefall: he wears a VHD camera on his chest and does five jumps, during which he attempts to balance a spirit level that measures him. Austrian composer Dorit Chrysler performs the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations" on the theremin for the video's soundtrack. The loop and sound create an atmosphere of perpetual return that seems to point to the eternal search for balance. However, the meaning of the work might actually be the opposite: the constant search for and presentation of our inequalities and imbalances. It is about finding and embodying a permanent presence of imbalance, which is the continual exposure of our human condition. Onofre can extend the current time, transforming it into the perpetual present. He represents the ever-present return of the inequalities that drive us. Balance is our aspiration, and imbalance is our condition.

Moreover, in artworks like his, which come from a strong legacy of '60s and '70s conceptual art, from artists such as Bruce Nauman and Sol LeWitt, the use of pop songs reduces the distance between the viewer and a kind of art that can be difficult to access. When visiting Onofre's anthological exhibition *Once in a Lifetime [Repeat]*,[53] this was something that propelled me to take that same step in my practice, to use music as a tool to get closer to the viewer. Onofre states that it is a vehicle to grab the viewer with, something that is already part of their imaginary museum, and in a way, the viewer also belongs to the work.[54] He continues, "That's the privilege of using pop or stuff from the popular domain. But I understand music as I understand Bruce Nauman. These are things I can work on. It is not so much an appropriation as a use. Kraftwerk, which I quote in *Instrumental Version*, or Nauman, are equal matters. Or Tony Smith [a minimalist artist Onofre mentions in *Box-sized DIE featuring* ...] and a metal band. That's how I understand them, almost like ready-mades that I work on later, in a post-production context."[55] This understanding of the circulation between erudite and popular cultural references allowed me to expand my horizon.

Ângela Ferreira is another artist whose use of music and voice has become recognizable through her *Talk Towers* series, which has strong political connotations, such as *Talk Tower for Ingrid Jonker*, from 2012, and *Talk Tower for Forough Farrokhzad*, from 2020. The project began with Gustav Klutsis's multimedia agitprop kiosks of revolutionary Russia and Vladimir Shukhov's radio tower, built in the early 1920s near Moscow. The towers that broadcast poetry are homages to historical, artistic figures who lived through regimes of oppression, giving back their voices in freedom, with references to their cultural backgrounds.

In her 2019 exhibition at Fidelidade Arte, in Lisbon, Ferreira presented *Dalaba: Sol d'Exil*,[56] a project that spoke to me on a profound artistic level. For me, *Dalaba* encapsulates Ferreira's conceptual depth, activist spirit, and empirical knowledge of the subjects she explores. In her own words, her artistic practice addresses "the state of colonial amnesia and the absence of reflection and compensation on the part of Europe"[57] that intersect with a "reflexive approach to modernism in contemporary art and architecture"[58] from her own life experience. *Dalaba: Sol d'Exil* focuses on the house where singer and activist Miriam Makeba (1932–2008) lived in Guinea, where she was exiled between 1968 and 1983 after being barred from returning to South Africa and the United States of America. Ferreira created sculptural pieces based on the architectural elements of the round building, almost like a prototype of the relationship between modernist and African vernacular architectures, and, above all, a symbolic place of exile and statelessness.[59] Witnessing the house disassembled into its different architectural elements—the balcony, the porch, the roof, the rounded mural centre —and then interconnected through a crane-style steel cable had a big impact on my practice. This conceptual choice on Ferreira's part was a metaphor for Makeba's rootlessness while in exile. This act of deconstruction is also reflected in the process and materialisation of my own projects. I adapted this methodology very clearly in *The Great Day of His Wrath*, for which I dismantled the artwork's main subject—the Mausoleum of Petar II Petrović-Njegoš—into its four structural elements of Roman influence (and its four negative shapes); this was part of my 2020 project, *Before It All*.[60] Since then, I have incorporated this concept deeply into my practice, which means it is now an essential part of my creative process, even if it is not present in its materialisation like in *The Great Day of His Wrath*.

Deconstructing what I am exploring into parts, such as the ISS, in my master's exhibition is a way for me to study and analyse the subjects in even greater depth, because it is how I work conceptually. My investigative mind wants to comprehend how certain theological, ideological, technological, and political systems work and break them down to go deeper into their meanings. Furthermore, the deconstruction adapts to my project methodology, in which a project comprises various works, which accentuates and helps this exact thought process. This is another way that I relate to Ferreira, because her projects are developed in this way, with an investigative and project methodology that shows the way her work is typically displayed. They present a thesis on certain historical events related to colonialism and post-colonial ideas or are tributes to iconic figures who stood up against the oppression of colonialism and fascist regimes, such as Estado Novo in Portugal. I also have a great interest in exploring history in my practice, as I mentioned, but my work does not focus on colonialism like Ferreira's. I admire and greatly appreciate the role that her work plays in this field, but I am more interested in exploring and deconstructing, for example, the themes of the propagandist policies of Salazar's regime in the case of Portuguese history. This is perhaps a little closer to her 2015 work, *A Tendency to Forget*. In it, Ferreira explores the hidden political agenda behind the ethnologist Jorge Dias's investigations and his alliances with the Salazar regime. The work has a human-scale sculpture of the old foreign

ministry, which the viewer is invited to enter and watch within the ethnographic films made by his wife, Margot. As Ferreira states, "It's also a work about how scientific ethics got married to politics."[61]

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At first, *Third Eye* seemed to be an anomaly in my body of work. As I made contact with a world that had long lost hope in itself, I understood my fascination with outer space, and while contemplating the heavens as a mirror, I saw the world reflected back to me. I never expected to dive into the spiritual potential of space exploration and its implications, but it felt necessary and pertinent. This is especially true in the case of the shift in perspective that space travel causes, which felt to me like a reality check for the meaning of our Anthropocene and anthropocentric perspective. As Apollo 11's Michael Collins said, "Ever since Copernicus' theory gained wide acceptance, men have considered it an irrefutable truth; yet I submit that we still cling emotionally to the pre-Copernican, or Ptolemaic notion that the earth is the centre of everything."[62]

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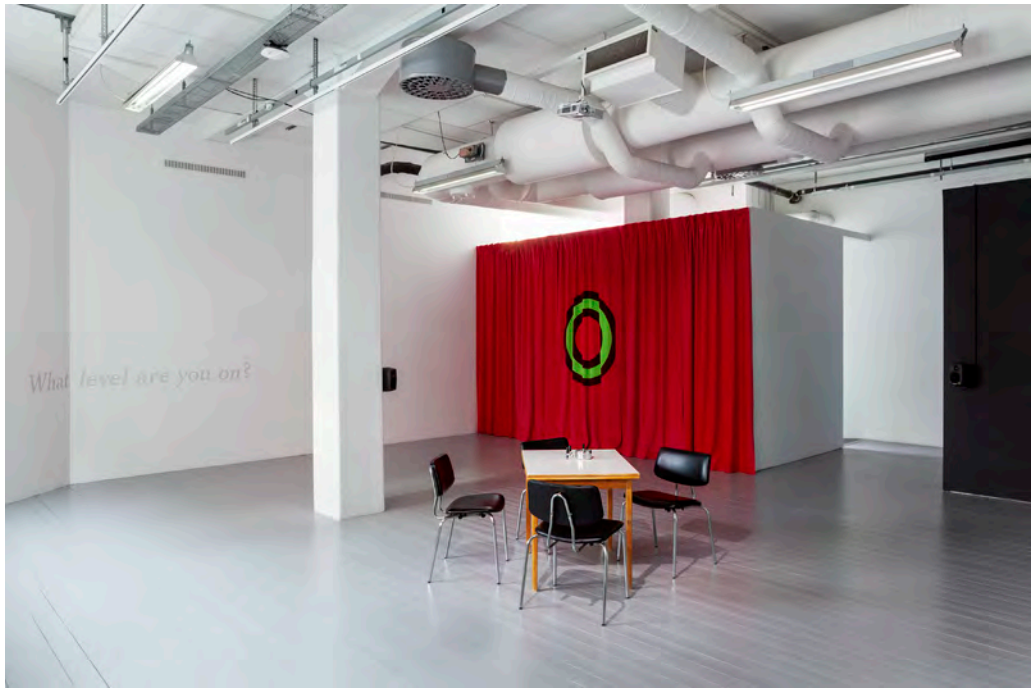

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Stacey de Voe, *overlocked*, 2023. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

S(C)ite Searcher

Stacey de Voe

I grew up with my mother, who worked as a sales adviser in the hosiery department of an already deteriorating, once deemed luxurious or "high-end" department store called Lord & Taylor in New York.[1] She would take me there to window-shop every weekend, always looking but never buying. It made me feel glamorous nevertheless. She knew her way around, having memorised the choreography around each and every display, and she was trained on the ways in which things should be folded in order to entice consumers' palates. I would follow her, a few steps behind, touching everything she laid her hands on—feeling the material, patrolling the quality. At the time, I was very unaware of the fact that she was doing this; in my mind she was performing good consumerism, and I wanted to emulate this exercise. However, as I grew older, I realised that purchasing was in fact the intended end to this carefully calculated department store score. She, like many of her colleagues, worked double. Exhibiting labour both on and off the payroll, and executing it in both the public and domestic domains. Training and quality control did not end at the revolving glass doors. It circulated, with a push into the domestic, into the home. My mother was born into a working-class family and raised a working-class daughter. Art and economy have always been interlaced in the discussion to become an artist and subsequently I believe it has affected the ways I approach my practice as work and as a worker.

My father grew up working in a variety of factories, from aluminium can plants to leather tanneries. Later on in life, he worked with numbers as an accountant. Accountancy was not exactly the most stimulating career path he could embark on, yet the stability of a state-wide, arguably worldwide, system seemed more attractive for him over economic precarity. In one way, I would argue that his work was seasonal. From September through winter and into early spring, office hours occupied the majority of his time. Once a week, he attended a meeting of a network that he was part of, called Business Network International (BNI).[2] Around the same time his engagement with the network started is when my interest in socialism bloomed, after an encounter with a high school global studies tutor. Those who understand the history of the labour movement in the US know that the implementation of labour unions has been and continues to be a contested practice, subject to frequent bouts of union-busting and mass layoffs. BNI is not a labour union,

1 Lord & Taylor, now "rebranded" as Lord + Taylor and available exclusively online, was originally a dry goods store that two British settlers founded in New York City in 1826. From the beginning, it was a colonial endeavour. Lord & Taylor opened its suburban branch in Westchester, New York, in 1948, which would become my mother's workplace. Department stores have a dark history, often experienced through the amenities they claim to offer. Take, for example, the restaurant that was located in this store, called the Bird Cage. It was designed for women with their children: much of the seating arrangements were interlocked, treating even the woman as a child, instilling "the pedagogy of modernity." I never experienced this restaurant, and neither did my mother aside from the occasional store gathering. See Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) and "Lord & Taylor," Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation, 2016, https://www.hbcheritage.ca/history/acquisitions/lord-taylor.

2 The BNI is an international peer-to-peer referral system for small businesses. Its global network is based upon notions of reciprocity and expectations of mutual respect. I am not sure if my father ever benefited economically from his membership, but I do know that the safety of having a network to rely on eased the stresses of operating in the unstable economic system of the post-9/11 nation. See "About BNI," BNI Network, accessed 1 December 2022, https://www.bni.com/about.

but—although my father would never admit to this fact—it is a practice in comradeship.[3] Other activities he insisted in participating in, though he never had capacity for them, was a slew of community board memberships. This realisation of my father's comradeship has only recently surfaced following his passing, after gleaning his personal accounts, papers, and testimonies that my mother inherited from former colleagues.

I met Marianna in a warm month in late 2009. She would, over the years, become my sister, although we share no relation or bloodline, and my comrade as we stand together in the hopes for a better and brighter future. Geographical distance has always kept us apart, but our streams of thought have remained aligned since our first encounter, which was mainly due to the fact that she was without a home or, more accurately, between homes for a few weeks one humid June in Paris. We have done many things together, and without her my existence in the way I experience it today would be completely different.

I call her my friend.[4]

There are very large gaps in the story of my origins. My matriline is a fuzzy memory, or so I've been told: a gang of seamstresses and stone workers who roamed from Albania to Italy to New York City's coastal construction sites. As for the side of the patriarch, the holes are so deep they are comparable to mines. Kinship is not solely defined within the sphere of the nuclear family, yet for many of us it is the first encounter we have with understanding the sticky bearings of relation, history, and legacy, all important pillars against which my artistic practice leans in both straight and skewed terms.[5] In one way, I can say that my practice arrived out of a desire to fill the gaps of my story, or perhaps a search for placeholders. One thing I have realised as I continuously unpick its intricacies and interrupt its audacities is that origins, along with departure and arrival points, are always set in relation.[6] In this text, I argue that my artistic practice and the multitude of forms it inhabits arrive from the use of various methods in regard to relation or a certain relationality through notions of friendship, comradeship, storytelling, and citation.

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Research—one of those semi-contested terms that likes to hover around my practice. I see the fear in the eyes of professors as they enter my studio, confronted with an avalanche of material haphazardly taped to my wall. This material defines me by default. Given that I consider myself curious rather than intelligent led by persistence as opposed to patience, I make it known early on that I am in it for the long run and that glass cases filled with A4 reproductions of archival materials have never been a preferred mode of display for me.[7] My desire to study, to revisit, and to reveal seems to be my driving force, keeping me on the phone and sneezing in dusty archives, sitting in basements and at random tables having coffee. Being on the periphery allows me to see things from perspectives that are not always possible for those who have been surrounded by a culture their entire existence—culture being intrinsically related to context. Approaching research or the act of searching is a privilege as well as a position, one that allows me to make contact, dig, study, and complicate. As an artist in search, you are outside the strict standards of academia. As an artist in search, you are always at a point of departure with no clear arrival. Navigating research with the status of artist has been incredibly helpful in regard to the number of people and places I have been allowed to access. A loophole status. A way to confront proposed-categorised-historical truths

3 "Comrade" is a term my father never would have used to explain his engagement with the community but one that I find utterly impossible to steer away from. In her book *Comrade*, the political theorist Jodi Dean argues for the reappropriation of the friendly greeting "comrade" not only as a term for assigning alliance but also as an active term that, in its distribution, conjures a set of relational expectations among its users. If my father considered this word's usage as an act of reciprocity in which he so often engaged, I believe he would have been up for my projection. See Jodi Dean, *Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging* (London: Verso, 2019).

4 Friend. Friendship is a political act. Thinker Jacques Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship* (1994) focuses on how we arrive at politics through certain intimacies around justice and democracy. And then there is the notorious friendship between political philosopher Hannah Arendt and novelist and political activist Mary McCarthy, which the artist Svetlana Boym fleshes out in a beautiful text she titled "The Scenography of Friendship." Boym refers to their relationship as a diasporic intimacy and one of the founding principles of Arendtian friendships. She writes: "Arendtian friends don't only talk about themselves, but also take as an object of discourse the world, which they humanize and reinvent through language. … With friends, one can take part in multiple dialogues and share solitude." Svetlana Boym, "Scenography of Friendship," *Cabinet*, Winter 2009/10, 92, https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/36/boym.php.

5 Many queer and feminist thinkers have grounded their existences and thinking patterns through strong aversions to the nuclear family. Alexandra Kollontai—who, for the record, never considered herself a feminist—was among the first to provoke proletariat women towards the collectivisation of domestic labour and childcare under the umbrella of an ideology. Kinship here manifests as the antithesis to ownership in the hopes of a more equal and just society. This form of kinship, although commendable, is the militant partner to Sara Ahmed's thinking around the figure of the killjoy. The killjoy is a catalyst for kinship, as the killjoy seeks out other killjoys. Ahmed writes: "We are creating a support system around the killjoy; we are finding ways to allow her to do what she does, to be who she is." Killjoys find each other, and through finding each other they confront history in its present, past, and future. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 15–16. See also Alexandra Kollontai, *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai* (London: Allison & Busby, 1977).

6 I wish I could have a term as beautiful as the one that the artist Sarah Pierce uses to describe the intricacies of her practice: *the Metropolitan Complex*. Her bios reads: "The Metropolitan Complex … [is] characterised by forms of gathering, both historical examples and those [Pierce] initiates. The processes of research and presentation that she undertakes demonstrate a broad understanding of cultural work and a continual renegotiation of the terms for making art, the potential for dissent, and self-determination" ("Artist Bio," Metropolitan Com-plex, accessed 1 December 2022, https://themetropolitancomplex.com/). I relate to this. A metropolitan—vibrant, chaotic, disruptive, yet at times seamless like a well-running conveyor belt. Vast yet invisible infrastructures holding a multitude of identities and histories all set within some form of present-past-future tense. I arrived through this space. Pierce often refers to the idea of relationality or affinities. Although I have never been able to experience any of Pierce's works first-hand, it is more her line of thinking and consequently doing that I align with. In the summer of 2021, I had the privilege of sharing space with her via Zoom. The day that we Zoomed, I was sitting in a library amid Europe's third largest collection of communist and socialist literature in a miniscule Norwegian town, where the sun touches down in the valley for only half of the year, called Rjukan. I find this important to mention when speaking about relationality, as my being there was dependent on an affinity with certain histories and ideas around archiving, which I will speak more about as this text unravels. Also noteworthy is the space of the library, to which I owe and will continue to acknowledge as one of my primary sites of learning. Much of my childhood was spent in the library. During this several-hour conversation with Pierce set within an educational context, she unpacked her complex practice, touching upon art's power of lying within its ability to avoid retellings.

7 Artist and curator Julie Ault made a statement regarding research in an interview with curators Jan Kaila and Henk Slager that I find immensely helpful in thinking about the longevity of an object of study. For Ault, research "indicates being in a state of unending inquiry. Inquiry and growth are not temporally bounded, which means that formal manifestations of a particular investigation, such as exhibitions, writings, publications, and books, are not end points. For me, research terrain is typically tangled in process as it expands and contracts, goes awry, spirals out of control, distills, opens up again, unravels, and so on" (Julie Ault, "Dishes, Diaries and Cemeteries and selected extracts," in *Trust, a Core Condition : Malmö Art Academy 25 Years*, ed. Maj Hasager, Mats Leiderstam, and Marie Thams (Malmö: Malmö Art Academy, 2020), 139). For Ault, research is an active and never-ending process within which formal occurrences seem to be points scattered along a larger timeline of practice. Research is an active mode of engaging with history. But more impactful is the ways in which Ault thinks about duration and subsequently continuation. Since the spring of 2018, I have organised a public reading group called The Readers. The group meets sporadically and uses public space and historical architecture as its classroom. When I started this group, I was living in a city where many landmarks were facing demolition. To reflect and effectively resist, I started the reading group as a way to actively research these structures—both social and architectural. The group will continue, as sites of memory will always be under threat within various geopolitical landscapes.

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Stacey de Voe, *overlocked*, 2023. Installation view

in the archive to later mould, shape, and form through my work, acting further on my findings. Questioning both the status and value of this found material. This is essentially how the content of my master's exhibition began: while in search, adjusting spotlighting and sneezing in a basement in Landskrona.

I would like to tell you the story of Peter, the archivist in Landskrona to whom I owe my gratitude. Peter sits among empty desks in the basement of the city's Folkets Hus (People's House). People's Houses were historically essential in Sweden, as they distributed art and culture to the working class. Unfortunately, many of the People's Houses, once so submerged in the aspirations of the labour movement and the early foundations of the welfare state, are becoming obsolete, or being repurposed and used by Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (the Workers' Educational Association). I enjoyed my time with Peter. He sat in a basement full of desks once occupied by colleagues and now only by piles of unorganised papers and pending invoices. He was full of stories, and I think he found me just as peculiar as I found him. He gave me my own desk to sit at and search through the folders of pamphlets and other printed matter that I had requested. From time to time, he would interrupt me to show me random memorabilia that was lying around. My favourite was a music box loaded with "L'internationale." As our hours together increased, he started asking me if I would like to accompany him upstairs to the shelves. As we strolled through the empty dance halls, he would tell me stories about how, when he was a teenager, this was the place to be and be seen. "Everyone has been here, even Joe Hill," he said, as he pointed to a small bronze plaque on the wall. When we shared coffee, Peter would quiz me on my Swedish labour history. He had so many anecdotes on all the radical happenings, especially the infamous Amalthea bombing of 1908.[8] An uneasiness spread over me as time went on, and the glamour of the empty desks and dance floors turned into symbols of a bygone era. Peter, a custodian, a keeper of keys, sitting alone simply due to a lack of interest and state funding. It was then that I began to question the myth of the welfare state. Before we said our final farewell, he asked me to bring a memory stick, as he had something he wanted to give me. When I said goodbye, knowing that we would not see each other for some time, I ran dewy-eyed to the bus, thinking about Peter among his ghosts. A few days later, I opened the memory card—to find the film *Arbetets döttrar – kvinnor i två fabriker* (Daughters of labour—Women in two factories).[9] I pressed play and began to watch a group of women tell their stories under fluorescent lighting, set against a soundscape of machines. It was at this moment that the foundation of my master's exhibition emerged, still disguised.

Peter is my comrade.[10]

8 The Amalthea bombing or, in Swedish, Amaltheadådet, resulted when dockworkers in Malmö went on strike, were replaced, and fought back.

9 I was mesmerised by this exquisite film made by Jean Hermanson and Torgny Schunnesson. It elegantly juxtaposes women working at a hosiery factory in Malmö, called Strumpfabrik, and at the Abba herring factory outside Gothenburg. The film makes visible women's labour without exploiting them, and without speaking *for* them rather speaking *beside* them. Hermanson's will to document the hands that made the welfare state and the hands that validated the notion of Swedish quality became his signature. I was unaware of his work prior to seeing the film, and at that point also unaware of his documentary photography. He has a style of documentation that portrays the present. Several scenes in this film are very evocative of a specific time and collective imaginary that is now lost, situated only in the past. One in particular involves a group of women sitting in a break room, laughing and sharing coffee, cake, and cigarettes together. These break rooms—spaces of organising or creating comradery in our eyes—are simply stagings of the past. Hermanson was able to capture this on film, preserving it as a memory to be awakened and provoked, as if to say: *Don't forget about us, don't forget about this. See Arbetets döttrar – kvinnor i två fabriker* (Daughters of labour—Women in two factories), documentary, directed by Jean Hermanson and Torgny Schunnesson (Sweden: Sveriges Television AB TV2, Stiftelsen Svenska Filminstitutet, 1986).

10 Bound, through solidarity, directed towards a better future. Peter and I spoke about methods of protest and how the internet has dismantled the left (among a myriad of other crises) but that protest is always a performative practice in public space. The general elections in Sweden were coming up, and we were both scared of the potential outcome. Expressing our worries strengthened this bond we shared. See Dean, *Comrade*, 2.

A week went by, and I watched the film again, this time paying closer attention to detail. *Do I see anything that looks familiar? A building, a sign, a landscape to which I can associate a place, a specific part of town, a neighbourhood*. Nothing struck me, and I continuously fastened my gaze to the women telling their stories, to the metal forms of "single-sized" legs rotating around the circular conveyors, and to the various songs playing from the radios dispersed along the factory floor, overlocking into one continuous melody.[11] I still didn't have any clues as to where this factory was. A quick Google search led me to its former location on Storgatan 20 in Malmö, and a few more clicks had me cycling to Trelleborgsvägen, without an address. I realised I was on my way to Mobilia, a shopping mall situated on what some would define as the periphery of this small city.

I look to my left, up. My eyes lock with a towering sign that reads "Välkommen till kontorhuset Strumpan" (Welcome to the office complex Strumpan). These are the early days of my research. It's early spring of 2022, when the sun is shining but there is still a nip in the air. The sign gives me very little indication if I have arrived at the right building. What was a vibrant workplace, as portrayed in the film, is now inhabited by an electric goods corporation and the city's adult psychology centre. It carries no traces of its history besides a small printed timeline hiding in the corner of one of the numerous entrances to the building, which at the time was covered in scaffolding. I returned back to my studio, having at least acknowledged a location, a site. That made my search seem more tangible, as if I could hear the rumbling reverberations of the machines despite the building's vague appearance.

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As summer approached, I started visiting the Malmö City Archives on a regular basis. These shelves were less dusty than Peter's. The City Archives are part of the Swedish National Archives and are well taken care of, equipped with a database and staff who meticulously categorise historical material. The City Archives host materials of companies and organisations that have been active in Malmö. I asked if they had any material on Malmö Strumpfabrik and the archivist pointed to an old black PC for public use—"Let's check the database."

To my surprise, an organised digital folder appeared on the screen: "Malmö Strumpfabrik AB, 1926–1985." Upon first glance, the folder seemed complete. It contained everything from employee records to packaging designs and marketing campaigns. A pair of silk stockings was even to be found in the folder marked "Other." I started there. The archive is an extremely tactile space, and I wanted the first thing my hands to touch to be the stocking. A moment where my hands, those of enquiry, met their hands of labour. The archivist came out with a cardboard box on a trolley. Quintessential archive aesthetics. I asked if I needed gloves and received a shrug of confusion. I opened the box as carefully as I remember my mother fixing her displays. I drew back the silk paper, printed with the logo of the brand Nivella, and removed two legs of a dark-brown shade. Holding them up to the light revealed their intricacies. Both legs had a back seam, and to my surprise, the legs had a shape that resembled the actual body part they were attempting to imitate. This moment stood out for a few reasons. There was a leg, a structure, a shape, an architecture— unlike the tubes without a leg being sewn together these days, and which are currently living in my drawers, and unlike the tubes I saw them sewing together in *Arbetets döttrar*. These stockings dated from the 1940s, when the Swedish stocking industry was still reliant on silk. I took a few pictures of them and neatly folded them back into their packaging. I returned the box, hopped on my bike, and returned to the site of the factory.

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I managed to get inside one of the entrance doors. I tried giving myself a tour, but I was mostly able to roam freely only between a few hallways and staircases. They didn't lead me anywhere. I rang the owners of the building, a private company that rents out the former factory as office spaces. I wondered if they could possibly give me a tour around the space. I was an artist doing research around the history of the factory. I received an elongated reply about security and ownership of the rented spaces, which translated to: not a chance. It was a bit of a defeat—my artist in search status hadn't helped me. The person on the phone did, however, provoke my reasoning. He asked me why I wanted access, and if I was planning on doing anything there. He caught me off guard. Why *did* I want to get inside? Did I want to be closer to this site, to its history? I knew that the inside of the building had been gutted just from seeing a small part of its interior. My geographic proximity to the factory made it seem more present, more visible. I wanted people to know about this history, know about this building—and not from an ambiguous sign.[12] I realised later that what became important about this site was its function as a citation. As a structure to reference within the exhibition framework. As a way to acknowledge its standing presence rather than trying to appropriate it into a public work.

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I am back at the City Archives. I am not an academic researcher, and therefore it takes me a little while to make sense of the database. I have visited many different archives throughout my life, and the nuance in abbreviations and punctuations vary and tend to never make sense to me. My strategy is to engage in conversation. The next few weeks are spent here sifting, photographing, and collecting. All acts of doing, and an essential part of being an artist in search. There is an overwhelming amount of material I am attempting to get through.

I try to skip through company protocols and jump right into employee records. I make my own file where I record the names of the women who worked there and who might still be alive. I notice something very early on that I find quite peculiar: the records in the City Archives end in 1985. At this point, I have studied and am aware that the factory closed on 24 January 1992. Where is the rest of the archive? I casually ask one of the archivists sitting at the circular reception desk; she has no idea. I repeatedly ask each and every person I meet working there, and no one has any idea. They ask me if I have spoken with Roger. No—who's Roger?

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Roger Johansson greets me on the ground level of Malmö University. I wrote to him in English, but when he collects me from the ground floor of Malmö University, we begin our conversation in Swedish. I am too shy at that point to interrupt him and ask him to switch. I've been living in Sweden since 2012, and I've mostly picked up my Swedish through various hourly wage jobs and conversations with friends that I have had throughout the years. He is accommodating of my

11 What I thought was common practice within the factory—listening to the radio—I later learned was in fact an earned privilege. I found this out through a series of interviews conducted by Malmö Museum with former workers in 2004 (Inga Persson-Engström and Eva Jönsson, "Textilindustri" [Textile industry], interview by Tony Arnér, 10 November 2004, transcription, 1–56, Malmö Museer). In the beginning, the single radio, placed on each floor, was permitted to be played one hour before lunch and one hour in the evening. Slowly, one radio turned into two, which then turned into three, which was a direct positive effect of the factory having been bought by new owners in the 1970s. The melody bleeding from the machines in *Arbetets döttrar* is none other than ABBA's "Money, Money, Money" from 1976, still transmitting a decade later.

12 This sign made me think about the artist Marge Monko and her work *Punane Koit (Red Dawn)*, which she executed in 2013. The work documents the restoration of the sign on the rooftop of a former hosiery factory in Tallinn. After the factory changed names, the sign was removed, but the metal support structure holding the letters remained. This is a beautiful gesture of memory, acknowledgement, and solidarity. I encountered a series of images of the entrance to Malmö Stumpfabrik: Groups of women walking out from their shifts through a metal gate. Some holding their bags open to show the security guard that they had not stolen anything. A routine check. Stockings are small, and within capitalist production workers are never to be trusted. Above them is an archway, from which hangs a neon sign in Times New Roman that glows *Malmö Strumpfabriken*. I wonder what happened to this sign. Neon is sensitive, but like the structure in *Punane Koit*, perhaps its metal bearings had been archived. I wrote to the city, asked at the City Archives, and went out to the harbour to visit some misplaced memorabilia. The museum that holds some of the Strumpfabrik material convinced me it had been thrown away when the factory closed. I later learned, as I continued to frequent the site, that much of the original architectural features had disappeared from the grounds, including the entrance gates and security house. See Marge Monko, *Punane Koit (Red Dawn)*, 2013, single-channel video, 4:11, available online at https://www.d-est.com/punane-koit-red-dawn/.

grammatical errors. An old worker at Strumpfabrik now turned professor. I tell him about my interest in textile and labour history. He smiles: the two go hand in hand. We discuss his history at Strumpan, as it was called colloquially both by the workers and by Malmö's citizens.[13] A history based on lineage, as the matriarch of his family worked there from its beginnings. I tell him I'm struggling with navigating the archive and that I'm interested in the history of this factory in relation to my master's project. Did the workers have a union? Did they strike? How did the introduction of nylon shift production techniques and organisation in the factory? I had so many questions. He draws me a map and, like Peter, suggests material that he believes might be of interest.

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The trolly arrived yet again. This time, it was full of large-format boxes and what appeared to be an array of newspaper clippings bound into a kind of family photo album format. I opened the first box and was confronted by a circular display disc covered in slender mannequin legs, all the same shape and size. Next, a series of advertisements from the 1970s of typical Swedish women, tall, blonde, and slender, modelling the latest and greatest Nivella stockings made by MalmöStrump, as written in the care labels. Finally, an album of poorly pasted press clippings.

NYLONS ANKOMST TILL SVERIGE![14]

These formats of architecture (the department store, the factory), of material (nylon), and of ideals or projections (women) became the seams of the archive that I would begin to unpick.

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All this information that I had gathered became my source material, a bibliography, and an anchor for further thinking. My master's exhibition would need several modalities of display if I were to convey the complexity—and by default, elasticity—of this material and its effects. In addition, I needed to think through it. Deconstruct it, juxtapose it, and complicate it. What did I want to say with this material, and what was this material saying to me? There were so many levels —which one was I on? I began to think about scenographies as stagings of the present.[15] Stagings as a way of interrupting linear temporalities and as a way of using citations spatially as a performative politics.[16] In staging, scenographies would become the overlockers[17] of the archive. Through this process, counter-narratives could be built and communicated. *Overlocked* became the seam, the title of the show, emulating the possibility of nylon's elastic imaginaries and breaking down the myths of innovation, consumer capitalism, and a one-size welfare future.

The department store : The break room
The worker : The consumer
Efficiency : Democracy
Access : Welfare

Props have to mean something, serve a function, communicate a history while being attached in the present, as opposed to being mere reproductions of the past. Attention to detail is pivotal. The perstorp board[18] in the break room was not just any perstorp board —it was the exact pattern I encountered when I first watched *Arbetets döttrar*. Within the practice of scenographic citation, detail matters, if not for the public who experience the work, then at least for me to be able to formulate my affinities and communicate my search.

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I would like to return to Peter and tell you how I arrived at his particular archive in Landskrona in the first place. In the fall of 2021, I was invited to have a solo show in a miniscule viewing room, run by a publishing house named SantoLaRosa. The year prior, I had been researching and building a deep affinity for the life and work of labour activist Ellisif Wessel and the history of mining in Northern Norway and was seeking both a context and a form for presenting this research—so I gladly accepted.[19] Ellisif was a poet and union activist.[20] She used language to puncture and critique her surroundings. She became my friend. I wanted to be closer to her and decided that an artist book would hold the majority of the content

13 Roger became an invaluable source of information and inspiration. His lived experience and stories about planned occupations in the factory are anecdotes that never made it into the archive. We have met countless times. In November 2022, before having a complete understanding as to how this material would surface in the space of the gallery, I invited him to give a lecture during the exhibition. I knew I would be reorganising the past within the present, fragmenting histories, and speculating affects, and therefore I wanted to present the public with someone who had embodied history. He happily agreed and we decided the Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund in Malmö would be the ideal location for hosting these histories.

14 (NYLON'S ARRIVAL TO SWEDEN). Nylon's conception began in the Delaware-based labs of DuPont in the early 1930s. The craze that met nylon's arrival to the Swedish market prompted my enquiry into the history of this elastic polymer. Nylon was conceived as a direct consequence of geopolitics and the US's adamant desire to cut off Japan's primary export, which at the time was silk. DuPont, originally an explosives manufacturer, sought to rebrand its image and invested in the polymer economy. Thus nylon was born, turning women's legs into erotic weapons. See Christine Hume, "Death, Sex and Nylon," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 49, no. 3 (September 2019): 411–28.When Sweden imported nylon, it was investing in not just the polymer economy but an entire concept that would tear through the mindset and the myth of the People's Home, Folkhemmet.

15 In the early fall of the 2022/23 academic year, I went to Stockholm to see an exhibition of artist Björn Lövin at Moderna Museet. I would be lying if I said I knew of his work beforehand. Marianna was an editor on the catalogue, and after several conversations about my current research, she suggested I make an effort to see the show. Lövin's work manifests in large-scale installations, which he calls "environments." I experienced them as dioramas. Curator Matilda Olof-Ors writes so beautifully in the catalogue about what Lövin's work does: "Lövin both depicts and comments on the surrounding reality through these worlds and weaves together complex social criticism and existential issues. In his ambiguous artistic production, Lövin brings together fiction and contemporary phenomena, revolutionary ideas meet hope-inspiring ones, and the demandingly sincere is mixed with playfulness" (Matilda Olof-Ors, "The Surrounding Reality," in Björn Lövin, *Björn Lövin – Den Omgivande Verkligheten ; Från P till C – Kampen Om Verkligheten* (Björn Lövin—The surrounding reality; From P to C—The struggle for reality) (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2022), 22–23). Although Lövin's work is time situated, the urgency of these environments and fictions to which he speaks are just as relevant now as they were then.

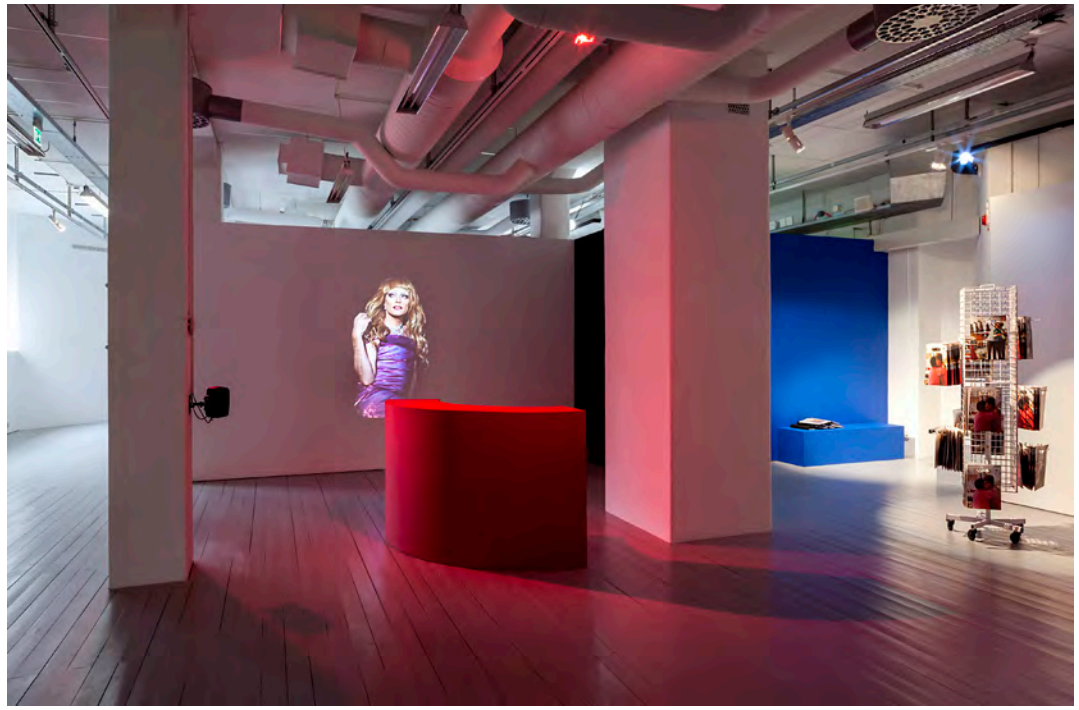
16 When I started thinking about my practice in terms of citation, I was directed to a wonderful article on the practice of citation, situated oddly enough within a geographical discourse. Geographers Carrie Mott and Daniel Cockayne map out the power of citation as a feminist tool of resistance and as a way "to work out how different kinds and types of voices relate to each other." Carrie Mott and Daniel Cockayne, "Citation Matters: Mobilizing the Politics of Citation toward a Practice of 'Conscious Engagement,'" *Gender, Place and Culture* 24, no.7 (2017): 960.

17 "Overlock" is a technical term referring to a specific type of stitching machine invented in the late 1800s, developed specifically to avoid fraying when constructing garments of elastic materials and knitwear. The machine is composed of three needles that lock and loop thread in a circular pattern, creating a knotting effect that produces a clean and finished seam. Overlocking machines were pivotal in increasing the efficacy of knitwear and nylon garment construction. The technique has now become an industry standard, as it conserves both time and money.

18 The perstorp bord or perstorp table is an example of canonical Swedish industrial design influenced by chemicals. Named after the company that made it, the Perstorp-Plattan is composed of craft paper and impregnated with phenol-formaldehyde varnish ("History," Perstorp, accessed 16 April 2023, https://www.perstorp.com/en/about/history). In 1960, the iconic pattern "Virrvarr," designed by Sigvard Bernadotte, was produced. *Virrvarr* means "clutter" or "perplexity"— odd considering this table exudes, in furniture design, the functionality of the welfare state and the concept of Folkhemmet. It was often seen in factories and is now a staple in "Scandinavian design" homes. Considering that this piece of furniture is having a revival, I found it peculiar that the Virrvarr pattern was next to impossible to find. It took me months of perusing the internet to find a seller.

19 As I established earlier in this text, the idea of form plays a funny role in my practice. It's never defined. I can't say I work with this or that, because the research or object of my intrigue and the story I want to tell is essentially what dictates the form it will inhabit. Sometimes it's sound, at others printed matter; in the end, I believe it's almost out of my hands and that the research dictates the form.

20 Ellisif Wessel was active in the early 1900s, so naturally this friendship is confusing to many, considering the simple fact that she is no longer living. This friendship, however, is based not on a conventional notion of intimacy but rather on an everlasting affinity. It's nice to take the time to get to know someone, even when they're not around. See Boym, "Scenography of Friendship," 1–5.



Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Stacey de Voe, *overlocked*, 2023. Installation view

around the exhibition. The book was a format Ellisif frequented. In the middle of this research, I moved to Malmö to begin the master's programme. I suddenly felt disconnected to Ellisif, and her stories alone seemed insufficient, regardless of the friendship that we had been building. I randomly passed by the kalkbrott, the limestone quarry in an affluent area of Malmö, Limhamn, and was suddenly struck by the metaphorical qualities that the mine possessed. The mine—barren, gaping, and vast—has the ability to leave only memories behind. The interesting thing about mines, setting aside, of course, their inherent violence against nature and thus in themselves their *violent nature*, are their tunnels. You simply don't just start digging and find what you're looking for. It's more difficult than that. A series of elongated gestures make up a mine's choreography. Thinking about tunnels and invisible labour led me to the notion of support structures.[21] I became interested in finding out if there were other women like Ellisif, organising within the geography to which I had just returned. I naturally went to Abetarörelsens Arkiv (Arbark) to see what I could find. After speaking with the archivist, I learned about several women's groups that had been organising in Malmö around the same time as Ellisif. When I asked if I could look through what was left of their labour, a peculiar look descended onto the archivist's face. *Well, I would pluck it for you, but it's not here, it's in Landskrona—rumour has it there was a disagreement, so the material followed its custodian, its keeper, to their new workplace, even though it was meant to be in Malmö.*

Sometimes lies are more valuable than the truth.[22] I found two women with the same last name in the archive. Coincidence maybe, but history is fragmented and the archive is contested, so for me this was the key to a relationship that could have been—and perhaps, even more precisely, *should* have been—between four women, three of their time and myself, authoring this support structure. *Untimely Loyalty*, my exhibition at SantoLaRosa, was a staging of history. I constructed a wooden table, in relation to the size of the gallery, that could function as the site for hosting a public programme, along with the publication itself. This table became a desk, a meeting space, and a support structure. Hand-printed letterpress posters, a technique pertinent to the historical time period, decked the walls, insinuating action or, in this case, an office for dissent. Lastly, a hand-painted mural of a sun in traditional falu red occupied the remaining wall. A mural, a backdrop, a citation.

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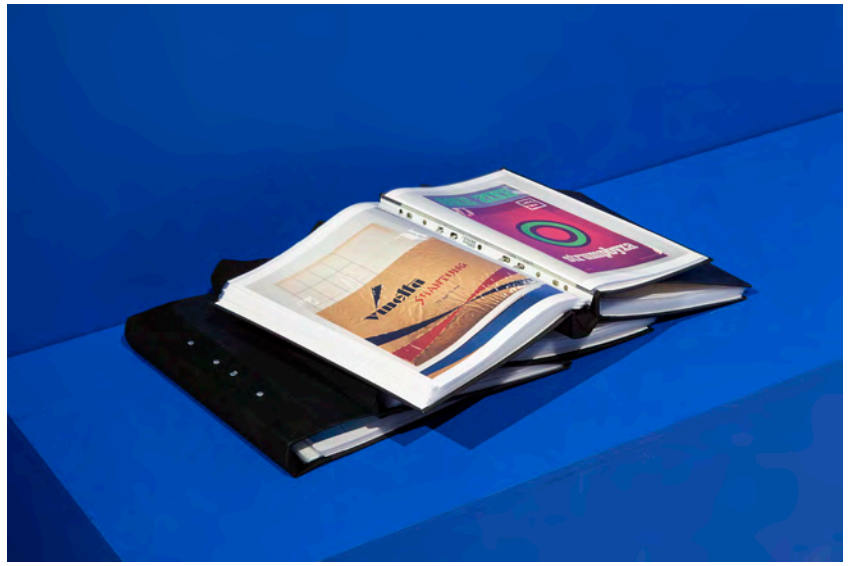
I wanted to tell you stories. Stories of how I arrived at certain materials through friendship and comradeship. I wanted to tell you about how my work is essentially a visual bibliography, where the exhibition framework, whether physical or transmittable, becomes an arena for citation and subsequently complication. These stories are some kind of new relationality for the production of work, amid which my practice will continue to multiply. Acts of attribution and affinity, through which I make history more complex, through which I raise voices that have been forgotten or discredited. In these times, art is our power, our tool.

In solidarity.

21 Céline Condorelli is an artist whose work manifests through support structures of friendship. She claims that choosing your company is not something done in the present—but is between past and future. Friendship and legacy are all parts of the alliance. See Celine Condorelli, "Notes on Friendship: A Conversation with Johan Frederik Hartle," in *Self-Organised*, ed. Stine Herbert and Anne Szefer Karlsen (London: Open Editions, 2013), 62–73.

22 Literature and African American studies scholar Saidiya Hartman conceived the notion of "critical fabulations" as a way to modulate events of the past as a means to counteract the grand fictions of history. She writes: "By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by representing the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done." Saidiya V. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism,* no. 26 (June 2008): 11.

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Top: Stacey de Voe, *Kaffeburn*, 2023. Perstorp table, ashtray, nail polish, chairs. Detail
Bottom: Stacey de Voe, *Research documentation*, 2023. Binders with archive material. Detail

Further Resources

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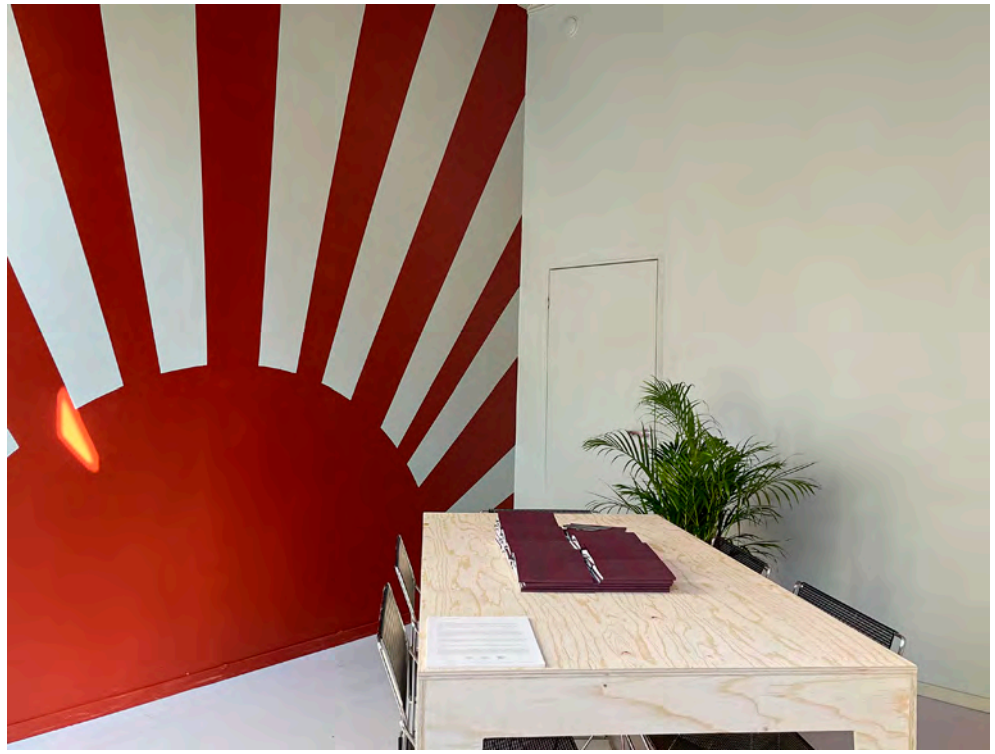


Image courtesy of the artist

Stacey de Voe, *Untimely Loyalty*, 2022. Installation view, Centralbanken/SantoLaRosa, Oslo, 2022

Images courtesy of the artist

, *The Secret of The Desert*, 2022. 16 mm to 2K video, stereo, 3 min

Silent Trade

Amin Zouiten

Looking at the black-and-white photograph, a sense of discordance occurred, as if the elements within the frame refused to cohere. First, there was a depiction of what appeared to be the Great Sphinx of Giza, but with a rather awkwardly placed pyramid structure superimposed upon its rear. A rendering that could be deemed somewhat labile in its portrayal of one of Egypt's most iconic symbols. At the periphery of the composition stands a gathering of individuals clad in predominantly white garments, forming a semicircle that gives space for the presence of a large crowd. The group appears divided into two halves: one stationed at the base of the pyramid, the other traversing the structure in a straight line, seeming to scale its incline from one of its corners. Despite the striking resemblance to a barren desert terrain, this photographic composition's location is not what it appears to be. Rather than an arid expanse in Egypt, this image was captured in North Jutland in Denmark in 1915 or 1916.

Egyptomania

While growing up, one of the few museums I visited on a regular basis was the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm. Perhaps the allure of the museum for my family and me was linked to the region that partly relates to our ancestry, but through the eyes of a child, the primary attraction was the portrayal of Egypt as a land of mummies and pyramids. In a larger historical framework, the roots of this fascination for ancient Egypt emerged during the eighteenth century, commonly referred to as Egyptomania, which pervaded Western culture. Although already present in ancient Greece and Rome, where Egyptian civilisation was seen as having a profound mystical culture as well as an advanced scientific and societal structure, the enchantment for its ancient knowledge was revived during the Enlightenment in Europe. When French ruler Napoleon Bonaparte campaigned in Egypt in 1798, a group of scientists and artists accompanied him, with the simple but very essential task of documenting what they observed and translating this into documents and artworks. Their work culminated in a plethora of books, artworks, and journals that ignited a newfound interest in the West for everything connected to Egypt. At the same time, ethnographic museums and private collectors in Europe began to form their collections with artefacts that had been plundered and excavated. And, with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, it became possible not only to read or see depictions of the land of pharaohs and pyramids but also for wealthy Europeans to visit it. Around travellers who sought adventure and exotic destinations emerged the tourist industry, with the complete experience of all-inclusive hotels, restaurants, and guided tours that would imprint the image of Egypt in the popular Western imagination.[1]

The ancient civilisation and monumental architecture of Egypt also became a source of inspiration for European artists and intellectuals, who saw in it the embodiment of timeless and universal values. Paintings such as Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Snake Charmer* (1870) and Frederick Arthur Bridgman's *The Siesta* (1881) portrayed Egypt as a land of exoticism, sensuality, and mystery, featuring veiled women, harem scenes, and belly dancers. Similarly, within literature, Gustave Flaubert's novel *Salammbô* (1862) can be seen as a prime example of the Egyptomania that gripped Europe during the nineteenth century. Offering a romanticised

portrayal of ancient Carthage and its interactions with Egypt, the novel features vivid descriptions of Egyptian artefacts and the unknown and mysterious aspects of the Carthaginian religion, reflecting European interests in the exotic and unknown that fuelled Egyptomania during the time.

The enthralment with Egypt extended well beyond its ancient history to the setting of the surrounding vast Sahara desert, which likewise has long been a site for conjuring Orientalist projections and fantasies. The Sahara was seen as a vast, uncharted expanse of mystery and danger, ripe for discovery and conquest. Early industrial films such as Georges Méliès's *The Impossible Voyage* (1904) and *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) as well as Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) feature desert landscapes, Bedouin tribes, and ancient ruins as backdrops for their narratives, highlighting the allure and exoticism of the Sahara as a site for adventure and exploration.[2]

The 1921 film *The Sheik*, directed by George Melford and starring Rudolph Valentino, further perpetuated the fascination with the Sahara and its associated sexual undertones, as seen in the aforementioned paintings. The film depicts the story of a young Englishwoman who falls in love with a dashing Arab sheikh, presenting the sheikh and his culture in a highly stereotypical manner that emphasises exoticism and sensuality while ignoring the political and social realities of the region. This portrayal falls into the "sheikh romance" genre,[3] which not only employs stereotypes but, as the Moroccan writer Fatima Mernissi has argued, also embodies "the colonial harem," whereby the genre represents the exotic and eroticised Orient as a space of male fantasy and desire, reinforcing Western power and domination over the region—reducing it to a passive and static entity.[4] Concomitantly, Orientalism influenced the design of cinemas themselves. The famous Grauman's Egyptian Theatre, built in 1922 in Hollywood, California, features an extensive exterior adorned with Egyptian-themed hieroglyphs and carvings, as well as a grand sphinx within its interior. In Sweden, Orientalist cinema design was present at the country's very first film screenings in the summer of 1896, which were held at a Moor-inspired summer theatre during a major industrial and crafts exhibition in Pilstorp, Malmö.[5]

The Secret of the Desert

Turning further to the Nordic context and cinema, the sheikh romance genre ran throughout the productions of the newly established Nordisk Film, founded in the early twentieth century and going on to become one of the region's largest silent film production companies. Precursing *The Sheik* by a few years were the films of Danish director Robert Dinesen. In the work-for-hire style of the early studio system, Dinesen directed eighty-five films during his lifetime, including two for Nordisk Film with a touch of Egyptomania. First was *Mumiens Halsbaand* (The mummy's necklace) in 1916, and then, in 1917–18, he made *Sfinxens Hemmelighed* (The secret of the desert).

The latter film, *Sfinxens Hemmelighed*—a still from which I describe in the opening of my essay—features a sheikh romance narrative and was mainly shot in Råbjerg Mile in North Jutland, Denmark, which is Northern Europe's largest migrating sand dune. The sphinx—constructed as one of the largest film props at the time and measuring approximately thirty metres—was erected in the middle of the roving sand dune, accompanied by a pyramid made from wood and plaster. Although the film, which was widely distributed throughout Europe, is now lost (as are many silent films), the elaborate archival material attests to the ambition of creating an all-encompassing studio system, whereby Denmark could stand in for anywhere.[6]

In 2022, a group of collaborators and I embarked on a trip to Råbjerg Mile with the purpose of locating and filming the now lost settings of Dinesen's original film. It soon became apparent that this was an impossible task due to the perpetual movement of the sand dune, which shifts approximately two hundred metres every year. The final work became a three-and-a-half-minute, black-and-white 16 mm film (like a hundred-foot film roll) titled *The Secret of the Desert* (2022). The film's imagery encompasses classic desert landscape tropes, such as sand blowing in the wind and towering dunes. The black-and-white format makes for an unsettled temporality, which uses rephotographed archival stills from Dinesen's film, creating a disruption in the montage between the actual location and the imagery. As the film progresses, the Danish landscape slowly infiltrates the seemingly boundless

Image courtesy of the artist

Amin Zouiten, *Silent Trade*, 2023. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

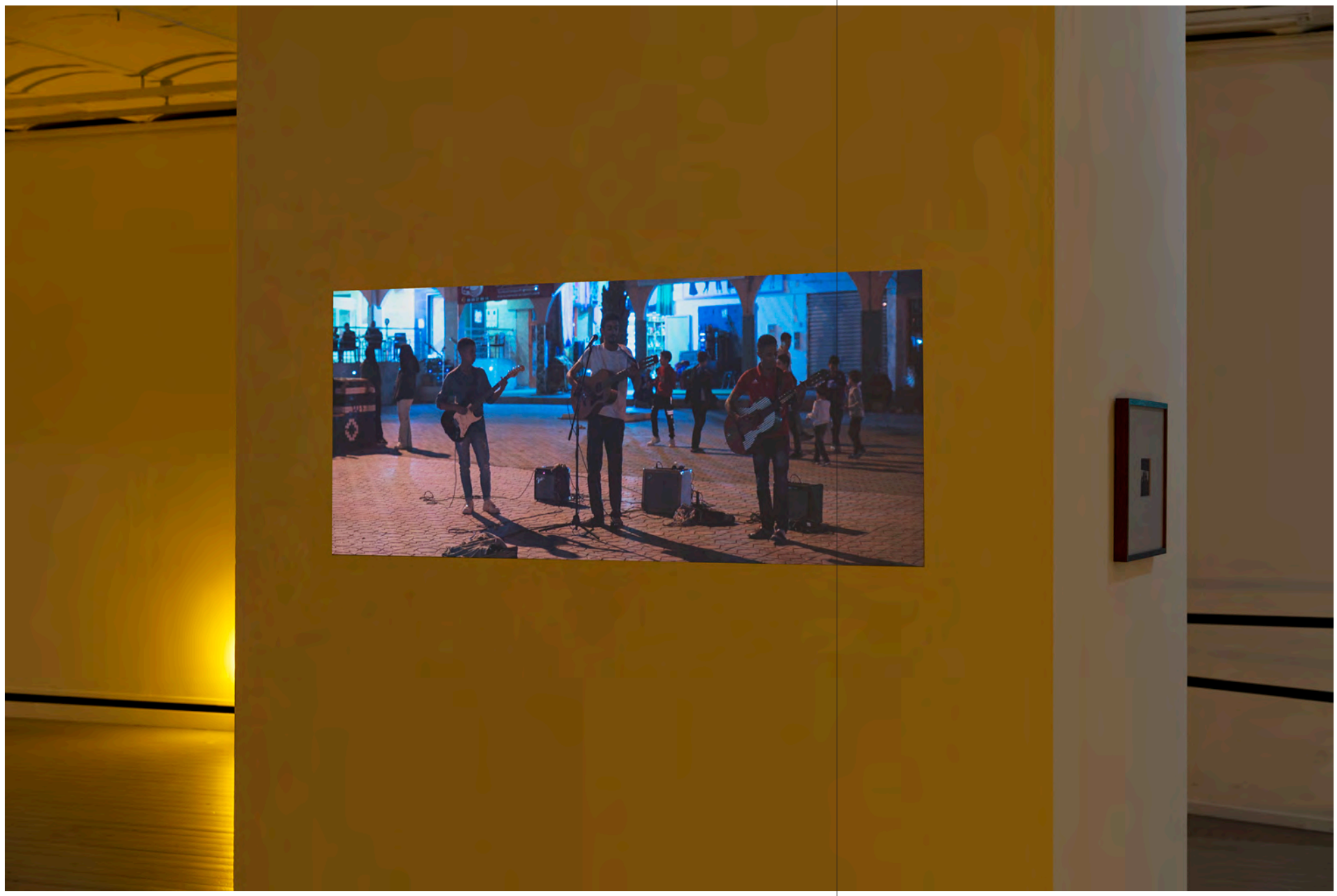


Image courtesy of the artist

Amin Zouiten, *Silent Trade,* 2023. Installation view

expanse of the "desert," with pine trees appearing on the horizon and the nearby ocean gradually encroaching on the sand dunes —ultimately shattering the illusion of the desert setting and blurring its boundaries.

The Secret of the Desert draws influence from the structural school of artist-filmmakers active in the 1960s and '70s, such as Andy Warhol and James Benning. These artist-filmmakers worked with and against the limits of the analogue film medium and apparatus as a form of enquiry into and resistance against Hollywood's commodification of images. Benning, for example, has extensively used the strategy of using one roll of film per shot, particularly in the approximately ninety-minute films in his California Trilogy, which presents psychogeographical mappings of locations in California without any commentary or voice-over. The inscription into the histories of these places is implicit in the images themselves, which are heavily loaded with significance in terms of microhistories and political poignancy—injected with Benning's "looking and listening" strategy, which involves visiting and being attentive to the flow of a particular location at different times. This sort of hierarchy, which prioritises the acts of looking and listening, has been incredibly influential to a younger generation of filmmakers. Sharon Lockhart provides an updated example of this with her work *Lunch Break* from 2008, which consists of one continuous tracking shot in extreme slow motion through a long corridor in a shipyard, recording numerous workers as they take their midday break, without any comment pointing to an intrinsic interest in labour or focus of the gaze.

The Secret of the Desert differs from these examples in two key ways. First, it consists of a series of shots filmed in analogue and then edited digitally. In this context, the decision to use analogue film does not aim to explore themes like the sustainability of attention or the technical constraints of the camera, and nor does my film attempt to mimic the aesthetics of these earlier films. Rather, *The Secret of the Desert* takes an interest in entering earlier traditions within the context of making and looking into specific micro-narratives that could prove to be fruitful for an image-maker. Secondly, it works around some of the ideas raised by sociologist Stuart Hall, who holds that Orientalism is not just about cultural differences but also about the exercise of power by those in dominant positions. By acknowledging these power dynamics, one can develop visual strategies to "decolonise the screen." The images reproduced in *The Secret of the Desert* try to interact with the power dynamics of early twentieth-century Orientalism, rather than simply dismissing or rejecting its problematic images. The work recasts existing narratives and images in a way that acknowledges and engages with the power dynamics at play in their original production and circulation.[7]

Reinscribing oneself into existing narratives and myths around a certain location though moving images is an interest I have developed within my work in the past years. I see it as starting with the work *Nadir* (2022), a thirteen-minute video that moves along Norra Grängesbergsgatan in Malmö, a straight one-kilometre stretch that connects the city's industrial history with its present. In a combination of static and moving camera sequences, glimpses of the activities along the street occur, both on the street itself and inside the old industrial buildings that now house car washes, carpet stores, and bakeries. Here, the street of Norra Grängesbergsgatan—which holds a variety of narratives, from being a "particularly vulnerable"[8] area to a gentrification zone—is depicted in way to undercut these narratives as an "anti-narrative," which uses the sensory as a way to point to activities of the street. The work has been screened and exhibited in a variety of contexts, from its first presentation at my bachelor's graduation exhibition, to industry film festivals, to a festival in Oberhausen, Germany, that sat somewhere between the visual arts and the film industry. The work was read quite differently, partly due to its open format but also due to the cultural signifiers and narrative around the street itself.

Image courtesy of the artist

Amin Zouiten, *Switzerland 1986–1987*, 2023/1986–1987. Chrysotype print, rephotographed Poloraid

Qirat

The title of my master's exhibition, *Silent Trade*, alludes to an alleged "primitive" method of trade in which two parties conduct an exchange of goods without direct communication. The myth surrounding silent trade is frequently depicted in stereotypical portrayals found in literary works, showcasing scenarios involving African or Middle Eastern merchants trading commodities like gold and salt. Negotiation and execution transpire from afar, with merchandise placed at an intermediate location and the stakes increased to the rhythm of a drumbeat or a smoke signal, until a satisfactory bid is reached. The historical authenticity of this practice has been questioned due to insufficient factual substantiation; its representation may actually be a mythical fabrication, perpetuated through sources that have lost their historical basis over time. In the exhibition, the concept is repurposed to revolve around a family oral account of a gold robbery in 1980s Fez, with the narrative relocated to the central-southern Moroccan city of Ouarzazate, situated at the edge of the Sahara.

In the film *Qirat* (2023), this oral anecdote is reconstructed, counting in at thirteen minutes of twelve scenes shot at dawn, dusk, and night. The loose reconstruction of the robbery follows the sun's trajectory, serving as a compass to navigate the city's landscape and its faces, as the narrative unfolds over one day, tracing it from the Atlas Mountains on the outskirts of Ouarzazate to the city centre. In turn, the oral anecdote was employed as a method, where I engaged with people on location in Ouarzazate over a five-year period. Telling the story would often prompt a person to share a story of their own. For instance, when I expressed my desire to film at the Noor solar power plant, a café owner shared a story about how he used to install smaller solar panels all over Morocco, long before it became a famous national initiative. Stories like these were then, in many cases, developed into scenes where the person telling it would become an actor, incorporated into the ride from the Atlas to the city.

Ouarzazate is a medium-sized municipality with a population of around 85,000 people that sprawls across the city, situated at the crossroads of the Draa Valley to the east and the High Atlas Mountains to the north. The nearest larger city is a three-hour drive, over the Atlas Mountains, taking you to Marrakech, or you can go over the Gorge Mountain Pass, which leads out to the dunes in Zagora, a small town. Its geographic location has historically made Ouarzazate a trading hub between Northern and Western Africa, and it became a military centre in the twentieth century for conscripts and as a strategic position against the border to Algeria to the east. In the 1960s, Ouarzazate became a destination for the visions of Hollywood and foreign film production, with films such as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). The development of the film industry in and around Ouarzazate could be attributed to its unique combination of a cost-effective, exotic location, with diverse topography featuring deserts and green plains, situated in a region with almost year-round even sunlight. Alongside this, Morocco's strategic location in a relatively politically stable region and its long-standing diplomatic ties to the US and Western powers incentivise filmmakers seeking to avoid logistical challenges and security risks.

When I came back to Ouarzazate after the travel restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic had been lifted, my acquaintances made it clear that the film industry that once bolstered day-to-day labour jobs had become s sparse, and the reasons went beyond the immediate impacts of the pandemic. As the film industry increasingly embraces other modes of productions in studio environments, on-location shoots are becoming more and more obsolete. At the same time, Morocco is trying to reduce its dependency on Western allies, and the Centre Cinématographique Marocain has professionalised the local industry by setting fixed fees for crew members, thus making foreigners' reliance on cheap labour less viable and causing the "time equals money" logic to backfire.

The Noor solar power station, located on the outskirts of Ouarzazate, stands as one of the world's largest solar plants and, since its construction in the early 2010s, has been promoted globally as a symbol of a green energy renewal on the continent and nationally as being emblematic of Morocco's newfound economic independence. In reality, the multinational investment project still exports much of the station's energy to Spain, which highlights the country's still underlying economic interdependence with Europe. In Ouarzazate, the situation becomes more complicated due to the dominance of both the entertainment industry and big energy corporations. The film industry, which of course follows capital influx, with trajectories focused on economic outcome, tends to not directly portray the region in its production, which leads the location to being reduced to mere scenography. Something that, in my opinion, perpetuates the same narratives that have been recycled and updated since George Melford made *The Sheik* almost a century ago.

In *Qirat*, I wanted to reflect on the potential artistic implications of reviving an oral story beyond its typical status as a family anecdote or a source of the fantastic. Such a starting point felt very potent to work from as an artist —through the lens of all these narratives and myths, like with *The Secret of the Desert*, to work with the "what-if" scenario of trying to recast the location's original narrative and myths

Considering *Qirat* through the perspective of theories such as Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's critical analysis of the entertainment industry, as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's interpretation of Franz Kafka's fiction through minor histories, presents compelling insights into what film's artistic potential can produce within a specific system. The work involved a large team of collaborators, some of whom usually work within the film industry, where cinema workers are trained to make images on demand and according to the logic that every minute of work is not a creative endeavour but rather a monetary transaction. I think these practices contribute to producing many of the images of a place like Ouarzazate, which I'm quite sceptical of. The position of an artist has, of course, been posited as a rather unique one, from which one can actively work *against* the systems of image-making. The number of photographs in the world exponentially increases every day—1.81 trillion images will have been taken by the end of the year in which I'm writing this[9]—and so it's crucial to consider how one can put oneself in opposition to those images. Such an action may, perhaps, involve entering through them and engaging with these images in a more direct way.

In their famous 1944 critique of the entertainment system, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the culture industry, which includes Hollywood movies, popular music, and other types of mass media, produces standardised products that preserve the lowest common denominator of taste. What the culture industry does, according to them, is prioritise the prevailing ideology of the ruling class and allow the situation to remain unchanged. This arrangement results in a society where culture is seen only as a commodity whose potential power is reduced to being sold and bought on the market. The concept of the culture industry and the commodification of culture remains relevant today, especially in the context of the film industry and image-making, where the system that underpins the culture industry links the value of an image to its cost and economic logic.[10]

Entering the oral history of *Qirat*, one way to approach it is by examining the concept of minor literature, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari.[11] Their argument circles around the fact that minor literature includes the stories and narratives that dominant historical narratives often overlook or marginalise—stories by people excluded from positions of power that offer an alternative perspective on the past and present. In the same way, one could interpret oral storytelling as having a long tradition of being a form of communication and expression used within and throughout different groups to transmit histories, myths, and narratives in ways that challenge these dominant historical narratives. Looking at oral storytelling as a form of minor literature or minor history could represent a mode to challenge dominant cultural and linguistic norms. The transmission of the oral can also be seen as a way of keeping ties and resisting assimilation into the dominant language, which, in the case of *Qirat*, is images. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that minor literature and minor histories have the potential to become "lines of flight," or ways of breaking free, from dominant structures of power and control, and thus have a transformative potential. By looking at *Qirat* as a minor history through using the oral mode of storytelling to reconsider the dominant narratives of the Sahara and Orientalist Hollywood filmmaking and positioning it as a polemic in line with Adorno and Horkheimer's criticism of the entertainment industry, then, I argue, that a problematising and potent potential emerges. In terms of the structure of the film, one could view its more or less flat structure as a way of relgating the narrative to the background in favour of a more map-like structure of the city's

Image courtesy of the artist

Amin Zouiten, *Silent Trade,* 2023. Installation view

topography. These moving images are subsequently produced, in part, within the production apparatus that Horkheimer and Adorno vehemently criticised—an industry closely linked to the emergence of Orientalist portrayals of the Sahara, which can also be debated in the context of Ouarzazate and Morocco. Yet I see that an interesting synthesis can arise here—one where the film's text positions itself within the history of the film industry while its minor history can dare to exert some kind of violence on the overarching structure favoured by Hollywood films. In this instance, my film can be perceived as venturing into the system's periphery, and while it may not be capable of dismantling the entire system (which, as per Adorno and Horkheimer, is already fractured), it can offer a collection of moving images that projects a distinct impression and adds complexity to the pre-existing narratives about a particular location. In other words, the narratives surrounding the Sahara desert, Ouarzazate, and Morocco as Orientalist fantasies could be made different.

1 R. H. Fritze, *Egyptomania: A history of Fascination, Obsession and Fantasy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017).

2 Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker (London: BFI Publishing, 1990), 56–62; Martin Leroy, "From the Dream of the World to the World of the Dream: The Sahara in Early Cinema," *Film History* 25, nos. 1–2 (2013): 90–107.

3 The sheikh romance genre is a type of popular romantic fiction that emerged in the early twentieth century. It often features strong-willed heroines and exotic settings in the Middle East, particularly North Africa. The genre reached its peak in the 1920s and '30s and is known for perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes and tropes, portraying Arab and Muslim men as dominant and hypermasculine while presenting their female counterparts as submissive and exotic objects of desire. See Gwen Sharp, "The World of Sheikh Romance Novels," Jezebel, November 17, 2010, https://jezebel.com/the-world-of-sheikh-romance-novels-5692618.

4 Fatima Mernissi, *The Harem Within: Tales of a Moroccan Girlhood* (Toronto: Bantam, 1996).

5 André Jansson, "First Films in Sweden," in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film*, ed. Cynthia Lucia, Roy Grundmann, and Art Simon (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 31–38.

6 I found this archival material in the archives of the Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen.

7 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222–37.

8 In Swedish "*särkilt utsatt område*," as defined by the Swedish government.

9 Matic Broz, "How Many Photos Are There? (2023) 50+ Photos Statistics," Photutorial, March 10, 2023, https://photutorial.com/photos-statistics/.

10 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso Books, 1944).

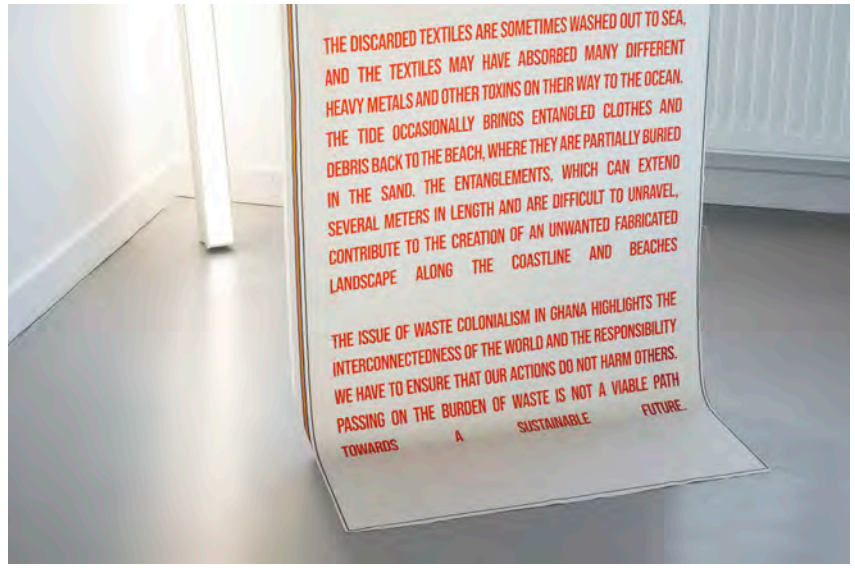
11 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

Master of Fine Arts
Year 1

Celeste Arnstedt
Juju Bento
Ida Brockmann
Carin Alegre Castegren
Anne Sofie Djernis
Karolina Bergman Engman
Oda Olsson Haugerud
Cornelia Hermansson
Irene Kaltenborn
Amanda Moberg
Anton Kai
Kristyan Nicholson
Jens Alfred Raahauge
Alice Ryne
Stella Sieber
My Sjöberg

Images courtesy of the artist

Celeste Arnstedt, (*Good News*), 2023. HUGO BOSS size 52, found object, mixed fabric material, metal, nylon, sand



Celeste Arnstedt, *Untitled*, 2023. 2 × digital fabric print, recycled pure organic cotton, 148 gsm, 70 × 300 cm

Images courtesy of the artist

Juju Bento, *Floating, is to Escape Gravity*, 2023. Installation view

Images courtesy of the artist

Ida Brockmann, *The arrow is pointing somewhere else*, 2023. Steel, 40 × 240 cm

Images courtesy of the artist

Carin Alegre Castegren, *Varv II*, 2022. Oil on linen, 45,5 × 62 cm

Carin Alegre Castegren, *Reverberate*, 2022. Oil on linen, 51,5 × 73 cm

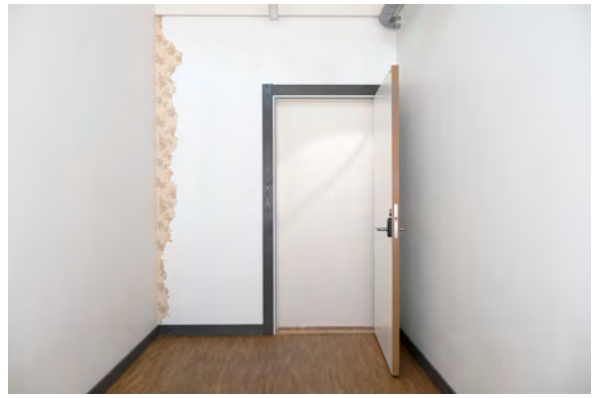
Anne Sofie Djernis, *Within the frame behind the back-drop, there is nothing but a dead body that can be studied as a beautiful pattern (To Help You See)*, 2023. Acrylic, textile color, pigment on unprimed canvas, 125 × 170 cm

Image courtesy of Celeste Knirke

Anne Sofie Djernis, *Rousseau's view of a jungle as the foundation for a building falling into ruin due to an earthquake (To Help You See)*, 2023. Acrylic, textile color, pigment on unprimed canvas, 125 × 170 cm

Images courtesy of the artist

Karolina Bergman Engman, *Förnimmelserummet*, 2023. Video installation,
sketch paper, sour milk, duration 11:49 min



Right: Karolina Bergman Engman, *Förnimmelserummet*, 2023. Ripped wallpaper. Detail

Left: Karolina Bergman Engman, *Förnimmelserummet*, 2023. Video installation,
ripped wallpaper, cotton fabric

Karolina Bergman Engman, *Förnimmelserummet*, 2023. Animated video. HD (16:9), color and stereo sound, duration 11:49 min

Images courtesy of the artist

Oda Haugerud, *city stir on eardrum* —, 2023. Fan chassis, threaded rods, mounting plates

Images courtesy of the artist

Cornelia Hermansson, *Spjäll*, 2023. Oil on cotton, 65 × 75 cm

Cornelia Hermansson, *Fold I*, 2023. Oil on cotton, 120 × 140 cm

Image courtesy of the artist

Irene Kaltenborn, *Asfalt*, 2022. 4K video, 16 min.
Documentation from the exhibition «I Love Seagulls» at Tromsø Kunstforening 2023

Image courtesy of the artist

Amanda Moberg, *Step 1, matter to matter (the backs talk to each other and I hear words that are not there – words words words without context to the essential)*, 2023. Concrete, plaster, variable dimensions

Images courtesy of the artist

Anton Kai, *Et drømmebillede af mig selv*, 2023. Silver gelatine baryta, frames, drawing, wood.
Installation

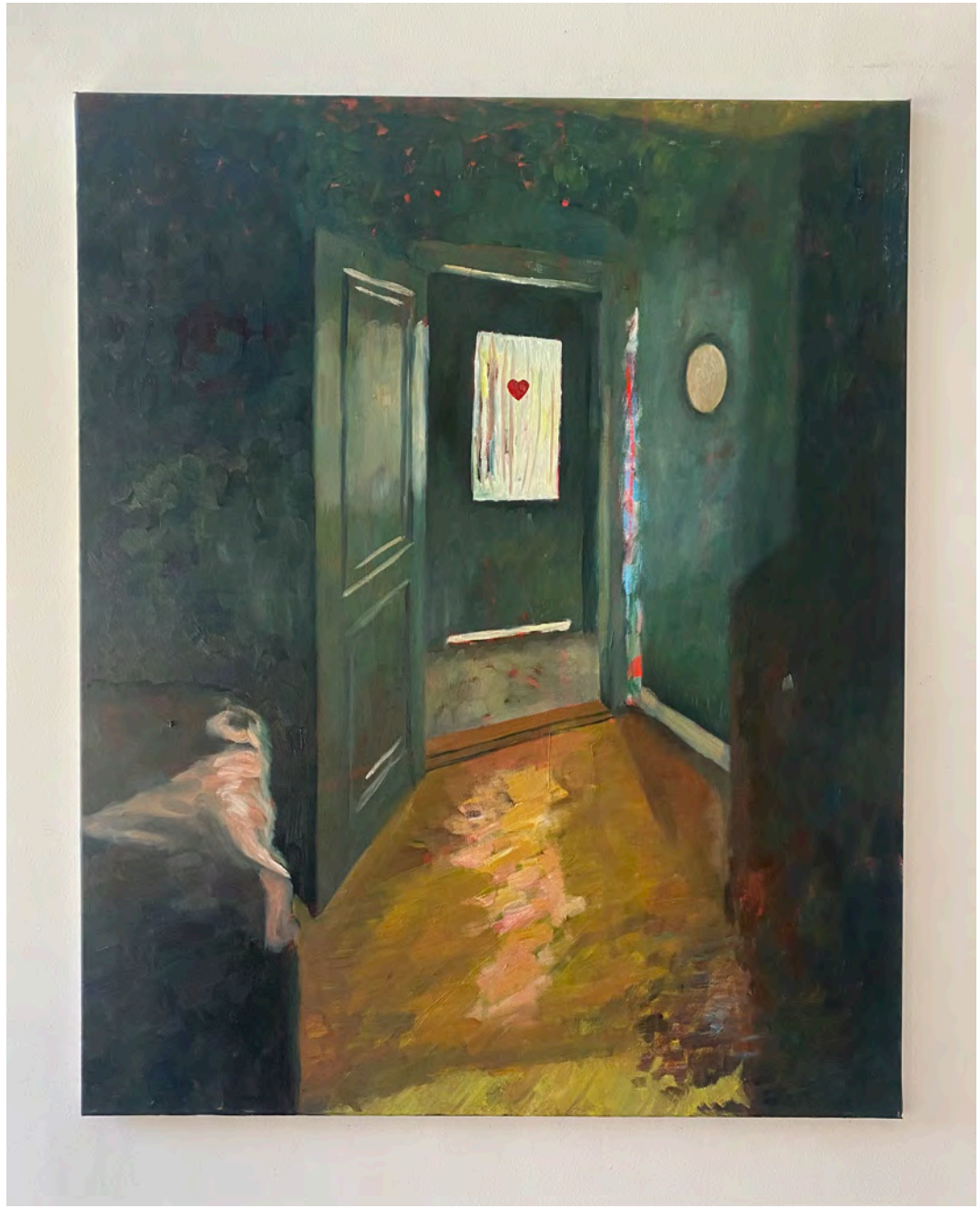
Images courtesy of the artist

Kristyan Nicholson. *and (well)*, 2023. Inkjet print, acrylic greenhouse window (bronze tinted)

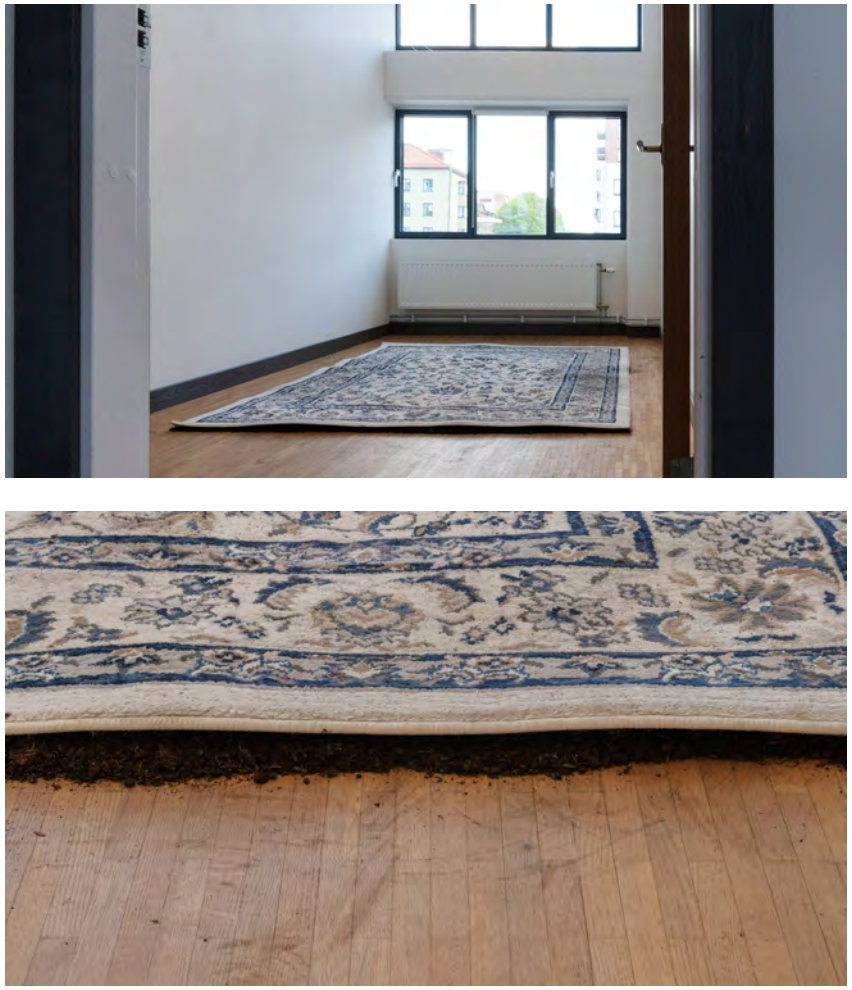
Kristyan Nicholson, *passage*, 2023. Door

Images courtesy of the artist

Jens Alfred Raahauge, *Spirit in the night*, 2023. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 75 × 100 cm



Jens Alfred Raahauge, *Restless legs*, 2023. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 80 × 105 cm



Images courtesy of the artist

Alice Ryne, *Det kan vara bra att ha till sen*, 2023. Rug, soil, variable dimensions

Alice Ryne (with Maja Oldefors), *BAD TAXIDERMY*, 2023. Film, 45:18 min.
Installation view

Images courtesy of the artist

Stella Sieber, *Creature Of Habit, Besucherin disturbed about Rosemarie Trockel's Gewohnheitstier at MMK Frankfurt*, 2023. Installation view

Stella Sieber, *Creature Of Habit, Besucherin disturbed about Rosemarie Trockel's Gewohnheitstier at MMK Frankfurt*, 2023. Calciumcarbonat, egg-tempera and oil on canvas, 170 × 160 cm

Images courtesy of the artist

Top: My Sjöberg, *Helsingborg*, 2023. Color photograph, metal, 40 × 40 cm
Bottom: My Sjöberg, *A room in two seasons*, 2023. Variable dimension. Installation view

Top: My Sjöberg, *It tickles III*, 2023. Metal pipe, clematis seeds, 153 × 68 × 40 cm
Bottom: My Sjöberg, *It tickles II & III*, 2023. Metal pipe, clematis seed, variable dimensions

Master of Artistic Research
Year 1

Ida Brottmann
Line Kallmayer
Tjelle Esrom Raunkjær

Ida Brottmann, *Inhumanly human / humanly inhuman*, 2023. Text

In 2015 I got my first job as a care-taker. I remember being embarrassed, when I met friends who asked what I was doing now. They had all just finished their studies and were now, mostly, in high paid jobs. I, on the other hand had, a couple of years before, moved to Amsterdam to study Fine Arts, and was now home working in the field of social care. I was embarrassed, but curious about the cultural value of labour, and stubborn in convincing myself, and others, that the labour of care was as important and interesting as any other labour. I am pretty sure that I have convinced myself, as this has been the labour of my choice ever since.

2015 was also the year of the so-called refugee crises, and the polarising debate that filled the Danish media and political discourse also had me curious about the labour of care. This brings me to my first job as a care-taker.

Naba was 14 at the time I became a part of her team, I only stayed for about 6 months.

She had been developing according to the normative measurements that are used for young children's development until the time she turned 4 years. That means that she could walk, run, talk, eat. After which she slowly lost her ability to develop according to her age and physical–mental condition, at that point when I started working, Naba was at the last stage of her illness. I do not remember the name of the illness, but it's said that it causes the steady destruction of all proteins in the body. With the illness rapidly progressing and taking over Naba's body and spirit, she could no longer walk, talk, eat or see and her cognitive abilities were assumed to be that of a 6 month old. Her hearing was intact.

Naba would always spend the evenings in the living room with her family, her two younger brothers playing around her wheelchair and her parents watching TV. They would always watch an Iraki TV station that followed the war that was still going on. They liked to keep updated on their home country – they had told me. I remember the channel following soldiers driving through the countryside, every now and then going into a battle.

Working in care with disabled bodies has led to many discussions on the value of the lives of the people I care for (read: heavily disabled bodies). Discussions of the lives of a person that can not do any of the things that we normally would consider valuable.

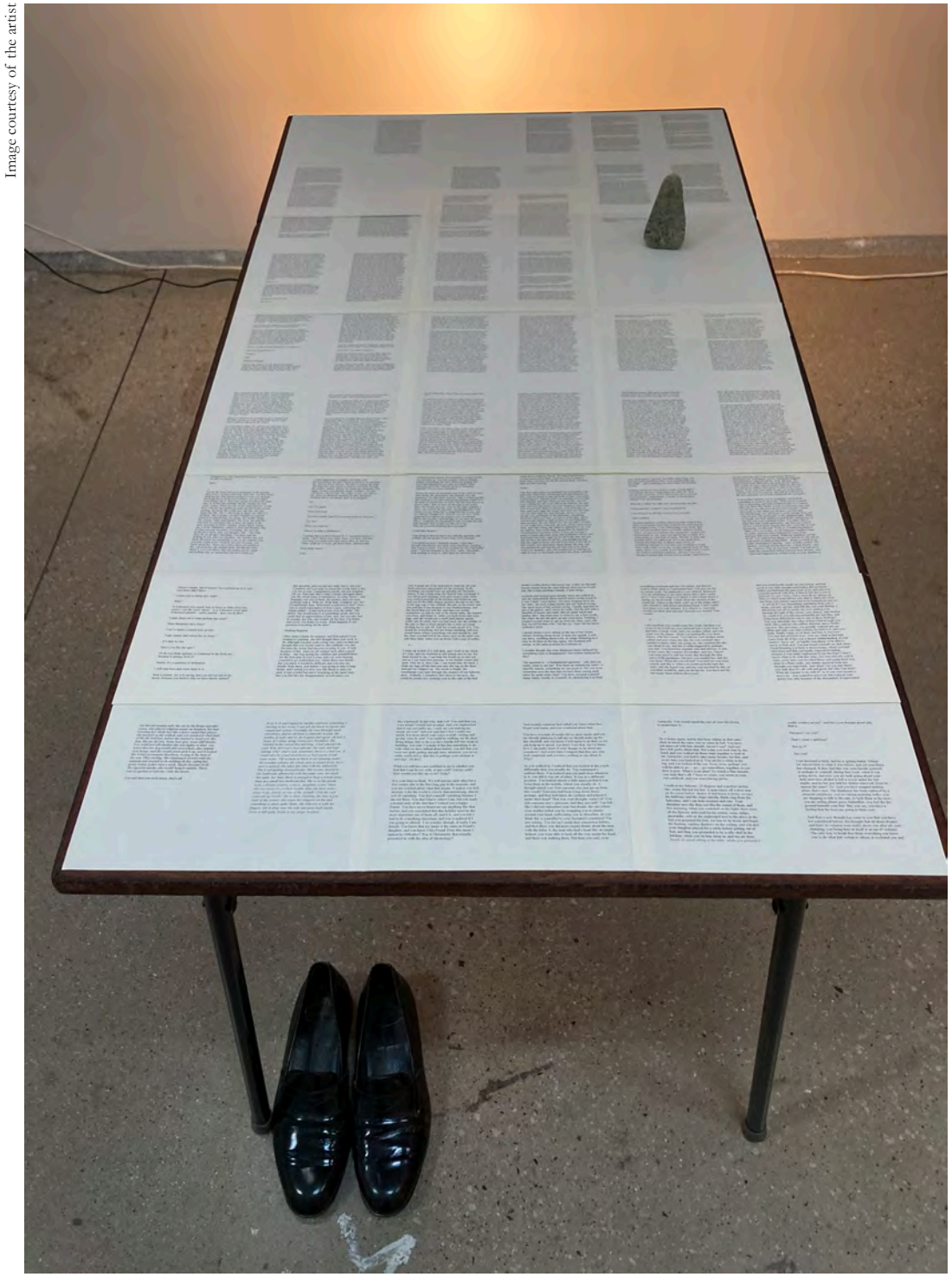
I am sometimes a care-taker, sometimes I take care, sometimes I care.

Care as labour, labour of value, non careers promoting labour = care labour. Career = computer or busy, controlling/managing people. To acknowledge that I would forget that the body I was working on was a living human. That I too would at times treat Naba as a non-human body.

This could be anything from forgetting to be carefull when dressing her, looking at my phone instead of reading or talking to her. It felt more like pushing around a sack of potatoes than a human body.

Line Kallmayer

Image courtesy of the artist



Line Kallmayer, *sketches for a novel, notes for a novel (IAMANNA)*, 2023. Table, printed text, rock, shoes, (part of installation)

Image courtesy of Line Kallmayer

Tjelle Esrom Raunkjær, *Aesthetics of Rebellious Mourning: Aids Activism*, 2023.
Performance lecture, 30 min. 17. May and 20. May, Malmö Art Academy, 2023

the lecture is a part of a research project on aesthetics of rebellious mourning.
the lecture focused on aids activism in mainly germany, denmark and usa in the eighties and nineties and was based on material from schwules museums' archive in berlin.
the lecture reflected on grief as the basis of political organizing, mourning as activism as well as the use of art and other forms of creativity in the aids movement.

Bachelor of Fine Arts
Year 3

Felix Christiansson
Pernille Emilia Kjær
Cecilie Mark
Billie Meiniche
Astta Nielsen
Maria Nadia Nour Nielsen
Sigrid Soomus
Jonathan Bue Plauborg Rasmussen
Marcus Wallström
Vigga Heisselberg Wæhrens
Hannes Östlund

Image courtesy of the artist

Felix Christiansson, *To touch a screen, and the meeting gaze of two mallards*, 2023.
Arranged objects, 120 × 130 × 150 cm. Installation view, BFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

The Two-Edged Stream
Felix Christiansson

I break the wind with my forehead, and it begins to ache. The sky is a steely grey and my cheeks are rosy—so I assume. A pale seabird sweeps past with a sense of helplessness before the roaring machinery, ringed around the neck.
The feeling grazes my shoulder. I let it slip past me.

In everything—I assume due to the character of time—moves a two-edged stream. Two gestures in one movement. The terms I've given these gestures: the becoming and the disappearance.
They're contradictory and occur in absolute simultaneity, the impossible process of something being unfolded and folded at once.
Their sound is like cymbals and strings. A grief deep like a chasm and an ecstatic song of praise, both occurring in the exact same moment. In the smallest of chestnuts.

I grew up seeing only half of the stream.
I could only see grief.
I was twisted, so the gestures appeared in me unevenly.
I was a knot, stretching tauter and tauter.

After many years of inklings, the knot came open in a violent snap and I lost myself.
My entire world fell away until all that was left was a string, and its movement was music. Apparently, everything else was removable.
I had a distinct sense of being a part of an all-encompassing instrument that plays for itself.
That I am the material and the listener.
That all I can do is to listen as it plays and let my string's tone sound.
Since that moment, work (life) has been about intensifying my inner movement.

Alberto Giacometti
I sit down on a rock beneath the steel-grey sky and try to unclench my jaw. It's the kind of rock that's served as a bench for many people, including, in this moment, me. I look down at the frozen mud and allow my gaze to relax.
I let myself go a little cross-eyed, and the ground begins to billow.
How can I explain it?
It never stops continuing.
Every kernel of gravel is like a mountain.

When I came home with rocks I'd found, my dad used to tell me that you have to break a rock with a hammer to know what it really is.
One time we did, but the answer I got told me nothing.
My dad is a geologist who used his knowledge to search for oil in the service of a sheikh who was later imprisoned in a luxury hotel by Saudi Arabia's crown prince.
Dad once told me that he doesn't need to describe an experience to think of it as real, that seeing something for himself is enough.
I admire it.
But I don't feel the same way.

I feel a great kinship with Alberto Giacometti, which I think stems from what appears to be a shared religious sense of duty toward depicting what happens inside of oneself, combined with deep despair over the impossibility of the same.

In Giacometti's relationship to work, I see a struggle against disappearance.
A struggle he is well aware is unwinnable, but to which he nevertheless dedicates his life.
In the encounter with the overwhelming greatness of things—if there is to be even the smallest hope to grasp something at all—reduction is inescapable.
The human figure turns into a bust, a face, a nose bridge.

> *"I no longer know who I am, where I am; I barely see myself anymore, I imagine my face must look like a diffuse, whiteish mass, fragile, barely held together, held up by a number of unshapely rags dragging all the way to the ground.*
>
> *Uncertain appearance.*
>
> *I no longer see myself, nor do I see that which surrounds me: glasses, windows, faces, colors here and there; yes, very brilliant colors, a plate on a table, the back of a chair.*
>
> *It is the objects in particular that appear real to me, the glass seems much less precarious than the hand holding it, picking it up and putting it back down, disappearing. The objects have a different substantiality.*
>
> *Heads, persons are nothing but the continual movement of the inside, the outside, they are incessantly remaking themselves, they do not have a true substantiality, their transparent side. They are neither cube, nor cylinder, nor sphere, nor triangle. They are a mass in motion, a changing form that can never be completely grasped. And then it is as though they are held together by an inner point that observes us through the eyes and which seems to be their reality, a reality without measure, in a space without limits and which seems*

to be other than that in which the cup stands before me or which is created by this cup.

Nor do they have a definable color.

All this must be investigated."
—Alberto Giacometti[1]

To me there's a clarity in the impossibility Giacometti describes here. I think of it as a heightened closeness. The boundaries of the self and the other have begun to dissolve, showing their true limitlessness.

I use drawing as a tool to try to approach this incomprehensibility.

There was a golden lounge I once drew. The room was flooded with lines, crossing each other. Tiled windows, mosaics, rain beating against the skylight. I placed myself in the state I call drawing. This state occurs as the hand begins to move in a slanted oval just above the paper and at an increasing speed, while I let my gaze bounce off the various objects it lands on until I'm sufficiently confused. By the time all I can see are angles, lines, and gestures, the pencil lands on the surface I will later call a drawing.

It might be compared to beating a rug. The first twenty strikes are a conscious physical act with purpose and intention. The next two hundred become a reverberating rhythm that silences the self;
now it is something that happens to you.
I saw the chaotic teeming, and in the pressure on the paper, there was a likeness to the room that fell over me.

The Distance
The sky has changed colour since I last saw it.
The clouds that previously covered the sky and rendered it mute have now begun to disperse; the new light reveals its shapes. Under the sky, by a line of pine trees across the water, is a house of cards that fights the weather.

When I learned to speak, the world closed before me, became flat, a remote story. Space, a conclusion I drew.
This is how it happened:
In the whirling hurricane of impressions and imprints, I put out a finger and pointed to a pattern I chose to call a glass of Chablis. A delimited particle of the storm became still in exchange for becoming invisible to me.
I continued:
Chequered tile floor, ballpoint pen, notebook, barstool, table.
On and on until I no longer saw anything at all.
Instead I started to read and count:
The barstool is under me, atop the table are the notebook and the glass.
Under both the table and the stool is the floor, and over the notebook, the pen strides, writing all these words in order. All had its place, in its order, when I looked through the catalogue.

The sight of the world made no impression on me, because the world and I no longer touched each other as it slipped between my fingers.

Then, a gust of wind grabbed hold of me and reawakened the buried memory of the hurricane.
I remembered a life far more real than this and suddenly space was immediate.
In front of me on the table, the entire world stepped out of a candelabra and asked me to hold it in my chest. I looked out the window where a tree grabbed hold of me with its gestures.
The tree's gestures took hold of me in a way that made me realise I'd never truly been seized before.
The love and the grief over what I saw filled me like a glass of water and then it ran over me like a rain.

The Approach
I used to view language as a windmill I had to conquer.
It was only yesterday that I understood that it is my power. A simple but very meaningful sleight of hand.
In the black water, between the waves, I see a stillness reflecting the clouds above.
I can't break out—it's a confused thought. But I can bend and twist, stretch to create openings.
I turn to objects because I've noticed that if I see them and fall silent before them, the impression is deepened, and they emerge.
Their meaning becomes musical.

To reach this closeness with the objects, I first need to make my gaze stop bouncing between its references.
To get some kind of clarity, I first need to still the water.
I tear up four lines in the frozen mud and make a frame.
I call that which is within the frame the stage.
Inside the stage, objects have no past.
They came into being precisely where I find them, and they've never been anything other than exactly what they are.
I understand the stage and the objects within it as landscape.
That is to say, a place where you can be and move, and where the figures don't claim meaning outside themselves and the viewer.

Everything around me: the seabird's wing flaps, the sky, the row of pines—they're reflected in me.
And in everything around me, I see myself.
As softly echoing memories.
It seems I am myself an empty vessel, and the world, in movement and facades, is finally a depiction that points back to me.
Everything self-experienced, echoing in constant motion. Sculpted in me.

An object reaches me, touches me. I allow the impression to imprint, mark this touch.
With this mark and its relations, I build a system I can navigate in order to subsequently compose, with these touches as my material.

Images courtesy of the artist

Felix Christiansson, *Crossroads from window in November / Chandelier over crowded skibar*, 2022. Ballpoint on paper, 30 × 22 cm. Detail

Felix Christiansson, *Landscape under towering flower*, 2023. Arranged objects, 130 × 84 × 62 cm. Installation view

The encounter with the objects within the stage creates an inaudible tone.
When I, the viewer, approach the objects, the sound increases in volume.
When the objects move, the tone changes.
This tone is the material by which I seek to illustrate the motif.
When the composition of the objects leads the inaudible tone to approach a resonance with the landscape, the wind emerges.
The objects led me here, because I followed the traces. Deep within them, a reflection of the landscape.

The Landscape

> "If everything broke in me as the force passed through, that's not because its function is to break: it just finally needed to come through since it had already become too copious to be contained or diverted — along its way it buried everything. And after, as after a flood, floating upon the waters was a wardrobe, a person, a stray window, three suitcases."
> —Clarice Lispector (*The Passion According to G.H.*)[2]

The wind increases and the trees agree:
"That which happens."
"That which happens."
It touches my entire being and my hair turns into a flag.
A small brook between two hills rises and sinks at the pace of the moon, which revolves like a fan.
A tree grows buds, the buds grow into large green leaves, which yellow and scatter in the wind.
Tall grass grows beneath the pulsing sky, becoming earth where new grass grows.
I look back at the row of pines and the water that's stilled.
Everything becomes a mirror. The same on both sides.
The inside has been given an outside and the outside an inside.
My worries and doubts dull and fall off, carried away by the wind, disappearing.
That's when I see the booming depths within me, breathing slowly and meeting my gaze.
We look at each other and I lose my lines.
First in fear. Then in grief.
A shudder makes what little is left of me tremble and radiate in a mix of grief, fear, and a profound gratitude over finally being seen.
Never has anything been this real.
All was on fire,
brilliant, and the moment echoed.
Stretched.

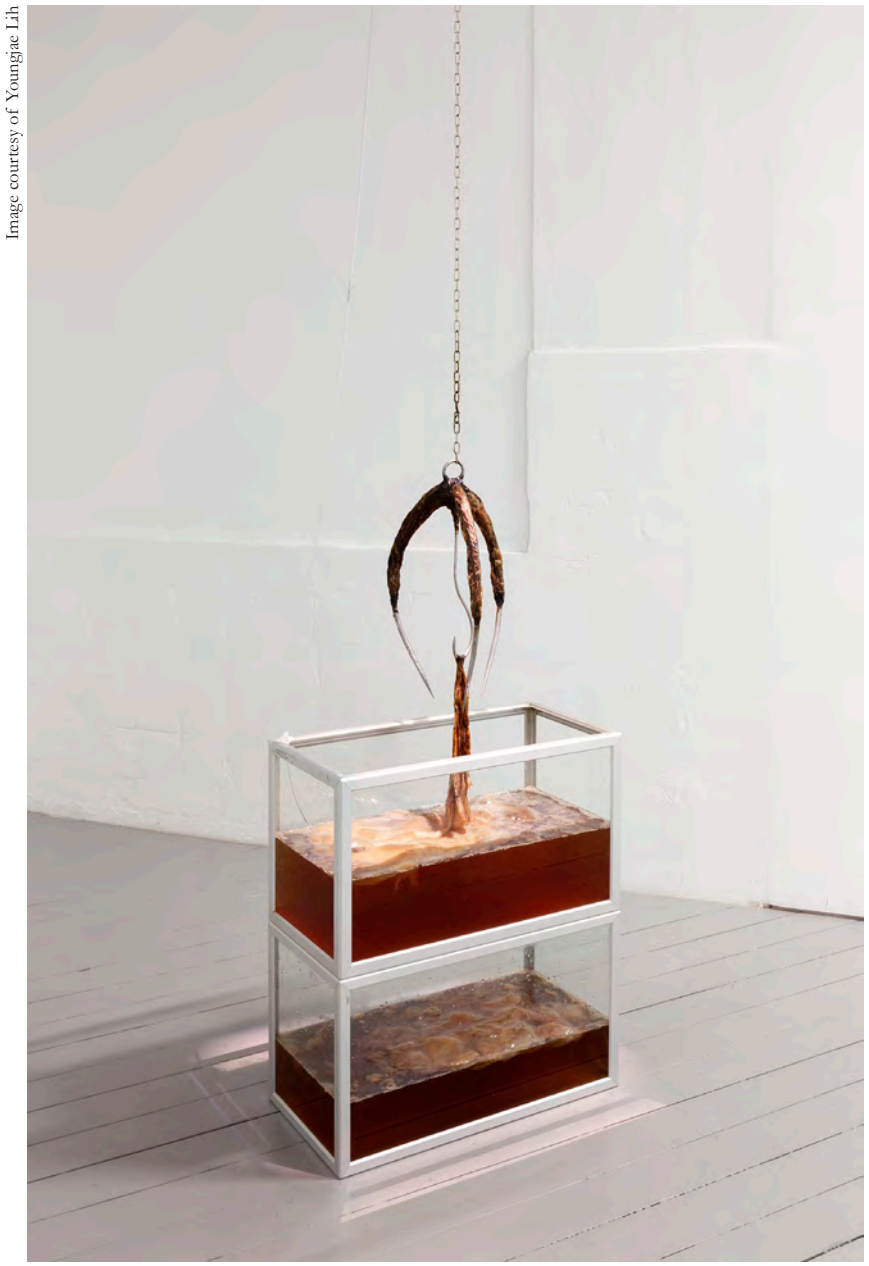
(A silence)

I remain kneeling, with everything I used to be strewn like autumn leaves around me.
The sky, the trees, the wind, and the water.
The entire world is a quiet waltz and I, a trembling string that plays along.
Every movement. Every colour. All is whole and clear.
I see it.
It is so unbearably beautiful.
You are so unbearably beautiful.
You crumbling sandcastle.

1 Alberto Giacometti, *Écrits*, ed. Mary Lisa Palmer and François Chaussende (Paris: Hermann, 1990), quoted in part in *The Colossal: From Ancient Greece to Giacometti*, by Peter Mason (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 218. The remainder is our translation.

2 Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. Idra Novey (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 66.

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Pernille Emilia Kjær, *Leaky Circuitry*, 2023. Steel, mycelium, 3d-print, micro servo motors, wire, arduino, distance sensor, PVC tube, metal chain, aquarium, dehydrated and live SCOBY, kombucha, plastic box, flies, contact lens container, variable dimensions. Installation view, BFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

I spent the first half of my twenties thinking that I was going to become a photographer. I completed my education and purchased a large and expensive camera from a man who appeared to be consumed with owning the latest and best equipment. I became obsessed with self-portraits, especially those of Francesca Woodman and her uncanny black-and-white photographs. Naturally, photography became the first medium I worked with in my artistic practice. My body became a tool for constructing sculpturally staged situations; what arose was an affection for the organic and the abject. Driven by this, I attempted to manipulate my body's expression and examine its form. I often wished that I could tear it apart and put it back together anew, into an amorphous mass of biological material. In the end, however, I always wound up ensnared in what, to me, came to be the medium's closed form. There was a gap between the subject in the pictures and me—the world that I wanted to build couldn't be built there. What was lacking was a sense of materiality. I needed 2D to turn into 3D, to crawl its way out of the frame and take possession of the room. It was then that I discovered Alina Szapocznikow's anthropomorphic sculptures, which took as their starting points casts of her own body. There was the solution: *sculpture*. This approach opened a myriad of form expressions and corporeal constructions. But most importantly, working with sculpture meant a physical contact with materials with which I could allow myself to merge.

This relationship to materiality has come to be an important part of my practice, especially biomaterials like fungi and scobies. It is a constant negotiation between the materials and me. I guide them in one direction, casting them into moulds, and let them take up residence inside containers. I determine their morphology, and they give me a reaction in return: adapting or refusing. It's often the case that these reactions are unexpected. At times, when I open the door to my studio, they offer me exciting surprises to work with—while other times, they provide grounds for making changes to my methodology because I have misunderstood the essential nature of the materials. I test, fail, change method, then test again. The fungi grow at lightning speed beyond the edges of the constraining form when the mycelia infiltrate the substrate they now inhabit. The hyphae radiate in all directions and the mycelium settles like a white and moist membrane over the casting moulds.[1] There they remain, smouldering. Suddenly, from one day to another, fruiting bodies shoot out from the sculpture, perforating the imposed form, like a leak from a crack in a container.

In everyday speech, a scoby (symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast) is also known as a "tea fungus," even though it's not actually a fungus, categorically speaking.[2] This culture never has a static shape. Instead, it takes on the character of the surface of the container within which it happens to be growing. It is an amorphous organism. When moist and alive, it resembles a slimy layer of fat. When dehydrated, it takes on the form of a leather-like skin. It replicates itself indefinitely, as long as it's being fed. Metal possesses this same shape-shifting potential. It can be firm and cold, fluid and warm, malleable, shiny, or perishable. In combination with scoby and fungi, another shape-shift arises: oxidation and rust.

This conversation between materials and artist is something that I see in Isabelle Andriessen's work. She creates artificial systems that are living, sweating, leaking, and growing. This happens because the materials are reacting with and triggering chemical reactions in each other. In Andriessen's *The Enchanters*, two futuristic figures towered above me as I entered the *Skymningsland* exhibition at Moderna Museet Malmö and saw her works for the very first time, in the real world.[3] Synthetic crystals of iron (II) sulphate are slowly spreading across larger parts of the installation. This transpires over a longer time span than I can fully comprehend when I'm in the presence of the work. From the wall, tubes extend to metallic limbs, and a built-in cooling system causes them to drip as if from perspiration. It is a kind of performance in which the lifeless is becoming animated and the boundary between what is and isn't alive is being blurred. This transformation of the pieces is also happening when the viewer is not present. They are something in themselves, even without an audience. Being in the room with them is like standing across from another living being. I think this has to do with the artworks' constant mutability, due to the materials' agency to transform the work through their own initiative.

In my work with living materials, there is likewise a loss of control to the other. I can only steer a certain part of the process, and at a certain point in time, I need to allow the other to take over. I am no longer the only actor, and we come to form a synthesis. The work is alive and evolves over an uncontrollable timeline. The materials mobilise and change each other upon contact. By virtue of their agency, they embody a generative potential to make the work with me. It is a form of co-creation with another organism.

The largest organism on Earth is a fungus, a gigantic network of mycelia that spreads underground. Fungi were here long before us, and it's quite possible that they're also going to outlast us. They are ancient. But to me, they are also organisms that hold the future within themselves. Fungi communicate via electrical impulses that are transmitted through the omnidirectional network of mycelium. They can form symbiotic relationships with trees, and through this common network, they can exchange nourishment and information.[4] The needs of every entity are met in this shared ecosystem—an organism that acts not unlike the basic principles of socialism.

We are more closely related to fungi than we are to plants, genetically speaking. The mycelia of many fungi species are capable of growing together with the mycelia of other genetically similar species, even when they are not sexually compatible. Is this organism, then, singular? Plural? Or both?[5]

"We are all lichens."[6]

This is the concluding sentence of the article "A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been individuals," written by biologists Scott F. Gilbert and Jan Sapp with philosopher Alfred I. Tauber. This article, published in *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, leads off with a criticism of the established criteria for the biological individual.[7] For example, animals cannot be considered individuals on the basis of anatomical or physiological criteria. The rationale behind this has to do with the many different symbionts of which animals are composed, symbionts that have important functions in completing metabolic processes and other physical functions.[8] Studies have shown that animal development would not be complete without these symbionts. The article points out that no organism is autonomous and independent, but that, instead, every organism is akin to lichen —a symbiotic organism that consists of a fungal partner and a photosynthetic algal or bacterial partner. The discovery of symbiosis throughout the animal kingdom transforms our classic conception of insular individuality into one in which interactive relations between species blur the boundaries of the organism and obscure the notion of essential identity.[9] What counts as "self" becomes fluid and difficult to encapsulate. Symbiosis is not an abnormality in a world

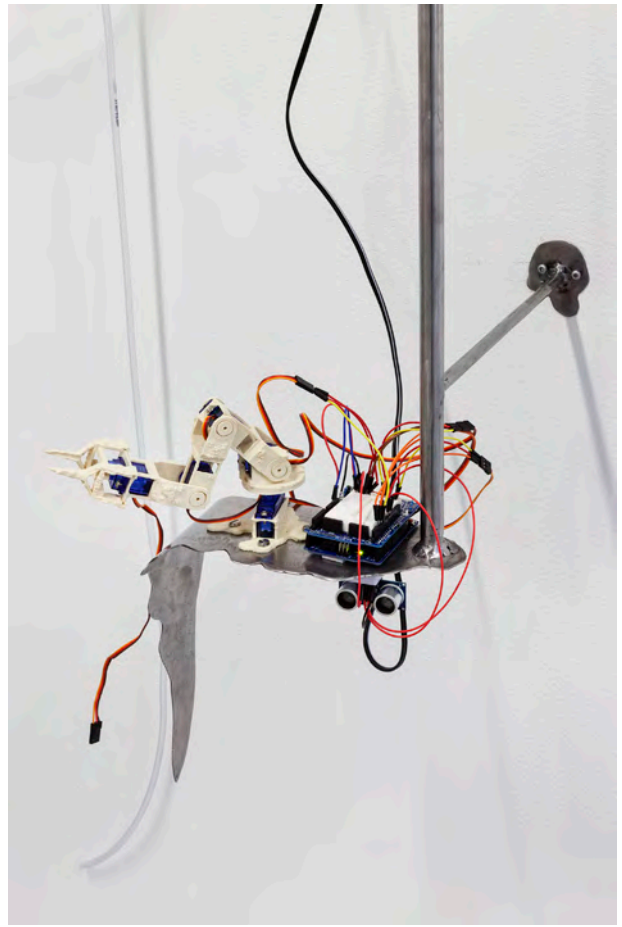


Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Pernille Emilia Kjær, *Leaky Circuitry,* 2023. Steel, mycelium, 3d-print, micro servo motors, wire, arduino, distance sensor, PVC tube, metal chain, aquarium, dehydrated and live SCOBY, kombucha, plastic box, flies, contact lens container. Detail

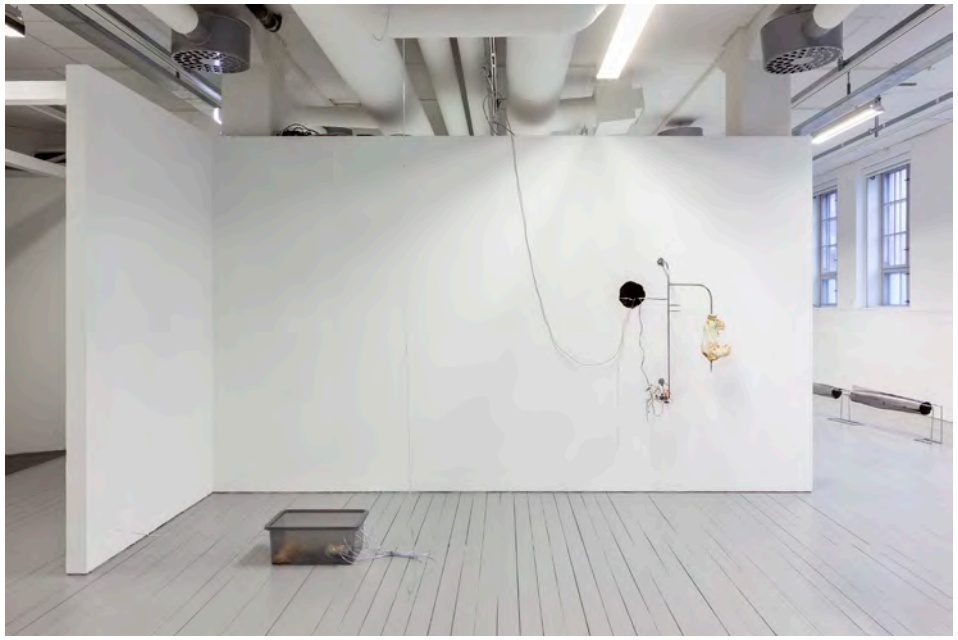


Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Pernille Emilia Kjær, *Leaky Circuitry*, 2023. Steel, mycelium, 3d-print, micro servo motors, wire, arduino, distance sensor, PVC tube, metal chain, aquarium, dehydrated and live SCOBY, kombucha, plastic box, flies, contact lens container, variable dimensions. Installation view

that is otherwise characterised by competitive survival, but is rather a pervasive find among animals, fungi, and plants. If we follow these arguments to their logical conclusion, then—as the title of the article suggests—we have never been individuals.

The skin of human beings is inhabited by yeast. Inside our intestines live more than 150 different bacterial species.[10] Our bodies house thousands of microbiomes upon which we are dependent in order to maintain our bodily functions. Just like lichens, we are composite organisms. My back is covered with splotches of pityriasis versicolor, a fungal skin infection that proliferates in clusters of round, miscoloured dry spots. They call to mind the marks on people who contend that they've been abducted by aliens. For a long time, these fungal spots seemed abject to me, like foreign bodies invading my skin's barrier. However, I have acknowledged that they, too, are part of a common hybrid body. We are a cross-bodily entanglement; we are not singular —but rather plural.

A pervasive image in Tishan Hsu's artworks is that of hybrid bodies, belonging to something that was once a human being. Not only is this the symbiosis between human beings and other organisms, it is also a symbiosis with the technology that we surround ourselves with. There's something disturbing and dystopian about his work, which I simultaneously find incredibly alluring. In her essay "Fluid Bodies," Kassandra Nakas describes Hsu's *Institutional Body*:

> The technoid framing and the magnifying glass-like enlargement of the "skin" with its pore-like orifices cause a strong affect. This skin is not a protective membrane of the (painted) body, but porous and leaky. It suggests a larger ecosystem with which the body is in exchange beyond its edges, and pipes behind its back that accomplish the necessary, quasi-physiological processes of disposal.[11]

As I see it, there is incredible potential in this boundless, leaky body.

Something becomes a leakage whenever a boundary serving to contain is transgressed. Everything that involves some attempt to contain has the potential to leak, regardless of its physical condition (for example, an oil leak, or a leak of news or digital files)—this implies a disruption of a given flow, a breakthrough, a liberation of content from form. Ambivalence is central to leakages, insofar as they can both pose a threat and present a chance for change.[12]

"Turning towards leakiness is not a call for absolute boundlessness and consensus; rather, it is an assertion that leaks disrupt consensus, and that this disruption is inevitable and often valuable. If we can reorient ourselves towards attending to leaky spaces—asking questions not just of substances and content but also of form and structure, I argue that new realms for ethics open up."[13]

In my work *Leaky Circuitry*, I lean into the ambivalence of the leaking body. The installation consists of three physically connected components, which are slowly changing shape—a large circuit in constant flux, infesting the gallery's architecture. Several types of elements act as containers of ecosystems within the circuit: aquariums, plastic boxes, and glass vials, as well as the gallery space becoming a container in and of itself. Containers with the potential to leak in response to the slightest change. Taken together, they come to constitute a great chimeral organism.[14] Protruding from mycelium in castings are fruiting bodies, around which flies swarm, while other parts of the mycelium are drying out and dying. A robotic arm moves with reptile-like jerks whenever anybody or anything approaches it and then emits a mechanical sound. On top of the aquariums hangs a metal claw with a dripping scoby, which is being kept moist by the fluid inside the container. The air is filled with a sweet, vinegar-scented smell that's seeping out from the container. The parts are conjoined by a thin, clear plastic tube that, in certain places, leads out into nothing —a subtle leak within a more comprehensive system. That such a leak in the circuit's flow can pass virtually unnoticed might seem ominous. In actuality, it's in this discomfort that the possibility of change is seated.

In 1925, Vladimir I. Vernadsky, geologist and geochemist, and an exponent of Russian cosmism,[15] wrote "Human Autotrophy." In this text, he set forth his thesis about human autotrophs. To put it succinctly, the idea proceeded from a premise that the people of the future should become autotrophic, like plants, in order to survive on an Earth that was becoming overpopulated and characterised by a glaring lack of resources. An autotroph is an organism that is dependent only on itself—and not on other organisms —in order to produce nutritive compounds. Human beings, on the contrary, are heterotrophic organisms. As Vernadsky points out, our whole existence is steered by our dependence on other living organisms or on products of *their* lives. For this reason, we ought to be able, instead, to emulate photosynthesis in order to produce nutrition and to replace fossil-fuel energy sources. Through a direct utilisation of the sun's energy, mankind would supposedly master green plants' energy source, versus the form that we are currently using, with the plant as intermediary. With the prospect of technological and scientific progress that was a salient tendency of his day, Vernadsky believed that realising this could be possible in the near future.[16]

I believe that in terms of his hopes for the future, Vernadsky was onto something absolutely essential. But perhaps the solution needs to be found somewhere else. Is the problem, in reality, a lack of resources? Or does it have to do with how these resources are being distributed? And is it because we, in the Western world, are being subjected to an ideological worldview that constructs a form of hyperindividualistic societal structure, resulting in a total alienation between the individual and the community? Individualism is not an inherent part of "human nature," as liberal thinkers are prone to believe. As Rosi Braidotti argues, it is rather a product of a specific historical and cultural discursive formation.[17] A discourse that I, too, am inclined to think is somewhat problematic, and that I, inspired by Vernadsky, would like to re-program in a radically different direction.

Humans have the potential to evolve in the direction of fungi, both ideologically and within a more speculative biological development. Evolution that moves forwards, moves backwards: a rhizomatic evolution. I believe that there are movements other than "forwards." In a series of works titled *Loss of Human Form*, I examine this fungal speculation—a narrative that zigzags between biological theory and fictional, posthumanist world-building. The works consist of a number of anthropomorphic sculptures in metal and scoby. Hybrid figures that no longer possess human form as we know it, as the title suggests. Their bodies have adapted to a new world and have partially become fungi: connected bodies with diffluent boundaries.

In pop culture, the realm of fungi is often portrayed in a negative way, as can be seen in the HBO series *The Last of Us* (based on the eponymous computer game).[18] A zombie epidemic breaks out, more specifically a cordyceps fungus that has suddenly mutated and now has the capacity to infect people. If a person gets infected, they will become a part of the fungus's enormous network. A vast, common body that can sense, from miles off, whether any part of it is being affected. The fate of humanity unfolds in this post-apocalyptic setting, while the constant fear of becoming a part of the fungus hangs over all. Western society's aforementioned hyperindividualism is reflected in narratives like this—a fear of losing oneself to this connected network, along with individuality and a bounded body. Why is this considered horror? In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva writes,

> "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."[19]

If surrendering one part of the self was done in exchange for an enhanced degree of connectedness, would the fear of encountering the abject then be diminished? Perhaps, then, being enshrouded in the vast mycelium wouldn't be so dystopian, after all. For me, at least, there is a utopia in a fungal future in which each of us are going to become part of a physical *we*, shouldering a shared responsibility. A dissolution of a bounded self in favour of a relational structure.

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1 Hypha (from the Greek, "hyphe": "web"): threadlike fungal tissue, usually 2–10 µm thick, from which the fungus's mycelium and fruiting bodies have been constructed. The mycelium is most often the subterranean part of a fungus, which grows as a threaded network. "Hyfe," Lex.dk, 31 January 2009, https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/hyfe.

2 Scobies are commonly used for brewing the fermented tea known as kombucha.

3 *Skymningsland* is the name of a group exhibition that was presented at Moderna Museet Malmö, Sweden, from 29 October 2022 to 9 April 2023 (https://www.modernamuseet.se/malmo/sv/utstallningar/skymningsland/).

4 More than 90% of plants are dependent on mycorrhizal fungi—etymologically stemming from the Greek words for fungus ("mykes") and root ("rhiza")—which can conjoin trees into shared networks. In this symbiosis, the fungi draw minerals and water up from the soil to the trees' roots, in exchange for obtaining carbon from the trees. Merlin Sheldrake, *Svampenes Forunderlige Liv* [*Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, and Shape Our Futures*] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2020), 6.

5 Sheldrake, *Svampenes Forunderlige Liv*.

6 Scott F. Gilbert, Jan Sapp, and Alfred I. Tauber, "A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals," *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 87, no. 4 (December 2012): 325–41, https://doi.org/10.1086/668166.

7 The term "individual" is used in many ways in the field of biology, and can accordingly be defined anatomically, embryologically, physiologically, immunologically, and evolutionarily. Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber, "A Symbiotic View of Life."

8 The word "symbiont" denotes an organism that is living in a state of symbiosis.

9 Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber, "A Symbiotic View of Life," 325–26.

10 Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber, "A Symbiotic View of Life," 327.

11 Kassandra Nakas, "Fluid Bodies: Corpo-Materiality in Works by Tishan Hsu, Alisa Baremboym, and Jes Fan," in *Fluidity: Materials in Motion*, ed. Marcel Finke and Kassandra Nakas (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag GmbH, 2022), 84.

12 Alysse Kushinski, "Leak Morphologies," in *Fluidity: Materials in Motion*, 62, 70.

13 Kushinski, "Leak Morphologies," 70.

14 In the field of genetics, the term "chimera" is used to designate an individual organism that consists of a mixture of cells from two or more genetically distinct tissues, such as an artificially produced sheep-goat, which consists of cells from two different species. "Fåreged," Lex.dk, 30 January 2009, https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/fåreged; "Kimære (genetisk begreb)," Lex.dk, 20 October 2014, https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/kim%C3%A6re_-_genetisk_begreb.

15 The first wave of Russian cosmism took place at the closing of the nineteenth century. It was a philosophical and cultural movement that commingled Orthodox theology with scientific prognoses about the future. Central to the movement were futuristic and spiritual visions, and a belief in technological and scientific progress as a means for realising these. Philosopher Nikolai Fyodorovich Fryodorov (1829–1903), one of the first cosmists, believed that we would accordingly be able to resurrect our ancestors and attain immortality. Juliette Faure, "Russian Cosmism: A National Mythology Against Transhumanism," *The Conversation*, 11 January 2021, https://theconversation.com/russian-cosmism-a-national-mythology-against-transhumanism-152780.

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I'm Drawn by All Living Things, as the Living Organism That I Am
Cecilie Mark

Image courtesy of the artist

Cecilie Mark, *An Inquiry (immanence)*, 2023. Concrete, moss, metal rack, magnifying glass, petri dish, human hair, variable dimensions. Installation view, BFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

Images courtesy of the artist

Cecilie Mark, *An inquiry (immanence)*, 2023. Concrete, stones, metal rack, magnifying glass, petri dish, plaster. Detail and installation view

A memory from my childhood: I'm sitting in the back seat of my parents' car. We're driving on the highway. My father is eating an apple. After he's finished with the apple, he hands me the core and asks me to toss it out of the window. I take the apple, looking out towards the field. "It's okay. It will decompose in its natural surroundings," says my father. But I'm feeling paralysed by the very thought of letting it go. The window on my side of the car is rolled down, and the forceful breeze swirling around the car is pressing against my face. I feel the apple in my hand, its shape, its juicy flesh bursting around its inner core, and I'm feeling a sense of presence that I don't want to relinquish. My parents keep telling me that I've got to throw the apple away. I finally throw it, ever so gently, out the window and onto the fields, as I persist, with my gaze, in securing its contours, which are being distended as a consequence of the car's rapid velocity. I'm left with a feeling of loneliness, both on behalf of the apple and on my own behalf. I'm left with a sense of guilt, a feeling of having been superior to the apple, of having exercised a power over the apple that I possess only on account of my humanness. These feelings and the thoughts they have brought with them have been following me throughout my whole life: thoughts about what mankind's relationship is to other forms of life.

For this reason, it's not all that strange that my artistic practice, *anno* 2023, is imbued with the same kinds of questions. In my practice, there has been an incessant longing to work with something that extends beyond myself. A yearning to understand and experience the world with other eyes and to break down the man-made hierarchies that are present and have influenced mankind's relationship to other living organisms. However, I am not in a situation where I can single-handedly break down the hierarchies or change our history. These hierarchies are upheld through traditions that are several thousand years old concerning the way that human beings position themselves in the world and how they describe it. I propose the idea of a cohesive world, with a shared language for everything that conjoins us: life. As naive as this may sound, I find it all the more necessary to lay bare this core condition so that we can find each other once again. In my quest for the collective, I have been dealing with everything from specific biological phenomena to more universal symbols.

I find solace in the thought that every time I am breathing, I am inhaling oxygen that has been released by plants. I feel that this is an altogether concrete process that causes us humans to be connected to another living being. The air feels so free inside our lungs, feels so innate that we don't even think about where it comes from. Or where *we* come from. In the natural sciences, the question of how other living beings can sense, remember, and feel, in each their own way, has been elucidated. I'm interested in the areas where our modes of being overlap and where we can meet each other. In this regard, I have been devoting my attention to dealing with the characteristics that various species have in common and with nature's own way of shedding light on this issue. I have been especially preoccupied with the spiral and have been working with it as a universal symbol—as something that captures a cosmic union running across various species. The spiral is found in every person's fingerprints, in the calcareous snail shell, in DNA's form, and in plant growth and the organisation of leaves. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe turned his attention to the latter phenomenon in his 1831 article, "Über die Spiral-Tendenz der Vegetation" (On the spiral tendency of vegetation). As an element within a more comprehensive examination of plants' metamorphoses and ways of growing, the occurrence of spirals came to be an overriding theme in Goethe's theory about plant development. In his studies, Goethe came across *Spiralgefäße*—microscopic spiral vessels that cause the plant's leaves to move, and which tend to develop in a spiral around its vertical stem. Goethe called the spiral the "basic law of life"[1]—it can be found in minutiae yet governs the great whole. These are thoughts that occasionally make me feel dizzy—"the smallest micro" and "the largest macro" —and my mind simply boggles at how the "organic whole" is connected. Goethe was not the only scientist to obsess over the spiral. The Italian mathematician Leonardo of Pisa created the Fibonacci series, which, in its specific calculation of the numbers' sums, engenders certain angle configurations and numerical ratios that form a spiral.[2] In nature, these specific patterns figure into flower heads, pinecones, and, as has just been mentioned, snail shells. Like the spiral's eternal repetition in forms and movements, I am recapitulating the use of the spiral again and again and again and again and again. In my artworks, the spiral is a concrete symbol of an interconnectedness traversing time and place. In its physical tangibility, the spiral lays bare a universal core condition, a vitality that unifies everything. For me, it becomes nature's proof that we all have *something* fundamental in common. This *something* can also be described thusly: the stream of life's movement as it manifests itself in physical and immaterial phenomena running across different species and different forms of life.

Why would anyone be interested in this? Because I believe that mankind, throughout its history, has created systems and distinctions that have established greater and greater differences between various kinds of life. I aim to challenge the idea of the distinctions, of the boundaries, in a rapprochement that tends towards a shared concern for what we come from and what we are.

In philosophy, there has historically been a tendency to posit distinctions between mankind and its surrounding world. Seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes laid the foundations for a substance dualism and for drawing a distinction between subject and object: the mind-body dichotomy. For Descartes, thought was the direct source of experience of the world, in contradistinction to the body and its sense perceptions.[3] Since that time, dualism has laid the groundwork for a great deal of discussion, and philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, among others, have been arguing for an entangled subject and object—and for a prioritisation of the body as a primary pre-reflexive form of cognition.[4]

A lot has happened in philosophy since that time, and in today's materialism, there are schools of thought in which researchers in both philosophy and science are speaking about gut bacteria as active players in our decision-making—a vitalism that the philosopher Jane Bennett has been advancing with her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.[5] Among other thinkers, Jane Bennett calls the philosopher Baruch de Spinoza into the discussion, along with his book, *Ethica*, from 1677. In this work, Spinoza introduces a monistic substance concept that considers everything to be modifications of one and the same substance, in direct contradistinction to Descartes's concept.[6] In Spinoza, this substance is God, who possesses an immanent presence in every living thing in the world. God is therefore nature, mankind, the great, and the small: in other words, God is everything that exists. In Spinoza's ethics, this relationship between everything can be interpreted as a form of connectedness. Every living thing inherently has God or nature in common, as the sole power that exists. It is particularly in relation to this connectedness that Jane Bennett draws on Spinoza. Spinoza puts forth the argument that physical bodies affect and are affected by each other.[7] In Bennett's neo-materialist vitalism, employing this reciprocity among the world's component parts as her point of departure, she distances herself from the notion that mankind is the only living thing that possesses agency. To a significant degree, Bennett's philosophical project has to do with refuting anthropocentrism, and with, in her words: "a hierarchy of subjects over objects."[8] What Bennett wants to develop, on the contrary, is a way of thinking about agency that is freer in its interpretive framework and accordingly does not confine itself to human beings.[9] Bennett is suggesting, among other things, anthropomorphising (interpreting something non-human in terms that ascribe human forms or attributes to it)[10] as a practice that, potentially speaking, can infuse a way of thinking that blurs the lines of demarcation between human beings, animals, plants, and things.[11]

Personally, I am working in a closely concentrated way with the concept of care as a form of anthropomorphising, for which a sense of solicitude for the non-human living things around us is essential. Let's return to the anecdote about the apple: properties, along with a value in its own right, are being ascribed to the object, the apple, in its capacity as an independent agency-bearing subject, which deserves acknowledgement and care.

This care can be said to be the goal. It is my belief that to attain this end, one needs to have the ability to feel empathy, a fundamental tool in my approach to accommodating the world and its species, in order to better understand them. I am very interested in the empathic figure and in the manner that this quality can constitute a competence in the way that we meet and in the way that we think about other kinds of life. In this context, I have found inspiration in Ursula K. Le Guin. In her science-fiction story, "Vaster than Empires and More Slow," she introduces a character who possesses such great "bio-empathetic qualities" that, while on an expedition to an alien planet, he becomes a connecting link to stability between the forest on the planet and the people aboard the spacecraft on which the delegation has been traveling.[12] The story ends with this character allowing himself to completely surrender to the forest. Because he does this, the sense of dread among the human beings and any sense of apprehension of nature on this alien planet fade away. When I was reading this book, I couldn't help thinking about whether we can allow ourselves to amalgamate. I imagined an affectionate meeting—that the empathetic character in the book was disappearing into the forest, and that the forest was welcoming him "with open branches." I was imagining how he was coalescing with the trees and drawing breath through their leaves.

For me, this image is rooted in a fundamental and essentially necessary compassion for an ecosystem in crisis. I believe that there is a need for a *bodily-emotional approach* to meeting with nature and with life around us, in order to solve today's most serious and imminent crisis: namely, the climate and biodiversity crisis. In this connection, I believe that art can help play a role in bringing about an interaction and a dialogue related to mankind's place in the world and the responsibility that we have for it.

In my view, Marguerite Humeau is an artist who is creating interesting spaces and stories about species and existence, who emphasises the presence of the cross-species meeting between human beings and other species. In the exhibition *FOXP2*, which was shown in 2016 at Nottingham Contemporary, Humeau draws parallels between the origin of human language and the evolutionary development of elephants. Humeau takes as her starting point a mutational gene called FOXP2, which was instrumental in language development in our ancestors. She places, within the exhibition, a question mark beside the riddle of how the elephants' evolution as a species might have proceeded had it been *them* that had lived through this genetic mutation and thereby developed language.[13] In collaboration with various scientists, Humeau has been gathering data about elephants and has, as a result, created eight different sculptures of elephants to perform and express different emotional states, within a narrative about the death of one of the elephants.[14] It could be said that Humeau, with this exhibition, is blurring the boundary between the human and the non-human by challenging the human ego and depriving the viewer of the gaze on "the other living creature," as something other and as something incommensurable in relation to ourselves.[15] In this constellation, the human viewer is confronted with a sentient being that, in spite of being radically different physically, passes through the same emotional and existential states (including joy, depression, and death). In this meeting, the viewer is compelled to look at themselves in the mirror and sympathise with the elephants, to almost undergo the kind of anthropomorphising that Jane Bennett speaks about, through the characteristics that we ourselves possess that are ascribed to the elephants.

The fact that, through this exhibition, Humeau is able to evoke these feelings inside the viewer reminds me once again of the importance of seeing mankind's existence and value as qualities that are on par with the essential nature and value of other living beings. After all, how would it have been if the mutated gene had arisen in the elephant, and they, instead of mankind, had consequently developed the power of speech? This is a potential alternative that, from a biological point of view, could have indeed been possible—in other words, what we have here before us is an evolutionary coincidence. Through Humeau's staging, one can imagine a scenario, a completely different world, where mankind does not have the same position, the same power, or the same opportunity to define and dominate its surroundings. Is it a simple genetic mutation, an error that has brought about our evolution into what we are today? And is this error the reason for the destruction that we see in the world and nature that we are living through right now? In my view, a return to our corporeality, getting back in touch with our shared bodily conditions, is a sine qua non for our being able to experience ourselves as what we truly are and to understand our position within the planet's ecosystem, a position from which we are going to have to advance and evolve. Human beings, as a highly pervasive species, have a responsibility to give something back to the planet and to the life that exists all around us.

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1 Kinko Tsuji and Stefan C. Müller, *Spirals and Vortices* (Switzerland: Springer Cham, 2019), 47. Herein, it is stated that Goethe's comment on the spiral appears in J. W. von Goethe, "Uber die Spiraltendenz der Vegetation" [On the spiral tendency of vegetation], in *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* [Natural science writings], ed. Rudolf Steiner (Donarch: Philosophich-Antroposophischer Verlag am Goetheanum, 1982), 217–38.

2 Tsuji and Müller, *Spirals and Vortices*, 48.

3 Ole Thyssen, *Det filosofiske blik, europæiske mestertænkere* [The philosophical gaze: European master thinkers] (Copenhagen: Information, 2012), 217.

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5 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 213.

6 Baruch de Spinoza, *Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Clare Carlisle and trans. George Eliot (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 73.

7 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 65.

8 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 120.

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15 Goloychenko, "Surreal Femininity," 187.

Image courtesy of the artist

Billie Meiniche, *No memory, not even the closest one*, 2023. Rebar, photograph, dollhouse, variable dimension. BFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

To monster
Billie Meiniche

> "I am not a man I am not a woman I am not heterosexual
> I am not homosexual I am not bisexual. I am a dissident
> of the sex-gender system. I am the multiplicity of the cosmos
> trapped in a binary political and epistemological system,
> shouting in front of you. I am a Uranian confined inside
> the limits of techno-scientific capitalism."
>
> —Paul B. Preciado, in *An Apartment on Uranus*[1]

If you want, you can see this text as a tent. A place for temporary refuge that we can unfold or stow away, even add to when needed. I stand by my tent, hopefully spun from my thoughts, helped along the way by other Queer[2] and trans[3] thinkers and artists. I know that I make mistakes. I know that there's always more for me to learn, more fragments to gather with those around me. And so, it's smart to have a tent, a flexible structure we can develop and grow. We can meet under its protection. We can make it all disappear when we don't wish to be seen.

Welcome! I almost want to say. I've been looking forward to you being here, for the words to appear between us. They've been brewing for quite some time. Now let's get started.

1. I'm Not Gonna Tell You My Gender, You Wouldn't Get It Anyway

In *An Apartment on Uranus*, Paul B. Preciado writes that the first diagnosis we get is that of a gender. Separating oneself from this diagnosis, from the two comically large categories of man/woman, is akin to separating oneself from the very foundations of personhood. Or, as Susan Stryker describes it, gender is "the tribal tattoo that makes one's personhood cognizable."[4]

I've spent many frustrating hours trying to untangle these threads. What is gender? Who presides over it? Is it material, essential, cultural? Or is it, most of all, political? In the Danish language, these terms are all jumbled: a gender is a sex is a gender. We have only the one word: "køn." This gives rise to a great deal of confusion. A confusion I've come to cherish. Nobody fully knows what they are talking about. Nevertheless, the gender binary is enforced every day. But if it were a given, a "natural" order, that wouldn't be necessary, would it? In this way, we're all sick with our gender diagnoses.[5]

Over time, I've become much more interested in the workings of these, our most robust categorisations. Assuming there's a function to the categories of gender, sex, or race, who, then, benefits from them? With this I should say, words or no words, these categories and the privileges they distribute exist. Naming one's oppression requires words. Still, I believe—drawing heavily on Édouard Glissant—that the living, like art, contain the ephemeral, an intangibility that defies categorisation. An opacity that only the few are afforded.[6] This is where I work from. I work to create much more space for the living, for the right to be without explanation, for the right to remain opaque.

2. Shapeshifter

Maybe it's my Leo sun, or that I'm the eldest of four siblings. Maybe it's trauma or simple vanity. But, for much of my life, "success," approval, being seen, was my only measure for my worth in this world. For long periods, this—and a couple of bipolar depressions—wrung me completely out of shape. It took years and several detours to eventually stumble upon art and a stable version of myself. I studied economics. I studied music production. I was a singer, an event coordinator, a waiter, a start-up dude, a project manager, and even an actor. I have also been a woman.

Finding my way through life has taken time. Especially because the whole matter of growing up, of becoming a functioning citizen under capitalism, is the opposite of what I have had to do to find my art and my being, my queerness.

Following the logic of success, art is an absurd choice. It is, for the vast majority, a precarious life, lived out in an obscure, somewhat eccentric corner of existence. For me, becoming an artist was the wholly improbable act that opened the door to this wholly improbable life. I started out making bodies. The body's inherent instability serves as an obvious site for rebellion. I became obsessed with drawing my own torso, shaping it over and over. Later, I recognised this in the works of other Queer artists. Working on your own embodiment becomes the work itself. See, for example, Cassils's *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture* and *Becoming an Image*; Zackary Drucker's *The Inability to Be Looked at and the Horror of Nothing to See*; Del LaGrace Volcano's portraits of his own transition and underground drag king milieus in the 1990s; and last but not least, Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie*, a protocol, an experiment, and a bodily rebellion that uses, among other things, synthetic testosterone as a weapon. Described by Preciado himself as an auto-political fiction and "body essay."[7]

In the Queer, as in art, lies a rejection, a farewell.[8] My "anti-maturing" as a Queer person and my maturation as an artist go hand in hand. Art has become my resistance to the "mature"

life in capitalism to which I once aspired: marriage, children, nuclear family, real estate, accumulated wealth. Ideals afforded by my middle-class privileges, hinging on a hetero-capitalist life.[9]

3. To Monster

In art, I find the space to create, while I create myself. In transit between genders, identities, and embodiments, I work in the crossings, the liminal. It's a practice full of hope, creating from destruction, making new systems from old patterns.

To sew, unravel, then sew again. In textiles, but also metals, memories, dreams, and long-forgotten objects. Sculpture is a relational practice. When a work is completed, it must "stand on its own" as a being in its own right. Much of my work up until now belongs somewhere between animal and object. They are beings of the crossings, the in-between, the cracks. They are big soft bodies, without heads or faces, existences from fragments. An uncanny albeit cute body-horror, recognizable as part of the living. We identify with them. We are disgusted by them.

I think this is also how an "unclear" gender expression can be perceived by outsiders. When the otherwise sharp line between genders is blurred, jumbled, it's all too often disgust that prevails. Even for the well-intentioned, encountering a person of the crossing is perceived mostly as a "glitch." A few years ago, while working a service job, an elderly man addressed me with the words, "Young man?" I turned around, greeting him with a big smile, but the poor man flushed bright red as he saw me. In his eyes, it was an unequivocally feminine face that met him. My then buzz cut had "fooled" him into recognising me as another man. He slunk out of the restaurant, walking sideways towards the door, his gaze fixed on the floor, spewing a stream of stammering apologies.

I didn't hear what he said. I don't think he himself would have been able to describe what had happened. So, what was it that this man thought he had done? For what was he apologising, really?

In most of the Western democracies, including my native country, Denmark, the law dictates that to be recognised as a citizen you must belong to one of two accepted genders: man or woman. You are assigned your official gender at birth, and there's no "opt-out." If one does not have a gender, one cannot exist—legally speaking. Trans and intersex people are stigmatised, classified into pathologies,[10] or made to conform[11]—categorised as deviations rather than as symptoms of an all too narrow system.[12]

Is the act of becoming ungendered, or degendered, also the act of becoming unhuman, dehuman(is)ed? Will losing your gender make you a monster? Did all the excuses from this older man come from the fact that, for a fleeting moment, he had sent me into exile, outside of gender, outside of humanity? Had he—involuntarily—monstered me?

Making monsters of "others" is nothing new. The European witch trials are a textbook example of demonisation as the primary weapon in a political campaign against women's freedom and "sexual deviants" (aka the Queers). Our own time, too, is rife with examples. Take, for instance, Hollywood's self-imposed taboo list, the Hays Code.[13] Even though the moral code was "retired" in 1968, its ideological tentacles still reach far into today's (pop) culture. Prohibiting depictions of "sexual perversion" (a catch-all phrase for homosexuality and any or all non-conforming gender identities or expressions), promiscuity, childbirth, and notably, white slavery! It's clear whom this code was intended to "protect." It even dictated that "The Good," who had to be unequivocally good, always triumph over "The Evil," who then also had to be unequivocally evil. In practice, this secured countless, often violent, wins for the "heroic" white man, at the expense of BIPOCs,[14] Queers, and other so-called deviants —a pattern that continues to dominate today.

Queer and BIPOC actors were—literally —cast as the villains. The feminine man and the masculine woman have become emblematic of the conniving villain who, at the behest of the moral code, was destined to perish in the most grotesque ways, film after film. Even in the Disney movies of the 1990s, this dynamic is prevalent. *The Little Mermaid*'s iconic sea witch, Ursula, who was directly inspired by the equally iconic drag queen, Divine, is a masculine woman who, adding insult to injury, is fat and adores her own body (an act of true heresy in our fat-phobic society). Ursula has reached icon status, celebrated by those of us who had to search among the villains to truly recognise ourselves. But in the film, Ursula ends her days in a most violent manner: first impaled by the mast of a ship, by our "hero," the handsome (white) Prince Eric, then electrocuted by King Triton. They both were avenging Ariel, who, in this scene, embodies another old trope: the innocent white woman, always in need of a saviour.[15]

There are many, many other examples. Staying within my childhood's animated universe, we find Scar, Jafar, Maleficent, "HIM," Hades, the Joker, and, of course, Shego. However, Dracula, Carmilla, and the Devil himself are well-known Queer-coded characters too.

Of course, it isn't just the Queer that is monstered—quite the contrary. Racism is responsible for and upholds some of the most violent and robust stereotypes, which, via countless repetitions, justify the white supremacy that invented them. Here, too, there are many classics, like the endless depictions of the "dangerous Black man," a trope that is, quite literally, lethal for Black Americans.[16] Not to say that the persecution of Queer and trans people is in any way equal to the hundreds of years of ongoing oppression of Black Americans. It is not. But the tactics of dehumanisation are similar. I recommend seeing Hanni Kamaly's work *BEAST-MODE*[17] as an example within contemporary art. Do not rest easy thinking this is "just" an American problem. Think of the depictions of refugees by politicians and in mainstream media in Denmark. Then think of the hordes of dangerously unknown, often suspiciously dark-skinned undead attacking

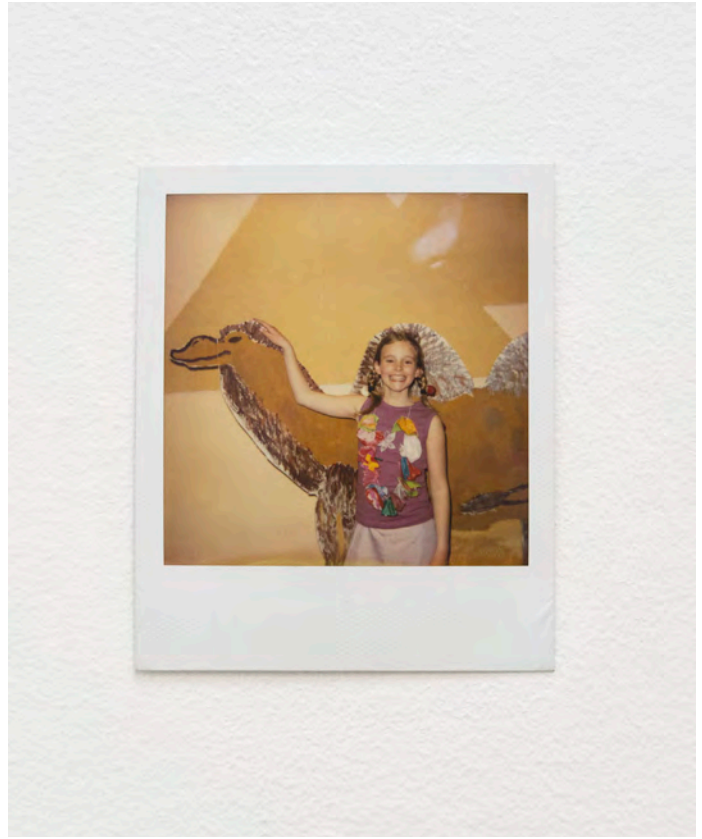

Image courtesy of the artist

Billie Meiniche, *No memory, not even the closest one*, 2023. Rebar, photograph, dollhouse, variable dimension. Detail

the peaceful lives of the white Westerners in zombie[18] films like *World War Z*.[19] It reads as a thinly veiled racist analogy for the "refugee crisis," and yet it is an example that I myself was made aware of only very recently.[20]

Culture isn't accidental. Monstering is a technique of oppression. We witness these tropes working at full force in the rhetoric surrounding the current surge of anti-trans legislation[21] and in the right-wing nationalism and explicit racism that is once again—or still—allowed to reign free in Denmark, Europe, and all of the "Cultural West."

4. To Monster Oneself

In her iconic song of fury, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," Susan Stryker speaks with the voice of the monster. Frankenstein's "unnatural" monster, assembled, created from fragmented body parts, has become a clichéd transphobic trope, but Susan Stryker speaks on behalf of the monstrous, the trans, the Queer. Rejecting the idea of the "natural order" as any guarantee of truth, she challenges the portrayal of trans-people as "unnatural" freaks. Instead, the monster is resurrected, from its mythological origins,[22] as harbinger of the joyful message that we are all created from the same dark waters of nature, technology, and science. [23]

"Though we forego the privilege of naturalness, we are not deterred, for we ally ourselves instead with the chaos and blackness from which Nature itself spills forth."[24]

The monster refuses to obey its creator.

Being estranged from one's body is not a Queer invention. Rather it's a kind of human condition. I seek no homecoming or transparency in my being, in my art, or in others. Following Susan Stryker, Paul B. Preciado, Édouard Glissant, and many more, I will defend the right to be fragmented. The right to travel along the crossings. The right to live on Uranus. The right to monster myself.

Unfortunately, achieving such freedom is complicated, to say the least. Besides the substantial obstacles of structural, systemic, economic, or even political conditions, I believe there's also another, shall we say "human," matter at stake. Structural inequality does not in itself evoke disgust, but disgust does serve to legitimise structural inequality.

When my otherness crosses the boundaries of your world, when my otherness unveils the otherness in you, when my otherness collides with your otherness and they merge, what structure do we anchor our lives upon? An entire worldview —temporarily—melted, by a single encounter.

Can we adapt to the dissolution?

5. Nostalgic Utopia

Queer art is often also queer in the sense that it is ephemeral. A Queer existence is, in many places, a threatened existence. Much in the manner of our tent, the ability to disappear and resurface can prove essential.

Work becomes a way of making space in a world that often feels too small for so many. In this light, art is a utopian possibility. In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, by José Esteban Muñoz, utopia is the becoming necessary for existing in the present. We create ourselves in the image of utopia, thus becoming utopian. Access to the future arrives through hope.

The American artist Jacolby Satterwhite's video works are some of the most extravagant Queer manifestations I've experienced. I saw *Birds in Paradise*, along with two other works by Satterwhite, at the Athens Biennale in 2021. *Birds in Paradise* is a wild dream ride through hundreds of voguing, half-naked, Queer embodiments, animated and emancipated within Satterwhite's fantastical worlds. The soundtrack struck me immediately. Yet I only recently learned that it was created from a cappella recordings of Satterwhite's late mother's voice. In this way, these euphoric future worlds also embody nostalgia, yearning, and memories.

My sculptures, my cute monsters, stem from our most intimate spaces. They are sewn in textiles from an imaginary home: towels, silk dresses, duvet covers, and pillowcases. Materials that are part of our most vulnerable, private worlds. Materials that function as extensions of the body. Assembled and sewn into new bodies, they become Frankensteinian, monstrous. Stuffed with hay, they carry the scent of the stable, of grass, blurring the boundary between animal and human. Stuffed like taxidermy, the creature awaits its animation with the arrival of the next storm.

Embodying otherness is still a big part of my work, but an interest in a more architectural or external body is emerging. *No memory, not even the closest one* was my first piece in this category. It is an S-shaped structure, in swirls of corrugated steel, an enormous architectonic body that you can enter, become part of, thus transporting the viewer from outside subject to an object within the work. It's a maze, yet it's transparent. A rusty exoskeleton guides your movement. At the end of each swirl, there's an empty space. In one sits a dilapidated dollhouse: an arena for imagining a future along the lines of normativity. The mirroring swirl sits empty. On the wall just beside it: an old Polaroid of a child, posing in front of a cardboard camel, greeting you with their biggest smile.

Image courtesy of the artist

Billie Meiniche, *No memory, not even the closest one*, 2023. Rebar, photograph, dollhouse, variable dimension. Installation view

The histories of our becomings are flexible and subject to memory— fragments, images, remnants of a life. This might sound scary, but this too can be a strategy for hope and rebirth. You've got to squint, as if to remember a dream that has become fuzzy with daylight.

My materials are a part of me. Like the lithium I take every night. Like my memories and the favourite shirt that my partner isn't allowed to borrow. Like Paul B. Preciado's synthetic testosterone. Like a tree that has grown its trunk around a fence. My works are made from everything that has stuck to me over time. Who can tell choice from coincidence, memory from dream?

The most obvious site for this blurring of what is Billie, The Real Billie, and what Billie creates is embodied in Billy. Billy Is a Boy is a drag king, a drag king alter ego. Modelled after my time in business school, he is a comic distillation of my previous lives. Billy has many of my own traits, but while Billie prefers to keep their identities ambiguous, Billy lays it all out there. His identity is a goal in and of itself. He wants to be a business*man*, a capitalist macho cliché. The economic man, rational, cool, calm, and collected—a successful go-getter. Billy wants to be a success. He is his own fiction, an embodied absurdity brought to life through Disney-inspired songs accompanied by electronic orchestral sounds. Sporting a fake moustache, slicked-back hair, a pinstripe suit, and of course, a tie, he sings his heart out, dances, bitches, and cries in secret—in front of the audience. Billy is no man's man. Billy is none of his ideals. Billy is sensitive, flamboyantly theatrical, and Queer.

"I'm a gender Terrorist, a walking, talking time bomb in The Boys Club. Tick tock. Tick tock."[25]

In a world where the ultra-rich conceal their wealth by performing the "average Joe" in washed out T-shirts, baggy pants, smoking weed on public radio, giving platforms to bigots to spread their hate under the guise of defending free speech— yes, I am looking at you, Elon—power's traditional costume, the suit, becomes the obvious attire of the defiant. The "natural" superiority of the masculine suffers an unredeemable defeat in the arms of a drag king. Pointing to the king saying, "Ha! I, too, can be king. See? Now we are all king!" Adopting a privileged position and devouring it from within subverts and destroys this position's power to invoke its privilege—a dangerous potential. It's probably no coincidence that there are—still—no drag kings in *Drag Race*.

6. To Monster, Vol. 2

Monsters don't monster themselves. As we now know, they are created. Let's take a final look at this label: monster. Who are the monstrous? What does their monster status tell us about being a monster in the first place? And perhaps, most importantly, what does this say about those who remain outside the monster category? The non-monsters? Those who "monster" the monsters?

The monster that I am, that my sculptures or alter ego are, are creations, beings in our own right. I am monstered by so many things: I am a monster of capitalism, a monster of gender, a monster in business school and in art school. I am also a non-monster.

Discriminated against, yes, but not oppressed. By virtue of my whiteness, my inviolable beetroot passport, and my middle-class upbringing, I am safe to live as myself. Safe to live my monstrous life.

The monster and the monstered are conditioned by each other. They frequently converge within a single body, in a fluid, confusing reality.

7. "Are You a Boy or a Girl?" the Child Asked. "No," I Replied.

I dream of bringing my many bodies to life, as true Frankensteinian monsters, creatures of the crossings. Who knows who they are when they awake? Certainly not what I planned.

For now, I pitch my tent on Uranus, near Paul B. Preciado's apartment. It seems that the safest place is far from Earth. And so, until utopia, we'll be staying here.

You're welcome to come and visit one day.

We are "the multiplicity of the cosmos trapped in a binary political and epistemological system, shouting in front of you." [26]

Since this essay was originally written, the conditions for trans people, especially trans youth in the United States, have gotten infinitely worse. With a meteoric rise in anti-trans bills and legislation, some of which even trying to criminalise gender-affirming care, moral panic is in full effect, endangering the lives of trans people and their families. You can stay updated on the legislative situation in the States here: https://translegislation.com/learn.

Danish media and politicians sadly seem to mindlessly follow the lead of the Americans, with state-owned Danmarks Radio uncritically parroting anti-trans media and the right wing opposing legal transitioning for minors. Preventing legal transitioning blocks a completely reversible clerical process that nonetheless plays a big role in a trans-child's life and disregards the wishes of both parents and children. We've even seen protests against drag queen readings at a library in Copenhagen!

Luckily, these bigots don't go unchallenged. Often representing a small albeit loud minority, they can be fought. In the case of the drag queen readings, the library in question stood their ground and the protest in favour of the readings grew far bigger than the one against.

To learn more about the anti-trans movements in Denmark, England, and the States, I recommend listening to the Danish podcast *Cybernormer* by Cybernauterne. Especially the series "Kønskrigerne,"[27] which is an incredibly well-researched and thoughtful dissection of the rhetoric, dog whistles, and general rise of the bigoted anti-trans movement.

1 Paul B. Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus: Chronicles of the Crossing* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2020), 29.
2 "Queer" meaning "strange" or "peculiar" is a reclaimed slur, a deliberately ambiguous term for a certain group of deviants. I'll borrow Jack Halberstam's definition: "'Queer' refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time." J. Jack Halberstam, "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies," in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 4.
3 About the word "trans," I'll say, backed by Paul B. Preciado and Susan Stryker, that the term covers those of us who either cannot or will not accept the gender diagnosis we were assigned at birth. Officially, there is another explanation, yet another diagnosis previously listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. I will not be going anywhere near that one.
4 Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," *GLQ* 1, no. 3 (1994): 93, https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-3-237.
5 Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*.
6 Édouard Glissant, "For Opacity," in *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing, 189–94 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990).
7 Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: Feminist Press, 2013).
8 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).
9 Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*.
10 Until the 2013 edition of the DSM-5, transgender was classified as a mental disorder.
11 On the human rights violations—including forced and coerced medical interventions—against intersex people, see: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *A Background Note on Human Rights Violations against Intersex People* (Geneva: United Nations, 2019), https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Discrimination/LGBT/BackgroundNoteHumanRights-ViolationsagainstIntersex-People.pdf.
12 Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 28.
13 The Motion Picture Production Code, commonly known as " The Hays Code"— after Will Hays, the postmaster general who pushed to implement it—was Hollywood's attempt at a voluntary moral guideline. The code was effectively made mandatory because non-complying films were barred from being screened in any American theatre. Bob Mondello, "Remembering Hollywood's Hays Code, 40 Years On," *All Things Considered*, NPR, 8 August 2008, https://www.npr.org/2008/08/08/93301189/remembering-hollywoods-hays-code-40-years-on.
14 Meaning "Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Color." "BIPOC," Merriam-Webster, n.d., https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/BIPOC.
15 In 2023, Disney is going to release a live action remake of *The Little Mermaid*. For casting Halle Bailey, a Black woman, as Ariel, the film has already received both praise and backlash. I don't have much faith in the Disney franchise, but here's hoping for a more inclusive, or at least less stigmatising, movie this time around!
16 In the United States, the probability of being shot and killed by the police is twice as likely for a Black person as it is for a white person. Double! Curtis Bunn, "Report: Black People Are Still Killed by Police at a Higher Rate than Other Groups," NBC News, 3 March 2022, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/report-black-people-are-still-killed-police-higher-rate-groups-rcna17169. If you are white—as I am—I suggest you visit this link and put a face to some of the people who have been murdered by police in the past ten years: https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2020/know-their-names/index.html.
17 I'm a big fan of Kamaly's work. Not only of *BEASTMODE*, but also her beautifully heart-wrenching metal "monsters," each named after victims of racial violence.
18 Adding injury to insult, this whitewashed horror trope owes its heritage to the Haitians that were enslaved by the brutal French colonial rule. Mike Mariani, "The Tragic, Forgotten History of Zombies," *The Atlantic*, 28 October 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/10/how-america-erased-the-tragic-history-of-the-zombie/412264/.
19 In *World War Z*, as in other zombie films, the living are never the first aggressor, but the zombies are always more or less brutally annihilated by the end. *World War Z*, directed by Marc Forster (Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 2013).
20 Thanks to Ana Teixeira Pinto.
21 See: https://translegislation.com/learn.
22 "Monsters" is etymologically derived from the Latin words "monstrare," to show, or "monere," to warn (alluding to the view that monsters are heralding the wrath of the gods).
23 Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein," 87.
24 Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein," 89.
25 Del LaGrace Volcano and Judith Jack Halberstam, *The Drag King Book* (London: Serpents Tail, 1999).
26 Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*.
27 "Kønskrigerne 1: Feminister der hader transkvinder" (The Gender Warriors 1: Feminists who hate trans women), April 2022, in *Cybernormer*, produced by Cybernauterne, podcast, audio, 50:40, https://open.spotify.com/episode/326d6K9lKr6gXzxM9pttyz?si=aa05418d0dc94df7.

In Between Memories in Motion
Astta Nielsen

Image courtesy of the artist

Astta Nielsen, *Reminiscences*, 2022–2023. Polyester plastic 61 cm, welded iron 105 × 98 cm, 119 × 103 cm, laser engraved satin 48 × 300 cm, 48 × 300 cm, 48 × 175 cm, 118 × 112 cm. Installation view, BFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

We walk in the usual way: turn to the right and walk along the iron railing and the curly oak trees. We pass the little grey house, because we won't be visiting there today. Then we walk to the left, down along a gravel path. It's narrow but we can still walk in a row while holding each other's hand.

Even though we're small, we know the purpose of our walk. A little further on, there's a wreath of trees. There are four entrances into the circular midpoint of the ring, where a fountain sits.

The basin is deep. In the middle of the basin, a boy is a sitting on the back of a swan. He's riding the swan. It's twice his size. Even though the boy is little, he's got a firm grip around its distended neck. A jet of water spouts from the swan's beak. It's raining down on them both.

We take off our shoes and socks, and we dip our feet in the water. You've sat down on one of the benches that's placed in a ring between the trees, with a cigarette in your mouth and a cup of coffee in your hand. Maybe we're all smiling at each other. Maybe we're teasing each other, or kicking up water, so that our pants are getting wet. But I don't remember.

I don't remember what we did here—what we were like. Do you remember that?

We came again, when the swan's beak wasn't filling the basin with water anymore, after the autumn leaves had alighted there.

"Yet feelings are the water of an instant."[1]

It's afternoon. The living room has large windows, through where the sunlight is falling, ever so softly. Even though the windows are large, the ceiling is low. This elicits a sensation of being pressed down and stretched out, at one and the same time.

I feel like I'm situated somewhere between being inside the room and being on the other side of the windows facing me. Next to both of the windows are curtains. When they hang there, they possess a decorative value. As I pass in front of them, the curtains make soft movements; they are falling back into their folds. Floating just a few centimetres above the floor. When they're drawn, the curtains have a function: to shield me from the view, from the light, from noise, and from the world. They provide peace of mind, in some way. They form a semi-transparent shield from the outside world, an extra membrane in space. I draw the curtains again. They make no sound. Now that clouds have appeared in the sky, the light has turned pale. My body has been moving around in the room without any thought behind it. I've been using the room, and concomitant with this, the room has come to be defined by the movements of my body. The thin layer that is situated between a shared space and me.

Centres of boredom, centres of solitude, centres of daydreams group together to constitute the "oneiric house."[2] The philosopher Gaston Bachelard writes: "A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality."[3]

The place is bound up with a time when we walked hand in hand, when we went for walks in the city and in the park to pass the time. This is our place, but also everybody's. But the memories elicit a sense of ownership and a private space, even though this is situated in the common space that is the park. Memories can suddenly drop down into the depths of consciousness and can bubble up, later on, to the surface, in order to continue circulating. The repeated movement occurs in the fountain's water and inside me. The unconscious, the fluid and flowing.

"After a while, the same water is something else."[4]

I come from a place in my practice where I was absorbed with the undervalued moving image: the image that has been clipped away, the image that has become blurred, the image that does not, at first glance, have any clear connection.

I was working with occupying a borderland between a dream state, a physical body, and a digital body where the pixels are smearing out, where the dividing line between the dream world and the digital world—between the physical and digital worlds—is tacitly becoming smeared out.

During that time, the moving image seemed like a safe place to be, where a story could be cut and pasted together without having any clear or concrete narrative. Because the thing absorbing my interest was never shown in the form of a body and face that could be found beyond the screen.

The grainy, blurred, and glitched were not confined exclusively to the images but spread out across its dissemination and to the words that simultaneously stood below, above, and beside the images. The viewer was not taken by the hand but rather pressed inside, behind the screen. I was trying to create a dream space, without answers, that could stand in a perpetual loop.

The text "In Defence of the Poor Image," by artist and theorist Hito Steyerl, made an impression on me at the time. It felt like my own way of making compromises with the moving image was substantiated when Streyl writes: "The poor image is a copy in motion. … It is a ghost of an image" and "The poor image tends toward abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming."[5]

The way Streyl speaks about images and her thoughts about them (though I will refrain, for the moment, from delving further into the capitalist context in which she actually inserts them) caused me to change my view of what moving images can be. This change came from where I happened to be situated: at film school, and wanting to break away from the hierarchy that inevitably arises during the production of films. This situation emboldened me to render the narrative in my videos even more abstract and to rail against any code of practice. It caused me to remember to place question marks beside the images we are shown, and it caused me to remember to stay capable of reading them in various contexts. However, the work, after all is said and done, was ultimately locked to the screen

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Astta Nielsen, *The door handle is the handshake of the building,* 2022–2023. A selection of the 20 new door handles made for Malmö Art Academy's studios. Black stoneware, glazed with woodglue, polyester plastic 25,5 × 11 cm, 20,5 × 12 cm, 20 × 13 cm. Installation view and detail

and was limited. When I look at it now, I experience a closed-off-ness, an exclusionary feeling, and the work became solitary and obstinate in its form.

I'm now at a place with my practice where I want to open it up. To open it up for a materiality and a sensuousness to be present. To embrace that which is happening beyond the screen.

Dreams are recognisable from our lives, but they nonetheless embody foreign and unknown elements that outshine everyday life and cannot be exactly positioned because they belong somewhere between reality and our imagination. This in-betweenness could be seen in *Piranesi—Vision and Veracity*, an exhibition of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's etchings at the National Gallery of Denmark in Copenhagen.[6] Here, the ruins of Rome —its ancient columns, temples, and public squares —are implicated in a parallel world, where they merge into a hybrid of historical monuments. In Piranesi's works, dreams and imaginative conceptions are curated anew. The architectural historian Martin Søberg writes: "In Piranesi's universe, the ruins of the past

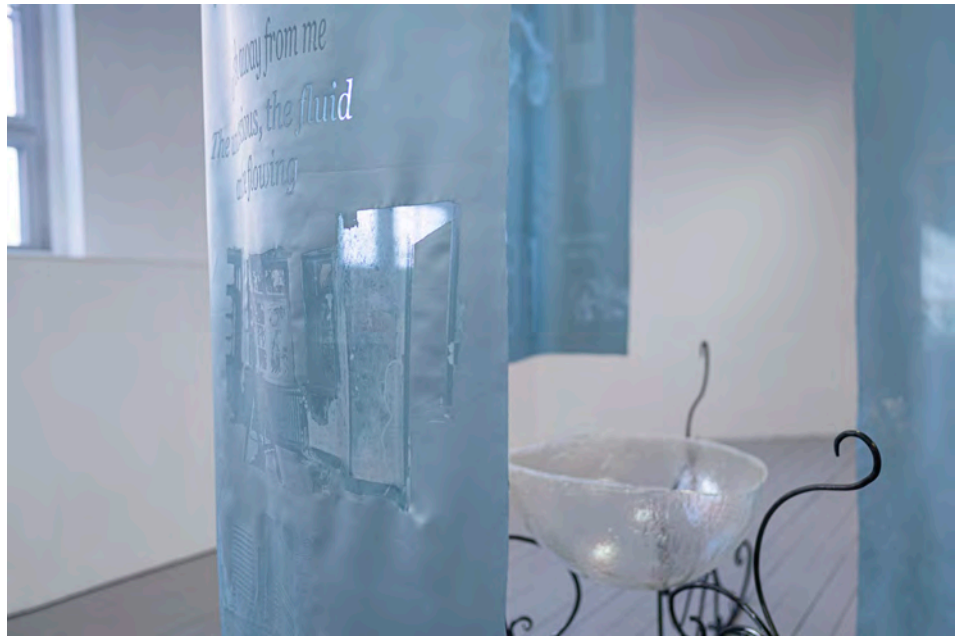

Image courtesy of the artist

Astta Nielsen, *Reminiscences*, 2022–2023. Polyester plastic 61 cm, welded iron 105 × 98 cm, 119 × 103 cm, laser engraved satin 48 × 300 cm, 48 × 300 cm, 48 × 175 cm, 118 × 112 cm. Detail

are not dead objects. All matter is alive and woven together in changing processes, which can also lead to the creation of new artworks."[7]

Piranesi's veduta engravings elicit a feeling of looking out through somebody else's eyes. In one engraving, the motif is a carefully chosen vista, a scene where clandestine stories are unfolding. The vista delves into the details and opens up a dialogue revolving around a possibility that the artist might actually want to outshine, to twist and modify the reality that he knew. The representation of perspective in art, along with the symmetry found in Renaissance perspective, positioned sight as the highest in the hierarchy of senses. An ocularcentric[8] view of the world, generated by the sense of sight. What we see also takes precedence when it comes to how we take note of our own bodies. The architect Juhani Pallasmaa explains: "The dominance of the eye and the suppression of the other senses tend to push us into detachment, isolation and exteriority."[9]

Technology has furthered magnified sight's sameness and importance as a sensory faculty, and this has resulted in an endless waterfall of images and videos that rain down upon us. The mass production of images has isolated the body outside the sense of sight, and the body has been forgotten and has become alienated from itself. In Pallasmaa's words: "The hegemonic eye seeks domination over all fields of cultural production, and it seems to weaken our capacity for empathy, compassion and participation with the world."[10]

The alienation of the body comes about because sight does not require any active movement or other participation of the body. The tactile part of the body has fallen dormant and become a passive aspect of everyday life. Pallasmaa reminds us that the activation of the body's other sense faculties is imperative when it comes to being in the world, so that the body does not lose its place in the world —to avoid falling into a state of meaninglessness. Or, as he puts it: "The world becomes a hedonistic but meaningless visual journey."[11]

Sometimes, I feel myself to be a thin membrane that is supposed to separate myself from the world outside. Taking up space on both sides, and trying to balance these two sides. I've been a membrane, a thin layer, that absorbs whatever I saw, and I have been experiencing and reading to myself, and fluttering quietly in the wind, with all these impressions. Now, I want to put what I've accumulated into a basin outside myself. *Down in that pond, I, the images, and the thoughts swim around. They may double themselves, or they may wither away into small bubbles and vanish away from me. Maybe, at some point in the future, they'll bubble up to the surface again*.

In *The Human Condition*, philosopher Hannah Arendt speaks about the private sphere in contrast to the public sphere. She writes: "The four walls of the home are the only reliable hiding place from the common, public world."[12] The home is where you can retreat not only from whatever's happening in the public sphere but also from being a public figure—as such: from being seen and heard. Removed from the common and public, inside one's room, which Arendt describes as a "reliable hiding place," we are the private versions of ourselves: "Since our sense of reality is deeply dependent on appearance and accordingly also on the existence of a public space," our private and intimate lives are "derived from the bright light of the public sphere."[13] Arendt writes that out in the public scene, the private is irrelevant, and so it must accordingly be confined to and cultivated inside the walls of the home.

Art arises, grows, and is sensed and felt inside my private space, shielded from the public sphere. However, these two spaces are not separate, and they have not been separate for quite a while: public space has pierced its way through the walls. With respect to the public sphere, the private is no longer irrelevant. In our current times, we have taken the public sphere inside, within our walls, and the two spheres have been commingling. Inside our private spheres, we interact with the public: "Touching screens more than skin."[14]

The body uses and remembers the rooms we are inside of, and it meets the two spheres in different ways. Inside the private sphere, which we have created for our bodies and ourselves, we use and shape this kind of space through our activities: cooking, sleeping, cleaning, dreaming, and engaging in intimacy. But we also use and shape the private sphere with the conversations that take place inside it.

Pallasmaa contends that "time and space are eternally locked into each other in the silent spaces between these immense columns: Matter, space and time fuse into one singular elemental experience, the sense of being."[15] The affirmation of being an individual is fortified in a space that Arendt calls "reliable." Another term for this could be a "secure" space. For Pallasmaa, "architecture strengthens the existential experience, one's sense of being in the world, and this is essentially a strengthened experience of self."[16]

In the private sphere's space, the feeling of being oneself is strengthened. This can provide greater freedom when it comes to making art. This is a space where the body moves about freely, while interacting and touching, smelling and hearing. The open window. The wind felt on the skin. The sound of the wind in the trees. The noise of traffic, conversation, and everyday life. The smell of the warm lawn and hot pavement. The heat blowing into the room. With its movements, the body shapes and adapts itself to both the private and the public spaces.

The body's being in the presence of both spaces, midway between them, in the open window: "The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace."[17] Dreams and memories require the calm provided by private space. The memories of the walk we once took and the memories of ourselves can flow on further.

I am going to return to that place. If I'm lucky, I'll do this together with you, and we'll dip our hands down into the water and sit for a while in the room where we can share our memories. This is something that we can do in the public space as well as the private space, because I feel secure with you and because with you, I am comfortable. As Bachelard puts it: "We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images."[18]

I want to grab hold of the intermediate space, the duality between the vulnerability and the memories that we carry around with us, to fuse the doubt and the decisiveness with that which exists outside myself, the surroundings that I move around in, and I want to take all of these into my art.

1 Clarice Lispector, "Clandestine Happiness," in *The Complete Stories* (London: Penguin, 2020), 324.
2 Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 17.
3 Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 17.
4 Clarice Lispector, *Hemmelig Lykke* [*Clandestine Happiness*], trans. Tine Lykke Prado (Copenhagen: Arena, 2020), 63. We decided to keep this fresh translation from Danish for its aptness, rather than use the official English translation: "As the same water is already different" (Lispector, *The Complete Stories*, 324).
5 Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image ," e-*flux journal*, no. 10 (November 2009): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/.
6 See "Piranesi – syner og sandhed," National Gallery of Denmark, 2021, https://www.smk.dk/exhibition/piranesi/.
7 Martin Søberg, "Arkitektur-fantasier," *Arkitekten*, January 2022, https://arkitektforeningen.dk/arkitekten/arkitekturfantasier/.
8 Oxford Reference, s.v., "Ocularcentrism", https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803-100245338.
9 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: A Wiley and Sons, 2012), 22.
10 Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 24.
11 Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 25.
12 Hannah Arendt, *Menneskes vilkår* [*The Human Condition*] trans. Christian Dahl (Copenhagen: Forlag Gyldendal, 2015), 72–73.
13 Arendt, *Menneskes vilkår*, 74.
14 ML Buch, "Touching Screens," on *Skinned*," released on Anyines, 3 July s2020. Available on Spotify at: https://open.spotify.com/track/7BqwsHoMo4EciJGW3sv05I.
15 Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 56.
16 Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 45.
17 Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 6.
18 Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 6.

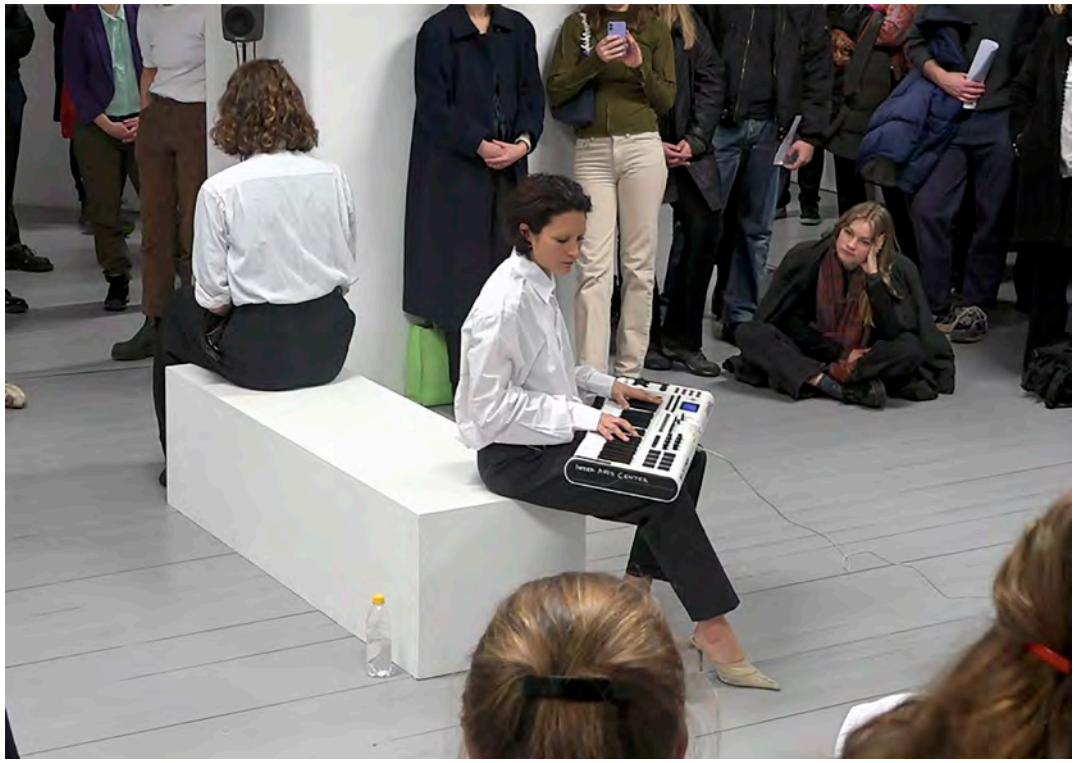

Image courtesy of Andrea Sitara Gran

Maria Nadia Nour Nielsen, *bable is bable, and I still listen*, 2023. Performance and multimedia installation. Video Animation (loop), sound installation, 20 minutes loop. BFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, March 10th 2023

The Waves, They Throw Themselves at Me Like Puppies

Maria Nadia Nour Nielsen

> "I never write in silence, I listen to myself, or I listen to the dictation of another voice, of more than one voice: staging, therefore, dance, scenography of terms, of breath and of 'changes in tone.'"
>
> —Jacques Derrida[1]

What does it actually mean that the body enters into language? I don't remember my own birth, but I'm carrying it around all the time. I don't remember my first words, either. I already had a place in the world before I came into the world. My name, a place in the language—all of this, taken together, in advance of my existence. The zones of my body were already drawn up. Some people wanted something from me, and I still don't know if I have managed to figure out what this might be.

When working with performance art, I try to get language into the body. Here, I'm not talking about an abstract language or a body language —but rather the language that we've been thrown into, and the language that can be a burden for some but can also, and at the same time, be enjoyable. I'm interested in the very place where language has deficiencies and mistakes—the place where we forget words, where we repeat sentences, and where register and rhythm become the bearers of meaning much more than what is actually being said. One might say that I investigate symptoms.

When I first experienced anxiety and suffered my first anxiety attack, it was then that the language inside me fell to pieces—and I started making up my own expressions:

> *"High as a kite"* and *"Fresh as a daisy"* turned into *"High as a daisy"*
> *"Hold your tongue"* and *"Hold your head up high"* became *"Hold your tongue up high"*

I suddenly experienced a sense of foreignness with respect to the language that I had been given, or that I had been thrown into, and which had followed me faithfully ever since. I also experienced how language had direct access to my body. Often, sentences started like this: "I don't know, I don't know, I, I, I don't know … I …" This was followed by an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness. And then my breath would get shallow and rapid.

It's not that I investigate anxiety in and of itself, but rather I'm interested in what else dwells in language. There's something more than the words we say: rhythm, air, hesitation, screams, signs, syntax, indicators.

The psychoanalyst and semiotician Julia Kristeva talks about two concepts: the "semiotic" and the "symbolic," which are two independent aspects of language. In her understanding, the semiotic belongs to the matriarchal, which is constituted by the speaker's inner drives and impulses.[2] Cecilia Sjöholm, a professor of aesthetics, explains Kristeva's ideas about semiotics and the symbolic in the following way:

> The text neither names nor determines an outside: it can only be described as a Heraclitean mobility with a double orientation —on the one hand it is produced in a specific signifying system, and on the other in a social context. Given that the text is produced between these systems, it overshoots both of them and overcomes a reduction to representation in either terms. The text never has one meaning (unsens), the textual practice "decentres the subject of a discourse (of one meaning, of one structure) and is structured like the operation of its pulverization in one undifferentiated infinity."[3]

Sjöholm goes on to describe Kristeva's ambition as being "to move beyond the science of linguistic signs towards an analysis of how the sign is produced."[4]

There are, then, certain formations of meaning that we have created in our structures that make it so that different symbols and signs have different meanings for different people. And everything around language becomes part of the formation of meaning for the subject.

For the 2022 Annual Exhibition at the Malmö Academy of Art, I worked with musical compositions, which take inspiration from YouTube tutorials that instruct people to compose with the aim of conjuring up certain emotions. For example, in my search for videos, I found cinematic compositions with titles like “Dramatic Trailer Music” and “Capturing the Emotion of Fear in Orchestral Music.”[5]

With this dramaturgical music in the background, I staged a performance of a text that I composed of fragments from theoretical and feminist discourses (Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, Hélène Cixous, et al.) and one-liners that imitated the build-up of tension from movie trailers. Through this juxtaposition, I wanted to animate the texts, and the ways of thinking they communicate, which can often seem detached from the lives that they engage with.

“How does the signifier look in these pants?
How does the signifier look in this shirt?”[6]

At the same time, I wanted to point out that when we read theoretical texts, it is, in itself, a performance: this whole thing of pretending theory can stand outside a particular situation, soberly and objectively.

*

I catch myself humming, my head rocks from side to side.

I’m walking down a street; it has rained, and the glow of the lamps reflects on the surface of the puddles. I guess I’m humming to create a space around me and, for a short moment, to be back at the beginning. A feeling of eternity emerges—I feel the world not as foreign, but now as part of me. But just for a short while, before I properly have to break with it again.

Someone suddenly interrupts, someone utters a “hi”—and I look up.

*

One of my ways of working with performance art is through the use of methods. With a background in, among other things, dance, it feels quite natural for me to reference other choreographers. I often use, for instance, the methods of the American choreographer and dancer Anna Halprin, who together with her husband, Lawrence Halprin, developed RSVP cycles: a system of creative methodologies for collaboration.[7]

To put it succinctly, it involves elements and impediments that you can add to your work. When working with language and the body, I can, for example, add parameters like speed, exaggeration, and repetition while creating performances. Something more or something new will thus turn up in the exploration that I’m already doing. Something that I could not have come up with myself using my own imagination, and which, for this reason, allows the body or the bodies to speak.

The exciting thing about method is—as is also the case of performativity in texts such as this one—that it works, regardless of whether you understand it or not.

To become conscious of the censorship that I practise on myself, I make use of writing. In my freewriting, I catch sight of others’ perspectives on what I’m writing. Voices turn up and say: “That’s not something you can write”; “That sounds stupid”; “What the hell is this?” Or I take it upon myself to edit out certain sentences that I think are too vulnerable, too shameful, too much, or even downright boring. But afterwards, I ask myself: Why is it shameful to have to share certain sentences and statements with others? What is it in the relation or in society that renders it so that the feeling of shame is pouring out from me? This point is where it starts to get interesting for me to investigate.

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I swallow my spit and make some new saliva straight away and I swallow again. My throat suddenly feels too narrow for this kind of motion. I don’t know how long I can hold on to the illusion of linear time. It’s as if the days merge into one, as if the people I meet remind me of each other —old relationships in new faces.

All conversations merge into one single voice for one single conversation. Who said what is no longer important. What’s more important is how I address myself to the voices and why they are coming back to me.

Images courtesy of Jelena Pajić

Left: Maria Nadia Nour Nielsen, *Bae, Bae!*, 2023. Installation view
Right: Maria Nadia Nour Nielsen, *Bae, Bae!*, 2023. Ceramics. Detail

1 Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous, “From the Word to Life: A Dialogue between Jacques Derrida and Helene Cixous,” *New Literary History* 37, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2006.0012.

2 Camelia Talebian Sadehi, “*Beloved* and Julia Kristeva’s The Semiotic and The Symbolic,” in *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 2, no. 7 (July 2012): 1,491–97.

3 Cecilia Sjöholm, *Kristeva and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 10, quoting Kristeva.

4 Sjöholm, *Kristeva and the Political*, 11.

5 “Dramatic Trailer (Production Music),” YouTube video, 1:55, posted by Fruity Audio, 3 August 2018, https://youtu.be/OBgmB-DyvyuQ; “Capturing the Emotion of Fear In Orchestral Music—FL Studio 20 Tutorial, YouTube video, 16:11, posted by Arcade, 23 May 2022, https://youtu.be/b9kBuih_s-k.

6 Quote from my performance at the 2022 Annual Exhibition.

7 *See Lawrence Halprin, The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment (New York: G. Braziller, 1970).*

Days of Flesh
Sigrid Soomus

It's unfamiliar and fumbling, the feeling of getting your bearings in the dark room. You bump into the edge of a table, and it leaves a big bruise on your thigh. You use your hands to feel all over the walls, the floor, orienting yourself towards an understanding of every little corner of the place. It takes time, but something begins to take shape. Lamps come on; furniture emerges—now you know where you are. You're starting to understand why you are here. What kind of room it is, how it's been constructed. What is about to happen.

Now you can leave it. Now it is done.

This is where I begin. Or this is where I always am. I am inside a house. It's a malleable house. The rooms and the walls are constantly changing, melding, and shifting in size. The rooms can function as an archive where I fetch or leave information. I group things together and try to orient myself in time, space, and feelings. One room may look entirely different from the other, and still they belong together. A lot can fit in there, and no matter how many things you think will get lost inside the house, inside its chaos, they remain. Exterior and interior, the spatiality around it and the spatiality inside it. The relationship room, the childhood room, perhaps the room with no name. The objects are in these rooms; they're there both before and after they've come into being, as parts of me but entirely their own. We belong together for a while, and then we're split apart, only to reunite later, and at that point, usually in a changed, new guise. I create, bend, and strike. It spreads in the body, a feeling. A purpose. Something is coming into being.

The Room and the Space
Nairy Baghramian is an artist and sculptor who pays close attention to space, place, and placement. She employs a wide range of materials and creates new sculptures from her old pieces as a way to reflect on that which has already been made. A timeline of new works born out of the old ones. She describes sculptures as neither static nor stable, best understood as infinite reservoirs of ideas to arrange and rearrange.[1]

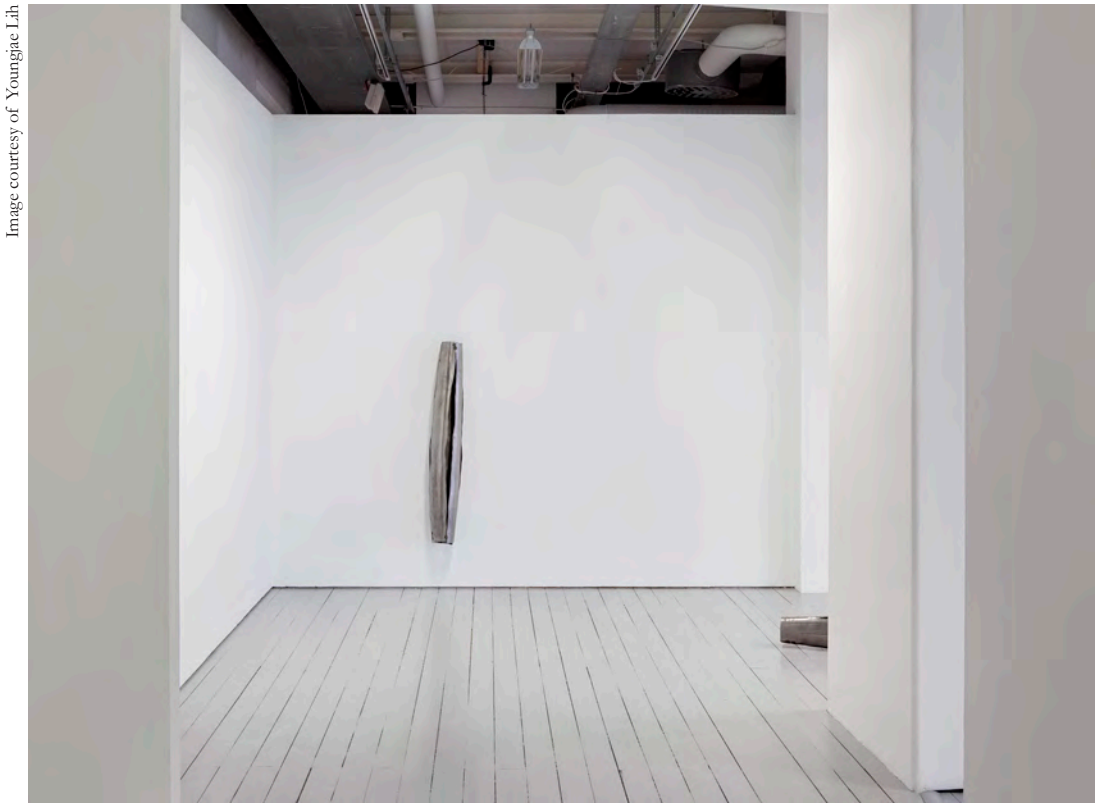
I too work with different materials, my hands reaching in all kinds of directions—between worlds and places, between fiction and daily life, body and construction. My hand recognises the shapes, knows it's touched something similar before. A location or an object, it's just that the references are unclear and hard to place. The hand and the head can't decide—is it something I recognise or is it new to me? The information in me meets the information in the material.

What inspires me about Nairy Baghramian is that she moves between decorating and delineating the rooms from which she works. She views her sculptures as lives in and of themselves, but also as a type of ornamentation that moves in the room. Then there is her way of mixing different places, terms, and references in her work. Baghramian's work conveys both seriousness and playfulness, and her pieces blend with the gallery space even as they stick out. The recurring minimalist aspect of her sculptures contributes to their sublime nature. They grow into the room, their presence changing and playing with the space. Among her sculptures are teeth, lungs, and other motifs inspired by the inside of the body meeting the outside world; industrial, architectonic exteriors; everyday objects, tools, and furniture meeting bodily references. She mixes different styles, influences, and worlds, turning them into artworks that are at once interior and exterior. Independent as themselves, but also coherent, permissive—part of their exterior, part of themselves. The shapes of her sculptures are such that the viewers can relate to them, feeling comfortable in recognising them. Figurative but also organic. Irritating the eye even as they let you rest. The everyday meets the novel as it is brought into a new context, given a new function. It becomes like a being we can recognise and feel safe with, even though it initially seemed unfamiliar.

"Her works mark boundaries, transitions, and gaps in the museum, prompting us to consider form and meaning in the context of interior and exterior spaces. Drawing on a multiplicity of references—including dance, theater, design, and fashion—and producing unlikely juxtapositions in material and scale, Nairy Baghramian questions and challenges the very definition of sculpture."[2]

Dwindler_Rear Tilt, Dwindler_Segue, and *Dwindler_Downdraft* are works from Baghramian's show *Breathing Spell*, at the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid. Coloured, sheer glass meets metal, as if they're dancing—finding their way around walls and floors, stretched vertically and horizontally, sometimes continuing the movement across the facade outside. Functional meets organic as the artworks and the surrounding space come together in the imposing museum with its glass walls.[3] She shows entirely new ways of applying sculptures in different rooms and spaces.

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Sigrid Soomus, *Repetition: Causer*, 2023. Coldrolled metal sheet, metal rod, 127 × 22 × 23, 126 × 20 × 22 cm. Installation view, BFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

The Function
What is there to say about a function? The body has several functions: legs that bend, breasts that feed, saliva that provides moisture. Clothes exist to protect us from heat and cold. Tools have functions: they manufacture and create things, they become an extension of the body, helping.

I pound the metal until I have blisters.

Functions create consequences. Something happens in reaction: my hammering creates a consequence in the material. Can I return to untouched material, can I erase my choices? Can I change my mind?

Over and over again I stop thinking, the body takes over as it meets the material. I let my body work, accomplish, and find the shapes. Sometimes the material decides, sometimes I do. Legs and arms, speed and force: my body meets a new body. What function does the workshop have? The place where the work comes into being. What happens in the other rooms, where the sculptures will go later? How do I view the work in these other rooms? The function of a place, of its surroundings and delimitations. It happens through testing, exploring, holding off on interruption. One part of the sculpture is what happens in the workshop, where it is given a look, maybe four legs to stand on, an interior, and an exterior. The other part is what happens to the sculpture outside the workshop, in a new context and environment. These places give the sculpture different functions, all depending on where it finds itself. The sculpture has propulsion.

A main role that will explore and experience all its inner rooms.

Rebecca Horn, an artist whose practice explores and works with function in various ways, makes machines and sculptures that mimic the gestures of the body. The machines express different

feelings and oppositions, like aggression and tenderness.[4] They expand outwards, toward others, they speak with the audience. They want something, as does the audience. We meet and communicate, or we wonder. Her body sculptures are performative, and when that aspect is added, they become akin to clothes, an appendix to the person and the body carrying them, apparently necessary to live. These sculptures refer or connect directly to the body, creating a dialogue between fashion, theatre, design, and function. I find Horn's *Cornucopia, Séance for Two Breasts* from 1970 to be incredibly poetic and sensitive, an almost mystical work, the sculpture linking the mouth to the breasts. The work becomes a blend of machine, instrument, and being.

"To feel tenderness for one's own breasts—preserving their warmth—touching them with the most delicate care.

The construction of this instrument is the rediscovery of a curved horn, which is lined with soft padding and bent in the wrong direction. The breasts are separated from the rest of the body. Communication is constantly maintained through the mutual isolation. This instrument sets up a sensory dialogue. The internal cavity between the mouth and the breasts gives the subject the desire to speak into himself; and since both breasts are isolated from their surroundings and from one another, to perceive each breast individually. One's sense of perception expands into a triangular form, offering individuality to each breast as two distinct beings."[5]

In the instrument, the work she's created, the breasts—these body parts—are separated from the rest of the body and turned into two individuals of their own. The work has multiple and varied functions. The splitting of the body, the display of body parts in a new light, making them more than and different from just skin and tissue. The function is created in the performative, in a dialogue between work and person. Someone who leads, something that follows.

The Repetition, the Reparation, and the Movement

Repetition repetition repetition repetition

repetition reparation repetition

repetition repetition

repetition repetition reparation

repetition

I repeat shapes and movements in my head and on my body. The fact that it is a repetition is something I only realise later on. In shapes, sketches, and drawings, I find repetitions of words, places, and feelings. In my notebook from 2019, I read about what I was working on the next day. Returning to the idea of a timeline, how works are arranged and rearranged. To be constantly in motion, to be moved back and forth, if not in space, then around yourself, in your mind. The new emerges from the old artworks. The sculptures talk to each other—maybe with different dialects depending on where they were first born, on what room I've been looking in. I repair myself through the work and through wondering. That reparation entails taking some of that which is inside and realising it on the outside, in whatever shape it takes. The space outside and around me is infinite, but it is also what limits me. The sculptures say something obvious, which is in fact just a dialect of the language you've already begun speaking. That which the work is to explain becomes a language unto itself. Repetition makes the process easier, whether or not it is visible—you plant an image in your mind that will evolve at some point down the road. What might eventually turn into them has its own language; that which has evolved without your knowledge is its own linguistic logic.

I transpose anxiety onto a material. The motion in me is placed in the sculpture. Something is processed through the spatiality around me, moves from me to the material. I try to win.

In her 1979 essay, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," Rosalind Krauss writes about the concepts of sculpture, landscape, and architecture, and how they all restrict and relate to each other in some way. She lists artworks and artistic practices in the 1960s and '70s that contributed to a new sense of what a sculpture could be, moving closer or farther from what was previously seen as correct. Sculpture as a term became more undefined, changeable, and broadly defined, as sculptures exist in an expanding field where they're shaped and changed.

"It would probably be more accurate to say of the work that one found in the early sixties that sculpture had entered a no-man's land: it was what was on or in front of a building that was not the building, or what was in the landscape that was not the landscape … as sculpture reduces almost completely to the simple determination that it is what is in the room that is not really the room."[6]

Krauss discusses sculpture's effect on our history, time, and place, as well as how new sculptures at the time were more comforting and recognizable to their viewers by being made familiar, something they thought they knew and could relate to.[7] When the viewer is able to make their own references to an artwork they might have an easier time accepting and allowing what was initially taken to be radical and foreign. Nevertheless, Krauss writes, sculptures have their own internal logic; rules that can be transposed onto various situations and placed in different locations without completely changing.[8]

The Touch

What does the material feel like, how is it perceived? The word tactile describes the transfer of information or sensation through touch—the ability to sense with the skin. It is information that moves from one part to another, an exchange. This plays an important role in my creative work—thinking through what it is that I'm sensing. What does the material feel like? What happens between me and that which is being created? What can my touch do to the material? The sensation, idea, and the thought grow out of that which is felt and experienced. The hard and the heavy, the fragile and the delicate—I explore all of it. Touch has consequences: choices made, and the traces seen afterwards. Paths to take.

Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes about the body, tactility, and touch. He views the body as having two sides: the body as sensible and the body as sentient;[9] these sides complete and relate to each other. Merleau-Ponty investigates the hand and its movements—to move over and around; how we can see, through the body, what we explore and feel; how we relate to touch; how we encounter the world through touch; and how we belong to the world around us because of it.

"Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are incrusted into its flesh; they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the same stuff as the body."[10]

There's something about the encounter, about being in another person's sphere. To feel and to be felt. To touch and be touched. To allow yourself to encounter or be encountered by something or somebody. Most of it is about touch, but different kinds of touch. To be surrounded by, to disappear into.

The seeking and the repetition are about the intimacy with one's own body and oneself, about listening to where one's body goes, how far you want to go. The movements and the shapes are already inside of you, where the conscious and the unconscious meet. You know why you're there.

Eva Hesse's art has an incredible physical presence—fragile and self-evident. Hesse used a great variety of materials in creating her sculptures, from metal, cloth, and papier mâché to industrial materials like latex and fibreglass. She explored, exploited, and tested the materials and their flexibility. Working with latex grew her self-confidence; the material allowed her to find visions and methods that helped her work significantly evolve. She began to take herself and what she created more seriously.[11] Lucy R. Lippard's book *Eva Hesse* reveals both a private and professional side of Hesse, but it never betrays her strength, never exploits her. In order to create, you must come close, undress. This is clear in Hesse, the fragility is there, even as it is her strength.

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Sigrid Soomus, *Repetition: Causer*, 2023. Coldrolled metal sheet, metal rod. Details

"*I have a confidence in my understanding of formal aesthetics and I don't want to be aware of it or make that my problem. That is not the problem. Those things are solvable. I solve them beautifully. What makes a tight circle or a little tight square box more of an intellectual statement than something done emotionally, I don't know. Art is an essence, a center. I am interested in solving an unknown factor of art and an unknown factor of life. My life and art have not been separated. They have been together.*"[12]

Eva Hesse invites the viewer into her works, where what is most fragile meets the aggressive. She soars through time, space, and materials. She sees the whole as well as the details. She captures the room with her works. She is a part of her work. She feels alongside the work. In it, I find parallels to the body, sex, and sensuality. A machinery, a repetition. Many of her works are given organic, sensual shapes; the body sits between what's meaty and what's industrial. She wanted her works to evolve past her own will, beyond her own knowledge and beliefs, beyond her preconceived notions about where the work and the material were going. She wanted them to move forward without her knowledge.

"I would like the work to be non-work. This means that it would find its way beyond my preconceptions. What I want of my art I can eventually find. The work must go beyond this. It is my main concern to go beyond what I know and what I can know. The formal principles are understandable and understood. It is the unknown quantity from which and where I want to go. As a thing, an object, it accedes to its non-logical self. It is something, it is nothing."[13]

The room helps the sculptures; it shapes them and shows them how to behave, indicates where they should go and where they belong. The walls and the ceilings—the surrounding space—give the sculptures choices, possibilities, and limitations. You've moved from the room into the body, out into the hand, and back again. You find different paths to follow. Whether it seems unfamiliar, searching, or like home: this is where you're meant to be.

You've been flung into this room.

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State of the Bachelor
Notes on Masculinities and the Readymade
Jonathan Bue Plauborg Rasmussen

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Jonathan Bue Plauborg Rasmussen, *Untitled I*, 2023, collage on paper, 70 × 100 cm

"If masculinity begins to deconstruct and look at itself,
it will collapse."

—Alona Pardo[1]

A diagnosed crisis in masculinity is nothing new. For years, we have been talking about educational underachievement, high suicide rates, unemployment, and a lack of role models as problems of men at large. At this present moment, however, it seems to me we are situated in a crisis specific to our time. The reason for this, I believe, is that we have never seen masculinity as performative. While the constructed and performative nature of queer and female identity formation has been a prominent subject for critical and feminist theory for decades, the male identity is less canonically deconstructed and thus lingers as an unquestioned default position.

Numerous masculinities have existed in every culture, but hegemonic masculinity sits on top—as part of a multilayered and multistructured hierarchy of power created in heteronormative, gendered, racialised, and classist terms. Masculinity functions best when it is unseen, and with a lot of recent books and seminars being published under the title of something like "What It Means to Be a Man Today," it seems like we are on the brink of a new discourse about contemporary masculinity.

I'm interested in how the construction of male identity happens through the design of our environment and, in contrast, how male identity constructs objects in our world. While masculinity and the male body are not reducible to each other, I have attempted to create a genealogy of masculine objects that might reveal some of the underlying patterns of male identity. I have sourced my objects from popular culture and the history of the readymade, primarily those of the early twentieth-century artist Marcel Duchamp.

Considering Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) is probably the most written-about piece of modern art, it strikes me how little attention its intrinsic masculine character has been given. A urinal, being an object designed exclusively with the male body in mind, strikes me as one of the most apparently male things. This interpretation led me to think about gendered bathrooms and how homosocial spaces enforce strict codes of how men are allowed to be together, especially heterosexual men. These spaces often contain their own distinctive discourses that create fertile grounds for so-called locker-room talk. This line of thought became a starting point for my investigation of the gendered nature of the original readymades.

In "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," feminist and queer theorist Sara Ahmed writes, "We get a sense of how being directed towards some objects and not others involves a more general orientation towards the world."[2] It is exactly this sense of "being directed" that interests me, since I wish to underline how the concept of "finding" readymades is closely intertwined with the "direction" of the author. Within art historical contexts, Duchamp's original readymades are often thought of as androgynous or ungendered artefacts of the modern world. My own work seeks to address structures of power and marginalisation through familiar objects, which in my graduation exhibition takes its particular starting point in the artworks *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), *Shovel (In Advance of the Broken Arm)* (1915), *Hat Rack* (1917), and *Fountain*, all by Duchamp.

The exhibition draws up a double critique: one of masculinity through readymades, and one of the readymade by highlighting its obvious masculine bias. As mentioned, several objects refer directly to Duchamp's works, while others point to later artists such as Cady Noland and David Hammons. A core idea for me in my bachelor's exhibition is to consider objects of the everyday as props for the unconscious performance of gender.

This analysis is not entirely new—countless artists have reappropriated Duchamp, and underlining the gendered and sexual focus of the readymades has been a particular feminist strategy applied by artists such as Sherrie Levine and Maureen Connor. As the art historian Amelia Jones has stated:

> These re-readings are explicitly feminist attempts to re-eroticize the interpretive field surrounding Duchamp and his works. … The majority of feminist artists interested in Duchamp have approached him through the readymades, but in such a way as to intersect these objects of institutional critique with an erotic politics of subjectivity, encouraged both through Duchamp's own work and through the feminist movement.[3]

In 1992, Rosemarie Trockel first exhibited her work *Untitled 1992*, an installation piece that, at first glance, looks like black dots of varying sizes randomly placed on a white wall. Upon closer inspection, the viewer sees that the dots are not entirely flat but actually stick out into the room by a couple of centimetres. The dots are actually hot plates released from their stoves, reoriented from their usual horizontal position to a new vertical surface—the gallery wall. These objects, traditionally assigned to the sphere of female domestic labour, now curiously face the viewer, resembling certain early modernist artworks such as those of Kazimir Malevich. A surface meant for cooking has become unusable and now sits on the wall like a black eye, staring at its viewer.

In Cady Noland's work *Deep Social Space* from 1989, we find another device for cooking rendered useless: the archetypal grill of the American suburbs, turned upside down and set alongside other Americana objects. Noland's work revolves around the oppressive American Dream, the entrepreneurial man who behaves like a psychopath, and a society deeply intoxicated by violence. By flipping the grill on its head, Noland inverts the symbol and refuses it, just as Trockel refuses the hot plate.

A symbol of white middle-class life, the barbecue grill is an object that transcends cultures and backgrounds. As art historian Alona Pardo explains, modern capitalist masculinity was defined by activities outside the home, while the domestic sphere was associated with the female.[4] The only housework that men traditionally carried out was that which happened outside the house, such as snow shovelling, lawn mowing, and barbecuing.

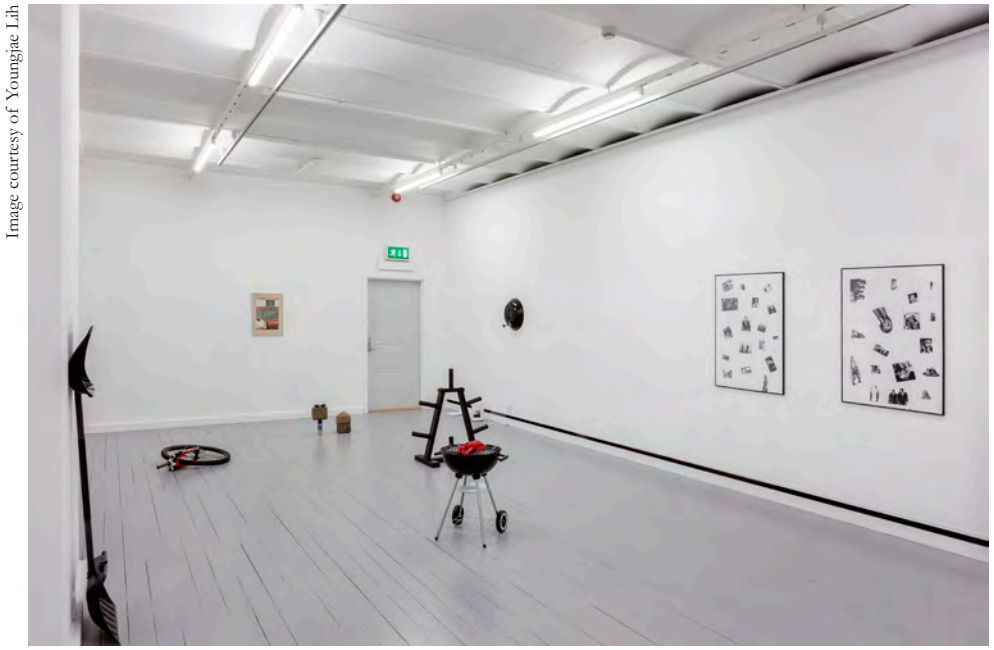
"We inherit the reachability of some objects, those that are 'given' to us, or at least made available to us," Ahmed states in "The Phenomenology of Whiteness."[5] For the works in my show, I tried to think of objects in the categories of *body*, *work*, *leisure*, and *reproductive work*. The weight rack symbolises society's preoccupation with a particular body type; the coffee machine is the bubbling source (or lukewarm backwaters) of productivity; and the barbecue grill and bike wheel fall into the category of leisure, while overlapping with the reproductive work that the snow shovel also represents.

A plastic lobster also makes an appearance—an animal found in works by modern artists such as Salvador Dalí and Marcel Broodthaers. The lobster has in recent years become a mascot for readers of psychiatrist Jordan B. Peterson after he construed it as a symbol of men's hierarchical power and aggressive nature in his book *12 Rules for Life*.[6] Groups of young misogynist men continue to refer to themselves as "lobsters."

It is difficult to say exactly in what order Duchamp's readymades appeared, as many sat in his studio for long periods of time before he exhibited them or even chose them as readymades. However, *Bottle Rack*, created in 1914, is widely recognised as the first readymade. Here Duchamp embodies the phallus of artistic authority, with the phallic spikes referencing the status of the bachelor, waiting for bottles to be hung on its prongs. My corresponding readymade is a weight rack obtained from a gym, meant to hold plates for barbells. *Weight Rack* (2023) draws a line from the Freudian sexuality of the bachelor to the idealisation of the male body and considers the connection between masculine identity and its signifiers.

Duchamp's later piece *Shovel*, also known as *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, was bought in a shop in New York. The artist was allegedly fascinated by this object, which he had never encountered before.

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih



Jonathan Bue Plauborg Rasmussen. Installation view, BFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

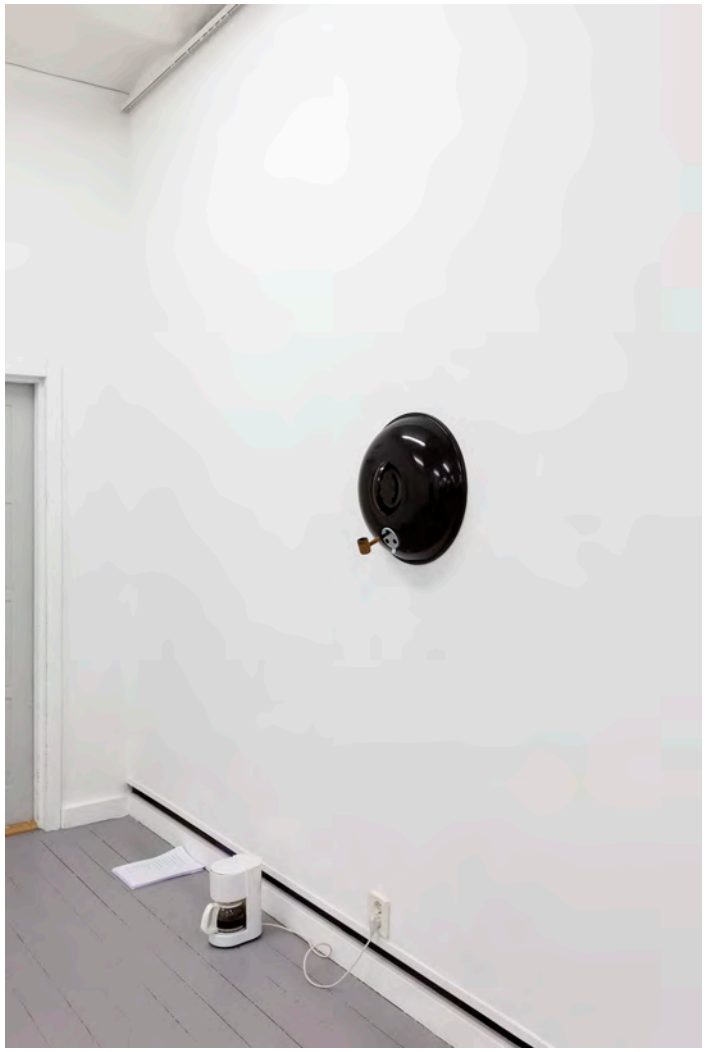


Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Jonathan Bue Plauborg Rasmussen. Installation view, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

The shovel is widely interpreted as a phallic symbol—besides the obvious reasons, because the shovel as an everyday object carries the same connotations as the barbecue grill. In my version, the shovel has two "heads," and thus loses its functionality. But the rejection of one functionality becomes a new functionality: at once impossible and leaping into a new realm. It could be the tool of someone who is overworked or who's trying too hard. My shovel also resembles a paddle and could suggest someone being in "deep waters."

As Jones reminds us, many consider Duchamp to be the father of postmodernity—the one who overcame modernism's machismo and belief in genius—and thus the bearer of postmodernity's phallus. But this conclusion, for Jones, is contradictory, since in her eyes Duchamp is really just a modernist who came to represent the anti-masculine wave of postmodernists. This construction short-circuits and overlooks the sexually charged elements of his works, by focusing only on the institutional critique of the readymade.

The cobblestones in my show, titled *Untitled* (2023) and *Untitled (The Best a Man Can Get)* (2023), point to the series of hairy stones, or *Rock Heads*, that David Hammons created around 2005. Whereas Hammons's stones gain their anthropomorphic character from the human hair that sits on top of them, mine are dressed in items of the contemporary hipster—sunglasses and a beanie—and one balances on top of a bottle of Gillette shaving foam. Gillette has long marketed itself under the slogan "The Best a Man Can Get"[7] and, in the aftermath of the first #MeToo movement, the company ran a widely discussed commercial titled "The Best Men Can Be." The bottle of foam in my work also points to Duchamp's obsession with shaving, which came across several times in his life and work—most prominently in Man Ray's 1924 portrait of him covered in shaving foam and in another iconic photo of Duchamp with a star shaved into the back of his head.

The hat hangers in my show, titled *Untitled* (2023), also deal with ideas about orientation. Here I return to Trockel as my inspiration for how the subtle act of changing the direction or orientation of an object can signal a refusal of the automated meanings we ascribe to everyday objects and produce several new meanings. In the inverse of Trockel's artwork, Duchamp changed the orientation of his hat hanger from a horizontal surface to a vertical one. The upside-down hat hangers have, like the altered shovel, lost their function and thus become anti-phallic symbols.

Bicycle Wheel was the first readymade to exist in Duchamp's studio but not the first to be exhibited. It is another example of how Duchamp's readymades are concerned not only with context but also very much with orientation. In my interpretation of this work, *Untitled* (2023), the wheel stems from a mountain bike and lies, tilted, on the floor. The mountain bike again refers to the dialectic of outside/inside and resonates as a symbol of modern man's escape into the wilderness—a solitary and at times dangerous occupation.

Returning to Jones, she once again reminds us how "Duchamp occupies a very different role for women feminist artists attempting to critique the masculinism of art discourse than he does for the majority of male artists who are forced to approach Duchamp's phallus, his paternity, through a rather classic Oedipal relationship."[8] The difficult thing about Duchamp is that he writes off the genius as a figure, but he was later hailed as one by virtue of his own status and fame. Sometime between 1921 and 1924, Duchamp created the alter ego Rrose Sélavy. Immortalised by Man Ray and referenced in numerous works and other instances by Duchamp himself, Sélavy stands at the core of Duchamp's gender play. Scholars have often read this act of creating a female persona as an attempt to de-essentialise gender.[9] Her name being a pun on the French sentence "Eros, c'est la vie" (Erotic, such is life) establishes the imperative Duchamp suggests: that life and everything is to be viewed through a lens of sexuality, gender, and eroticism.

A small drawing of a coffee mill made by Duchamp in 1911 was the pre-study for what became the chocolate grinder in *The Large Glass* (1915–23), also known as *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. Duchamp created the drawing as part of a series for his brother's kitchen, but he later used this motif as a symbol of male masturbation and desire. This was one of my reasons for putting a coffee machine in the show. Another one is that black coffee holds strong symbolism for the masculine in general, since it is associated with toughness and dominance.

All of the above reminds us to consider the structural agency of objects, as well as the prisms used for looking at the world. Sociologist and gender theorist Michael Kimmel has stated that "there are thousands of books about men, but books about men are not books about men as men."[10] In the context of art and exhibitions, it can be said that there too are a lot of artworks about men, but the work itself is rarely aware.

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seeking / presence
Marcus Wallström

> "The influence of the natural world upon our sense of identity—both national and personal—and upon the production of art is well acknowledged; however, it must also be acknowledged that both the sense of identity and the art thus produced does, in turn, influence our relationship with and understanding of the natural world, thereby creating a rich area for exploration."[1]

In this quote, taken from the publication *Place* by Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, I find part of the foundation for my practice. It is through my own experiences of the world that I create, and it is through what I create that I communicate with the world around me.

I tend to think out loud in conversations, which sometimes allows me to articulate my thoughts more easily. The same thing happens in the creative process, when creating becomes a conversation between me and the materials.

I've always felt different and like an outsider in many ways—in school, at home, among friends and acquaintances. Rarely am I told that someone sees or hears me in the sense that they understand me; it feels like thoughts and feelings swirl faster in me than in others. I live with the experience of standing on the side, watching myself—at the same time, I'm present, reactive to what is going on. It's taken me years to reach some kind of understanding of how I function. I've never believed that there is something wrong with me, but circumstances have led me to feel that way. Today I live with the reins and tools that life has given me. In many ways, I am an on/off person, feelings going hard in every direction. This has led and still leads to both amazing and difficult situations.

While growing up and at times during my adult life, I've battled anxiety. I don't feel at home in the society we live in. But when I'm in that which we call nature, I feel a type of belonging. Out there, I see and hear, and I often feel seen and heard. That's where I'm most at home.

I say "that which we call nature," because, as David Thurfjell describes in his book *Granskogsfolk*, the term "nature" tends to mean a wide range of things in casual conversation.[2] He describes how people he interviewed for the book relate to the term and how difficult it is to hone in on a precise definition. Thurfjell chooses to define nature as "that which surrounds us and is outside the manmade world."[3] He notes that for many, nature is an everyday term that doesn't need a precise definition to fill its function, writing that "in casual conversation, it's enough with a tacit and approximate definition: nature is the forest, the fields, and the untouched landscape outside the city, as well as the shifting weather, time, and seasons, and the experience of the same when spending time outdoors."[4] I agree with Thurfjell's definition of the term as far as everyday speech goes. But to me, this is not the full truth about the term's meaning as I use it in this text. I see humans as part of nature, and therefore our activities, too, are part of nature. Consequently, even "the manmade world" is a part of nature.

In the Forest, with the Forest

From deep, humid old forests to drained tree farms and clear-felled lots.

My upbringing provided me with strong ties to the place where I lived and its natural conditions. In many ways, I lived in close proximity to that which we call nature; the trees became my friends. As a child, I played *in the forest* and *with the forest*. A stick or a pinecone could reveal a new imaginary world. To a great extent, the places where I spent my time made me the person I am. People around me tended to *work in the forest* and *with the forest*, a fact that's subconsciously followed me through life. It's affected my way of living and the way I interact with and view the world around me. I believe it is important to understand that we as humans are part of that which we call nature. By exploring the places I find myself, I see possibilities of shaping the experience of and relationship we have to ourselves, the place we are in, and the world that surrounds us.

I grew up in a village north of Dalälven, in the woods of Hälsingland. The landscape I come from is clearly shaped by the natural environment. The forest was always present in my life. My many excursions have given me perspective on life, and I've become a person who perceives what's around me and seeks what's inside me. The older I get, the more important the forest and nature as a whole are in my life. Maybe I notice it even more now since the forest is no longer around the corner like it used to be when I was a child. Maybe it's that I've realised that I pay attention to things that connect to "the natural world" when many others don't seem to do so. Increasingly, I find myself longing for the calm brought by an encounter with that which we call nature, even as the encounter itself is more difficult to make happen. My empathy is triggered by realising the things mankind does to nature, threatening the very existence of that which we call nature, along with its inhabitants. We destroy the natural environment and kill my friends in the forest. We disturb the ecosystems the planet depends on, and in so doing, we destroy our own prospects.

To a great extent, my practice is based on being on-site, present. I visit areas, explore places;

Image courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Marcus Wallström, *Medan jag strövar 1,2 & 3*, 2022. Dry pastel and white coal on paper, 170 × 150 cm each. Installation view, BFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

I experience and document. The information that's subsequently collected and stored—intellectually, but also emotionally and physically—is transformed, through the creative act, into artworks that continue to carry this information in their bodies.

The idea, or the concept, has long been central to my seeking. My explorations have a structure even before I've visited a site; I'm open and curious along the way, but I've always made sure to hold the work strictly to the idea. This approach has worked well; I view it both as a source of and a quest for knowledge. It's a practice that's closely related to other empirical explorations, artistic or not. One example is the artistic documentary work of Francis Alÿs.[5]

My explorations have had a clearly defined framing, resulting in works like sound recordings presented with a view to creating dialogue, representative drawings of various kinds, or conceptually documented landscapes in a sort of collaboration with the sites' own parameters, as well as abstractions and cartographic representations. I have also created installations based on the shift in how we perceive an object as found materials are transposed from one place to another. Most of these works are a form of documentation—recordings I've made but that are enabled by the site itself and the moment. My way of thinking emerges from this method.

My practice is currently in a transitional phase, or at least in an evolutionary phase, where embodied knowledge is increasingly taking precedence. I take a more serious interest in what's inside of me, and I seek by working. The resulting artworks look different and stem from another place within me.

I am nature.

My new drawings come from a curiosity and a desire to see what's accreted within me, what is inside the materials, and what drawing can be.

I often choose to call my drawings documentations, since that's how I experience them. Documents that lay out the contents of the process that's created them. Tied to the situation, to me, to the moment and the materials. Documents that, when presented, can be read, and perhaps they're best read if the reader gives them the time they would have given were the sheets full of written words rather than drawings.

I draw because the directness of the medium appeals to me; to me, drawing is a language that takes over when words can't go all the way. It's a medium that enables translation, making visible that which might otherwise get lost. The format is an important aspect of the work that allows

Images courtesy of Youngjae Lih

Marcus Wallström, *Untitled (Guide Lines),* 2022. Dry pastel on paper, 17 × 30,5 cm. Detail

Marcus Wallström, *tomrum*, 2023. Dry pastel on paper, 111 × 537 cm. Installation view, BFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

me as well as the viewer to actively and physically relate to the work; interacting with the picture with one's whole body and gestures offers both an intellectual and sensorial experience, no matter what stage of the process. Details are brought out; the material is allowed to speak.

The process of drawing is linked to the presence and the moment of the creative act itself. Drawing, to me, entails using my body, senses, and mind in interplay with the materials and their characteristics, responsive to the environment I inhabit, taking from and giving to what is there, in, during, before, and after the moment itself. It's like a conversation. A way of learning and understanding.

My entry point to a drawing is often a photograph I've taken. Once I'm truly in the process, I leave the model behind and enter, instead, a conversation with the image I have in front of me. In that dialogue, everything I and my body, with all its senses, register and store, gets to speak. My movements and the materials I'm using collaborate in creating something new as the dialogue turns into a sort of deconstruction of the image and its origins, the memory and drawing.

When I came across Käthe Kollwitz's charcoal drawings for the first time, in an old book whose title I can't remember, I was spellbound by their qualities. The drawings seemed to go right to the emotional register without first passing through an intellectual analysis. Just like music and sound are able to do. A few years later, I visited the Käthe Kollwitz Museum[6] in Berlin to see her work in person. I was captivated. The direct expression of the work allowed me to bypass the material as such and directly access the story told, only to subsequently, and for the same reason, return to the materials, fascinated by their own inherent abilities and history. Whether it is her drawings, sculptures, or prints, her apparently simple lines and gestures come to life and wordlessly communicate a form of understanding. I find Kollwitz's work to be expressive, highly empathetic, and anchored in solidarity.

Soon after this visit, I realised that some of the materials Kollwitz employs, like charcoal and paper, were ones that were very close to me. I hail from the forest, just like them. Right then and there, I initiated a project I named *Bränderna (The Fires)*,[7] a series of explorations of wildfire sites near the village where I grew up. These materials have felt close to me since then, and when I wanted to investigate drawing with colour in the late fall of 2021, I found a dry pastel described as coloured charcoal on the manufacturer's website.[8] I bought a few sticks and tried them. The feeling is similar to using charcoal, naturally expanding my possibilities for drawing in colour. For me, this is not about the pastel tradition, but rather about the immediate expression of drawing, about the material and the feeling of using it. It's about the potential in drawing and its simple tools.

Back to Tacita Dean, who is most known for her analogue films and large-scale blackboard drawings. These are physically demanding to make, and they depict, among other things, different natural phenomena. In speaking of her film work, Dean likes to highlight the magic of analogue, the fact that the picture is made inside the camera as she shoots. She finds something unique in the blindness[9] and magic she ascribes to analogue film when comparing it to digital, which allows for a different kind of seeing and editing. Analogue links her work to time and place in a nice way, making it about "the moment." I understand her fascination with the medium and can relate to it in my own practice. Like an analogue camera, my body and mind react to the site and the moment. That which happens in me can be likened to the chemical reaction caused by exposure in an analogue camera. I can't edit what I've registered, but I can relate to it in different ways, and I can choose what tools and formats I want to employ to develop the motif.

Tacita Dean is part of the organisation save-film.org, which fights to preserve analogue film and the industry supporting it. Dean lists "the magic" of analogue film as one of her driving forces. Describing her own films, she says that analogue mistakes and errors are beautiful, unlike those of the digital world.[10] Similarly, analogue drawings will contain mistakes or errors from the process, and that's what makes the resulting drawings beautiful and alive. What Dean describes as the unknown, the blindness of the medium, resonates with my understanding of "straying from the path." To actively and responsively seek something, without knowing what it is. To create as a way of discovering and exploring. Because that's how we find what we don't know we're seeking.

1 Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, *Art Works: Place* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 50.
2 David Thurfjell, G*ranskogsfolk: Hur naturen blev svenskarnas religion* (People of the spruce woods: How nature became a religion to the Swedes) (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2020), 21.
3 Thurfjell, *Granskogsfolk*, 21.
4 Thurfjell, *Granskogsfolk*, 21.
5 In his projects, Francis Alÿs visits different sites to document them and perform various actions. His primary mediums are video and painting. The work is discursive and poetic, performative and documentary.
6 For more information on the museum, see https://www.kaethe-kollwitz.berlin/en/.
7 In the summer of 2018, Sweden was ravaged by several large forest fires. In the spring of 2019, I worked on a capstone project consisting of several works exhibited in a show entitled *Bränderna*. This work took the 2018 fires and their effects in Ljusdal's municipality as their starting point.
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Trust Me, I'm Lying
Vigga Heisselberg Wæhrens

> "Prediction is the business of prophets, clairvoyants, and futurologists. It is not the business of novelists. A novelist's business is lying."
>
> "I talk about the gods, I am an atheist. But I am an artist too, and therefore a liar. Distrust everything I say. I am telling the truth. The only truth I can understand or express is, logically defined, a lie. Psychologically defined, a symbol. Aesthetically defined, a metaphor."
>
> —Ursula K. Le Guin, introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*[1]

The tale is loosely outlined on the drawing board. The scenography, the camerawork, and the music enhance and enlarge the narrative. The whole thing is pure fabrication, falsehood, but it does tell of something that's true.

It starts out with a "What if …," as a thought experiment. It is this "What if…" that is the starting point for most of my pieces. "What if everybody had a chip in their head, for measuring their sleep" or "What if my dirty dishes were fortune-telling orbs." This doesn't require one to create a completely new, fictitious world from scratch, in which every plate contains a prophecy. The thought experiment is set in this reality because I'm often standing and reflecting on the future, precisely when I'm washing the dishes. It's an exaggeration of the existing and a misplacement of elements within a realistic environment, so that we can say, "What if…"—albeit with-out stepping into completely unknown territory. This only calls for a minor change, a small misplacement, in order to obtain a new vista.

Ursula K. Le Guin's sci-fi classic *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the introduction of which is quoted above, is not a prediction about the future but rather a closer look at some characteristic features of our time, as it is now. Like picking up a magnifying glass and cutting away whatever is surrounding the thing at focus—and maybe pasting in a new element. A collage of what's well known and unknown, consequently making what is well known—and ordinarily taken for granted—more clear and distinct, so that the viewer sees and *lives through* the point in the fiction and not merely overlooks the point and lives with it, as tends to transpire in everyday life.

Yes, *The Left Hand of Darkness* takes place on the planet Gethen, with Genly Ai as the protagonist, but the plot really revolves around our own planet and all the odd rules and ideals we set up for ourselves. While the inhabitants of the planet Gethen are all androgynous, Le Guin comments:

> Yes, the people in it are androgynous, but that doesn't mean that I'm predicting that in a millennium or so we will all be androgynous. … I'm merely observing … that if you look at us at certain odd times of day in certain weather, we already are. I am not predicting, or prescribing. I am describing.[2]

Elaboration of Fiction through Editing

When I am editing and cutting video, I often think of the video as a moving collage, or in terms of building a digital scenography. There are many layers of different video sequences superimposed on top of one another that I'm cutting, retouching, speeding up, or inverting until, at last, the whole thing is experienced as one single picture. One scene, from one imaginary location, and not eleven different video sequences. Accomplishing this requires a whole lot of time and a lot of RAM, but, for me, sustaining the narrative's universe, the fiction, *the lie*, is a necessity in my works. Most often, my agenda is: draw the viewers into an entertaining fictional narrative, and once they are engrossed, serve them your criticism—they wouldn't know what hit 'em!

At the same time, I really like that it's never quite perfect. It's not a Hollywood production. The digital, artificial scenography can come to disclose itself in the form of some digital noise in a corner or in a glitch, here and there—that's the very charm about the "composite image."

Imagination, Lies, and Humour

Metaphors are not precise but they are in possession of a certain power, inasmuch as they make room for the imagination—and maybe that's the truest thing we possess. In any event, if you ask Le Guin: "The truth is a matter of the imagination."[3]

Unfortunately, when you take a look at the global political landscape, a commonly shared, fact-based reality seems to be farther and farther away. For my own part, I have a notion that you're more receptive to criticism when such criticism is neither direct nor confrontational nor moralising —otherwise, you will immediately be on guard.

Image courtesy of the artist

Vigga Heisselberg Wæhrens, *The Oaks Tale*, video installation, 2023. Aluminum and wooden frame, back projection fabric, acrylic paint, metal wire. Video: 25:00 min duration, screen dimensions: 300 × 170 × 5 cm. Installation view, BFA exhibition, KHM2 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

When somebody is telling a story, you listen. You empathise with the thought experiment and you're amenable to alternative points of view—"because, after all, it's fiction."

Sci-fi and speculative fiction are not rational progressions of that which exists. They are tortuous, full of holes, rife with variables, and left open for our imagination to occupy. They're not saying, "That's the way it is," but rather "What if…"—a quality that, for my own part, I really like when I'm working with societal issues in my video art. I don't see any point in drawing a line and a morality that one is either for or against. But I do see the point in creating a new reality, full of absurdities and crazy contrivances, that can potentially provide a needed place for thinking outside the box and for taking a critical look at the status quo, by empathising with a separate reality, for a brief moment. Thinking in nuances, and laughing a little bit at it all. Humour, I would maintain, has precisely the same quality—it opens up, instead of drawing lines in the sand.

The artist duo Astrup & Bordorff offer a textbook example of how to intertwine criticism, humour, music, and art. In one scene in their film cabaret *Urolige Hjerte* (Quivery Heart, 2018),[4] you watch three real estate investors. They are inspecting a property in Copenhagen. The chief investor, played by Rosalinde Mynster, suddenly starts to sing and rap over an insistent pop beat:

> House in the house
> Give it up
> Dance on the roof
> We'll be shakin' nonstop
>
> Hood in the hood
> Dig it up
> Grab the roots
> Get a bottle make it pop
>
> […]
>
> Get your hands in the sand
> Get low get real get low go oh oh oh

In the chorus, the song veers into a more rock-ish and heavier beat, with a dramatic opera-parodying upper voice, and the two assisting investors begin singing a dark-sounding choir:

> House in the house we take it down
> Take it down dig it up[5]

In the video piece, the three investors march through the building's corridors and ride on a large crane while looking very important.

What happens when property speculation and real estate investments are set to music and becoming funny and laughable, as is the case here? Why is this funny?

If the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's words are to be believed, the combination of two conflicting ideas is an element that frequently enters into comedy.[6] Astrup & Bordorff's portrayal of the real estate investor—a cool singing woman in a lime-green tailor-cut blazer and skirt—stands in striking contrast to what most people would imagine a real estate investor looks like and in striking contrast to what the typical real estate investor actually looks like (try googling "top 20 richest real estate tycoons in the world 2022").

The real comedy though, I think, is seated in the contrast between song lyrics, musical genre, and action. A line like "Get low get real get low go oh oh oh" triggers associations with Kool & the Gang, KC and the Sunshine Band, and Marvin Gaye, all of whom sing lyrics like "Let your love come down,"[7] "Get down on it,"[8] and "Do a little dance, make a little love, get down tonight."[9] All of this being typical 1970s slang for partying, dancing, drinking, or having sex, and most often sung by men to women, as an invitation ("Go down," "Get low with/on me"). But sung, here and now, in Astrup & Bordorff's version, by a woman, working in a "serious," male-dominated profession—I read this as a critique of and challenge to gender roles, capitalism, and lucrative, exclusionary industries. There's also a comical contrast between a "serious occupation" and party music, along with the attempt to render real estate speculation "sexy."

There's also a comical juxtaposition in the word choices of "dig it *up*" (that is to say, digging up the ground in order to clear it for a new property) and "take it *down*" (slang for having sex, partying, dancing, but also possible to interpret literally, as in "tear the building down"). The rhyming of words frequently forms a constituent element in comedy; Freud himself comes up with countless examples in his book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*.[10]

The more rock-style chorus, with electric guitar, the dark choir voices, and the theatrical upper voice underscore the destructive and violent element of property demolition, which, moreover, is clearly stated in the lyrics: "House in the house we take it down, Take it down dig it up." Once again, the juxtaposition of "down" and "up" are to be taken quite literally here.

Urolige Hjerte is one of a series of film cabarets that comment critically on, among other things, the loss of public welfare, working conditions in the public sector, and the outsourcing of public services and properties to private players. But Astrup & Bordorff do not directly lock horns with these topics. It is rather through humour and music that they put the criticism forward—and it is enormously incisive and entertaining at one and the same time. When criticism arrives in the form of humour, it differentiates itself from the customary presentation of the same political topics, which one might otherwise typically encounter in the form of flyers, posters, critical contributions to debates, and so on—all of which are, to be sure, important mediums in the public debate but which turn up with such frequency that they can, accordingly, appear to be uniform in their modes of communication. Humour and music are other ways of grabbing hold of these themes, approaches that can (maybe) get the criticism to live on, inside the viewer, for a longer stretch of time, because these methods provoke laughter and induce rhythm into the body—in contrast to an informative flyer, which addresses itself mostly to reason and to the head.

As a part of her master's thesis on comedy and humour in art, modern culture scholar Rosa Danielsen interviewed Astrup & Bordorff and the artist Emilia Bergmark about their artistic practices and asked them how they make use of humour in their work. About her practice, Bergmark had this to say:

> I think there are several strata of meaning that can be built up in a work of art, and there I see that the artistic method can be to create different points of entry into the work. … My method, I suppose, mostly has to with creating something that's funny and that makes people laugh, and something along the lines of "Hey, that was a funny way of saying that." … So I regard it as an entrance.[11]

In Danielsen's thesis, humour is mentioned in several passages as being relationship building, and the artists talk about how, in their experience, viewers seem more disposed to enter into a conversation with them about their work when it's humorous. Or as Bergmark put it: "So humour is like a lot like that, relationship-building, I think. Putting it in this way: I see you. I see the situation. I'm turning the situation around in this kind of way. And then, all of a sudden, we are a 'we', instead of a 'you' and a 'me.'"[12]

If we grab hold of Freud once again, he points out that one doesn't get any satisfaction out of making a joke for oneself—no, it has to be shared with somebody else. Watching the recipient laugh is what gives satisfaction to oneself.[13] Maybe when one tells a joke, it's not done on the basis of the egotistical motive of obtaining satisfaction or showing off but is motivated, rather, by a desire to attain the feeling of being connected through laughter, and it is this that generates a need to share jokes with others. Danielsen summarises her interviews with the artists in this way: "All three artists describe laughter as playing an essential role in creating recognition, familiarity and thereby relation in the meeting between viewer and work. … In Astrup & Bordorff's case, it even holds the potential to cross significant social and cultural segment borders."[14]

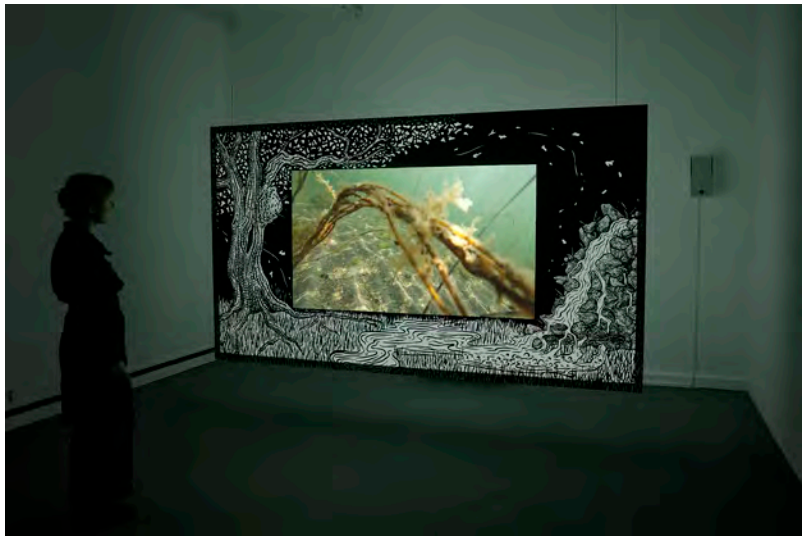
One might ask how humorous art differentiates itself from satirical talk shows. Both are entertaining. Both can be political. But I believe humorous art has a different potential because an artwork doesn't exclusively need to be either entertaining or political. In an artwork, you've got the freedom to explore several different feelings, moods, and expressions, which can be combined with the humorous. It might be sad, surreal, unpleasant, angry, mercurial, *and* humorous, whereas the frames in mainstream comedy are more fixed—mainstream comedy is, first and foremost, entertainment. In my practice, humour is neither the core nor the goal, per se, but rather an entrance towards—or a method for working with—different topics. Bergmark describes it in this way: "Just to say something about humour: it's something that always exists in my art works but it's not something that I see as a theme to investigate—I'm thinking more that it's simply my way of formulating myself."[15]

Humour, the Unconscious, and the Aggressive

Humour, as it were, is a double-edged sword. Again and again, discriminatory attitudes masked as "funny" memes are disseminated in public debates, causing any real critique to be dismissed with a "Well, it was just for fun." At the same time, many memes, through being spread on social media, help to legitimise and normalise deeply problematic statements—especially when shared by high-profile authority figures, as Donald Trump did during the 2016 US presidential campaign, with his "Crooked Hillary" and "Lock her up" jeers targeted at his opponent, Hillary Clinton. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud talks about how jokes are a way of venting the repressed and tabooed feelings that one is carrying around—feelings of a sexual and aggressive character, which are either forbidden by law or by norms (Freud calls these "tendentious jokes").[A] Tendentious jokes accordingly can be regarded, according to Freud, as expressions of a (sexual) aggressiveness that the "joker" can give an outlet to only through jokes: "The person concerned finds criticism or aggressiveness difficult so long as they are direct, and possible only along circuitous paths."[16] The butt of the joke is being subjected to aggression, but in a way that is permitted because this aggression is conveyed verbally and indirectly, while the person who hears the joke seals the debasement by laughing along. Is this the same kind of aggressiveness that dwells behind certain parts of meme culture? Unbridled aggressivity, which Facebook would block, can circulate, nonetheless, in the form of memes. Now, those who witness and listen to the joke are no longer "merely" individual persons; rather, they represent millions of social media profiles who reshare the joke and whom the algorithm is going to continue to feed with similar material. I've also run up against the argument that humour is a mask that you, as an artist, can hide behind to avoid saying what you really mean; this is something that I happen to disagree with. In my opinion, when you're making fun of something, you're certainly saying—and quite pointedly, albeit indirectly—that something is better than something else. Freud quotes the philosopher Kuno Fischer as having written: "A joke is a judgement which produces a comic contrast" and "A joke is a *playful* judgement."[17] However, I'm inclined to agree with those who adopt a somewhat more sceptical stance about the use of humour: that humour can be ambiguous and multifaceted—and that this ambiguity can be misused. Humour is not set in stone; it softens the lines and is not so much black and white as it is grey. But it's quite precisely this quality that I also think is humour's special power, especially in connection with conveying political content, since it has the capacity to embrace several different criticisms simultaneously; at the same time, it can also avoid becoming too high and mighty and can circumvent being overly moralising (since its goal is to provoke laughter). About the interview with Astrup & Bordorff, Danielsen writes: "Bordorff claims how humour or comedy complexifies and can make different sides of the same thing visible, using the word 'mudrer' (muddies up) several times. She explains how, in their view, this also means that humour or comedy holds the potential to nuance and create new conversations and perceptions."[18] In other words, the ambiguity inherent to humour can be used to open up discussion on topics where the fronts have otherwise become firmly locked. The ambiguity also mitigates any moralising element, which can otherwise be hard to avoid when it comes to dealing with political content.

For me, self-deprecating humour is actually a conscious means towards meeting the viewer at eye level. It is, quite precisely, self-exposing and is *not* a mask. It is here, where you make yourself vulnerable, that humour has relationship-building potential: its "muddiness" is beneficial and can soften the lines of an otherwise polarised debate. That is why I insist on working in the midst of the paradox between making artworks that are critical of societal issues while simultaneously refraining from making moralising and closed statements. Making artworks that declare their position but discuss topics without coming to any unequivocal conclusion about them. Humour, and especially self-deprecating humour, makes this possible for me, inasmuch as I'm pointing fingers at others and at myself and at the whole setup, at one the same time. If I display myself and make myself vulnerable,

A Freud posits a distinction between "jokes" and "humour." Jokes can be found in many forms, and their effect and intentions can be widely different. For example, there are "tendentious jokes" that embody hidden aggressivity. Freud describes humour, on the other hand, as an expression of turning oneself into the object of the comic, in an attempt to counteract suffering and transform this into something positive—a decentralisation of oneself. Freud cites, by way of example, the story of a criminal who, on a Monday, is being led to the gallows. Along the way, he says, "Well, the week's beginning nicely." Sigmund Freud, "Humour," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XXI (London: Vintage, 2001), 161.



Images courtesy of the artist

Vigga Heisselberg Wæhrens, *The Oaks Tale*, *video installation,* 2023. Aluminum and wooden frame, back projection fabric, acrylic paint, metal wire. Video: 25:00 min duration, screen dimensions: 300 × 170 × 5 cm. Installation view

maybe others will also dare to laugh at themselves and take up some matters for consideration? In this way, room is created for the "we" that Bergmark refers to, by laughing together and maybe even laughing a bit at ourselves.[19] A "we" that establishes a solid point of departure for engaging in a fruitful discussion.

If we are still sticking to the idea that jokes and aggressiveness are conjoined, need one be bashful about transferring this kind of coupling to humour and the uncanny?

I often see this juxtaposition in movies—the intermingling of humour and eeriness. Is this because they are linked in the unconscious? Or is it rather because they work well together by virtue of their contrast? Laughter is situated quite close to what's scary and unpleasant, when it arrives in the form of "comic relief." There are also expressions like "I didn't know whether to laugh or cry"—a situation in which most people have probably found themselves. The reflex to laugh at something that is actually profoundly awful is something

found inside many people, myself included. When something is meant to be eerie but is not conveyed successfully, the result is quite often comical. Why this is so is something that I cannot answer; I can only question it.

Humour in relation to the uncanny can also be used to elevate heavy, dark topics and render them easier to enter into. Bergmark describes how she consciously uses this contrast between laughter and seriousness to insist on being able to speak about something difficult:

> I don't really want to hear a lot about heavy topics. I think there's so much of that in the world right now. But anyway, I do feel, as an artist, a responsibility to keep on addressing things that are serious, and it is right there that humour can become a way to continue saying, "We're going to stick with talking about this topic, and we can do it in a way that's not only depressing."[20]

This grip is also one that I, for my own part, use in my practice.

The Uncanny and Misplacement

Earlier on, in connection with analogies and fiction, I wrote about how it takes only a small misplacement within an otherwise familiar environment to give rise to a sense of something absurd, unknown, something that's "off," and about how such a minor misplacement can hopefully serve to add new perspectives to what we already know.

It is the same small misplacement that gives rise to the feeling of something "uncanny," as if there's something wrong, without really being able to put one's finger on what that might be. This is a comment that I often hear in response to my pieces, and which I also tend to pursue in the idea-development phase. Freud writes, in *The Uncanny*, about how authors use a mixture of reality and fiction to evoke the sense of the uncanny within us: "In a sense, then, he [the fiction author] betrays us to a superstition we thought we had 'surmounted'; he tricks us by promising us everyday reality and then going beyond it. We react to his fiction as if they had been our own experiences."[21] He continues:

> This is the fact that an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes, and so forth.[B]

In fiction, we have the liberty to amplify unrealistic elements and distort the story in such a way that the sense of the uncanny is amplified, far more than would be possible in reality.

In his text, Freud goes into depth on the etymological origin of the "uncanny" by examining the German equivalent *"unheimlich"* (which is actually the original title of his German-language text). *Unheimlich* is the antonym of the word *"heimlich,"* which signifies homely, well-known, safe. That is to say, *unheimlich* signifies something that is new, foreign, unknown, and not-homely.[22] The uncanny, then, is a concept linked to the homely sphere. This incited me to think about how, in countless thriller and horror movies, the plot unfolds inside a haunted house: a place that once used to be safe, secure, familiar, but which is now unsafe and uncertain because it has been taken over by something that is new and undefinable. Something that does not belong to our reality—a fiction that glides its way into our realistic world. Moreover, I came to think of the camerawork in a scene from *Mulholland Drive* (2001), directed by filmmaker David Lynch.[C]

B Freud, *The Uncanny*, 150. In his analysis, Freud arrives at the conclusion that the sense of the uncanny is something we carry with us from our childhood fantasies and anxieties, and that it is constituted by remnants of a belief we had at an earlier point in our self's development. According to him, back in the days when humans had an animistic world view instead of the rational world view that we possess today, we were less developed as individuals. We have therefore "overcome" our superstitions and are trying to suppress any remnants of our earlier, animistic beliefs. When we, through means of magical realism or similar fiction, are fooled into accepting a seemingly realistic universe, only to suddenly be surprised by a supernatural element, this tends to reawaken the remnants of the animistic superstitions dwelling within us, and it is precisely this awakening that fosters the experience of the uncanny. For my own part, I don't buy Freud's premise that the development of the self is supposed to be a linear progression and that a rational world view is better than an animistic one. Freud can be criticised on many counts—theories that are full of holes; a conservative and all-too-narrow understanding of other cultures, of gender, and on and on—but I also recognise that Freud was influenced by the Enlightenment. This is why he looks ahead, with a linear understanding of development. And that is why we accordingly view him as a product of his own day. The fact that he takes what is tortuous and veiled in our unconscious, and that he takes the plight of his patients, as seriously as he does, simultaneously testifies to his foresightedness. He is therefore a thinker about whom I feel somewhat ambivalent. But I have chosen to include him in my text anyway, because there are most certainly aspects of his theories that I find interesting and that I can use to elaborate my own reflections.

C The main character, Rita, has survived and then wandered off from a car crash, and she has managed to find her way to—and is now hiding inside—Betty's aunt's house. Betty and Rita do not know each other and Betty has just arrived, and is walking around, admiring the apartment, where she has been given permission to stay from her aunt. Betty is happy and free from concerns—but there is nonetheless something that's tense and uneasy about this scene, especially because the viewer knows that Rita is hiding somewhere in the house.

The scene has been filmed slightly below eye level, with a handheld camera, as seen from the main character Betty's point of view. The camera continues to wind its way through the house's narrow, tortuous passages, where it is impossible to see around the next corner and where you are held in fearful suspense about when a confrontation is going to occur. It is the uncertainty around "what is it that's hiding there" that Lynch draws on and which is amplified by taking place in an environment where one otherwise might feel safe—at home. The film is set in a realistic Los Angeles environment, but already at the start of the film, we run into a supernatural phenomenon. For this reason, we are aware that there *may* be something lurking around the corner.[23] Something that does not belong, a displacement, something supernatural—*unheimlich*. It is most often the case that there's nothing lurking around the corner. And when there is something there, it's not anywhere near as scary to see it as are the uncertainty and pent-up tension that precede its appearance. It is the fear of encountering the misplaced that gives rise to the sense of suspense.

Music and the Dissolution of Time

Now I would like to return to the element of music. Because suspense and eeriness seldom elicit the same effect without background music and sound effects. This is something that I myself am very conscious about when editing films. I make use of music to underline, to elucidate, and to amplify the visual material *after* I have filmed, but in the vast majority of cases, it is actually the soundtrack that first comes into being and then dictates what I shoot and how I cut.

When I'm editing, I'm often thinking about film as collage, as I wrote earlier. When I am playing and editing music and sound, I take the same kind of approach. And things do not always come into being in a thoroughly thought-out manner. It might start out with a single sound that catches my ear and that "I've just got to record," which then becomes a catalyst for the rest of the soundtrack, even if, in the finished result, the initial sound is merely present as a minor effect, which you can hear only faintly. The catalyst also might be an existing song that embodies the emotion that I want to pass along in the artwork. I refer and I quote from, among other things, older Nordic, Gregorian, and medieval melodies, and I sometimes combine these with newly composed or improvisational sound and music, in order to underscore time or, alternatively, to dissolve it. I am well aware that when you're working with political content in your art, you run the risk that it's going to become a very short-lived piece. It revolves around what is right here and right now, around a critique of the status quo, which might not prove to be relevant in five, ten, or twenty years' time. Even if the underlying problems might be unaltered, they nonetheless make their appearance in different ways in each decade. By implicating time and historical references, the topics are removed from a here-and-now context and set into a larger perspective, which hopefully serve to render the work more generally applicable.

The mixture of times and temporalities is also a topic I have begun to explore, both visually and in terms of form, keeping pace with the fact that my video works are moving further and further away from being one-shot scenes to being endowed, presently, with more complicated narratives. Narrative forms from different times cross-pollinate each other and turn into something new. A fairy tale is mixed with YouTube aesthetics; the fairy tale's moral could turn into a pop song, as well. Why? Because I find many points of similarity between the fairy tale's knight character and today's influencers. Because the moral expressed in a fairy tale is as catchy and flat as the refrain in a pop song, and because I do not think that history moves forward but rather that it moves in an eternal, upward-rising spiral. Again, I need to grab hold of Le Guin. In "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction,"[24] she discusses the linear progression in the hero fictions that fill our shared narrative in the West, which speak about what it means to be human. She stages a showdown with the home-away-home form: the hero who sets out on a quest, overcomes challenges, and then returns home, victoriously, and so much the wiser. Le Guin points back towards the stories' origin and towards our everyday lives—because how many times in life do we, ourselves, act out the home-away-home narrative? Everyday life is characterised by repetition and seemingly inconsequential experiences—by gathering grain rather than by slaughtering a mammoth. It is the cyclical narrative that ought to dominate our stories about mankind, but, after all, it's way more exciting to hear about a mammoth being brought down than it is to hear about a cornfield that looks the same as it did the day before: "It is hard to tell a really gripping tale of how I wrested a wild-oat seed from its husk, and then another, and then another, and then another, and then another."[25]

It may seem a bit far-fetched that Le Guin needs to go all the way back to hunter-gatherer society to get her point across. Because the world certainly did look different back then. But she nonetheless has a point. The linear narrative, with a single good hero and a single evil obstacle and a single goal and a development that can proceed in only one direction— → *forward*—is well-worn and something only a few people see themselves reflected in. This lack of relatability is also what constitutes the whole starting point for "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction." But we still, today, hold up this kind of linear narrative as an ideal.[D] In fiction, as well as in society, the economy, education, and consumption, the keywords are "progression," "momentum," and "optimisation." For this reason, I try to reflect on what form, what tempo, and what understanding of time needs to be there in my works. In order to give rise to a much needed pause. In order to shift into reverse gear or into carousel mode or forward—but with many convoluted sidetracks.[E]

It was Bjørn Melhus's artistic work that introduced me to the mixing of times, genres, music, and sound as a basis for working with video.

I first came across Melhus's practice in Munich in 2019, at the Haus der Kunst, where his video work *The Oral Thing* (2001) was on display.[26] The combination of genres, the performative element—with the artist himself in the centre—along with the absurdity and the humour that glides imperceptibly over into the sinister and uncanny, constituted, for me, a new angle on video art that I became deeply captivated by. Even though Melhus is not the artist whose work I am following most avidly *right now*, I have spent a lot of time visiting his website, where most of his video works are available to watch—which is also why I have chosen to analyse one of his video pieces in this text.

In Melhus's video work *Freedom & Independence* (2014), we meet the character Randi, who has been modelled on the writer and thinker Ayn Rand.[F] We also meet a parapsychological medium and the results of its fission, Mr. Freedom and Ms. Independence, along with a security guard and a flock of half-dead men. The settings are, respectively, an empty sacred space, a new urban development in Istanbul, and a morgue. All of the roles are played by Melhus, and all the speech is sampled from an assortment of semi-religious apocalyptic films, as well as from interviews with Rand. The juxtaposition of religion and Rand simultaneously offers an irreconcilable contradistinction and an already existing fusion. What I mean to say is: Rand's philosophy of "objectivism" dismisses everything that has to do with religion, faith, and emotions and therefore stands in contrast to these. However, the personality cult surrounding Ayn Rand as well as the pedestal upon which she and her adherents place capitalism are utopian in nature and are articulated as being unconditionally good and representing the ultimate liberation of the individual, which precisely triggers connotations of a religious discourse. This juxtaposing of Rand and religion, besides making a point, is therefore also humorous by virtue of its ambivalence. The many layers of music in Melhus's video support the contrast between the "emotional" (and religious) and the "rational." The music sounds as though it had been taken directly from the apocalyptic films quoted in the artwork: it is both emotional and embossed with action. When Randi steps into the scene, however, the music is replaced by pure rhythm. No feelings here, only Randi's whip that dictates the tempo, as she repeats the mantra: "Reason, individualism, capitalism"—the cornerstones of objectivism. There is, on the whole, something very machine-like about the character. In the last scene, where Randi is challenged by a group of half-dead men, she hesitates slightly in her speech, as her eyes go drifting around—an all-too-human trait. But Melhus has coupled the sound of a tuning radio with the rolling of her eyes, so that she seems, instead, to be even more artificial and inhuman, like a robot. Moreover, she is monitoring Mr. Freedom and Ms. Independence through the television set, and in the last scene, she proclaims: "I will not die, it's the world that will end." This statement stands in conspicuous contrast to the half-dead men at the morgue, who, in their revolt against Randi, are whispering: "I am dying"—a fundamental condition for everything that is alive.[G] Many of the films that Melhus has chosen to quote in this piece also feature technological development, surveillance, and artificial intelligence as the chief catalysts for the apocalypse—for example, *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *Terminator 3: The Rise of the Machines* (2003). Transformation of the body, bodily absence, and commodification of the body make their appearance in several forms in *Freedom & Independence*, in addition to the machine-like: namely, in the guise of the parapsychological medium, which shifts its bodily form along the way, but also through the site of the morgue—the final station for the body and the place where bodies wait to be identified as well as through the fitness sphere, promoting the narrative of an improved body. A sphere that Mr. Freedom and Ms. Freedom contribute to forming. They are both wearing sportswear. We see them running and training in an outdoor fitness area, and we see advertisements in the cityscape for "My Club' World—fitness & life centers," where they happen to be running.

The fusion of religion and capitalism is also touched upon through the music and the editing of the film. We can see this, for example, when Randi (the capitalist) has tormented the medium (the religion), after which the medium quietly sings "Jingle Bells" to itself, without any further connection to the plot. Christmas is, I would suppose, the best example of a commodification of a religious narrative.

D Le Guin describes how she is unable to recognise herself as human in the history of the "hero"—as the one who kills, vanquishes, and triumphs: "Wanting to be human too, I sought for evidence that I was; but if that's what it took, to make a weapon and kill with it, then evidently I was either extremely defective as a human being, or not human at all." She finds the answer to her quest in a carrier bag, the earliest relic that we have from human beings. Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," 153.

E I cannot honestly say that, in my own practice, I do not retell stories with linear progressions. And neither can Le Guin. For example, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, whose introduction has been studiously quotedin the present text, is classically structured and features a (male) hero who is on a higher mission that he and others are willing to sacrifice their lives for. Why is it so difficult for us to let go of these stories, even when, like Le Guin, one simply cannot identify with them?

F Ayn Rand (1905–1982) was a Russian American writer and philosopher. She founded objectivism, a philosophy that strives to encourage and cultivate flawless rationality and individuality in people, and was a strong advocate of unregulated capitalism.

G Bjørn Melhus explores surveillance and technology contra humanity in several of his other works, among these being the video piece *SUGAR* (2019).

Christmas is the busiest time for retail businesses.[27] Christmas films are constantly made. There's Christmas tourism. And, for most people, as soon as they hear the word "Christmas," they probably think about presents before they think of Jesus. There are also two scenes where we see a newly built but desolate area, encircled by barbed-wire and populated by palm trees and a swimming pool as well as empty, clean, neat streets. The security guard who's patrolling this deserted area whispers to the camera, "We are in heaven. Why are we in heaven?," in an extremely disquieting way, with tense background music. Is paradise truly private property, secured from the unclean poor?[28]

One could easily fill five pages talking about this complex piece, and I have probably overlooked several important points. What I have attempted to do here, though, is stick to the readings and methods that I can recognise in my own practice, along with focusing on that which fascinated me when I first saw Melhus's work. To sum up, it is his way of pairing very diverse material and emotions in such a way that he creates a piece that serves up a clear critique while simultaneously pointing in many different directions. It is the detailed work with the connection between sound or music and characters—as though leitmotifs from classical music—as well the combination of contemporary mainstream culture with older, historical material that I find most compelling about his practice.

Where Do We End Up?

Maybe right back where we started. The whole thing could very well turn out to be a dream that one wakes up from. Or a lie, perhaps?

The multifaceted, serpentine, tortuous road, with dead-ends, T-junctions, and roundabouts, leads not so much ahead as it leads back. Or maybe it even leads upwards. This is also how I want to bring my text to a close—I will go back into the text and repeat what was said at the very beginning: "I am an artist too, and therefore a liar. Distrust everything I say. I am telling the truth."[29]

1 Ursula K. Le Guin, introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness* (London: Gollancz, 2018).
2 Le Guin, introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*.
3 Le Guin, introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*.
4 Kirsten Astrup, with contributions from Maria Bordorff, *Urolige Hjerte* [Quivery heart], Copenhagen, 2018, 35:00. Astrup & Bordorff became an official duo after this work was made.
5 Kirsten Astrup (music) and Maria Bordorff (lyrics), "Dig It Up," *Urolige Hjerte* (LP), released by Museet for Samtidskunst, 2019.
6 Sigmund Freud, "The Technique of Jokes," in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (London: Harmondsworth, 1976).
7 Marvin Gaye and Ed Townsend, "Let's Get It On," *Let's Get It On*, Tamla Records, 1973.
8 Kool & the Gang ,"Get Down On It," *Something Special*, De-Lite Records, 1981.
9 KC and the Sunshine Band, "Get Down Tonight," *KC and the Sunshine Band*, TK Records, 1975.
10 See Freud, "The Technique of Jokes."
11 Emilia Bergmark, quoted in Rosa Danielsen, "Interconnecting the Relational and Critical Potential of Comedy in Art" (master's thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2022), 27.
12 Danielsen, "Interconnecting the Relational and Critical Potential of Comedy in Art," 30.
13 Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 209.
14 Danielsen, "Interconnecting the Relational and Critical Potential of Comedy in Art," 35.
15 Danielsen, "Interconnecting the Relational and Critical Potential of Comedy in Art," 27.
16 Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 194.
17 Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 40.
18 Danielsen, "Interconnecting the Relational and Critical Potential of Comedy in Art," 33.
19 Emilia Bergmark, quoted in Danielsen, "Interconnecting the Relational and Critical Potential of Comedy in Art," 30.
20 Danielsen, "Interconnecting the Relational and Critical Potential of Comedy in Art," 31.
21 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 157.
22 Freud, *The Uncanny*, 124.
23 *Mulholland Drive*, feature film, directed by David Lynch (US: StudioCanal, 2001)
24 Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (Newburyport, MA: Grove/Atlantic, 1997). First published in *Women of Vision* (New York: Saint Martin's, 1988).
25 Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," 151.
26 Bjørn Melhus, *The Oral Thing*, 2001, video, 9:00, https://melhus.de/the-oral-thing/.
27 Danmarks Statistik, Detailomsætningsindeks, accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/erhvervsliv/handel/detailomsaetningsindeks.
28 Bjørn Melhus, *Freedom & Independence*, 2014, video, 15:00, https://melhus.de/freedom-independence/.
29 Le Guin, introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

Their Hands Graze Each Other at the Chain
Hannes Östlund

Image courtesy of the artist

Hannes Östlund, *Ett litet minne*, 2022. Looped scan from analogue film, 00:14 min.
Installation view, BFA exhibition, KHM1 Gallery, Malmö, 2023

There is a term in physics that explains the strange lustre found in many antique photographs: halation. This lustre, which is seen in the brightest parts of the photo, often appears on white clothes—they seem to be glowing—and in backlit interstices of foliage and other ornate details. It's the light pushing through, almost enclosing that which gets in its way. Halation is technically an undesired defect, one hard to avoid back when glass plates were used as photographic negatives. In a studio, the photographer could circumvent the phenomenon by controlling the light, but in the field, both indoors and outdoors, it was more challenging. Once materials other than glass came into use, the defect became less common, but it still was not always avoidable. This curious lustre is a result of the light coming through the lens in the moment of exposure hitting the glass plate's light-sensitive emulsion more than once. Some of the light travels through the emulsion side, is subsequently reflected by the back side of the glass plate, and hits the emulsion a second time. The result is that the brightest parts of the photograph are diffuse, somewhat dispersed, looking as if they have been pushing through the image in an almost violent way. In many old photographs, this lustre is a "punctum" for me.

In his book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*,[1] philosopher Roland Barthes introduces the terms "studium" and "punctum." Studium and punctum are the two elements in his method to analyse photographs. Barthes describes the first as anchored in the viewer's knowledge, culture, and reason, always linked to the information held by the photograph in question: what the image shows, what it tells the viewer. The second element, the punctum, is described as a disruption or hole in the studium. A photograph's punctum is highly personal, often private, and it is that which strikes the viewer, bypassing the intellect. It is a cut in the image's studium. A picture can have several puncta or none at all, since this element is unpredictable and distinct to each viewer.

Before leading this text to my own artistic practice, I would like to analyse a photograph using Barthes's method. For anyone seeking to understand my practice, I believe it is just as important to see how I read photographs as it is to hear about the practice itself. The photograph in question was created by John Alinder sometime between 1910 and 1920, catalogued as negative number 0596.[2] Before turning to this image, I'd like to give a simple account of Alinder himself, to give us a deeper understanding of his work. Alinder was the son of farmers, born in Uppland in the late 1870s. As an only child, he was expected to take over the farm, but instead he taught himself how to take pictures, and in time he started to work as a photographer. Now to the photograph in question. It shows two young men, dressed in what must be assumed to be their most elegant clothes: blazers with matching dress pants, well-ironed shirts, neatly tied neckties, stylish hats, and shiny shoes. (I can't put my finger on what it is exactly, but something reveals that this is not their everyday clothing; perhaps it's the hands, which look accustomed to physical work.) They're standing in a garden, next to a simple swing that hangs from a rope on one side and a chain on the other. The rope and the chain lead to a tree branch. The first man is leaning casually against the swing, holding the chain with his right hand, his grasp no tighter than what's necessary to keep his balance. The other man is standing close to him, turned the same way; it's obvious that they're a romantic couple. His legs are placed on either side of the first man's left leg, and he rests against the first man's hip. Their legs are loosely intertwined. His right hand reaches behind the first man's back, and their hands graze each other at the chain, though they're not overlapping. He is holding on tight. His left hand is on his own hip, elbow jutting out from the body. The first man has his arm around the second man's waist, his hand placed right above the other's. They are both looking directly at the camera. At first blush, their expressions could be mistaken for solemn, but there's a sense of excitement in both of them. The second man's face also holds signs of anxiety, while the first man's face reveals a hint of curiosity. In the background is a spare, simple wooden fence that marks the end of the garden. Behind it, we glimpse a field. What has so far been described is the photograph's studium. But what strikes me in this image—its punctum—is a small detail that's stuck with me. The thumb on the first man's left hand, the hand that holds the other man around the waist, is blurry. An attentive viewer will notice that it's been exposed in two positions: it has moved back and forth between two spots over the course of the photograph being taken. It looks like the first man has not been able to keep himself from stroking his thumb over the second man's waist. Other than this, they're absolutely still.

*

The central, and most private, source of my practice is secret. Nevertheless, I will try to invite you in and show you as much as I can. It might be easier for you if we start from the beginning, and perhaps it sounds obvious to say that it all started in my childhood. Before I was of school age, I spent almost all my waking hours drawing. Every day, several hours on end, with a focus that could not be broken. I allowed it to swallow me whole. It was very rare that my drawings

Image courtesy of the artist

Hannes Östlund, *Untitled*, 2022–2023. Gelatin silver print (contact print), 52 × 81 mm

were representative; instead, they sprung from what I assume was my imagination. My parents made sure I always had materials to use, even when it strained their budget, and they diligently saved everything I produced. Every evening, they would collect that day's drawings, archiving them in folders marked by year. Now and then I would put on shows for them and my two sisters, either in my room or, on special occasions, in the living room. We stretched string between the walls and hung the drawings with clothespins. Visitors were treated to popcorn in cones made from rolled-up printer paper. When I started school the desire was still there, but I lost my ability to draw without inhibitions, and in time I completely ceased to create. My artistic practice has been marked by two multi-year pauses: the one just mentioned, and one in adulthood. I have not yet fully understood the grounds or consequences for these interruptions, but I know they've been important for me and the way my practice looks today.

One of the most central questions in my current work is that of the credibility of photography, in particular early photography. In her essay "Photographing 'The Family of Man,'" historian Ludmilla Jordanova describes the medium's unique position in this regard:

> It is common to see *through* photographs. … Spectators place a special kind of trust in what photographs depict, although it is well known now, and has been since the invention of the medium, that manipulation is easily done. Those reporting the news use photographs in just this way, to—apparently—tell it as it was. Thus we are prone to see through the representation to an original scene, and to engage with that scene as if it were immediately before us.[3]

Images courtesy of the artist

Hannes Östlund, *Untitled*, 2022–2023, Gelatin silver print (contact print), 55 × 47 mm

My interest in this credibility can be split into two elements: the photograph as image and the photograph as object—both touched by what philosopher Walter Benjamin, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," calls "aura."[4] Aura is what is contained in the difference between the original and what is technically its representation—but also between reality and the photographic image. It is what gets lost and, when it comes to the original or reality, is weakened by the technical representation.

The first element, the photograph as image, concerns the ability of the photographic image to serve as evidence. Courts have employed photography as evidence ever since the 1870s, but of even greater fascination to me is the more commonplace version of the same phenomenon. The photographic image appears to be able to confirm that something has existed or happened, even though we are, as previously discussed, very well aware of the medium's ability to twist reality. Philosopher Susan Sontag discusses this in the essay "In Plato's Cave":

> A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture. Whatever the limitations (through amateurism) or pretentions (through artistry) of the individual photographer, a photograph—any photograph—seems to have a more innocent, and therefore more accurate, relation to visible reality than do other mimetic objects.[5]

The second element concerns what Benjamin, again in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," describes as "authenticity." If we view the physical photograph as an object—as a three-dimensional holder of images instead of a two-dimensional image—then we can also situate it in time and space. The object's authenticity is that which testifies and links it to its unique history: a folded corner that reveals how it's been handled, or a dark edge of silvering that speaks to the time passed since its making. To spend time with the unique object, to share time and space with it, is to inhale its aura. In light of the question of credibility, these terms are interesting in my work.

Some time ago, I came across an interview with the artist Masao Yamamoto.[6] Though I was not previously familiar with his practice, I soon felt a sense of kinship. Yamamoto's practice has two particularly interesting aspects. The first is that he allows his photographs to be marked by chemistry, handling, and time. This makes the individual pieces unique, even though the possibility of copies is part of the nature of the medium. The other part is closely related to the first, and concerns the physical size of the photograph. For the past few years in my own practice, I've taken an interest in small photographs, often contact prints. In the interview, Yamamoto noted that it's of course possible to make photographs any size you want, but, he explained, each object has its own appropriate size. To him, the most suitable size for a photograph is no larger than what can fit in the hand. This choice is motivated by the fact he wants his works to be objects. Like Yamamoto, I believe that size is important for whether we understand a photograph as an object or just an image.

My work is also about time. In one sense of the word, it's about photography's apparent ability to capture time, which is directly linked to the duration of exposure. If we return for a moment to the glass plates of early photography, there's something special about them in addition to the halation. The particularity of it is difficult to put a finger on, but it's certainly a result of the long exposures required by the plates' low light sensitivity (which was of course even more tangible in the very first photographs, daguerreotypes). Benjamin writes about this in "A Short History of Photography," noting that this particular aspect appears as the motif essentially grows into the image during the long exposure time.[7] In my practice, I'm interested both in this ineffable quality and its opposite, the snapshot. Both are about time and the human desire to capture it.

*

During a studio visit, one of my mentors described a nascent artistic practice as a map that's not yet been drawn; the artist is the one drawing it. They continued by pointing out that once you've discovered a source—something that interests you or a place of value—you might mark it on your internal map so that you can return to it whenever you wish or need to. In this text, I have described one such place on my map: the one I currently think of as the most interesting. Many years have passed since I first found it, but it still feels new. I only just got here.

1 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage Classics, 1993).

2 This photograph is reproduced in Jonn Alinder, *John Alinder. Porträtt 1910–32* [John Alinder: Portraits 1910–32], ed. Janne Jönsson (Lund: Historiska Media, 2021), 36–37.

3 Ludmilla Jordanova, "Photographing 'The Family of Man,'" in *The Look of the Past: Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 130.

4 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, ed. Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

5 Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," in *On Photography* (1977; repr., London: Penguin Books, 2019), 4.

6 Masao Yamaoto, "Masao Yamamoto: The Space Between Flowers," YouTube video, 5:31, posted by fwdthinkingmuseum, 17 June 2010, https://youtu.be/Yq9wf2wfnnw.

7 Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," Screen 13 (1972).

Bachelor of Fine Arts
Year 2

Zsófia Boda
Hauge í Gongini Djernis Exchange student
Andrea Sitara Gran
Siri Hammarén
Solvej Heise Jakobsen
Isis Lindskog
Sturla Magnússon
Sebastian Gabriel Nord
Jelena Pajic
Chiara Salmini
Friedel Weiser

Image courtesy of Jelena Pajic

Zsófia Boda, in collaboration with Andrea Sitara Gran. Photos: Jelena Pajić,
The Bunny Problem, 2023. Performance documentation

Image courtesy of Sebastian Gabriel Nord

Hauge í Gongini Djernis, *The floor is made of lava, and this is the electric dream*, 2023,
2 computers, 2 projectors, a live simulation, 5 plaster plates, 3 × 4 m

Images courtesy of the artist

Images courtesy of the artist

Andrea Sitara Gran, *Vilorum*, 2023, Stills from video. Video installation, 00:31 min

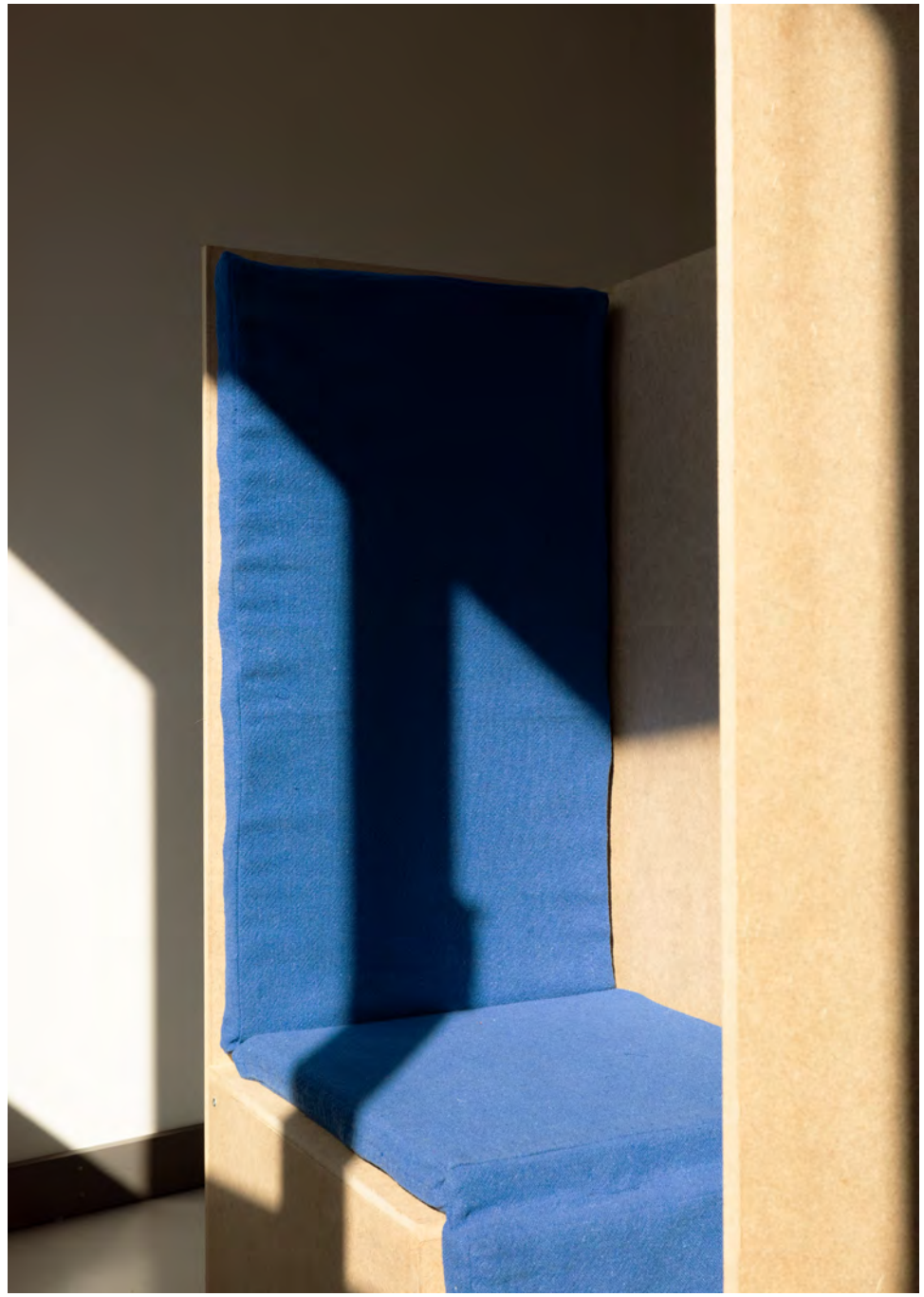
Andrea Sitara Gran in collaboration with Zsofia Bóda. *The Bunny Problem (Nap room edition)*, 2023. Still from video. Video installation, 04:36 min

Images courtesy of the artist

Siri Hammarén, *Is to see, to see, look*, 2023. Two channel video installation, 8:40 min

Images courtesy of Carl-Christian Perch-Nielsen

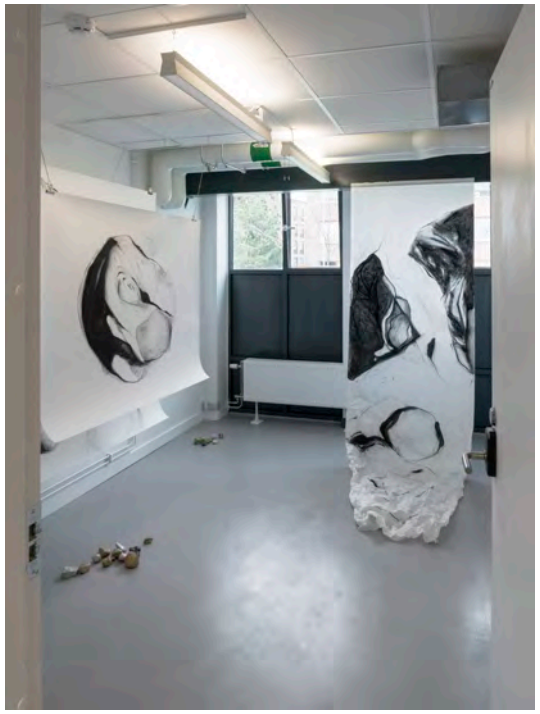
Solvej Heise Jakobsen, *Cubicle #1*, 2023. Wood sculpture, MDF, screws, cushion, 1200 × 80 × 45 cm

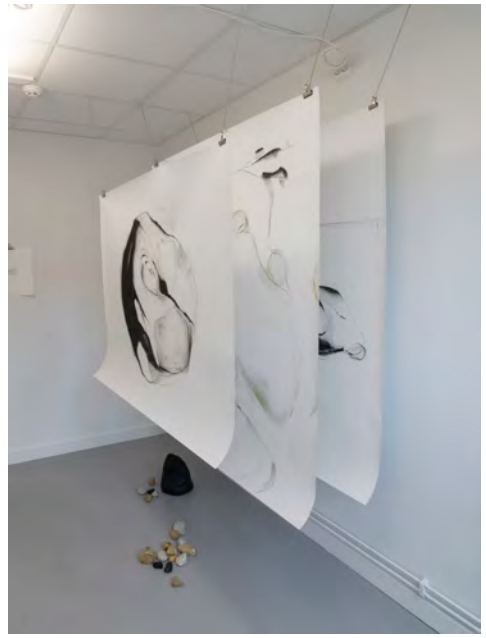


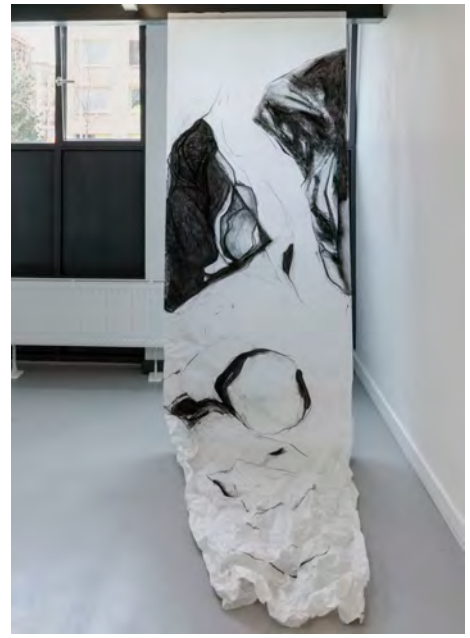
Images courtesy of the artist

Top: Isis Lindskog, *The Place*, 2022. Charcoal on paper, 150 × 160 cm, 150 × 160 cm, 150 × 110 cm

Bottom: Isis Lindskog, *Location / Place*, 2023. Room approximately 3,5 × 2 m. Installation view

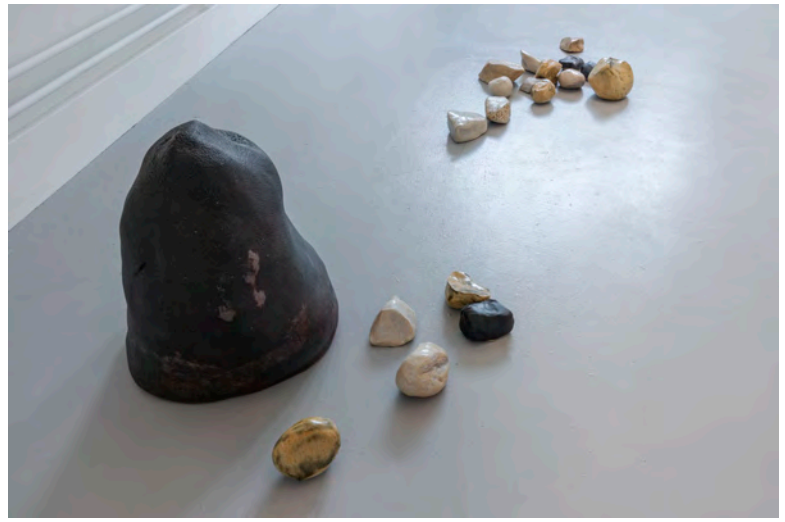






Left: Isis Lindskog. *Location / Place*, 2023. Detail

Right: Isis Lindskog, *As if the location was the (same) place*, 2023. Charcoal on mulberry paper, 70 × 400 cm

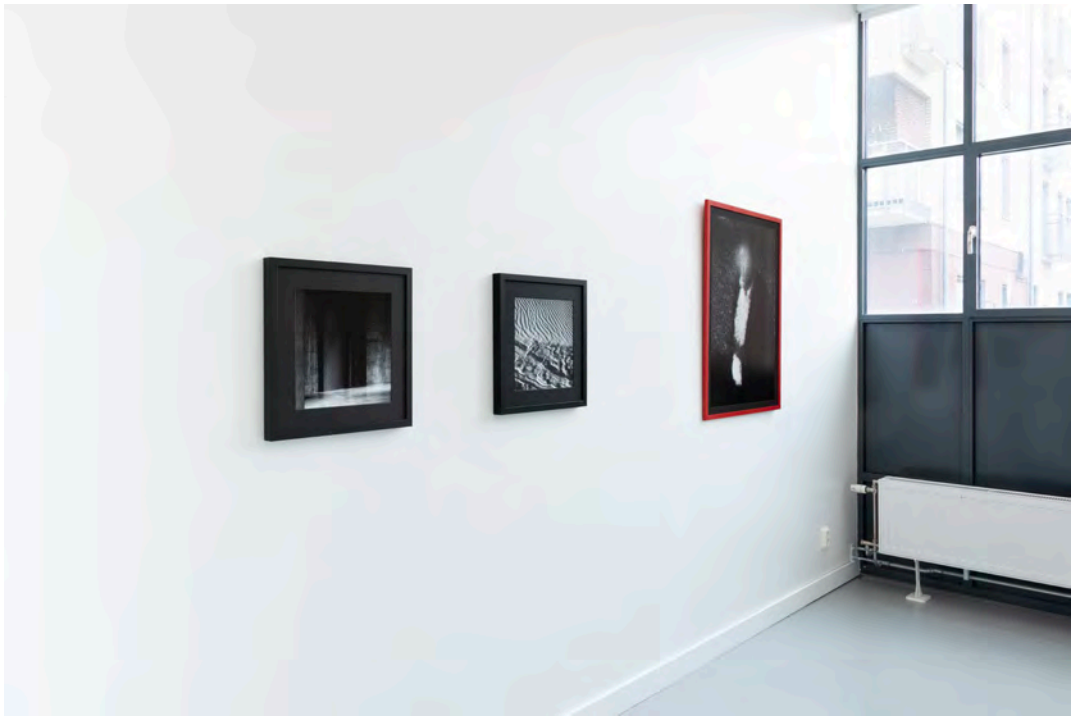


Isis Lindskog, *The Location*, 2023. Ceramics, big sculpture approximately 25 × 35 cm, small sculptures in various sizes between 3–10 cm.

Images courtesy of the artist

Sturla Magnússon, *Berättelsen om en Familjemiddag*, 2023

Sturla Magnússon, *Berättelsen om en Familjemiddag*, 2023. Details



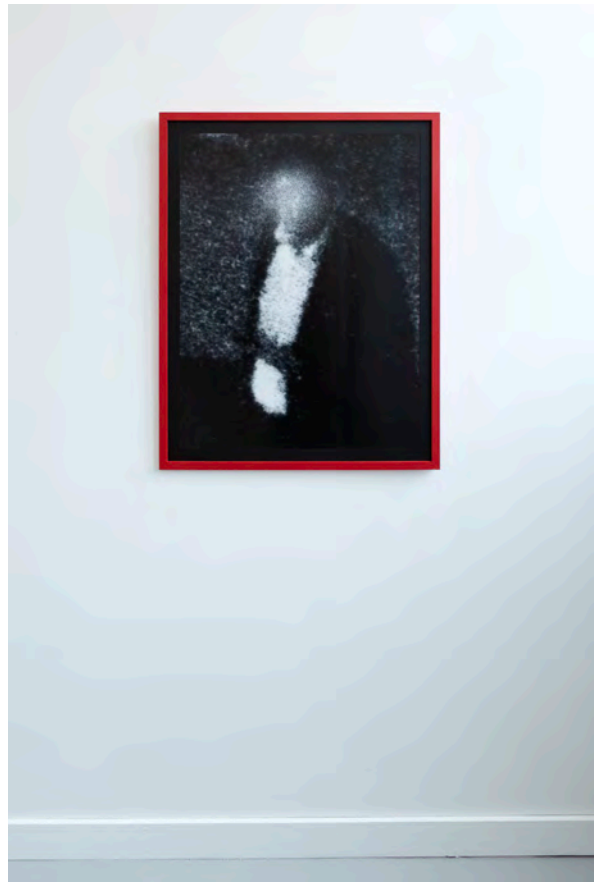
Images courtesy of the artist

Sebastian Gabriel Nord, *Expansion & Contraction*, 2023. Archival photographs, archival pigment prints, varied sizes. Installation view

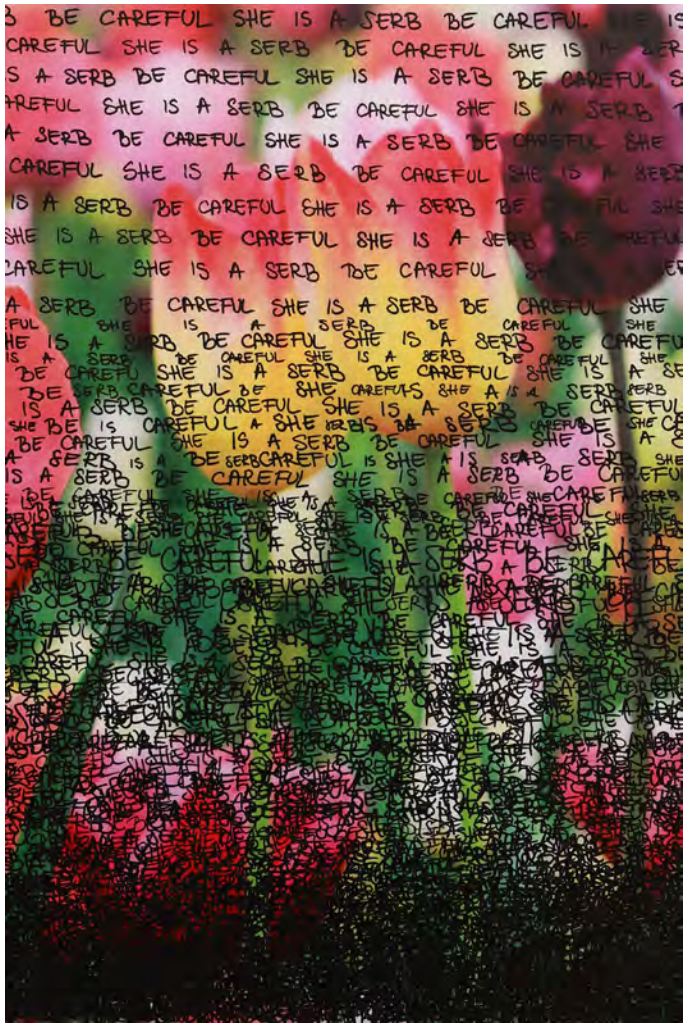
They say that you'll never walk in the same river twice. Life, just like everything else, appears to be in constant flux. In the taoist tradition existence is described in the same way. Like water continuously polishing the bedrock, the autumn leaves of the forrest never patterning exactly the same way, and the way spring seems to be a little wetter, dryer, earlier or later than the year before.

As the condition of our present times morph, and the seasons of our lives change, so does our ways of seeing. The changes in the way we utilise sight, project onto and relate to images is something I've investigated with the project "Expansion & Contraction". Returning to my archived material with new experiences, and under different circumstances allows for new ways of relating and other narratives to emerge. This time the project takes on this form—at a later moment, another.

Sebastian Gabriel Nord, *The Gateless Gate & The Other Shore*, 2023. Diptych, 40 × 40 cm



Sebastian Gabriel Nord, *The Observer*, 2023. 90 × 70 cm

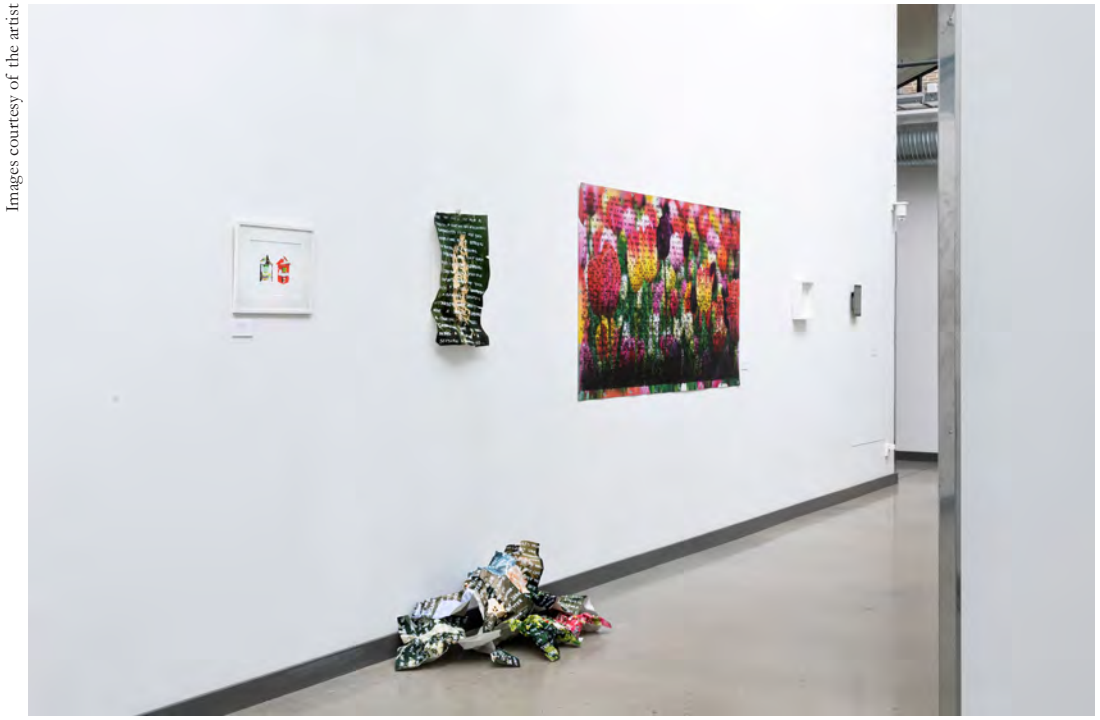


In the next question, we ask you about your “European sense of belonging”. This expression refers to your feeling of being European, belonging to the same community as other Europeans, and sharing common identity, culture and values with them.

6.6. Do you think that you have an increased European sense of belonging after your participation in Erasmus+ learning mobility?

// from Erasmus+ participant survey

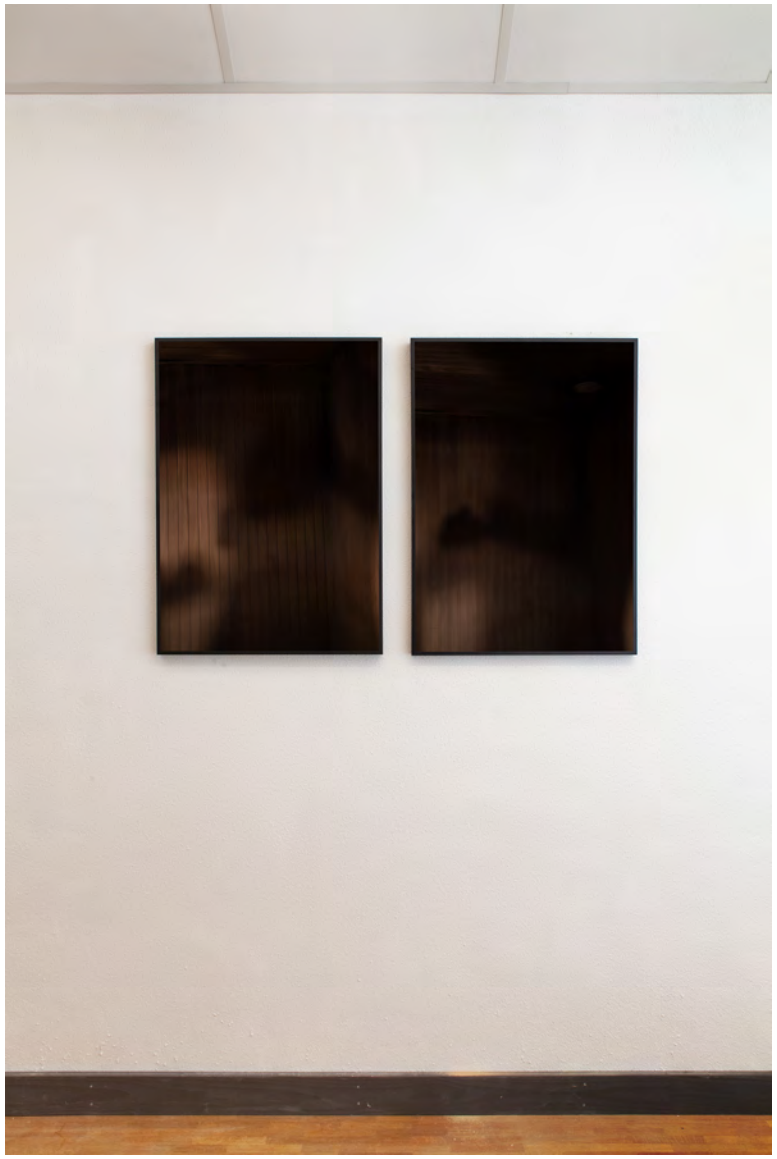
Images courtesy of the artist



Jelena Pajic, *Notes from Amsterdam*, 2023. Multimedia installation (photography, print, text, video)

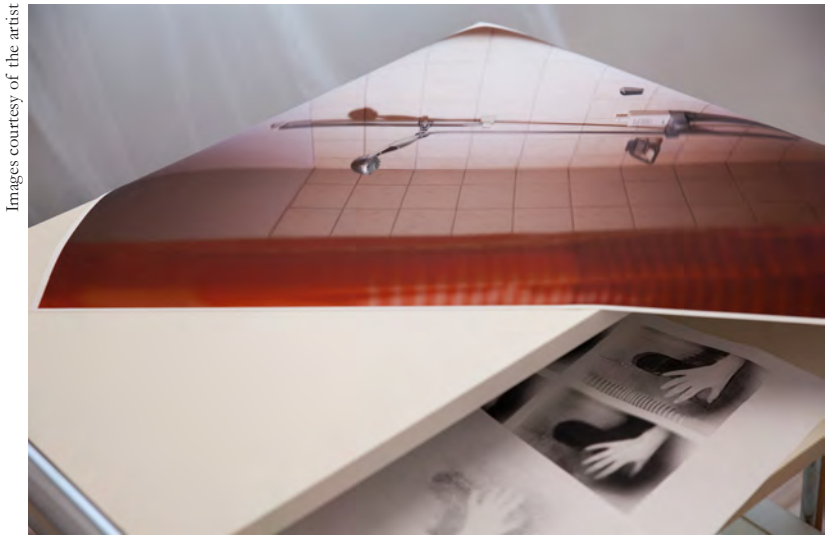
Chiara Salmini

We are presented with a sight of a forensic medical laboratory—an unsolved mystery involving a shampoo bottle, blurry shadows and an unknown hand. The photographic work, directed by Chiara Salmini and photographed by Jelena Pajić, with the collaboration of Zsófia Boda, is hanging both as a representation and a tool, installed in frames, lying or pasted on objects around the room. Combining imagery inspired to cinematographic works by Alfred Hitchcock and Brian De Palma, *Normal Person Shampoo* plays with notions of normativity and the Freudian Unheimlich through storytelling to convey feelings of both the victim and its shadow or doppelngaenger.



Chiara Salmini with Jelena Pajić and Zsófia Boda, *Body Double*, 2023.
Dyptich, archival photographic print, framed, 50 × 70 cm each

Images courtesy of the artist

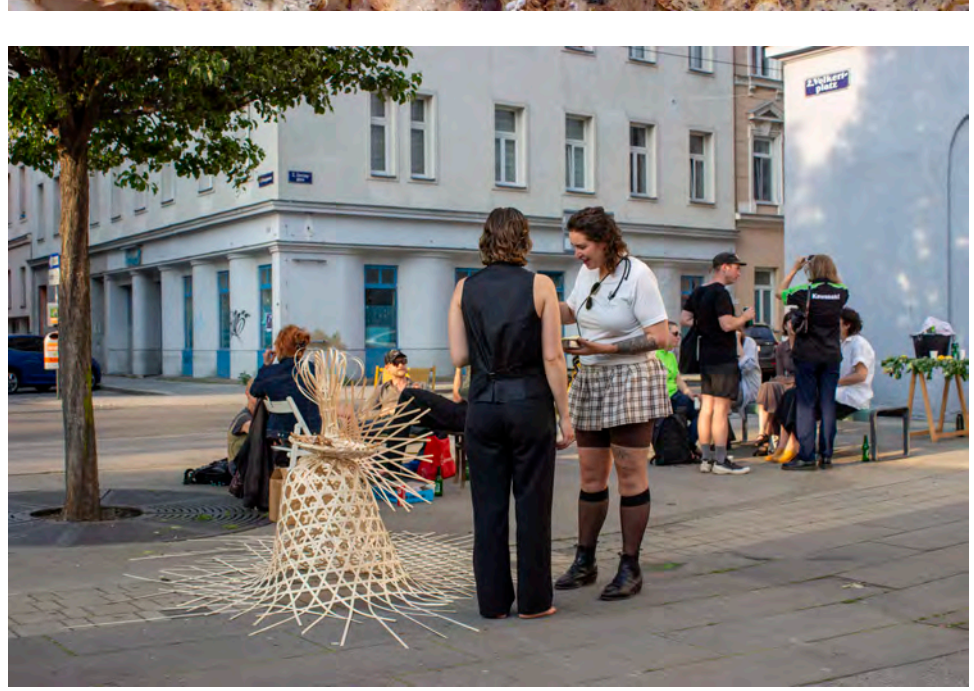


Chiara Salmini with Jelena Pajić and Zsófia Boda, *Cabinet with Samples*, 2023.
Furniture, archival photographic prints, inkjet transfer on paper

Images courtesy of the artist

Friedel Weiser, *Woven Sculpture – Cakes of Despair*, 2023

Installation and performance in collaboration with Hedda Bauer and Cakes of Despair, serving shoe shaped knäckebröd to visitors and bypassers from a sculpture woven with stripes of maple veneer. Opening at GOMO Art Space, Volkert Platz, Vienna

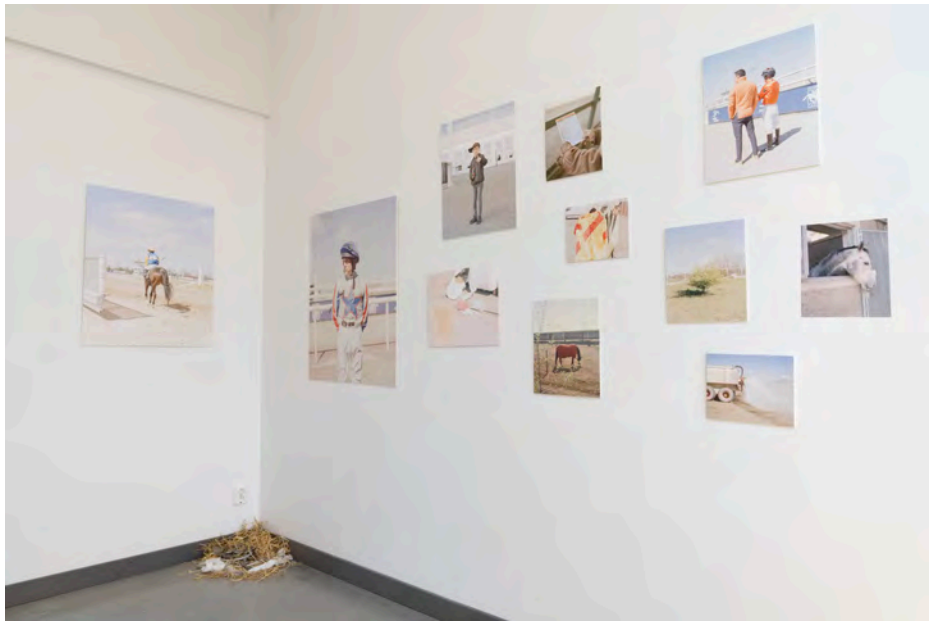


Bachelor of Fine Arts
Year 1

Mads Skarsteen Andersen
Loke Berg
Gunvor Lind Balslev
Benedikte Nøstvik Eide
Alicia Gonzalez
Noah von Hauswolff
Cecilie Kappel
Othilia Hoby Leth
Klara Paulin-Rosell
Lavinia Samson
Felix Schéele

Images courtesy of the artist

Mads Skarsteen Andersen. Lightboxes: left side *Jockey*, right side *Muscle Boost untitled*, 2023. Backlit transparent print on acrylic glass, 100 × 80 cm



Mads Skarsteen Andersen, Untitled prints, 2023. C-print on photo inkjet paper, horseshoes, steel, aluminum, rubber, cotton cushioning, metal nails, plastic, hay

Mads Skarsteen Andersen, series of works from the series *Muscle Boost*, 2023. Installation view

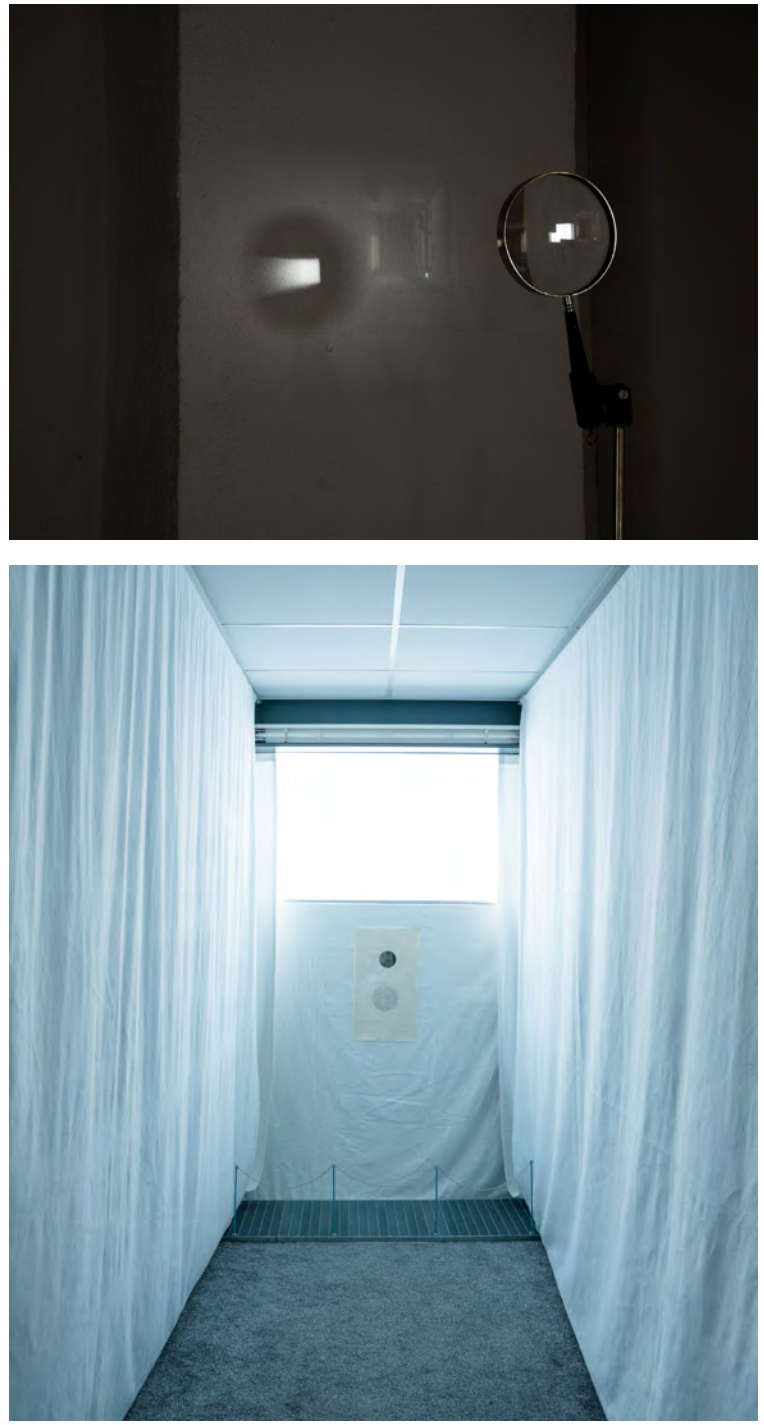
Mads Skarsteen Andersen, *Hestepære*, 2023. Glazed ceramics, hay

Text and images courtesy of the artist

If the protagonist has ghosts, then he has everything. They enable him to say and do anything he wants, that is why -when he lost them- he lost everything. Ghosts are veils of spatialized time—unfolding to him as pure, mental views -they are the *synthesizer*- to all that he perceives, embodying his thoughts and justified beliefs.

Nature has a tendency of hiding from him, even when it has already been revealed, like the moon; super-positioned in his periphery (to the left) “You can call it, surprise there it is!” The moon is the future that he can not see, it is a part of his thoughts in the same way as a part of him is *he*. As he contemplates the infinity of the wind and its position (also to his left) the prolonging of the before into the after makes him perceive his existence from within.

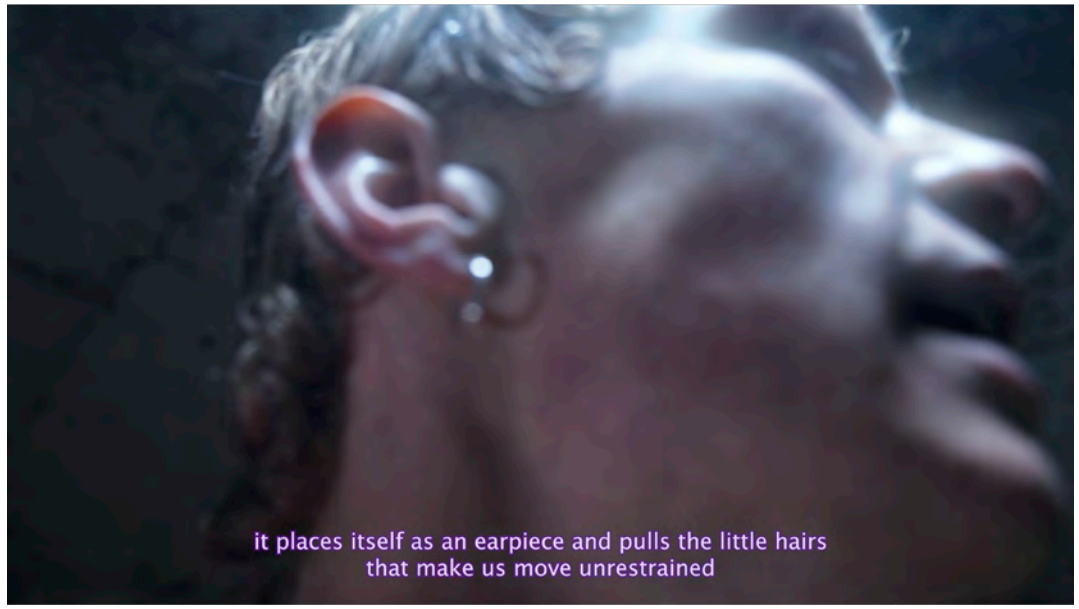
His life is a double exposed projection on a rough surface and he needs to stay aware, to keep the blend in balance. The recipe lays deposited in his language, which constitutes the borders of his being. On one hand he has ghosts and on the other, a flux memory of change *itself* -this is his melody- and (especially at night) that makes him *real*.



Loke Berg, *If you have ghosts, then you have everything*, 2023. Light projection, podium with peakhole, sound corridor. Installation view

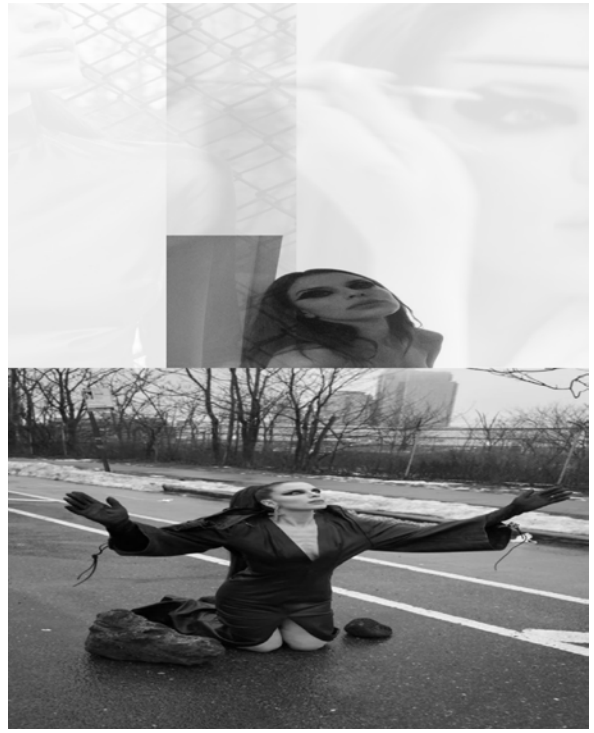
Images courtesy of the artist

Gunvor Lind Balslev, *Newtons vugge / Newton's cradle*, 2023. 4k video installation with sound, 13:49 min. Installation view and stills from video



Images courtesy of the artist

Benedikte Nøstvik Eide, *En verden av lys (A world of light), Sannhetssøkeren (The truthseeker)*, 2023. Installation view



Benedikte Nøstvik Eide, *En verden av lys (A world of light), Sannhetssøkeren (The truthseeker)*, 2023. Internet, photography collage

Benedikte Nøstvik Eide, *En verden av lys (A world of light), Sannhetssøkeren (The truthseeker)*, 2023. Analog print made by exposure of computer light, 17,8 × 24 cm.

Images courtesy of the artist

Alicia Gonzalez, *Dike / Trench*, 2023. Metal, plastic, soil, 450 × 160 cm

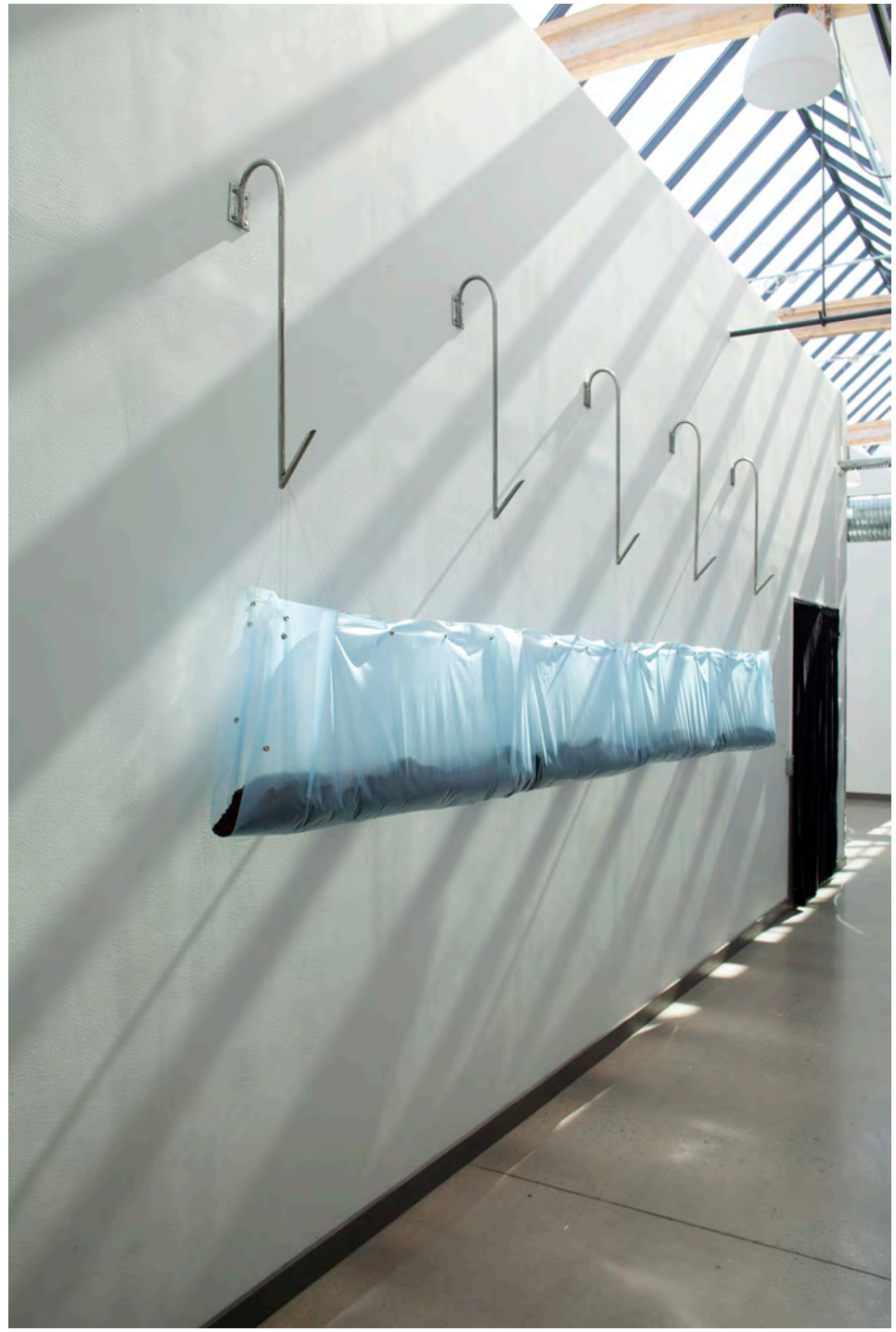
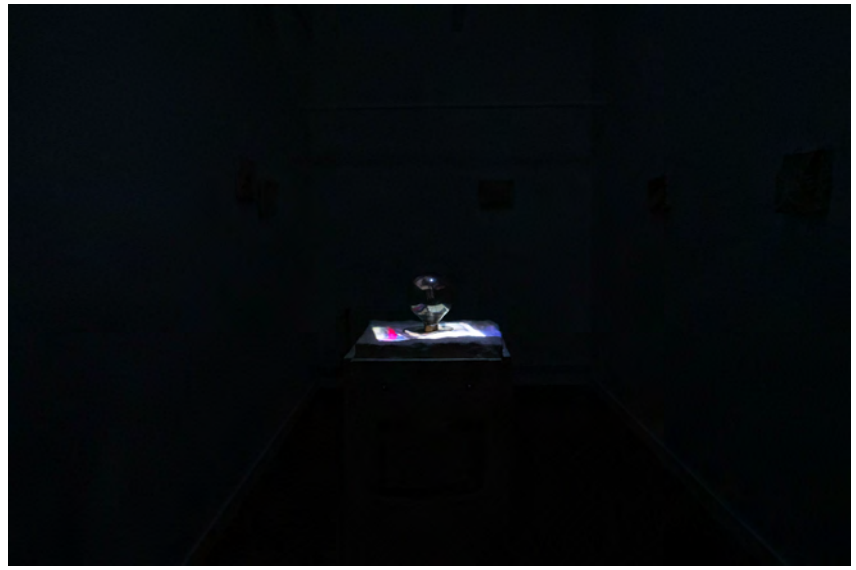


Image courtesy of the artist

Noah von Hauswolff, *Untitled*, 2023. Oil on MDF, 25 × 37 cm

Images courtesy of the artist



Cecilie Kappel, *Udskiftelig*, 2023. Installation view.
Plaster, clay, metal parts, lightbulb, soundwork, videoprojection

Othilia Hoby Leth, *Counterclockwise*, 2023. Video still, HD video, sound, 07:20 min

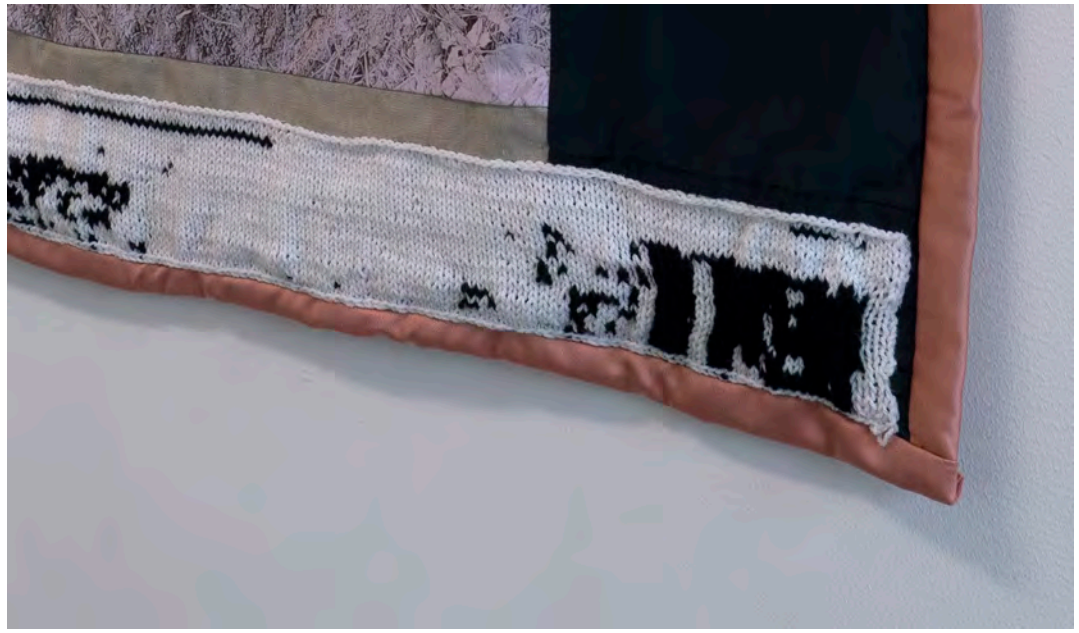
Images courtesy of the artist

Images courtesy of the artist

Klara Paulin-Rosell, *Nattljus* (prolog), 2023. Mixed media installation, Video 1:16 min with sound.
Installation view and stills

Images courtesy of the artist

Lavinia Samson, *Minneslucka (memory gap)*, 2023. Cotton, satin, linen inkjet-print, yarn, 120 × 100 cm



Images courtesy of the artist

Felix Schéele, *Aerox (Dimman / The Fog)*, 2023. Video, 01:59 min.

Felix Schéele, *Ersättnings Disk / Replacement Drive) 4*, 2023. Ceramic Relief

Felix Schéele, *Ersättnings Disk / Replacement Drive) 3*, 2023. Ceramic Relief

Felix Schéele, *Ersättnings Disk / Replacement Drive) 2*, 2023. Ceramic Relief

PhD Candidates

Sven Augustijnen
Yael Bartana
Jürgen Bock
Bouchra Khalili
Jacob Korczynski
Emily Wardill

Images courtesy of the artist

Sven Augustijnen. Hassan Saleh, former fedayeen and mayor of Jericho, Palestine, 2016

Archival Procedures, Unresolved Processes: An Anthropophagy of History

Sven Augustijnen

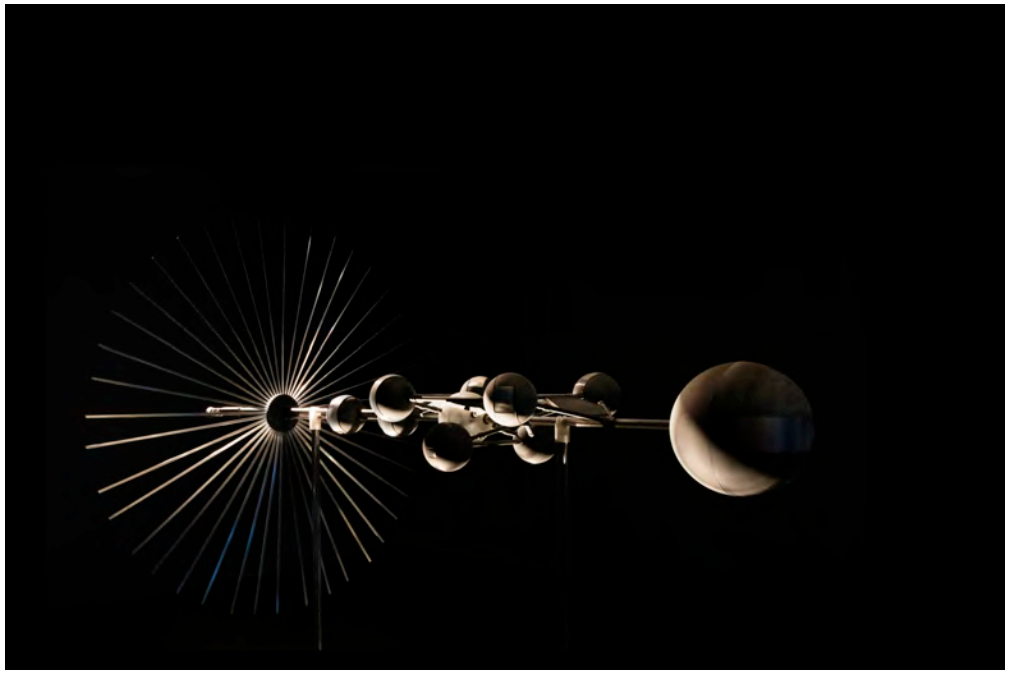
The proposed aim of this PhD research, "Archival Procedures, Unresolved Processes: An Anthropophagy of History," is to work on and work through one large and multi-faceted art project, which is currently in progress.

In different ways, this project is about little-explored fissures within the larger fractures of a modern history that runs from the Second World War and the new political world order that emerged from it to the birth of Israel and the Palestinian conflict, the Cold War, decolonisation and neo-colonisation processes, and movements of revolution and counter-revolution. While originating in the past, the project resonates in the contemporary global context: *Fierté Nationale* focuses on the complex material, symbolic and ideological meaning, and history of the FAL rifle, as well as how the rifle was used on both sides of the ideological spectrum during the Cold War and through the connections between the Belgian arms industry based in Wallonia and those in South Africa and Israel, among other subjects.

Excavating lost or discarded documents, I develop strategies of presentation that involve practices of unfolding and exposing, montage and juxtaposition, derivation and diversion within my work. The result brings to view "the shadow archive" of established historical representations.

Working with archival documents, which form the basis of my work, particularly on colonial and post-colonial spaces, is always combined or, more precisely, interwoven with a practice of working with living individuals. These are men and women with whom I engage in a process of exchange and dialogue. Through conversation and travelling to historical sites, these individuals are driven to re-enact past events and complex stories. These processes, which are documented and staged in my films, posit these living, breathing bodies as ciphers, more than just receptacles of historical events, traumatic or not. One could say that history is written within their bodies. And in working with these individuals, we/they enact something of an anthropophagy of history. That is to say, in my estimation, survivors, relatives, and witnesses of the revolutions and counter-revolutions that I investigate need to viscerally interiorise and embody memories, to digest them and spit them out again. During this process, they work through these memories and transform them into what I like to call bodily and verbal prayers of and for the living and the dead.

BIO Sven Augustijnen (b. 1970) lives and works in Brussels. His films, publications, and installations on political, historical, and social themes constantly challenge the genre of the documentary, reflecting a wider interest in historiography and a predilection for the nature of storytelling: "Historiography is by no means a natural phenomenon. The way we use stories, images and fiction to construct reality and history fascinates me." Sven Augustijnen is represented by Jan Mot, Brussels, and is a founding member of Auguste Orts, Brussels.



Top: Yael Bartana, *Generation Ship Light to the Nations*, 2023. Exhibition view, The Center for Digital Art, Holon, Israel, 2023

Bottom: Yael Bartana, *The Polish Trilogy (2007–2011)*. Logo of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP)

Images courtesy of the artist

Shades of Ambiguity

Yael Bartana

The core question of my thesis is the role of ambiguity in my work.

Confronting the discourse on the effect of trauma on contemporary politics, I began to sense that there are limits to the political discourse in which I was hemmed in. I felt that I needed a new strategy to help me explore the subject or talk about it in a different way. That feeling led me to create ambiguity and ambiguities in the images and films I developed and the voice that I wanted to articulate. This was a way to move away from the imprisoning, predictable and very limiting discourse of knowing the answers and knowing the questions.

Through looking into my projects—*The Polish Trilogy (2007–2011)* and *Light to the Nations (2023)*—as case studies, I ask whether ambiguity as a method can tackle nationalism, bigotry, extremist tendencies and the construct of national consciousness?

How does ambiguity challenge the Status quo in Israel-Palestine that entrench and fortify the position of the side that benefits from it?

I use ambiguity as a tool to dive deeper into highlighting the problem of nationalism as Ideology; as a force that gives a sense of community; a sense of belonging, but also as a system of inclusion and exclusion. Shades of Ambiguity can be identified through such modes of irony; satire; temporality; spacing; transgression of symbols; utopian visions; queering; and the separation of form from ideology.

BIO Yael Bartana, an artist born in Israel, is an observer of the contemporary and a pre-enactor. She employs art as a scalpel inside the mechanisms of power structures and navigates the fine and fissured line between the sociological and the imagination. Over the past twenty years, Bartana has dealt with some of the dark dreams of the collective unconscious and reactivated the collective imagination, dissecting group identities and (an-)aesthetic means of persuasion. In her films, installations, photographs, staged performances, and public monuments, Bartana investigates subjects like national identity, trauma, and displacement, often through ceremonies, memorials, public rituals, and collective gatherings. Her work has been exhibited around the world and is represented in the collections of many museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; and Centre Pompidou, Paris. She currently lives and works in Berlin and Amsterdam.

Selected solo exhibitions: *Two Minutes to Midnight*, Cecilia Hillstrom Gallery, Stockholm, 2022; *Malka Germania*, Claire Trevor School of the Arts, University of California, Irvine, 2022; *Redemption Now*, Jewish Museum Berlin, 2021; *Cast Off*, Fondazione Modena Arti Visive, 2019–20; *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2018; *If you will it, it is not a dream* Secession, Vienna, 2012; Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2012; Moderna Museet, Malmö, 2010; and MoMA PS1, New York, 2008. Selected group exhibitions: *Witch Hunt*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2021; São Paulo Art Biennial, 2014, 2010, 2006; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2015; Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2012; documenta 12, Kassel, Germany, 2007; Istanbul Biennial, 2005;and Manifesta 4, Frankfurt, 2002. Bartana won the Artes Mundi 4 Prize in 2010 and her trilogy … *And Europe Will Be Stunned* (2007–11) was ranked as the ninth most important art work of the twenty-first century by the *Guardian* newspaper in 2019.

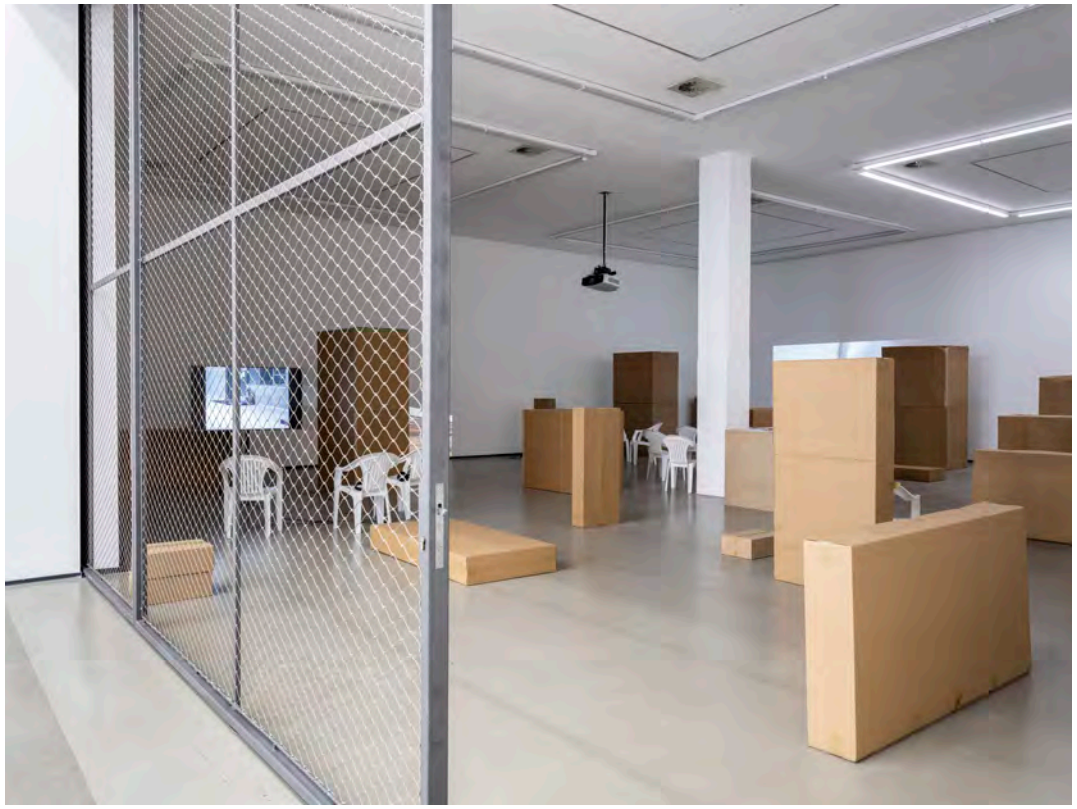


Image courtesy of Fred Dott

Maumaus as Object, part of *The Educational Web*. Installation view, Kunstverein in Hamburg, 2023

Revisiting through the Lens of an Art School

Jürgen Bock

Through the lens of the history of Maumaus, an art institution in Lisbon dedicated to education, curation, and production, my aim is to come to a greater understanding of how art and arts education—with their inherent critiques—have shifted over the last twenty-five years. My research aims to explore to what extent the history of Maumaus can be considered to mirror developments in the wider art world from the 1990s onwards. The project considers whether Maumaus has been able to provide an alternative to an increasingly accelerated world of "cultural industries" or paradoxically be understood as an institution that has enabled the system it opposes. I consider the specific socioeconomic and political circumstances under which Maumaus has developed, and what such circumstances—encountered and recognised or consciously created—have in turn both enabled and disabled. The PhD is based on a reflexive analytical approach to achieve an in-depth understanding of what seems to be an increasingly professional art world that functions under the dictates of performance indicators and productivity, based on instrumentalised modes of enquiry and experimentation.

BIO Jürgen Bock obtained an MFA from the Cologne University of Applied Sciences and currently works as a curator, writer, and producer. Exhibitions he has curated include a series at the CCB Project Room, Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon (2000–2001), comprising projects with artists such as Eleanor Antin, Nathan Coley, Harun Farocki, and Renée Green; Andreas Siekmann, Triennale India, New Delhi, 2005; Ângela Ferreira, *Maison Tropicale*, Portuguese Pavilion, 52nd Venice Biennale, 2007; *Heimo Zobernig*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2012; Allan Sekula, *The Dockers' Museum*, La Criée, Rennes, 2012, and Johann Jacobs Museum, Zurich, 2014; *Parting with the Bonus of Youth—Maumaus as Object* (with Simon Thompson), Galeria Avenida da Índia, Lisbon Municipal Galleries, 2019; *Maumaus as Object* (with Simon Thompson) as part of *The Educational* Web exhibition at the Kunstverein in Hamburg, 2023.

Over the course of the last three decades, Bock has established and grown the Maumaus School of Visual Arts in Lisbon from a local photography school to an internationally recognised independent study programme, where participants are encouraged to analyse and develop their art practice in a stimulating and intellectually rigorous, yet informal, environment. During the course of their studies, the students encounter a number of international lecturers, among them artists, filmmakers, art historians, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural and political scientists.

Since 2009, Bock has curated and programmed more than forty solo exhibitions at Lumiar Cité, the exhibition space affiliated with Maumaus, including work by artists and filmmakers such as Gabriel Abrantes, Maria Thereza Alves, Judith Barry, Gerry Bibby, Cosima von Bonin, Tiffany Chung, Manthia Diawara, Loretta Fahrenholz, Harun Farocki, Ângela Ferreira, Peter Friedl, Renée Green, David Hammons, Florian Hecker, Judith Hopf, Ana Jotta, Aglaia Konrad, Lone Haugaard Madsen, Willem Oorebeek, Christodoulos Panayiotou, and Fredrik Værslev.

In addition, Bock has written numerous essays, published a range of catalogues, and edited several books, including *From Work to Text: Dialogues on Practise and Criticism in Contemporary Art* (2002) and *Parting with the Bonus of Youth—Maumaus as Object* (co-edited with Simon Thompson, 2021). He produced Renée Green's artist book *Negotiations in the Contact Zone* (2003) as well as Portuguese versions of Allan Sekula's books *TITANIC's wake* (2003) and *Ship of Fools / The Dockers' Museum* (2015). Bock has been responsible for the organisation and coordination of numerous international conferences and has produced several documentary films, such as *AI: African Intelligence* (2022) and *Angela Davis: A World of Greater Freedom* (2023), both directed by Manthia Diawara. Bock has been a PhD candidate at Malmö Art Academy and Lund University since 2019.

Images courtesy of the artist

Bouchra Khalili, *The Magic Lantern Project*, 2019–2022. Mixed media installation: video, objects, textile, silkscreen prints. View at "Between Circles and Constellations", solo exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona, 2023

Bouchra Khalili, *The Circle Project*, 2023. Mixed media installation: dual synchronized channels, wooden structures, five 16 mm films on monitor, mural poster. View at "Between Circles and Constellations", solo exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona, 2023

The Hypothesis of a New Community (to Come): Speaking a Collective Voice in/ from the First-Person Singular

Bouchra Khalili

This PhD research took its start from my practice in film and video. Since the early 2000s, I have devoted myself to making works by examining, through a collaborative method, how filmic forms can create a space for subjects rendered invisible by the nation-state model: stateless citizens, individuals forced to cross borders illegally, undocumented workers, second-class citizens of immigrant descent in the Global North.

Through my practice, I aim to suggest alternative forms of belonging, freed from the restrictive and normative conceptions of the nation-state model that, through exclusion, defines the "right to belong" to a political community.

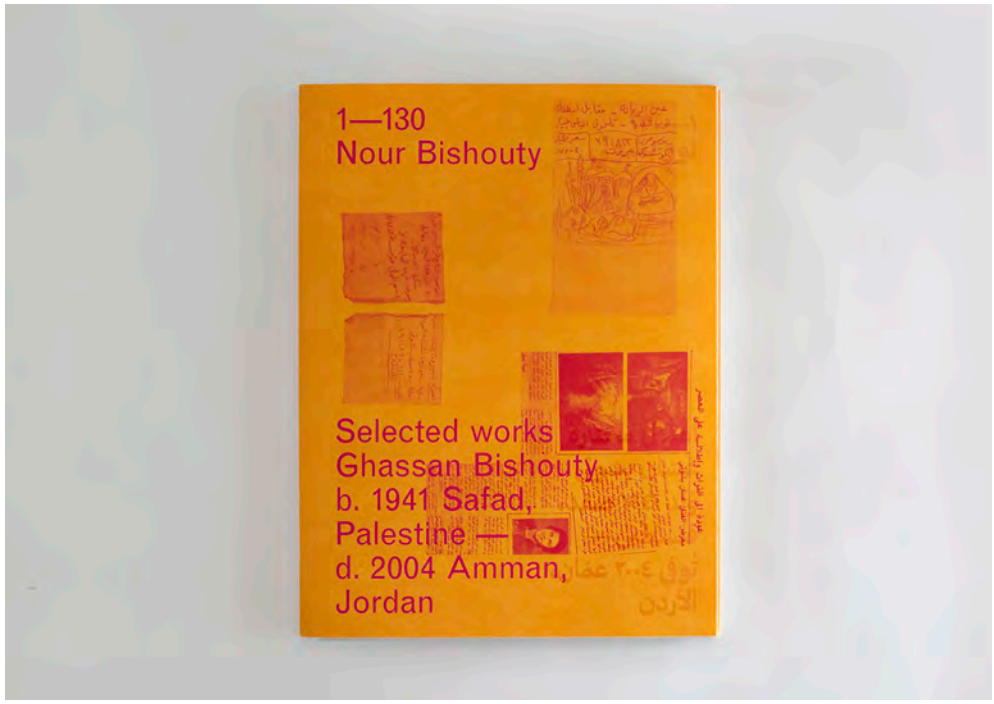
In my film and video works, visual and sonic forms are combined to create a space in which those portrayed are represented with and through their own bodies, their own voices, their own words, their own languages—including their native unwritten languages and dialects—their own situated positions (social, political, historical), and, eventually, their own world views. From the first-person singular, they formulate a "right to belong" and implicitly convey the hypothesis of a potential new political community coming into being.

Starting from my work and the reflections I have developed with and through it, my PhD research will discuss the following research question:

How can film allow us to envision a potential political community, starting with and from those who are excluded from the "right to belong"?

BIO Bouchra Khalili is a Moroccan-French artist. She graduated in Film & Media Studies at Sorbonne Nouvelle and Visual Arts at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Paris-Cergy. She works with film, video, installation, photography, printmaking and editorial platforms. Khalili's work has been subject to many international solo exhibitions including recently at Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona (2023), Luma Foundation (2023, Arles) ; the Bildmuseet Umea (2021) ; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2019); Museum Folkwang, Essen (2018); Jeu de Paume National Gallery, Paris (2018); Secession, Vienna (2018); Wexner Center for the Arts (2017); MoMa, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2016); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2015); PAMM, Miami (2014–2013), among others. Her work was also included in collective exhibitions and biennales, such as Sharjah Biennale 15 (2023); Documenta 14 and the Milano Triennale (2017); Telling Tales, MCA, Sydney (2016); The Future of History, Kunsthaus, Zurich (2015); Positions, Vanabbe Museum (2014); Here and Elsewhere, New Museum (2014); The Encyclopedic Palace, 55th Venice Biennale (2013); "Intense Proximity: La Triennale", Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2012); among others.

An award-winning artist, she received in 2023 the Sharjah Biennale Grand Prize and is nominated for the Marcel Duchamp Award. In 2019, she received the Columbia's Institute for Ideas and Imagination Fellowship. She was also the recipient of Harvard's Radcliffe Institute Fellowship (20172018), Ibsen Awards (2017), Abraaj Art Prize, (2014), Sam Art Prize (2013), DAAD Artists-in-Berlin (2012), among others.



Images courtesy of Nour Bishouty

Nour Bishouty, *1—130: Selected works Ghassan Bishouty b. 1941 Safad, Palestine–d. 2004 Amman, Jordan*. Artist's book, 32 × 24 cm. Edited by Jacob Korczynski (Toronto/Berlin: Art Metropole/Motto Books), 2020

A continuous project, altered daily: Distribution as curatorial practice

Jacob Korczynski

My research asks how the activities, associations, and organisation of distribution can be a critical, ethical, and sustainable curatorial practice. In doing so, it acknowledges this mode of collaboration as undertaking two separate but interconnected initiatives: establishing and maintaining a curatorial framework for a group of artists and their distributed works, and, at the same time, facilitating the means for their projects to be accessed, executed, and presented across a potentially unlimited number of contexts. This dual approach asks the curatorial questions of who and what enters into distribution alongside the when and where of presentation, which is framed by the overall question: why distribution? My trajectory as a curator, which has led to this body of research, is indebted to extant distribution models initiated by artists. Just as importantly, my research departs from the ongoing histories of those networks in order to situate the artists at the centre of my research outside of a medium-specific approach.

It is important to assert that pursuing distribution as a method of curatorial practice does not simply mean developing an organisational structure that then disseminates extant or upcoming works by artists. Instead, it is premised upon the practices of artists who take distribution as material.

BIO Jacob Korczynski is a curator based on the lands of Treaty 13 known as Toronto whose projects take the form of exhibitions, screenings, and publications. He has curated projects for the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Cooper Cole, Toronto; Western Front, Vancouver; and the Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, and has edited the publications *I See/La Camera: I* (If I Can't Dance I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution, 2014), Andrew James Paterson's *Collection/Correction* (Kunstverein Toronto/Mousse Publishing, 2016), Jimmy Robert's *Revue* (Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, 2020), and Nour Bishouty's *1—130: Selected Works Ghassan Bishouty b. 1941 Safad, Palestine—d. 2004 Amman, Jordan* (Art Metropole / Motto Books, 2020).

A former participant in the de Appel Curatorial Programme, his writing has been published by *Afterall*, *BOMB*, *Camera Austria*, and *Flash Art*. The recent recipient of a Curatorial Research Fellowship from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, he is also the inaugural recipient of the General Idea Fellowship from The National Gallery of Canada.

Photographer: Carlier Gebauer

Emily Wardill, *Identical*, 2023. 2 screen video installation, 5.1 sound. KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2023

Emily Wardill, *Sleep Patterns and Musical Chairs*, 2023. Light and sound installation. Casa São Roque, Porto, 2023

Misremembered Bones: The Imagined Image

Emily Wardill

The title *Misremembered Bones* comes from an essay that Luigi Ghirri wrote in the 1970s. In it, he used the J. G. Ballard short story "The Drowned Giant" to talk about a rip in time. In his collection of short stories about photography, Ghirri misremembers a carcass that washed up on an Atlantic shore as a whale, when in fact, it was a giant human. These misremembered bones serve as an imaginary being that we can use to elucidate our own relationship towards structure and image. Bones are the things that we dig up in order the find out about our evolution as well being the structure that stops us from falling into a mass of body parts. Photographs provide an external image of us that makes us seem whole. My research moves between this inside and outside perspective, inspired by a giant imagined skeleton.

The imagined image can be the space of the example, the case study, the metaphor, the hallucination, the dream, the nation-state, the utopia, or the ghost. Particular to these spaces is their dependence on a material that never materialises. These spaces reflect on desire, on how images communicate, and on our relationship to fictitious materials.

The permanence of imaginary material that outlasts its use is a way to think about meaning and its relationship to form. We can think of the imagined space as a space of pure ideology—but then what is the nature of the material that constructs it? Is it related to computer-generated imagery—which also attempts to co-opt the material world without ever constructing it? Consciousness both shapes and is shaped by images, so then, what is the relationship between consciousness and the imaginary? Avoiding signature styles has kept this question present in my practice: knowing the power of the image to override that which it was intended for and knowing too that if the work were to settle into a recognisable form, that the work itself might become its own meaning.

BIO Emily Wardill's practice spans film, video, sculpture, performance, photography and installation. It has been an ongoing enquiry into the imagined image—what it is, what it has been used for and how it leaves indelible motes and shrapnel behind it. This has taken her from examples of entropy to case studies on risk detailing fires attributed to paranormal activity. It has travelled from psychoanalytical case studies on negative hallucination to memory palaces and their relationship to colourless vision. From stained glass as an early device to communicate with the illiterate right up to the filmic technique of 'day for night'—reversing it to reflect on technological vision, performed gender and imagined utopias.

Wardill's work has been exhibited at KW, Berlin, Secession, Gulbenkian Project Spaces, SMK, de Appel arts centre, List Centre MIT, The ICA, XYZ Collective Tokyo,The Biennale of Moving Images Geneva, The Serpentine Gallery, The Hayward Gallery, MUMOK Vienna; and MOCA, Miami. She has shown in the Berlinalle Forum Expanded and the New York and London Film festivals. Her work was awarded the Jarman Award in 2010, the Leverhulme Award in 2011 and the EMAF award in 2021. She participated in the 54th Venice Biennale and the 19th Sydney Biennale.

Wardill has taught at The University of the Arts Helsinki, University of British Columbia, Central Saint Martins, Academy of Fine Arts Munich, School of the Art Institute Chicago,National Art School Sydney, Städelschule, Goldsmiths University & the CCA San Francisco.

About Malmö Art Academy

Malmö Art Academy is a department at Lund University that has been offering higher education in fine arts since 1995. Together with the Academy of Music and the Theatre Academy, Malmö Art Academy is part of the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, one of nine faculties within Lund University.

Malmö Art Academy offers advanced study programmes in fine arts at the Bachelor's and Master's degree levels for aspiring artists. Malmö Art Academy also has a wellreputed research studies programme. Teaching is not divided into separate categories of art. As a student, you can choose to move freely between various forms of artistic expression or to specialise in a particular form. Your studies will provide ample opportunity to develop your art and a firm professional identity. You will be included in new and inspiring contexts and acquire the tools to develop your critical thinking. To enable you to develop your skills, you have access to the Academy's premises and your own studio around the clock.

Malmö Art Academy offers wellequipped workshops for work with wood, metal, plaster, plastic, clay, concrete, photography, video, and computing. It also features large project studios, a library, and lecture rooms, as well as the students' own studios. Malmö Art Academy also offers a PhD programme in fine arts, mainly intended for internationally active artists, at the Academy's research centre, the Inter Arts Center. The programme is key to current artistic research.

Our study programmes offer students the opportunity to work with internationally active artists and teachers, whose expertise covers a broad spectrum of interests and mediums. Individual supervision of the student is considered to be key. The language of tuition is usually English. The students' commitment to and influence on the design of the study programme is given high priority. In 2014, Malmö Art Academy was assessed as being of very high quality, with regard to both its BFA and MFA programmes, by the Swedish Higher Education Authority's quality evaluation of all higher education in fine arts in Sweden.

Malmö Art Academy cooperates with other fine arts programmes all over the world and has built up strong networks over the years. The education offered at Malmö Art Academy also benefits from the active artistic climate in the Öresund region, with its galleries, museums, and other arts institutions in a markedly cosmopolitan context. Lectures from visiting artists, critics, and curators, as well as various forms of collaborative projects, are natural elements of Malmö Art Academy's activities.

Several graduates of Malmö Art Academy have become successful artists who have earned strong international recognition.

Since the autumn of 2018, Malmö Art Academy has been located at three addresses in Malmö; Båghallarna at Föraregatan 4, in Kulturhuset Mazetti at Bergsgatan 29, and in Dimman at Bergsgatan 20. The premises offer large project studios, a library, and lecture rooms, as well as private studios for the seventy students in the fine arts programmes and a common study room for students taking the Master of Fine Arts in Artistic Research. Students have access to their studios and the common study room as well as most of the workshops twentyfour hours a day throughout the year.

Malmö Art Academy was set up in 1995 by Lund University. Its study programmes were offered in the former Mellersta Förstadsskolan in central Malmö, a building that was considered a model of modern school architecture in 1900.

Lund University's remit for the new school included the ambition that the Academy be inter disciplinary and international. The Academy became the first school in Sweden to actively avoid the socalled professors' school model. No divisions were created; rather, the idea was to make the hierarchies as horizontal as possible. Another central concept was the requirement for students to be independent. It is still the case that meetings with lecturers take place on the students' own initiative.

From the outset, Malmö Art Academy wanted to make the most of the artistic expertise of its lecturers and professors. This is also why administration is not part of their duties. The Academy further wished to facilitate the continuation of the artistic careers of its lecturers and professors, enabling them to participate in major international contexts. Hence lecturers and professors have come, and continue to come, to the Academy for defined periods in order to free up time for their artistic work. To extend opportunities for students to benefit from a broad spectrum of artistic supervision, external supervisors were also introduced in 1996. External supervisors are internationally active artists who come to the Academy five times per year.

Malmö Art Academy was the first art academy in Sweden to invite external contributors to examinations in 1996. The Academy wanted both to ensure its quality in an international context and to reinforce students' chances of being correctly assessed. The external examiners have primarily been internationally active curators such as Bart De Baere, Charles Esche, Lynne Cooke, Carolyn ChristovBakargiev, Maria Lind, Iwona Blazwick, Dirk Snauwert, Jürgen Bock, Robert Storr, Sabine Folie, Brigitte Franzen, Lisa Le Fevre, Martin Clark, Lolita Jablonska, Jochen Volz, Mats Stjernstedt, Jens Fänge, Abraham Cruzvillegas, and John Peter Nilsson.

Malmö Art Academy launched a Master of Fine Arts in 2002, the same year the PhD in Fine Arts was established. Malmö Art Academy was the first institution in Sweden to award three doctoral degrees in fine arts in 2006, to Sopowan Boonimitra, Miya Yoshida, and Matts Leiderstam.

The Bachelor of Fine Arts was introduced in 2007.

In 2020, the Master of Fine Arts in Artistic Research was launched, directed by Verina Gfader. The programme builds on the earlier Master of Fine Arts in Critical & Pedagogical Studies, which ran from 2011 to 2019 under the direction of Maj Hasager. Prior to this, the Critical Studies programme was set up by Simon Sheikh, first as a oneyear Master's programme in 2001 and later as a twoyear Master's programme in 2008–10.

Over the years, the following people have worked as professors and lecturers at the Academy: Lars Nilsson, Charlotte Gyllenhammar, Anette Abrahamsson, Niels Bonde, Axel Lieber, Jimmie Durham, Sophie Tottie, Jens Fänge, Andrea Geyer, Matthew Buckingham, and Annika Eriksson.

External supervisors have included Sigurdur Gudmundsson, Berend Strik, Cecilia Edefalk, Voobe de Gruyter, Eva Löfdahl, and Olav Christopher Jenssen.

Maj Hasager has been Rector of Malmö Art Academy since 2021. Gertrud Sandqvist was Rector of Malmö Art Academy from 2011 to 2020, a post she also previously held from 1995 to 2007. Anders Kreuger was Director of Malmö Academy from 2007 to 2010.

The Academy's first Yearbook came out in 1996 and has been published every year since.

Maj Hasager Rector

Maj Hasager has been Rector of Malmö Art Academy since 2021.

Hasager is a Danish artist based in Copenhagen. She studied photography and fine arts in Denmark, Sweden, and the UK, earning an MFA from Malmö Art Academy.

Hasager's artistic approach is research and dialogically based, and she works predominantly with text, sound, video, and photography.

She has exhibited her work internationally in events and at institutions such as Lunds Konsthall; Fondazione Pastificio Cerere, Rome; Critical Distance, Toronto; GL STRAND, Copenhagen; Galleri Image, Aarhus, Denmark; FOKUS video art festival, Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen; Moderna Museet, Malmö; Cleveland Institute of Art; Red Barn Gallery, Belfast; Laznia Centre for Contemporary Art, Gdańsk; Liverpool Biennial; Al-Hoash Gallery, Jerusalem; Al-Kahf Gallery, Bethlehem; Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center; Ramallah; Overgaden Institute of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen; and Guangzhou Triennial.

Hasager is the recipient of several international residencies and fellowships, most recently at 18th Street Arts Center, Los Angeles. She has been awarded grants in support of her work from Edstrandska, Danish Arts Council, Danish Arts Foundation, Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (Beirut), and ArtSchool Palestine. Additionally, Hasager is a guest lecturer at the International Academy of Art Palestine; Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture, Bethlehem; Barbados Community College, Bridgetown; Sacramento State University; and University of Ulster, Belfast. She occasionally writes essays, catalogue texts, and articles.

Verina Gfader Professor of Fine Arts;
Programme Director of Master of Fine Arts in Artistic Research (MFA)

Verina Gfader is an artist, researcher, and occasional poet whose practice is orchestrated as organised fields of research aided by printed matter, drawing and animation, text performance and fabulations, and fictional institutions. The work is an interaction, a relation between thinking-theory and making-performing-practice, and it often results in a book object or piece of printed matter: a diagram encompassing "worlds, materiality, study, spirit."

Gfader is Co-director of the international animation network Animate Assembly and Creative Director of EP, a book series across art, architecture, and design, published by Sternberg Press, Berlin.

Her recent research on abstract animation for the University of Hong Kong follows on from a postdoctoral fellowship at Aarhus University, doctoral studies at Central Saint Martins, London, and a research residency at Tokyo University of the Arts (Geidai).

Often residing in Japan, Hong Kong, and elsewhere in Asia, Gfader has exhibited and presented internationally in places such as Centre Pompidou, Paris; 13th Shanghai Biennale; Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong; Los Angeles Art Book Fair; and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.

Her publications include *The Last Resident* (Sternberg Press, 2019) and *Cloud Chamber* (Officin/Antipyrine, 2017). The talks she delivers at conferences (including at the universities of Princeton and Harvard in the US and Waseda in Japan) underline her pursuit of research around fine art animation and time-images, including performance.

Alejandro Cesarco Professor of Fine Arts

Alejandro Cesarco is a Uruguayan artist based in New York.

Recent solo exhibitions include *A Solo Exhibition*, Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam, 2019; *These Days*, Tanya Leighton, Berlin, 2019; *Tactics & Technics*, Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, 2019; *Song*, Renaissance Society, Chicago, 2017; *The Measure of Memory*, Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milan, 2017; *Public Process*, Sculpture Center, New York, 2017; *Prescribe the Symptom*, Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, 2015; *Loyalties and Betrayals*, Murray Guy, New York, 2015; *Secondary Revision*, Frac Île-de-France/Le Plateau, Paris, 2013; *A Portrait, a Story, and an Ending*, Kunsthalle Zürich, 2013; *Alejandro Cesarco*, mumok, Vienna, 2012; *A Common Ground*, Uruguayan Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale, 2011; *One without the Other*, Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, 2011; and *Present Memory*, Tate Modern, London, 2010. These exhibitions addressed, through different formats and strategies, Cesarco's recurrent interests in repetition, narrative, and the practices of reading and translating.

Group exhibitions include *Question the Wall Itself*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2016; *Under the Same Sun*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2014; *Tell It to My Heart: Collected by Julie Ault*, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, 2013; and *The Imminence of Poetics*, 30th Bienal de São Paulo, 2012.

He has also curated exhibitions in the US, Uruguay, and Argentina, and most recently a section of the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (2018) and ARCOmadrid (2020). He is Director of the non-profit arts organisation Art Resources Transfer, New York.

Joachim Koester Professor of Fine Arts

Joachim Koester is a Danish artist based in Copenhagen. His work has been shown at documenta X, Kassel, Germany; 2nd Johannesburg Biennale; 1st Gwangju Biennale; 54th Venice Biennale; Busan Biennale 2006, South Korea; Manifesta 7, Trento, Italy; Tate Triennial 2009, London; and Taipei Biennale 2012. Koester's solo shows include Bergen Kunsthall, Norway; Camden Arts Centre, London; Beirut Art Center; Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen; Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, Barcelona; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City; Power Plant, Toronto; Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover; Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne, France; MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA; Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; S.M.A.K. – Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent, Belgium; Camera Austria, Graz; Centre d'art contemporain Genève; Turner Contemporary, Margate, UK; Greene Naftali Gallery, New York; Galleri Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen; Gallery Jan Mot, Brussels; and Galeriá Elba Benitez, Madrid.

Koester's work can be found in the following museums and collections: Tate Modern, London; Louisiana Museum, Humlebæk, Denmark; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; S.M.A.K., Ghent; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Baltimore Museum of Art; Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Madrid; SMK – Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen; ARoS, Aarhus Kunstmuseum; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Kiasma, Helsinki; Kongelige Biblioteks Fotografiske Samling, Copenhagen; Fonds national d'art contemporain, Paris; Sorø Kunstmuseum, Denmark; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Malmö Konstmuseum; Sammlung Hoffmann, Berlin; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; MACS – Grand-Hornu, Boussu, Belgium; Kadist Art Foundation, Paris; FRAC Le Plateau, Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne, France; Generali Foundation, Vienna; Sammlung Verbund, Vienna; and Museum Sztuki, Łódź.

Publications on his work include *Bringing Something Back* (Koenig Books 2019), *maybe one must begin with some particular places* (Guayaba Press, 2015), *Of Spirits and Empty Spaces* (Mousse Publishing, 2014), *I Myself am only a receiving apparatus* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2011), *Message from the Unseen* (Lunds Konsthall, 2006), *Nordenskiöld and the Ice Cap* (Space Poetry, 2006), and *Message from Andrée* (Lukas & Sternberg and Pork Salad Press, 2005).

Sarat Maharaj — Professor of Visual Art and Knowledge Systems; Supervisor for the Doctoral Programme

Sarat Maharaj (South Africa / United Kingdom) is Professor of Visual Art and Knowledge Systems at Lund University and Malmö Art Academy, and Research Professor at Goldsmiths, University of London, where he was previously Professor of Art History and Theory (1980–2005). Maharaj was Rudolf Arnheim Professor, Philosophy Faculty, Humboldt University of Berlin (2001–02) and Fine Art Research Fellow at the Jan Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht (1999–2001). In 2018, he was the Stedelijk Fellow at the University of Amsterdam / RKD, Art History Institute, Den Haag / Stedelijk Museum and is Visiting Fellow at Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp in 2020–21.

Maharaj's specialist research and publications focus on Marcel Duchamp, James Joyce, and Richard Hamilton, and his writing covers: Monkeydoodle—"thinking through art practice," visual art as know-how and no-how, textiles, xeno-sonics and xeno-epistemics—"thinking the other and other ways of thinking," cultural translation, "dirty cosmopolitanism," North / South divisions of work, manufacture, and "creative labour."

His selected publications include *The Sarat Maharaj Reader*, published in both English and Chinese (Nanfang Daily Press, 2010); "Small Change of the Universal," *British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 3 (2010); *Hungry Clouds Swag on the Deep: Santu Mofokeng at Kassel 2002: Chasing Shadows* (Prestel, 2011); *Sounding South Africa: In the Rainbow State* (2012); "The Jobless State: The Global Assembly Line, Indolence," in *Work, Work, Work: A Reader on Art and Labour* (Iaspis, 2012); "What the Thunder Said," in *Art as a Thinking Process* (Sternberg Press, 2012); "Nicky-Nacky to Bunga-Bunga: Venice Preserv'd in the Global Assembly Line of Biennials," in *Venezia, Venezia* (Actar, 2013); and "The Surplus of the Global," a conversation with Marion von Osten, *Texte zur Kunst*, September 2013; "Weggebobbles to Virginatarian: The Alimentary Passage through the Vegan and Beyond in James Joyce's Foodscape" for the XXVI International James Joyce Symposium; "'Sillymotocraft / Cinematograph': Towards e-Gutenberg: On Finnegans Wake" (2019); and "Diversity Fever: Notes Towards an Epidemiological Map," *South as a State of Mind*, no. 11 (2019)

He was a co-curator of documenta11 and he curated *retinal.optical. visual.conceptual* ... at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, in 2002, with Richard Hamilton and Ecke Bonk. Maharaj was also co-curator of *Farewell to Postcolonialism*, Guangzhou, in 2008, and *Art, Knowledge and Politics*, at the 29th Bienal de São Paulo in 2010. He was Chief Curator of the 2011 Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, *Pandemonium: Art in a Time of Creativity Fever*, and a peer advisor to the Sharjah Biennial 11 in 2013.

Recent lectures include "Surya Namaaz. Deniz Sõzen," Institute of International Visual Arts, London, 2020; "Dataists or Dadaists? Drivers of the Human," ZKM Karlsruhe, 2020; "Mapping the First India Diaspora, Euro-Art History and Tantra," Bihar Museum Biennale, Patna, India, 2021; "The Sphinx Contemplating Napoleon: Gilane Tawadros," Africa Institute, Sharjah, 2021.

His current research projects (2016–) are "Repristinating London: Knowledge Mecca" and "The Apartheid Era Art History Room, Durban, Salisbury Island." Maharaj sits on the boards of several journals, museums, galleries, and other institutions.

Gertrud Sandqvist — Professor of Art Theory and the History of Ideas; Supervisor for the Doctoral Programme

Gertrud Sandqvist was Rector of Malmö Art Academy from 2011 to 2020, a post she also previously held from 1995 to 2007.

Professor Sandqvist has been writing extensively on mainly European contemporary art since the early 1990s, and most recently she authored *Estragon*, a monograph on the Norwegian painter Olav Christopher Jenssen, published in 2018.

Sandqvist is the curator of *Jag bor i ett annat land, men du bor ju i samma, Drömmare söder om Hallands-åsen* at Ravinen Konsthall, Båstad, held in the autumn of 2021. In 2010, she was the co-curator of the *Modernautställningen* at Moderna Museet, Stockholm. She co-curated, together with Sarat Maharaj, Dorothee Albrecht, and Stina Edblom, the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, 2011. Furthermore, she recently curated *Siksi—The Nordic Miracle Revisited* at Galleri F 15, Moss, Norway, 2015; *Red Dawn* at HISK, Ghent, Belgium, 2014; *Channeled*, which showed contemporary artists alongside Hilma af Klint, at Lunds Konsthall, 2013; and *Against Method* for Generali Foundation, Vienna, 2013.

Since 2019, Sandqvist has been a member of the Novo Nordisk Foundation's Committee on Research in Art and Art History.

Fredrik Værslev — Professor of Fine Arts

Fredrik Værslev is a Norwegian artist based in Drøbak, Norway, with a focus on conceptual painting.

Selected solo exhibitions include Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, 2018; Bonner Kunstverein, 2018; Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, Switzerland, 2017; Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, 2017; Gió Marconi, Milan, 2016; Bergen Konsthall, 2016; Kunsthal Aarhus, Denmark, 2017; Le Consortium, Dijon, France, 2016; STANDARD (OSLO), 2015; Power Station, Dallas, 2014; Lumiar Cité, Lisbon, 2014; Circus, Berlin, 2013; and Indipendenza Studio, Rome, 2012, among others.

Selected group exhibitions include Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, 2017; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2017; CANADA, New York, 2017; National Art School Gallery, Sydney, 2017; Ramiken Crucible, New York, 2017; Index, Stockholm, 2017; Galleri Riis, Stockholm, 2016; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2016; Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York, 2015; Tegnebiennalen, Oslo, 2014; Galerie Mehdi Chouakri, Berlin, 2014; Lunds Konsthall, 2013; and Modern Institute, Glasgow, 2013, among others.

Værslev is Director of the artist-run project space Landings in Vestfossen, Norway, which he founded in 2008. The organisation also produces *Landings Journal*, published once a year. Publications on his work include *Fredrik Værslev as I Imagine Him* (JRP|Ringier, 2018); *Tan Lines* (Sternberg Press, 2018); *The Constant Gardener* (Hatje Cantz, 2016); *All Around Amateur, vols. 1 and 2* (Sternberg Press, 2016); *Reality Bites* (Mousse Publishing, 2015); *East Bound and Down* (Power Station, 2016); and *Fredrik Værslev: The rich man's breakfast, the shop-keeper's lunch, the poor man's supper* (STANDARD (BOOKS), 2012).

Værslev's work is found in the collections of Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Le Consortium, Dijon; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Malmö Konstmuseum; Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo; and Astrup Fearnley, Oslo.

Maria Hedlund — Senior Lecturer in Fine Arts

Maria Hedlund is a Swedish artist based in Berlin. She graduated from the Photography Department at the University of Gothenburg in 1993.

In her latest ongoing works, she uses objects, plants, and smaller collections. They are mostly found or given to her. What they all have in common is that they are in a state of transition and of being outside their original context. This specific interest has formed works such as *Life at Hyttödammen* (2006–), *Dissolve* (2011), and *Some Kind of Knowledge* (2014–). The title of *Some Kind of Knowledge* refers to an ambivalent condition that always needs to be renegotiated and rephrased as new objects come into play. The work's "collection" is in a state of constant evolution. Sometimes there is a clear direction, which a while later might be forgotten, followed by a new one. Its objects and plants appear in other works as well.

Hedlund has recently exhibited at Kohta, Helsinki, and Västerås Konstmuseum. Last year, she completed a public commission for the Tranströmer Library in Medborgarhuset, Stockholm.

Per Olof Persson — Senior Lecturer in Fine Arts

P-O Persson is a Swedish artist based in Malmö. He graduated from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm, in 1988.

As a Senior Lecturer at Malmö Art Academy, P-O Persson is responsible for technical and practical courses.

Exhibitions include Skulpturträdgården—Galleri Arnstedt, Östra Karup, Sweden, 2017 and 2018; Liljevalchs Konsthall, Stockholm, 2004; Krognoshuset, Lund, 2003; Busan Metropolitan Art Museum, Seoul, 1999; Kampnagelfabrik, Hamburg, 1991; Lunds Konsthall, 1989; and Malmö Konsthall, 1987. Public commissions include Landskrona stad, 2007; Helsingborg Fire Department, Public Art Agency Sweden, 2005; Karlskrona stad, 2001; and Astra Zeneca, Lund, 1999–2000.

Grants include Edstrandska stiftelsens stipendium, 1996; the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, working grant, 1990–95; Ellen Trotzig Foundation, Malmö, 1981; Malmö Stad kulturstipendium; and Aase and Rickard Björklund stipendium, Malmö. Public collections include Malmö Museum, Kristianstad Museum, and Blekinge Museum, Karlskrona.

Gabriel Karlsson Junior Lecturer in Fine Arts

Gabriel Karlsson is a Swedish artist based in Malmö. He received his Master´s degree in Fine Art from Malmö Art Academy in 2019 and has previously studied literature at Stockholm University.

Through the medium of sculpture, Karlsson explores the concepts of objects, materiality, nature and thought systems. He is interested in how human and non-human worlds interact spatially. As a Junior Lecturer at Malmö Art Academy, he is responsible for both practical and theoretical courses related to sculptural processes and the medium´s unique way of communicating via form and matter.

Recent solo and duo exhibitions include Untitled (Cumulus), Study For Art Platform, Stockholm, 2023; Pivot V-XIII, duo exhibition, Galleri Arnstedt, Östra Karup, 2022; Krummholz (Pivot I-IV), duo exhibition, Landings Project Space, Vestfossen, Norway, 2022; One finger, Artipelag, Stockholm, 2021; Repose, duo exhibition, Canopy, Malmö, 2020.

Selected group exhibitions include Malmö Konsthall, Malmö; One Room One Day, ADDO, Malmö; Ravinen Konsthall, Båstad; Galleri Arnstedt, Båstad; Skissernas Museum, Lund; Soft city, curated by Coyote, Stockholm; Galleri CC, Malmö; The Great Hall of the Art Academy of Latvia, Riga.

Grants include Fredrik Roos Foundation, 2021; Edstrandska Foundation, 2019; Ann-Margret Lindells Grant, 2016; Gerlesborgsskolans Exhibition Grant, 2015.

Youngjae Lih Junior Lecturer in Fine Arts

Youngjae Lih is a Korean artist and engineer living and working in Sweden. He holds a Master of Fine Art from Malmö Art Academy and Bachelor of Fine Art from Korea National University of Arts, Seoul. Previously, he had a career as a research and development engineer in the semiconductor industry. Focusing on the nature of existing objects and the interactions between them, Lih is interested in the syntax and formation of new narrative strands. In this sense, while the majority of his works are developed in different mediums, they share an obvious grammatical and linguistic structure.

Solo exhibitions include Färgfabriken, Stockholm; S:t Pauli Kyrka, Malmö; Skånes konstförening, Malmö; and Luxelakes·A4 Art Museum, Chengdu.

Selected group exhibitions include Fotografisk Center, Copenhagen; Sharjah Art Foundation; Cinema Museum, London; Hiroshima Art Document, Japan; Royal Academy of Arts, Stockholm; and Ewha Womans University, Seoul.

Lih was a recipient of the Beckers Art Award, Stockholm; Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives Research Grant and Residency, New York; Swedish National Arts Grants Committee International Artist Studio Programme, Stockholm; and Mercedes Benz Art Foundation, Seoul.

Joakim Sandqvist Junior Lecturer in Fine Arts

Joakim Sandqvist (b.1988) is a Swedish artist based in Malmö. He studied at Malmö Art Academy and Slade School of Fine Arts, earning his MFA from the Malmö Art Academy in 2018. In 2021, he participated in the Maumaus Independent Study Program. Sandqvist works in a wide range of mediums including sculpture, textile, photography, video drawing and installation. His work predominantly revolves around the intricate interplay of visual culture, power structures, infrastructure, technology, and abstraction.

Resent solo exhibitions include Just in Time, Galleri Ping-Pong, Malmö, 2023, Façades, Galleri Ping-Pong, Malmö, 2020, Workers, Settlers, Hippies and Imaginary Lovers, Galleri Storgatan, Stockholm, 2020.

Selected group exhibitions include Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, The Centre for Photography, Stockholm, Malmö Art Museum, Malmö, Galleri BOX, Gothenburg, Public Support, Vestfossen, Canopy, Malmö, Österängens Konsthall, Jönköping and SEART, Stockholm.

Sandqvist has received several grants in support of his work, including The Edstrandska Foundation, The Aase and Rickard Björklund Fund, The W. Smiths Fund, awarded by The Swedish Royal Academy of Arts and working grants from Swedish Arts Grants Committee.

His works are held in the collections of The Swedish Public Art Agency, The Jönköping County and HSB (Public Work in Hököpinge).

Charif Benhelima External Visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Charif Benhelima is a Belgian artist. He lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium.

Through the medium of photography, Benhelima deals with the topics of memory / oblivion, time, space, origin, identity, politics of representation, and perception. He gained recognition with the *Welcome to Belgium series* (1990–99), a nine-year research project on the sentiment of being a foreigner. Besides having worked with analogical photography, he has been experimenting for fifteen years with the Polaroid 600.

In parallel to his artistic research, Benhelima is a guest professor at the Higher Institute for Fine Arts (HISK), Ghent.

Recent solo exhibitions include Museu Oscar Niemeyer, Curitiba, Brazil; Niterói Museum of Contemporary Art, Rio de Janeiro; BPS 22, Charleroi, Belgium; Palais des BeauxArts (Bozar), Brussels; Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston; Volta NY 2010, New York; and Künstlerhaus Bethanien GmbH, Berlin, among others.

Benhelima participated in the Lubumbashi Biennale, DR Congo, 2015; Beaufort, Triennial of Contemporary Art by the Sea, Belgium, 2015; Marrakech Biennale 5; International Biennial of Photography, 2010 and 2012, Houston; and in group exhibitions at the Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro; MuHKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp; Musée de Marrakech; Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore; Bag Factory, Johannesburg; Shanghai Art Museum; Palau de la Virreina—La Capella, Barcelona; Centro Arte Moderna a Contemporanea Della Spezia, Italy; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires; Witte de With, Rotterdam; EMST—National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens; Jewish Cultural Quarter, Amsterdam; and Lunds Konsthall, among many others.

Ann Böttcher External Visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Ann Böttcher was born in 1973 in Bruzaholm, Sweden. She currently lives and works in Malmö.

She has held solo exhibitions at Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm and Malmö Konsthall (2021–2022), Malmö konstmuseum, (2016), Vandalourum, Värnamo (2015), INDEX, Stockholm (2007) and Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2006). She participated at the EVA International Biennial, Limerick, and has been exhibited at Malmö Konstmuseum (both 2014), Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm and the Lofoten International Art Festival, Svolvær (both 2013). In 2014 she was one of the artists exhibited in Magasin III:s The Drawing Room.

She has participated in group exhibitions at venues including Kimball Art Centre, Park City, Utah, USA (2023), He Art Museum, Shunde, Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm (both 2020), Eksjö Museum (2018), Kunsthall Stavanger, Marabouparken, Sundyberg (both 2017), Tecknigsmuseet, Laholm (2015), Borås Konstmuseum (2012), Liljevalchs, Stockholm, Lunds konsthall, Lund, Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle (all 2011), Malmö Konstmusem, Malmö, Magasin III, Stockholm (both 2010), Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, WUK Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna (both 2009), Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, ZKM, Karlsruhe (both 2008), Moderna Museet, Stockholm, P.S. 1 MOMA, New York, Gallery Murray Guy, New York (all 2006), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (2004), Magasin III, Stockholm and Centre Culturel Suédois, Paris (2003).

Matts Leiderstam Researcher and External Visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Matts Leiderstam is a Swedish artist based in Stockholm. He obtained a PhD in Fine Arts at Malmö Art Academy in 2006 and studied painting at Valand Academy between 1984 and 1989.

Leiderstam is currently working on the research project “What Does the Grid Do?,” with support from the Swedish Research Council. The project aims to focus on ways of seeing in relation to contemporary painting practices and to trace what it is that remains—the ruins, perhaps, of artistic knowledge connected to the grid, a concept deeply rooted in Western art history. How might the grid frame what it is that we inherit? Whether that be in the recent return to abstract painting, historically associated with the grid, or in the amplification of the uses of the grid in the context of a quantum shift in our time of today’s planetary-scale computing—in a culture dominated by the mediations of the screen.

Selected solo exhibitions include Tomelilla Konsthall; Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam; Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Stockholm; Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Grazer Kunstverein; Salon MoCAB—Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz; and Magasin III, Stockholm.

Selected group shows include Art Encounters Biennial, Timi șoara, Romania, 2019; Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm; 11th Shanghai Biennale; National Gallery Prague; Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway; Fondazione Prada, Milan; 8th Berlin Biennale; Gasworks, London; Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City; Witte de With, Rotterdam; Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art 2010; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and Third Guangzhou Triennial.

Publications on and of his work include Matts Leiderstam: Panels (Wilfried Lentz Rotterdam, 2018); *MOM / 2011 / 47 (and into the room swallows flew)* (artist book, 2012); *Matts Leiderstam: Seen from Here* (Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2010); *Matts Leiderstam: Nachbild/After Image* (Argobooks, 2010); and his dissertation, "See and Seen: Seeing Landscape through Artistic Practice" (Malmö Art Academy, Lund University, 2006).

Marie Muracciole External Visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Marie Muracciole is an art critic, writer, and independent curator based in Beirut and Paris.

Since February 2014, she has been the director and the curator at Beirut Art Center. Her publications include: *With*, about Jeff Weber in *Serial Grey*, (Carré d'art de Nîmes), 2021, *Lights, Camera, Movement, Film Praxis in the Work of Zineb Sedira* in Zineb Sedira (Sharjah Foundation), 2018, *Transports (Prière de toucher)* in Pierre-Lin Renié, D'autres jours/On Other Days, 2017, *Contrecourants: à propos d'Allan Sekula et d'Aerospace*, in Jeux sérieux, (HEAD), 2015, *Something New About Plants, Genealogy Tree*, in Yto Barrada (JPRingier), 2013; *A Love Story, Transportations*, in Amar Kanwar: Evidence (Fotomuseum Winterthur/Steidl), 2012; *Memory's body. "Retrospective" by Xavier Le Roy*, in Texte Zur Kunst, 2011/12; *It Is Your First Mirage Sophie, on Guy de Cointet*, Texte zur Kunst n°82, 2011*; Tomorrow Never Knows, Peter Roehr*, in 20/27 n°5, 2010. She is the French editor of *Écrits sur la photographie*, Allan Sekula, éditions de l'ENSBA, Paris, 2013. She published *Photography at Work: Allan Sekula*, 2017, Beirut Art Center, and *Knots'n Dust ; Francis Alys*, 2019, Beirut Art Center, with Michael Taussig.

João Penalva External Visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

João Penalva is a Portuguese artist who since 1976 has been living and working in London, where he also studied at Chelsea School of Art. He has been External Visiting Lecturer at Malmö Art Academy since 2003.

Penalva represented Portugal in the 23rd Bienal de São Paulo (1996) and in the 49th Venice Biennale (2001). He also exhibited in the 2nd Berlin Biennale (2001) and the 13th Biennale of Sydney (2002).

Solo exhibitions include Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon; Camden Arts Centre, London; Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius; Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck; Tramway, Glasgow; Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art, Malmö; Institute of Visual Arts, Milwaukee; Power Plant, Toronto; Serralves Museum, Porto; Ludwig Museum, Budapest; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; DAAD Gallery, Berlin; Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, UK; Lunds Konsthall; Berlinische Gallerie, Berlin; Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon; Brandts Kunsthallen, Odense, Denmark; Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Norway; LOGE, Berlin; Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg; Culturgest, Porto; Lumiar Cité, Lisbon; and Appleton Square, Lisbon.

Group exhibitions include, among others, Haus der Kunst, Munich; Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany; K20 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden; Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul; Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei; Bombas Gens Centre d'Art, Valencia; Tramway, Glasgow; Wellcome Collection, London; South London Gallery; Lunds Konsthall; Hayward Gallery, London; and Tate Modern, London.

Penalva was awarded the DAAD Berlin Artist's Residency in 2003; the Bryan Robertson Award, London, in 2009; and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award, London, in 2020.

He is represented by Simon Lee Gallery, London, Hong Kong, New York; Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin; and Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon. He has had numerous exhibitions with these galleries.

Michael Portnoy External Visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Michael Portnoy (b. 1971, Washington, DC, USA) is a New York-based artist.

Coming from a background in dance and stand-up comedy, his performance-based work employs a variety of media: from participatory installations to sculpture, painting, writing, theater, video and curation. Portnoy is largely concerned with manipulating language and behavior as a tool for world-bending—either in his "Relational Stalinist" game structures in which confusion, complication, and ambiguity are used to stretch participants' speech and movement; or his quest to "improve" existing breeds of art through re-engineering. He has presented internationally in museums, art galleries, theatres and music halls, including recently Steirischer Herbst, Graz, Austria (2019 & 2018); Witte de With, Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2016); the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2015); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2014); Cricoteka, Krakow, Poland (2014); Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2013); KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany (2013); The Kitchen, New York, USA (2013); dOCUMENTA 13, Kassel, Germany (2012); 11th Baltic Triennial (co-curator), Vilnius, Lithuania (2012); and the Taipei Biennial, Taipei, Taiwan (2010).

Nina Roos External Visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Nina Roos is a visual artist working in the field of painting. She lives and works in Helsinki.

Solo exhibitions have been held at Kohta, Helsinki; Lunds Konsthall; Galerie Forsblom, Helsinki; Galerie Francois Mansart, Paris; Galleri K, Oslo; Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Malmö Konsthall; Kiasma, Helsinki; and Brandts Klædefabrik, Odense.

Selected group exhibitions include the MuHKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp; Kiasma, Helsinki; Galleri F15, Moss, Norway; Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Finland; Artipelag, Stockholm; Lunds Konsthall; Carnegie Art Award touring exhibition (first prize 2004); KUMU Art Museum, Tallinn; Kunstverein München; Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki; Nordic Pavilion, 46th Venice Biennale; and Frankfurter Kunstverein.

Public commissions include Campus Allegro, Pietarsaari, Finland, 2013; the Church of Shadows, Chengdu, China, 2012; and University of Gävle, Sweden, 2006.

Roos's works are included in collections internationally, including the Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki; Apoteket AB, Stockholm; ArtPace, San Antonio; Gothenburg Museum of Art; Helsinki City Art Museum; Kiasma, Helsinki; Malmö Art Museum; and Moderna Museet, Stockholm, among others.

Programmes

Malmö Art Academy is the ideal institution for those intending to pursue a professional career as an artist and who want solid training in their field of interest.

The teaching is not divided into artistic specialisations and the Academy has no separate departments. Students have the opportunity to move freely between different forms of artistic expression or to specialise in a specific form.

The programmes offer a wide range of courses and projects in artistic creation, theory, and technique. Students choose freely from these options and build up a personalised programme of study. Regardless of the focus the students choose for their work, their own artistic development is always key, and emphasis is therefore placed on individual artistic supervision.

Bachelor's Programme in Fine Arts—BFA

The three-year Bachelor's programme consists of individual work in the studio and individual tutoring from professors and other teachers, as well as scheduled courses in major areas of artistic techniques, artistic interpretation, and art theory. Malmö Art Academy's internationally active professors work in a range of artistic fields. This leads to important and diverse interaction at the Academy and also gives the students the opportunity to choose courses that reflect their artistic intentions.

The programme begins with a set of compulsory foundation courses dealing primarily with different artistic techniques and the development of the artist's role over the last two hundred years. After this, students select their courses in theory, technique, and artistic creation. The topics offered vary from year to year, depending on students' interests and the current artistic activities of teaching staff.

Students who successfully achieve 180 ECTS credits through their studio practice and completion of courses are awarded a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Students must also have participated in a group exhibition at one of Malmö Art Academy's galleries and have written a short text (approx. five pages) based on their artistic position (art-work documentation and texts from this year's graduating students are available in this *Yearbook*). Professors at Malmö Art Academy act as examiners for undergraduate students, and an external examiner is always invited to participate in the assessment.

Graduates with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Malmö Art Academy are entitled to apply for the two-year Master of Fine Arts programme at the Academy or for Master's programmes at other institutions.

Master's Programme in Fine Arts—MFA

The Master's programme in Fine Arts is a two-year programme offering more specialised artistic training through individual studio practice and courses in art and various related disciplines.

During the first year, students begin their advanced artistic work, along with different types of teacherled seminars and also a study trip. Just as on the Bachelor's programme, students choose from a range of technical and theoretical courses, many of which are taught by internationally recognised artists. Guest lectures from visiting artists and critics as well as various forms of collaborative projects are regularly offered at the Academy.

In the second year, students focus on their degree projects, which includes writing an essay (approx. ten pages) about their artistic practice and presenting a solo exhibition at one of the Academy's galleries (artwork documentation and texts from this year's graduating students are available in this *Yearbook*). Students who pass their degree project are awarded a Master of Fine Arts (120 ECTS credits). Professors at Malmö Art Academy act as examiners for Master's students, and an external examiner is always invited to participate in the assessment.

Master's Programme in Fine Arts in Artistic Research—MFA

The Master's programme in Fine Arts in Artistic Research (MFAAR) is a two-year full-time education programme. The purpose of the programme is to prepare visual artists to define and formulate a research project in fine arts that aims at admission to a Doctoral programme in fine arts.

The programme maintains a high international profile and prepares artists for professional activities at an international level. The focus is on the individual research project, which the student uses as their application and then develops during the programme. From this project, the student is encouraged to develop research questions that emerge from their own research processes and artistic methods. These are discussed and advanced in relation to methods that have emerged from other relevant research fields, in close collaboration with existing academic disciplines.

Through this training, the student is encouraged to develop their own methods that differ from those applied in other fields of research. The teaching method includes both seminars and courses. The seminars include programme-specific seminars and seminars together with the PhD programme at Malmö Art Academy, where the student becomes an auscultant.

Courses include method courses with a special focus on artistic research projects, but also more general method courses with invited researchers and artistic researchers from Lund University and other educational institutions. A course in research ethics is also given. The students have access to a shared workspace.

During the two years of study, students will encounter various think tanks through which to open up new vocabularies around thinking through the visual: a methodology lab, a reading group, seminars and workshops, a publishing forum, writing sessions, proposal writing, and archives. Further, they will participate in assemblies, tutorials, meditation sessions, creating a collective glossary, and other discursive events. Conducted or choreographed across those units, the MFAAR essentially links to the Doctoral programme at the Academy and fosters exchanges with other disciplines, thereby underlining an ethics of inclusion and heterogeneity. Within this relational context, the call is for thinking about artistic research today as an expanded and all-encompassing field around visual thinking. Additionally, the programme aims to confirm artistic research against its apparent marginality as a core field of thought, in synchrony with and producing emerging forms of sociality, culture, and thought.

The degree project consists of a joint exhibition / seminar / publication / conference, where the individual project is presented. A longer individual text proposing a research project, including a research question and timetable, is also required. Teaching, supervision, and examination is conducted in English. Students who pass their degree project are awarded a Master of Fine Arts in Artistic Research (120 ECTS credits).

Admission requirements, selection process, and tuition fees

Find more information about admission requirements, the selection process, and tuition fees at www.khm.lu.se/en/education/programmes.

PhD Programme in Fine Arts—PhD

The four-year Doctoral programme in Fine Arts for practising artists and curators is the first of its kind. Sweden's first Doctors of Fine Arts graduated from Malmö Art Academy, Lund University, in 2006. Professor Gertrud Sandqvist is responsible for the programme and Professor Sarat Maharaj is Head Supervisor of the Doctoral candidates, who gather for seminars in Malmö at least twice every semester.

The study programme is experimental and highly individualised, focusing on identifying, understanding, and developing artistic thinking as a specialised field of knowledge production. The studies are based on artistic knowledge and artistic work, and the focus is on individual artistic work and research.

The artistic work is both object and method. Reflective and theoretical study is not a self-fulfilling goal but serves as a means for developing artistic competence. The programme in total is 240 ECTS credits, subdivided into various seminars and courses (60 ECTS credits) and a documented artistic research project (180 ECTS credits).

Admission requirements, application process, funding and financing

Read more about PhD studies at Lund University at www.lunduniversity.lu.se/admissions/phd-studies.

MFA Courses

Matrix, Mater, Matter, Materiality, Materialism, New Materialism, Old Materialism ...
Optional MFA level course
Credits: 15
Teachers: Ellinor Lager
Gertrud Sandqvist

Participants:
Amanda Moberg
Juju Bento
Anne Sofie Djernis
Astta Nielsen
Billie Meiniche
Zsófia Boda
Carin Castegren
Celeste Arnstedt
Cornelia Hermansson
Felix Christiansson
Hjördís Gréta Guðmundsdóttir
Irene Kaltenborn
Kristyan Nicholson
Marcus Wallström
Maria Nadia Nour Nielsen
Merit Böger
My Sjöberg
Sebastian Gabriel Nord
Sigrid Soomus
Siri Hammarén
Stella Sieber

"The question is not, or not only, that of the organism, history and subject of enunciation that oppose masculine to feminine in the great dualism machines. The question is fundamentally that of the body—the body they steal from us in order to fabricate opposable organisms."
—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 276)

When second-wave feminism took shape in the 1970s, thinkers such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous began to connect the (female) body to writing and philosophy. Irigaray introduced the term *bilabiality*; Kristeva was investigating semiotics through the abject; and Cixous closely analysed what it could mean to give birth to text. A lively debate was formed around the position of essentialism: that the (female) body, through its biology, possessed specific experiences that needed to be translated. The Lacanian notion of the position of the phallus was part of this discussion. Judith Butler's performative position, in which she moved (in accordance with Jacques Derrida and partly with Jacques Lacan) the focus from sex to gender (*Gender Trouble, Bodies That Matter*) seemed to end the discussion.

Today, a new generation of thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, Elisabeth Grosz, and Margrit Shildrick have reopened the battlefield over the body. This time, their tools include phenomenology and new materialism together with posthumanism.

How do we find new answers to the old question? How do we rethink and reintegrate body and mind? Or will we need to speak in plural?

The Deleuzian/Guattarian toolbox is useful: we speak of multiplicities, bodies without organs (BwO), assemblages, rhizomes, becomings when we enter into the field of leaking, nurturing, breast-feeding, birth-giving, transplanted and prosthetic minds/bodies.

Currently, Rosi Braidotti is writing about posthuman feminism. What does she mean?

New thinking is in the making. All are welcome to participate!

Translation
Optional MFA level course
Credits: 6
Teacher: Alejandro Cesarco

Participants:
Daniele Di Girolamo
Anne Sofie Djernis
Hjördis Gréta Guðmundsdóttir
Djoana Emilova Gueorguieva
Rosita Kær
Anton Kai
Maia Torp Neergaard
Jens Alfred Raahauge

This course focuses on ideas of translation as a creative and generative process. We will explore questions of originality, use of references, and practices of translation, and discuss how these practices of reading may pertain to contemporary artistic practices. We will be looking at and reading a diverse roster of authors, including Jorge Luis Borges, Roland Barthes, René Vienet, Louise Lawler, and Claire Denis, among others.

Within this larger framework, students will be asked to curate genealogies and contextualise their own work and practice, and to ultimately entertain the idea of art making as a form of art history. Additionally, and in advance of each seminar, each student will prepare a short, written provocation or question to pose to the class. (This is a short paragraph that speaks to a moment in the text that you want to affirm or put in doubt. This informal writing will help us guide our conversations around each reading.)

BFA Courses

Haunting and Affect
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 6
Teacher: Ana Teixeira Pinto

Participants:
Alice Ryne
Andrea Sitara Gran
Billie Meiniche
Celeste Arnstedt
Hannes Östlund
Hauge í Gongini Djernis
Jelena Pajić
Jonathan Bue Plauborg Rasmussen
Leonard Vincent Rode
Malthe Jos Lundquist
Merit Böger
Pernille Emilia Kjær
Rosita Kær
Siri Hammarén
Solvej Heise Jakobsen
Stacey de Voe
Stella Sieber
Vigga Heisselberg Wæhrens
Zixin Gu

The supernatural entities that haunt us render abstract forces and pressures concrete, palpable even, oftentimes in gory detail. Surveying body-snatching stories, from the Balkans to Uganda, Gothic novels, and supernatural fiction, this seminar will look into the connections linking horror and history, and hear what vampires, ghosts, witches, and zombies have to tell us about modern medicine, changing conceptions of the body, the symbolism of blood, colonial power, real-estate value, gender troubles, capitalism, and sexuality.

Ghost Stories
Do you believe in ghosts? What about vampires? Anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard argued that belief in the supernatural was not superstition, but explanation. In a similar manner, this seminar is less concerned with whether ghosts are real than with what they can tell us about reality. The sighting of a ghost always says something about how history is experienced as horror.

Love Is the Answer! What Is the Question?
In the 2016 documentary *Vers la tendresse* by filmmaker Alice Diop, one of the film's young interviewees, prompted to discuss affection and intimacy, retorts, "Love is for white people. "In her 2008 book, *The Female Complaint*, recently deceased affect theorist Lauren Berlant argued that though women are often disappointed by lived intimacy, they blame "flawed men," rather than divest from romantic fantasy. Love remains a site of disappointment, but not disenchantment, with the way life is lived under the rule of private property. Love, Berlant sustains, is "the gift that keeps on taking."

In our seminar, we will examine the social function of romantic love and its position within the cultural grammar of modernity, as well as its structuring force in the racial and gendered ordering of the social, by surveying the promise of undying love, romantic heroines, histories of shame and stigma, the colonial origins of modern sexuality, the nexus between semiotics and the somatic, insolvent desires, aesthetic categories, paraphilias, vampires, and the quest for eternal life.

Gestures of Defiance:
Queer, Feminist, and
Activist Performance Practice
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 3
Teacher: MC Coble

Participants:
Billie Meiniche
Friedel Weiser
Merit Böger
Sebastian Gabriel Nord
Solvej Heise Jakobsen

Drawing upon historical and contemporary forms and practices of resistance, this workshop explores the social, artistic, and political potential of queer performance. It is structured through two main elements, including thematic discussions and physical movements that support an investigation of the relationship between queer performance, art, and activism.

The dramaturgy of protests in their diverse modes and methodologies will be examined, including examples that are humorous, playful, militant, and violent.

We will ask: How do bodies assemble? What language is used? Whose voices are activated or excluded? And what histories do they conjure or open space for?

We will move, think along with, and draw inspiration from artists, activist groups, and theorists such as ACT UP, AKU-MATU, Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion, Jack Halberstam (*The Queer Art of Failure*), Judith Butler (*Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*), Rebel Clown Army, River Lin, Sara Ahmed (*Living a Feminist Life*), Shaun Leonardo, and the Water Protectors of Standing Rock.

The workshop will have a somatic component where we will experiment with our own bodies, voices, text, and objects. Movement practices that we will draw from include queer choreographies by Dinis Machado, scores of radical empathy developed by Public* Display* of Actions* (P*D*A*), and methods from *Elements of Performance Art* created by The Theatre of Mistakes and Anthony Howell.

This workshop is suitable for artists from all disciplines—with or without a live performance or movement background. People of all abilities, fitness levels, and experiences are encouraged to attend. This will be held in English, but all languages are welcome. Together we will figure out modes of translation and understanding.

This workshop will be led by M.C. Coble (they, them, hen), a non-binary trans* artist, activist, and educator with a practice spanning over two decades, currently based in Gothenburg, Sweden. One of their consistent aims has been to manifest problems of bodily, societal, and symbolic navigation, particularly focusing on issues of social injustice and normative boundaries. Working primarily with live art, photography, and installation, Coble's practice revolves around trans*/queer/ feminist politics, play, failure, and intersectional activism. Their methodologies are often site-specific, research-based, and collectively developed. Coble's artistic activities not only involve creating performances and other artworks, but also leading and engaging in workshops, making publications, community organising, and activism.

On Duration:
How Long Should a Film Work Be?
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 3
Teacher: Shirin Sabahi

Participants:
Alice Ryne
Andrea Sitara Gran
Hannes Östlund
Irene Kaltenborn
Jonathan Bue Plauborg Rasmussen
Leonard Vincent Rode
Maia Torp Neergaard
Marcus Wallström
Sara Andreasson
Siri Hammarén
Solvej Heise Jakobsen
Vigga Heisselberg Wæhrens
Zixin Gu

Since the 1960s, with the constant merging of artforms and disciplines, the hyper-commercialisation of film industries, and the closure of arthouse cinemas, among others, the art gallery has become a place where experimental filmmaking has migrated en masse. This emancipation of the viewing conditions is what filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek has called "Expanded Cinema." Nowadays it's rare to step inside a contemporary art exhibition and not see a screen or a projection.

In this course, we will reflect on both the possibilities and the limitations of employing moving images as a medium, with a focus on the question of duration: *how long should a film work be?* Alongside the image dimension, the number of channels, and other spatial and viewing properties of a film or video installation, duration is the *size* of the artwork in temporal terms and, as such, an important aspect for artists to work with intentionally. We will watch and discuss various conceptual and practical uses of duration, repetition, and tempo in films and installations by artists and filmmakers such as Tacita Dean, Kevin Jerome Everson, Harun Farocki, Tsai Mingliang, and Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Furthermore, we will read texts on cinematic time by cultural critics Giuliana Bruno and Tom Gunning, as well as a thesis on size by biologist J. B. S. Haldane.

The objective of this course is for the students to acquire basic theoretical and applied knowledge and language skills around the filmic medium. This includes developing an awareness of the aesthetic, material, formal, and above all, temporal implications of working with moving images within the artform's context and from our contemporary standpoint.

Silk Screen Introduction KKV
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 0
Teacher: Jan-Anders Hansson

Participants:
Kristyan Nicholson
Maria Nadia Nour Nielsen
Mette Riise
Sigrid Soomus
Stella Sieber

This course introduces artists to screen printing, one of the most versatile print mediums. Students will gain a complete understanding of materials from coating and exposing a screen to registration, use of stencils, and mixing inks. Direct emulsion photo screens allow students to work from handmade, photographic, text-oriented, or digitally produced image sources.

Beyond Gravity
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 6
Teacher: Gabriel Karlsson

Participants:
Amanda Moberg
Friedel Weiser
Ida Brockmann
Pernille Emilia Kjær
Sebastian Gabriel Nord

To look at sculpture is about moving around something and letting the gaze follow a surface or a reasoning 360 degrees. This movement can take place both spatially and mentally. In this course, we move around the concept of sculpture to illuminate it from different perspectives. Through literature, texts, and presentations, we will have a conversation about what sculpture is today. Our starting point is the sculptural process and the shift that takes place in the relationship between the imagined idea and the materialised work. How can one use this shift in meaning in working with materials, and how does it relate to language, signs, and traces? In Jack Burnham's text *Sculpture's Vanishing Base* (1967), he describes a movement away from the materialised object. The text follows the development of the base/plinth from the nineteenth century onwards and describes the problems that became sculpture's dilemma: is it possible for an object—for example, a sculpture—to exist under different conditions than anything else in the world?

"The base is the sculptor's convention for rooting his art to surrounding reality while permitting it to stand apart. As such, the base creates a twilight zone both physically and psychically. It says, in effect, that this sculpted object has a life, a 'presence' of its own."
—Jack Burnham, *Sculpture's Vanishing Base* (1967)

I think that the description of the plinth as a barrier between reality and the "sculpture itself" is an interesting thought that can be used to explore where a sculpture begins and ends in space. In this course, we will work with basic sculptural concepts to understand how we can use sculptural and spatial thinking to challenge habitual vision. We will also discuss whether it is possible and, if so, where to draw the line between sculpture and what is considered an object.

Documenting Your Artworks
Practical photographic, 3D-modelling course
Mandatory for BFA3, MFA2
Credits: 6
Teachers: Youngjae Lih
Johan Österholm

Participants:
Ana Beatriz Miguel Neto
Astta Nielsen
Billie Meiniche
Cecilie Mark
Clara Mosconi
Daniele Di Girolamo
Felix Christiansson
Hannes Östlund
Hjördís Gréta Guðmundsdóttir
Jonathan Bue Plauborg Rasmussen
Leonard Vincent Rode
Marcus Wallström
Maria Nadia Nour Nielsen
Mette Riise
Pernille Emilia Kjær
Rosita Kær
Sara Andreasson
Sigrid Soomus
Stacey de Voe
Stella Sieber
Vigga Heisselberg Wæhrens

The aim of this course is to introduce photographic and digital technique, and to give the appropriate knowledge to the participants to allow them to document their own work.

Photo studio: We will go through "general" camera settings, how to use a grey card, light settings on flat and three-dimensional objects, discuss common obstacles and how to overcome them.

To prepare for photographing installation views, we will discuss natural light vs portable studio light and look at examples from each. We will also document work in motion and reflective works.

Computer room: We will look into how to get a good digital workflow; screen calibration; Photoshop editing and RAW-file processing; correcting exposure, white balance, and lens distortion; merging images with different exposures and removing unwanted objects like dirt from the floor and walls, emergency signs, etc.; straightening lines; and creating a seamless sequence of images.

The purpose of the 3D-rendering class in the second week is to prepare students to use rendering tools (SketchUp/Maya) for model building to flesh out ideas and present their works in a timely manner, use V-Ray for SketchUp or Arnold for Maya to create renderings with proper lighting and photorealism. Participants will also learn to use rendering-tool layouts to create presentations including the renders, floor plans, sections, and elevations in an organised manner. Students are expected to take notes, review the videos, and practice the instructions given in class. It is the students' responsibility to further look into subjects that will be touched upon in class. These include but are not limited to documentation, lighting, and digital-space design.

Plastic
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 3
Teachers: David Nilson
P-O Persson

Participants:
Kristyan Nicholson
Juju Bento
Oscar Eriksson Furunes

The course in handling plastics gives knowledge in laminating and casting of plastics, plus basic information about the safety prescriptions in the workshop. After finishing the course, you will get a "driver's license" that permits you to work in the workshop on your own.

Welding
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 0
Teacher: Ariel Alaniz

Participants:
Beatriz Neto
Cecilie Mark
Djoana Gueorguieva
Felix Christiansson
My Sjöberg
Sturla Magnusson

Through this course, you will gain knowledge about different welding techniques such as MIG and gas welding as well as information about the security regulations for the different techniques. After finishing the course, you will receive a "driver's license" that allows you to work on your own with the welding equipment.

Flickan/The Girl
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 5
Teachers: Gertrud Sandqvist
Allison Katz
Fredrik Værslev

Participants:
Alice Ryne
Amanda Moberg
Andrea Sitara Gran
Anton Kai
Carin Castegren
Celeste Arnstedt
Cornelia Hermansson
Gralls Johan Kvarnström
Isis Lindskog
Jelena Pajić
Jonathan Bue Plauborg Rasmussen
Kristyan Nicholson
Merit Böger
Oda O. Haugerud
Stella Sieber
Sturla Magnússon

"The question is not, or not only, that of the organism, history and subject of enunciation that oppose masculine to feminine in the great dualism machines. The question is fundamentally that of the body—the body they steal from us in order to fabricate opposable organisms. This body is stolen first from the girl ... The girl's becoming is stolen first, in order to impose a history, or prehistory, upon her."
— Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 276

In this seminar, we will explore the iconography of the young girl across philosophy, film, literature, visual art, and mass media. In particular, we want to look closer into her creativity, but also her anger, her cruelty.

Allison Katz, Fredrik Værslev, and Gertrud Sandqvist will run the seminar together with invited guests, such as artist Julia Sjölin and poet Ariana Reines.

The seminar will consist of one intense week together with dreams, projections, and investigations of the figure of the girl, with two follow-up days.

Economy and Law for Students
Optional BFA level course (mandatory for BFA2)
Credits: 7.5
Teachers: Joachim Koester
Katarina Renman Claesson

Participants:
Andrea Sitara Gran
Friedel Weiser
Hauge Djernis (exchange in)
Ida Brockmann
Isis Lindskog
Jelena Pajic
Malthe Jos Lundquist
Sebastian Gabriel Nord
Siri Hammarén
Solvej Heise Jakobsen
Sturla Magnusson
Zsófia Boda

The aim of this course is to provide theoretical knowledge and practical skills in economy and law, which are important for students in the artistic process and the practice of art as well as in the role of small business owners.

The purpose is to prepare students for questions about economy and law that they may encounter after their studies. Not least, students will gain insight into when it may be necessary to consult legal and/or financial counsel.

Module 1
Credits: 15
Teachers: Verina Gfader
Rebecca Carson
Siún Hanrahan
Johannes Ljungberg

Participants:
Oleg Matrokhin
Line Kallmayer
Tjelle Esrom Raunkjaer
Ida Brottmann

In *Module 1* the students are exploring the field of research and will engage in a two-week intensive writing workshop led by Verina Gfader and with guest tutor **Dr Rebecca Carson**, where the first draft of the research proposal will be presented. During the two weeks the students will be introduced to multiple examples of PhD applications, and through discussions they will present and problematize their research proposals.

The writing workshop is oriented toward writing up the individual PhD research proposal for those who seek to earn a PhD in the (near) future. Writing is affirmed as a fundamental artistic tool. It will also be demonstrated that this 'writing' must be approached on a case-by-case basis.

Trained as a philosopher, **Dr Rebeca Carson** is invited to contribute for three days; her expertise across philosophy, critical theory, art theory and literature, will be highly valuable for the MFAAR to understand some implications and requirements for writing a PhD in Arts and Humanities, while embracing the fundamental non-reproducible knowledge and specific epistemologies Art research has to be able to articulate.

Overall, the workshop with its varying topics (one day – one task) is partly oriented toward the specific and individualised research the MFAAR participant is pursuing. This writing workshop is designed for the MFAAR for testing various forms of 'putting down words, art through words, and discourse.' And importantly, for initiating the rigorous process of writing research, first of all by means of writing the PhD research proposal.

In *Module 1* the students will engage in a two-week course on source critique, led by **Dr Johannes Ljungberg**, where they will be taken through and engage with research material and how to be critical of sources as taught in academic disciplines. In this in–depth course the students learn how to orient themselves as researchers: what it implies to be critical of re-sources, knowledge production and relevant epistemologies, and how to work within academia when researching.

In *Module 1* the students will engage in a one-week seminar, conducted by **Dr Siún Hanrahan**, on how to work with research literature and how to build a substantial reading list. This in-depth seminar responds to crucial requirements PhD researchers have to handle in terms of critical theory and sourcing literature that is most relevant for their very singular explorations and artistic-theoretical concerns. The reading list most often covers several forms and levels of references, and includes primary, secondary and tertiary levels of texts/materials/resources. For a PhD in the arts the students need to evidence extensive research, both conceptually and in terms of their practice. And the reading list must by necessity respond to and present the progress and final state of the research project.

Module 2
Credits: 15
Teachers: Verina Gfader
Mike Cooter
Sanneke Stigter
Sinéad Hogan
Linus Brostrom

Participants: Oleg Matrokhin
Line Kallmayer
Tjelle Esrom Raunkjaer
Ida Brottmann

Module 2 consists of individual preparation of artistic research. Here the focus is on planning an individual seminar in relation to one's own research.

During *Module 2* the students will join a seminar on research ethics as well as looking into other forms of sources such as oral history, and how they can be explored.

During *Module 2* the students (MFAAR1+2) will join a seminar on research ethics in three parts, led by the three distinctive guest tutors Dr Sinéad Hogan, Dr Linus Brostrom and Dr Sanneke Stigter, as well as looking into other forms of sources such as oral history, and how they can be explored.

In addition librarian Madeleine Bergqvist will run a course on library knowledge—how to search for sources.

Module 2 will have a one-week intense writing workshop with Verina Gfader. For this week, guest lecturer Dr Mike Cooter is invited to contribute to join for 2 days; as an artist and researcher Mike Cooter, who completed his PhD at Goldsmiths London with a highly interesting thesis on "Mac-Guffins"—a type of narratively-structured and socially-organising artefact rendered in film and literary works, will bring his sharp mind to bring in his experience of writing a highly theoretical dissertation in the Arts. During the one week, and in continuation of the earlier writing workshop, the students will be exposed to engage with a variety and levels of materials, here explicitly linking to practice-s and its/their potential modulations into critical text, as well as epistemological consciousness.

MFA Courses

Wake Up? Sleep, Soma, a Studio in Our Head
Optional MFA level course
Credits: 3
Teacher: Marie Muracciole

Participants: Celeste Arnstedt
Karolina Bergman Engman
Stacey De Voe
Juju Bento
Cornelia Hermansson
Anton Kai
Isis Lindskog
Amanda Moberg
Jens Alfred Raahauge
Adam Ravn
Ida Brockmann
My Sjöberg
Marcus Wallström

In *Woman Sleeping* (1981), Liz Magor interprets a famous sculpture by Constantin Brancusi, *Sleeping Muse* (1910). Stating that women have been, for so long, artists "put to sleep" and struggling to wake up, Magor's photomontage associates the passivity of Brancusi's beautiful head with a space for elaborating a practice, a studio—as she says, being slow is a method, a different pace for thinking, moving, and producing, and incidentally, a way to deal with the brutality of the art market.

This seminar will take "sleep" as a ground to explore art practice through the way it is linked to different kinds of awakening and to the possibility of developing multiple nuances of *attention*, as well as the part played by the body, the *soma*, in the artist's experiments and projects. Alternation and porosities between sleep and awakening discretely shape our lives. Stating that art embodies and renews awareness, we will explore the working process and ask ourselves *what* is at work in the studio while we are working.

Biological rhythms of activity and rest have a social and political history. Indeed, both the duration and structure of sleep have been governed by a succession of norms. Jonathan Crary's book, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, details the political stakes attached to this supposedly unexploitable moment. Roger Ekirch, by researching segmented sleep in preindustrial societies, has excavated the long-term politics of sleep and the invention of insomnia—initiating what are now called *sleep studies*. Modernity wants the body to be "recycled" overnight. The contemporary world cultivates and exploits the ideology of sleep disorders. Meanwhile, the most dispossessed among us, in metropolises the world over, sleep outside.

Falling asleep remains a resistance: to the principles of blind exploitation that rule the planet, to permanent solicitations of commercialised exchanges—an escape—to socialisation and its orders, to the brutality of the real, and sometimes it is a luxury.

Art sometimes settles some reactivation of sleep, some hallucinatory experience, by imbedding the viewer's body into montages of sound, visual mirages, and their woven narratives, like in the cinema projection theatre and the black cube today. We'll question experimental practices addressing more directly a *somatic* regime that stresses our proximity with the other living organisms on the planet. Moreover, they emphasise a key notion of anthropology today by contesting the opposition between nature and humans, denying the human species the ownership of the planet, as in the approaches opened by Viveiros de Castro or Philippe Descola. The daily cycle of rest is our intimate winter, when we are most in phase with our planet rhythms and those of other species, as well as with the unknown that we contain. Within this contradiction, some forces perhaps remain.

As sleep engenders various degrees of presence, making our consciousness oscillate among emotions, facts, sensations forgotten or repressed, hallucination and invention, we will consider it as a life process, a studio in our head and body, a somatic entry in the living.

Introduction to 3D Animation with Maya
Advanced 3D-modelling course
Optional MFA level course
Credits: 12
Teachers: Youngjae Lih
Margot Edström

Participants:
Anne Sofie Djernis
Hauge í Gongini Djernis
Ida Brockmann
Klara Paulin-Rosell
Loke Berg
Solvej Heise Jakobsen
Sturla Magnússon
Zsófia Boda

This course introduces students to the major features of Maya: modelling, animation, texture, lighting, rendering, rigging, and popular workflow. Concepts are quickly reviewed and explained and then demonstrated using Maya at an advanced level. Students will gain proficiency by following class examples as well as creating projects and exercises. The coursework is designed to make sure the student is exposed to all relevant aspects of CG creation with Maya with an eye toward giving the student a base foundation from which to explore and expand.

BFA Courses

Hannah Arendt—Being a Citizen
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 15
Teacher: Gertrud Sandqvist

Participants:
Adam Ravn
Alice Ryne
Andrea Sitara Gran
Anne Sofie Djernis
Benedikte Nøstvik Eide
Carin Castegren
Cecilie Kappel
Cornelia Hermansson
Jelena Pajić
Karolina Bergman Engman
Klara Paulin-Rosell
Loke Berg
My Sjöberg
Othilia Leth
Stella Sieber

"If I survive, I know that I will have to break with the aroma of those essential years, silently reject (not repress) my treasure."
—French poet and member of the Resistance, René Char, quoted by Hannah Arendt, preface of *Between Past and Future*, 1961

To Hannah Arendt, real life begins only as a citizen, when you are able to participate in public life, or public happiness, as she is quoting the American founding fathers. How come? Why is it so important to become a citizen and participate in public life? One could start by asking all the undocumented refugees in Europe, stateless people, like Hannah Arendt herself, who coined the term statelessness while still being stateless herself.

Hannah Arendt, the philosopher and political thinker who celebrated public life, was also an intensely shy person who defended the private as the necessary counterpart to the public.

How does she think around these terms, the public and the private?

How does she differentiate between truth and facts in politics—and why?

How did she understand *The Human Condition*?

What does it mean to be a citizen?

We'll read and discuss texts from *The Origins of Totalitarianism, Truth and Politics*, and her magnum opus, *The Human Condition*. We will also connect to Joakim Sandqvist's course on public art.

Art in the Public Sphere
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 7.5
Teacher: Joakim Sandqvist

Participants:
Alicia Gonzalez
Andrea Sitara Gran
Chiara Salmini
Gunvor Lind Balslev
Isis Lindskog
Kristyan Nicholson
Lavinia Samson
Mads Skarsteen
Noah von Hauswolff
Sebastian Gabriel Nord

"The external power that deprives man of the freedom *to communicate his thoughts publicly deprives him at the same time of his freedom to think."*
—Hannah Arendt reciting Immanuel Kant in *Between Past and Future* (1961)

Through a series of seminars, we will work out a theoretical ground for thinking about what it means to be working with art in a public space. We will mainly focus on what is called "public art," but not exclusively, as most exhibitions take place in a public context.

First, we will have to figure out what public space or the public sphere is, and in what time and context it was established. To do this, we will read Jürgen Habermas's seminal text *The Public Sphere*, as well as Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*.

Through reading Miwon Kwon's *One Place after Another*, we will consider site-specificity as something spatial, geographical, social, and discursive. To what degree can a work embrace or disregard its site-specificity or context? What can be gained from site- or context-specificity, and what can be lost?

The course will start with a joint seminar with Gertrud Sandqvist's course on Hannah Arendt.

Performance Workshop—Creative Processes
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 3
Teacher: LILITH
(Elin Lundgren and Petter Pettersson)

Participants:
Juju Bento
Chiara Salmini
Friedel Weiser
Sebastian Gabriel Nord
Siri Hammarén

A two-week performance workshop during which we will examine the creative process. You will work on several smaller performances in groups and independently, which we will analyse and discuss together.

Topics and questions covered during the workshop:
How do you create the foundation for a creative process?

The different phases of the creative process: from concept work to display

How do you make decisions in the process, what to keep and what to leave?

When is the work ready to be shown?

How do you create a favourable platform/ base to operate from?

Welding
Credits: 0
Teacher: Ariel Alaniz

Participants:
Juju Bento
Benedikte Nøstvik Eide
Daniele Di Girolamo
Ida Brockmann
Jonathan Bue Plauborg Rasmussen
Sara Andreasson

Through this course, you will gain knowledge about different welding techniques such as MIG and gas welding as well as information about the security regulations for the different techniques. After the course you will receive a "driver's license" that allows you to work on your own with the welding equipment.

Ceramics/Keramik
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 6
Teacher: Margit Brundin

Participants:
Felix Schéele
Mads Skarsteen
Noah von Hauswolff
Sebastian Gabriel Nord
Lavinia Samson
Jens Alfred Raahauge

This course is intended as an introduction to working with clay and ceramic materials, dealing with different techniques, and the stages in the process leading to a final object.

The course consists of three days of workshops over four weeks. The content will be teaching, shorter exercises, as well as individual work and individual tutoring during the process. We will work with stoneware and stoneware glazes.

What Is Practice—
What Do We Need to Know?
What Can We Do?
Optional BFA-level course
Credits: 0
Teacher: Joachim Koester,
with guest lecturer Joakim Sandqvist

Participants:
Adam Ravn
Alice Ryne
Amanda Moberg
Ana Beatriz Miguel Neto
Juju Bento
Andrea Sitara Gran
Anne Sofie Djernis
Anton Kai
Astta Nielsen
Benedikte Nøstvik Eide
Carin Castegren
Cecilie Kappel
Cornelia Hermansson
Djoana Gueorguieva
Felix Christiansson
Felix Schéele
Friedel Weiser
Gunvor Lind Balslev
Hannes Östlund
Ida Brockmann
Irene Kaltenborn
Isis Lindskog
Jens Alfred Raahauge
Klara Paulin-Rosell
Kristyan Nicholson
Lavinia Samson
Mads Skarsteen
Maia Torp Neergaard
Marcus Wallström
Mette Riise
My Sjöberg
Noah von Hauswolff
Sebastian Gabriel Nord
Sigrid Soomus

Most often, artists make a living by multiple means: exhibition fees, commissions, public works, grants, sales, teaching, or odd jobs. It's a marginal economy and complicated, since it involves many different interactions and business-like relationships.

Over the years, I've been approached by many former students, asking the same questions again and again: What happens when you sell an artwork, and what if it's a video or another editioned artwork? What is an edition typically, how should it be priced, and how do you make a certificate? How do you work with galleries, and is it important to work with galleries or not? (There are many myths and misconceptions about this.) How do you work with institutions and other art venues, how do you handle a budget and what to expect when it comes to the exhibition fee? And what about the VAT, is it better not to bother? What are the advantages of starting your own company, or does it make more sense to join organisations like KKArt? Is it a problem if someone infringes your copyright? And why do artists deliberately break the law, by infringing on somebody else's copyright?

Over three sessions of two hours, we will address these questions (and many more). There will be exercises, discussions, and games, and hopefully we will come out with a better understanding, but also a more hopeful mindset towards the precarious time that follows art school when you try to make a living as an artist.

Documenting Your Artworks
Mandatory for BFA2, MFA
Credits: 6
Teachers: Youngjae Lih
Johan Österholm

Participants:
Adam Ravn
Andrea Sitara Gran
Chiara Salmini
Hauge Djernis
Isis Lindskog
Jelena Pajic
Sebastian Gabriel Nord
Solvej Jakobsen
Sturla Magnusson
Zsófia Boda
Alice Ryne
Amanda Moberg
Juju Bento
Anne Sofie Djernis
Anton Kai
Carin Maria Alegre
Celeste Arnstedt
Cornelia Hermansson
Ida Brockmann
Irene Kaltenborn
Karolina Bergman Engman
My Sjöberg
Oda Olsson Haugerud

The aim of this course is to introduce photographic and digital technique, and to give the appropriate knowledge to the participants to allow them to document their own work.

Photo studio: We will go through "general" camera settings, how to use a grey card, light settings on flat and three-dimensional objects, discuss common obstacles and how to overcome them.

To prepare for photographing installation views, we will discuss natural light vs portable studio light and look at examples from each. We will also document work in motion and reflective works.

Computer room: We will look into how to get a good digital workflow; screen calibration; Photoshop editing and RAW-file processing; correcting exposure, white balance, and lens distortion; merging images with different exposures and removing unwanted objects like dirt from the floor and walls, emergency signs, etc.; straightening lines; creating a seamless sequence of images.

The purpose of the 3D-rendering class in the second week is to prepare students to use rendering tools (SketchUp/Maya) for model building to flesh out ideas and present their works in a timely manner, use V-Ray for SketchUp or Arnold for Maya to create renderings with proper lighting and photorealism. Participants will also learn to use rendering-tool layouts to create presentations including the renders, floor plans, sections, and elevations in an organised manner. Students are expected to take notes, review the videos, and practise the instructions given in class. It is the students' responsibility to further look into subjects that will be touched upon in class. These include but are not limited to documentation, lighting, and digital-space design.

Critical Animal Studies:
Animals in Society, Culture, and the Media
Optional BFA level course
Credits: 7.5
Teachers: Eva Marie Lindahl
Tobias Linné
Naja Yndal-Olsen
Lena Lidström
Maria Ruiz Carreras
Chi-Lan Song

Participants:
Adam Ravn
Chiara Salmini
Hauge í Gongini Djernis
Irene Kaltenborn
Maria Nadia Nour Nielsen
Stella Sieber

What is speciesism and how does it intersect with racism and sexism? What ideas and developments in modernity have made large-scale animal production and its globalisation possible? What place do animals have in struggles for social justice and change? Animals figure in human society and culture in multiple ways, while frequently being marginalised or reduced to commodities, production units, status symbols, and tools. This course offers a critical exploration of how a shifting economic, scientific, political, and media-shaped landscape assigns various roles and values to animals in contemporary Western society, and the consequences for living conditions of animals and humans alike. The course integrates innovative critical animal studies research from a range of areas such as sociology, media and communication studies, philosophy, cultural studies, geography, gender studies, and critical race studies.

Module 3
Credits: 15
Teachers: Verina Gfader
Lucy Cotter
Lea Porsager

Participants: Oleg Matrokhin
Line Kallmayer
Tjelle Esrom Raunkjaer
Ida Brottmann

Module 3 consists of individual preparation for artistic research, and preparation towards the individual seminars in *Module 4*

Closely connected to singular research, the series of seminars is coordinated and conducted by the individual MFAAR students, to gain the specialisation required to conduct research on a high international level. Guest speakers–experts in the field are chosen and invited by the students on the basis of the very specific research question-s the students are concerned with and working on. The seminars' main aim is to being thoroughly trained to develop, stage and document discourse from within one's own field. The seminars equally foster networking and enable connections to fellow researchers close to one's interests.

The MFAAR1 students will be integrated in this year's MFAAR2 seminar in the fall 2022–3 as participant yet their own sessions will take place during spring. This participation of the MFAAR1 is most fruitful to get insight into more developed MFAAR projects and studies, hence providing a close opportunity to learn from the other students and get inspired, and equally challenged, by them as they progress toward PhD research. The process of shaping up one's own artistic research is singular by nature, and possibilities to get a glimpse of how other artists researchers go about it, supports the MFAAR1's own processing of visual thinking in profound and nourishing ways.

Module 3 includes a two-day seminar with artist and researcher **Dr Lucy Cotter**, author of *Reclaiming Artistic Research*.

The spring semester (*Module 3*) includes an exhibition visit to Louisiana (or other relevant exhibition venue), led by Verina Gfader.

There will also be a session on art/theory (making–thinking–plotting) with former PhD candidate at the Academy, **Dr Lea Porsager**, who will present her/his research project.

Module 4
Credits: 15

Participants: Line Kallmayer
Tjelle Esrom Raunkjaer
Ida Brottmann

Module 4 is largely dedicated to the individual seminars, which are a core element in the programme. Following from above and to underline, the students are guided and trained toward staging individual seminars with guest speakers–experts in the field from within their own research field, and in particular with regard to singular research question-s they are trying to grasp and understand. The outcome/harvests of the seminars shall form a fundamental element in the exam. And part of this process around the seminars and their particular epistemologies is hence also to consider documentation and publication of discourse/a life event.

Essentially, the role of the students is to organise individual one day seminars with an expert in their respective research fields.

Throughout the year, courses-seminars may include the MFAAR1&2's participation in 50% and 75% seminars in the PhD group if there is a candidate ready for this stage.

The seminars take place in the Mazetti lecture room, starting at 10am. No prior preparation required, so for the MFAAR it's to follow the seminars only.

This participation in selected PhD seminars is crucial in getting a first glimpse of the developing knowledges (individually and collectively, from within a communal spirit) that emerge of and from within that concept of Art Research, considered as a Visual Thinking –and that is here discussed in the context of an actual PhD research project in progress.

Part of the larger engagement is the learning of certain responsibilities that Phd Research requires, as well as acquiring self-criticality of one's own making-thinking-researching (in the case of the MFAAR close to entering PhD studies). Under this umbrella, a focus on artistic methodologies, vocabularies, and research aesthetics is implicit.

The shared sessions link PhD level and MFAAR level in the Academy, hence fostering communication and exchange between artists researchers across two different programmes. The sessions hence provide context and condition for the MFAAR to start understanding both the connections and interrelations between, and the mutual trajectories across these distinct studies and 'levels of knowledges.' It is of necessity that the students will adapt a way of becoming part of the smaller research community at the Academy, before they go off in different directions.

Text
Credits: 15
Teacher: Verina Gfader

Participants: Oleg Matrohkin

The degree project consists of a joint exhibition where the individual project is presented. A longer individual text with proposals for research projects with research question and timetable is also required.

Text-textual element exam work.
A 4–pages formalised Research proposal including research question, summary of project and timeline.

Dissertation/essay including bibliography = a 15–pages deeper analysis of the research project. The students need to connect to the questions raised in their seminars.

The textual element of the Exam work in particular demonstrates knowledge and understanding in the main field of study, including both broad knowledge of the field and a substantial degree of specialised knowledge in areas of the field as well as specialised insight into current research and development work; in addition, what needs demonstrating is a familiarity with methods and processes for dealing with complex phenomena, issues and situations in the field.

It is a necessity for the students to evidence their understanding of and capacity for articulating their academic skills. Overall, key is the conscious handling of the way Artistic Research/ artistic knowledge (in its experimental, individualised nature) is carried out and implemented as a Visual Thinking precisely in the singular instances. (For example, if a more creative writing is crucial to a specific project, this shall be emphasised and argued for in a section on methodologies.)

Individual project as part of a joint exhibition.
Presentation of individual practice by way of a joint exhibition at Inter Arts Centre (IAC), Malmö.

The individual project of the Exam work forms the second fundamental contribution and outcome of the MFAAR two-year full-time studies. At the very core sits the art practice from within which the research question–s, and further the research proposal, develop–s, and which also proofs that the student has developed a singular and promising 'signature.'

Toward undertaking the PhD, the artistic work is both object and method (in line with the PhD). Artistic competence is required to operate in an international context.

Current and graduating students

Bachelor of Fine Arts—Year 1
Mads Skarsteen Andersen
Loke Berg
Gunvor Lind Balslev
Benedikte Nøstvik Eide
Alicia Gonzalez
Noah von Hausswolff
Cecilie Kappel
Othilia Hoby Leth
Klara Paulin–Rosell
Lavinia Samson
Felix Schéele

Bachelor of Fine Arts—Year 2
Zsófia Boda
Hauge Djernis Exchange student
Andrea Sitara Gran
Siri Hammarén
Solvej Heise Jakobsen
Isis Lindskog
Malthe Jos Lundquist
Sturla Magnússon
Sebastian Gabriel Nord
Jelena Pajic
Chiara Salmini
Friedel Weiser

Bachelor of Fine Arts—Year 3
Felix Christiansson
Zixin Gu Exchange student
Pernille Emilia Kjær
Cecilie Mark
Billie Meiniche
Astta Nielsen
Maria Nadia Nour Nielsen
Sigrid Soomus
Jonathan Bue Plauborg Rasmussen
Leonard Rode Exchange student
Marcus Wallström
Vigga Heisselberg Wæhrens
Hannes Östlund

Master of Fine Arts—Year 1
Celeste Arnstedt
Juju Bento
Ida Brockmann
Carin Alegre Castegren
Anne Sofie Djernis
Karolina Bergman Engman
Oda Haugerud
Cornelia Hermansson
Irene Kaltenborn
Amanda Moberg
Anton Kai
Kristyan Nicholson
Jens Alfred Raahauge
Alice Ryne
Stella Sieber
My Sjöberg

Master of Fine Arts—Year 2
Sara Andreasson
Oscar Eriksson Furunes
Daniele Di Girolamo
Hjördis Gréta Guðmundsdóttir
Djoana Gueorguieva
Rebecca Jansson
Mette Riise
Grälls Johan Kvarnström
Rosita Kær
Clara Mosconi
Maia Torp Neergaard
Beatriz Neto
Stacey de Voe
Amin Zouiten

Master of Artistic Research—Year 1
Ida Brottmann
Line Kallmayer
Tjelle Esrom Raunkjær

Master of Artistic Research—Year 2
Oleg Matrohkin

PhD Candidates
Sven Augustijnen
Yael Bartana
Jürgen Bock
Bouchra Khalili
Jacob Korczynski
Emily Wardill

Master of Fine Arts—Year 2

Sara Andreasson
Oscar Eriksson Furunes
Daniele Di Girolamo
Hjördis Gréta Guðmundsdóttir
Djoana Gueorguieva
Rebecca Jansson
Mette Riise
Gränlls Johan Kvarnström
Rosita Kær
Clara Mosconi
Maia Torp Neergaard
Beatriz Neto
Stacey de Voe
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Bachelor of Fine Arts—Year 3

Felix Christiansson
Pernille Emilia Kjær
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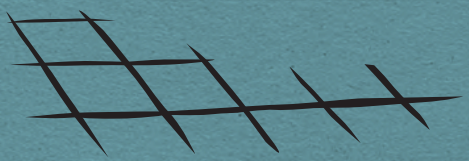
Jacob Korczynski
Emily Wardill



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