

## Theresa Traore Dahlberg, *Beckers Art Award 2019*

The allure of shadow play, casted by springs of light streaming in from a passage resting ahead, meets the visitor upon entering an extended corridor serving as a transitional space. To speak of the symbolic significance of a physical transit in Theresa Traore Dahlberg's exhibition at Färgfabriken, encompassing the entirety of its 900 m<sup>2</sup> exhibition room, is to brush on a pivotal theme here which is resonant with our times and is marked by that of global shifts in a multitude of domains currently reshaping the world. The passage in question here is the install of *Copper and Cotton* (2018), a work that has come to signify the artist to date and marks the beginning and end of what the audience has been acquainted to already, after which point the exhibition takes new leaps forward in her artistic practice. At immediate glance, the work standing four meters tall vertically as a paneled-wall, sees the juxtaposing union between hard-surfaced and industrially produced circuit cards and organic materials in the form of yarns of cotton interweaving through the panels and out into the room. Probing the history of the materials, they are essentially joined together on the account of both representing something "unwanted", ultimately being discarded materials. In the case of the circuit cards they make for redundant outtakes from the last batches of their production in Sweden that is being terminated at the hands of capitalist and economic incentives and realities that equalize in industrial moves to other geographic regions of the world. The cotton which is seated in a realm that is traditionally related to as feminine and domestic tells here a universally poignant and centuries-old story about the persecution of women that has always taxed the human condition, while ringing true still in 2019. The cotton is spun by women, who following the exclusion from society in her father's native Burkina Faso based on accusations of witchery, have since been brought into a collective and social context through labour initiatives. A reminder is brought forth here of the metaphysical notion that the objects and materials that surround us too possess "a life", vested into them by the human presence presiding over them over time. The narratives that they become bearers of might even reveal themselves varyingly with visible imprints, as is the case with the discarded circuit-cards which factory workers have bestowed their own engraved initials. *Copper and Cotton* illustrates a merger of two geographically-distanced sites in the world which on a personal note make part of the artist's identity, having grown up between both, and reflects a moment in time where the far outposts of the world are grower increasingly closer together. The circuit cards reappear yet again in a new series of work unveiled at Färgfabriken, masked in filters of blue which render an aesthetical transformation towards a futuristic appearance. Presented in slope-angled structural formations, the circuit cards point upwards towards the ceiling of the room. It's a commanding display in disposition and yet aptly poetic, appearing to be telling you to look beyond the thresholds of the already known and to open yourself up to the potentials and possibilities of the future. For the exhibition, Theresa Traore Dahlberg also explores a notion from the past by bringing back to light a fixture from Burkina Faso's cultural-history; her father Seydou Richard Traore-Seydoni's pioneering life's work of setting grounds for Burkina Faso's own

musical recording industry. To speak of “unboxing” its history for the exhibition is more than merely metaphoric in so far as literally being what had to be done, with the her finding that what once used to be the infrastructure of an entire industry up until recently had been resorted to dust and shambles in storage. Intersecting with the story of a national legacy is also a highly personal family-narrative where the artist speaks of a near bitter-sweet sentiment towards her father’s musical involvement during her formative years. She compares his work to that of something bearing a physical embodiment; another family-member or child taking precedence over the rest. Opening on the same day as the exhibition at Färgfabriken, in cross-national parallel conjunction, is a grand retrospective survey, *Seydoni Pionnier de l’industrie musicale au Burkina*, at the Musée national du Burkina Faso in Ouagadougou which examines the history of the domestic musical industry. Theresa Traore Dahlberg uses her carte-blanche at Färgfabriken to create a physical and mediated link between the two museums, by extending the premises of Färgfabriken through a projection of the museum room in Ouagadougou into the very room in Liljeholmen. The exhibition in Ouagadougou chronicles an archival and ongoing restoration process of a musical body of work that the visitor is invited to take part in, through an interactive installation of a back catalogue of cassette tapes and music videos screened at Färgfabriken. It’s a unique moment, dissolving national boundaries and the delineation of tangible space. If the stories we tell and want to pass on through generations is left at the behest of our own will and efforts to write, record and document them, then the fallibility of memory and time, subtly begins to make itself known amid the various displays found front and center.

**Ashik Zaman**