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A journal about contemporary art

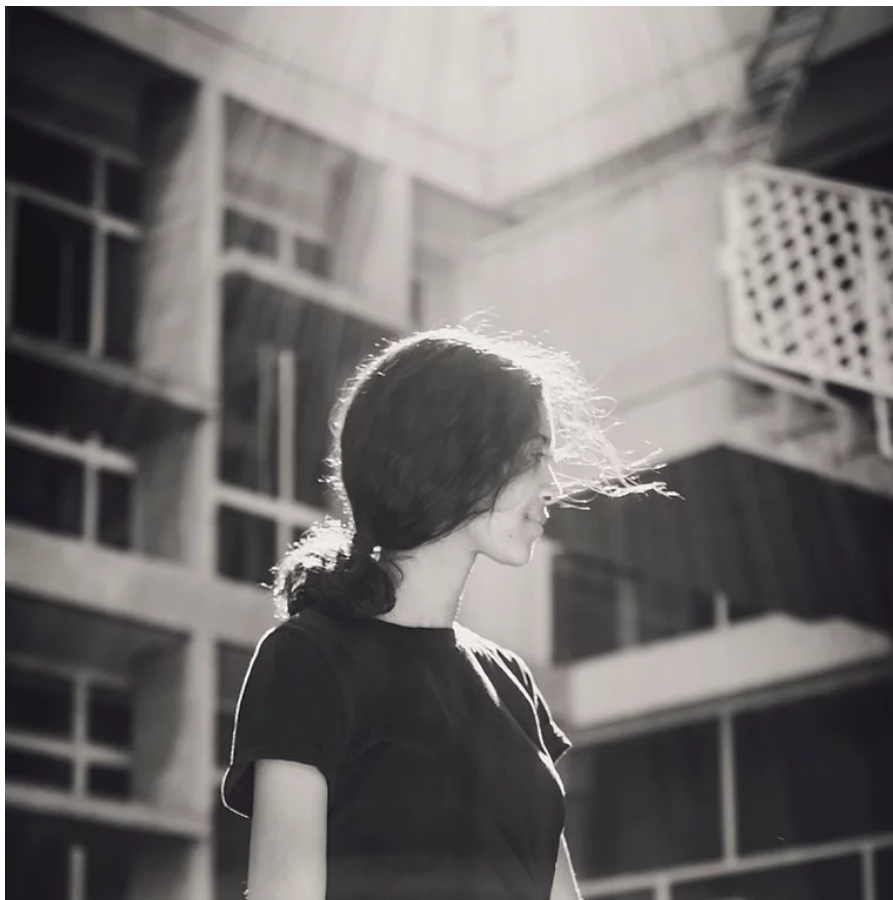
HOME ABOUT PROJECTS



Future Watch Times Four

March 6, 2018

Theresa Traore Dahlberg, Susanna Jablonski, Lap-See Lam and Liva Isakson Lundin make four very compelling artists whose work has stuck on our mind since first experiencing it. We strongly believe in the great artistic command founding their respective work, and are excited to learn about busy and exciting times lying ahead for all four this year.



Theresa Traore Dahlberg

C-P: It appears that you have assumed dual artistic identities as filmmaker and artist. Since the recent release of *Ouaga Girls*, which opened to great critical acclaim, you have been gaining renown as a filmmaker. Following your prior background in film, what was your experience of studying art at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm?

T.T.D: Coming from a background in film, I used the time mainly to work with other materials. Although the process is different, it is my own thoughts, ideas, fears and wonders in the end. I was quite stressed in my final year, as it felt like time was running out while I still had so many ideas. Since I had worked a lot before going there, I knew that all the space, workshops and time were a privilege that came with a due date.

C-P: Tell us about the large-scale sculptural installation *Copper and Cotton* that you presented at the spring degree exhibition last year.

T.T.D: It's a 12-meter sculpture made out of leftover circuit cards in copper and wool spun by excluded women accused of witchery. My thoughts circled around the collective, such as collective exclusion, the power that can come out of people organising themselves and collective reflection. To me, the materials are seductive and their history touches upon subjects that integrate the past, present, local and global.



C-P: The common denominator between your film works to date is that the narratives derive from places in Africa, while bringing the realities of female protagonists to the fore in light of the patriarchal expectations of women. *Taxi Sister* follows one of the very few female taxi drivers in Dakar, Senegal, and *Ouaga Girls* a group of female car-mechanic students in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Do stories come to you organically or do you set out to find poignant ones to tell?

T.T.D: They come organically and usually reflect where I am at that point in my life. I never know what my next work will be, since I cannot predict the future. I just finished *Ouaga Girls* and *The Ambassador's Wife*, and everyone is already asking me what my next film will be. I am aware that this would be a good time to dive into new ideas, but I don't rush into things.



C-P: You've described your personal experience filming *The Ambassador's Wife* as "complex" based on the power structures and notions of post-colonialism omnipresent in the narrative. Looking back at it now, what are a few things that comes to mind that stayed with you after the project was completed.

T.T.D: It was interesting to hear and see in discussions after the film was completed how people had experienced completely different films. What you see, says a lot about what you don't see.



C-P: What is in store for you in 2018?

T.T.D: Ouaga Girls will be released in cinemas all over France this spring and will keep travelling the world for festival screenings. I just found out that I will exhibit new works – sculptures – at OFF Biennale Cairo, which I am greatly looking forward to!

Image credits:

- 1) Portrait by Elise Ortiou Champion of Theresa Traore Dahlberg
- 2) Ouagadougou, copper and cotton (2017)
- 3) The Ambassador's Wife (16 minutes)
- 4) White material (2017)



Liva Isakson Lundin

C-P: How would you reflect on your time since graduating from the Royal Institute of Art?

L.I.L.: After I graduated in spring 2016, I took some necessary time to think, sketch and find new materials and points of departures. I recently showed a group of sculptures with glass and silicone for the two-person exhibition *Elaster*. I am continuing to explore these two materials that have introduced me to new directions in my work. Glass has a stiff surface in contrast to the bendable steel that I am used to, resulting in a much more angular, almost graphical expression. Silicone allows me to work with transparency and depth with the help of colour. “Everything in production is much more complicated now, since I generally work with big sculptures and installations that are demanding in terms of space and materials. I am still figuring out how to work without the opportunities afforded to you at art school in terms of equipment and big studio rooms. However, I’ve got better at organising projects.



C-P: There is an evident sense of physicality in most of your body of work to date. On that note, how would you describe your own studio practice?

L.I.L.: elaborate my ideas by working in parallel with sketches, experiments, models and writing. I follow all the clues I can find, letting the sculptures crystallise from the practical process. I try to keep an open mind all the time, since things that by coincidence happen on the side of the focus often lead to new projects. It is like a chain of reactions.

The components of my installations take turns shaping, stabilising and deforming each other, creating tense encounters that often relate to bodily experiences like weight, strength or balance. Working initially with steel, I realised how it has its own strength and will. I found a resistance to my sense of control over the sculpting process that intrigued me. I still work with it, both by itself and in combination with, for example, latex. Latex is an organic, very fragile-looking material that is super-elastic and strong. It is very different from steel, but both of these materials have a potential inherent movement that can be used to create tension.



C-P: As a sculptor, what are your ideas on spatiality in the way you approach a room?

L.I.L.: I usually see my sculptures as something going on in, and interacting with, a room, rather than something merely on display. The exhibition can, for example, be a measurement of power between the room and the material, where I am letting the relationship between the two vary. It's a situation that can shift between intimacy, control, reliability and daring. I want the insecurity from my experiment-based process to stay intact during an exhibition.

When installing an artwork I also think a lot about how you can move in the room and what happens to the work when you do that. That movement can create new shapes, angles or reflections of importance. For me, the work is never finished until it has been installed somewhere. Sometimes the permanent parts of the room help maintain the shapes of the sculptures.



C-P: What lies ahead for you in 2018?

L.I.L.: I am in full production mode for rgw Market Art Fair at Liljevalchs in Stockholm, where I will show with Wetterling Gallery. I am also working on a solo exhibition at Ahlbergshallen in Östersund that will open during spring. Later in the year, I will take part in an exhibition at Aguelimuseet in Sala, and I will start the fall with a solo exhibition at Wetterling Gallery. After that, I will go on a scholarship journey with the Royal Academy of Arts to Rome to get some new inspiration.

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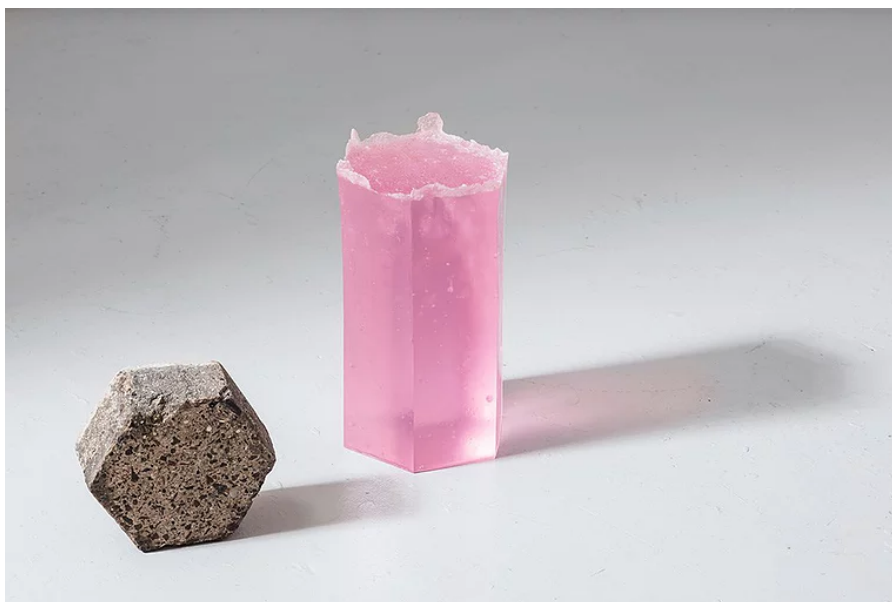
- 1) Portrait courtesy the artist
- 2) Inwards (2016), steel and latex; photograph by Jean-Baptiste Béranger. Courtesy of Wetterling Gallery
- 3) Stimuli (2016), spring steel and gelatin; photograph by Jean-Baptiste Béranger. Courtesy of Wetterling Gallery.
- 4) Peel, Shear, Tensile (2017), Silicone, glass and mdf; photograph by Liva Isakson Lundin.



Susanna Jablonski

C-P: Your presentation at the spring degree exhibition of the Royal Institute of Art last year was so delectable. In what was a giant space – Tomtebodan, Stockholm’s former mail terminal – it appeared to confine a sculptural world of its own, coming across as a dense exhibition in a considerably small amount of space. How did you approach it?

S,J: I like to let the space decide how, and sometimes what, I will show – to let the room make an impression on the work, as well as the work on the room. At Tomtebodan, I wanted to use one of the tall, unfinished concrete walls by a restroom. I built a floor – a stage, you could say – mirroring the wall like a fold-down bed, in order to create a defined space for my sculptures. Some of them got to rest on the light fixtures, others climbed up the walls.



C-P: As a sculptor, what is your studio process like?

SJ: I sketch sculptures and videos over and over again and think about them, plan them, and then make them. I have many different types of studio processes that goes on simultaneously. That doesn't stop when I leave the studio, partly because I'm working in so many different materials and mediums. One day of work can consist of anything from casting in glass, testing asphalt samples, arranging found objects, editing sound or video, reading, making small clay sculptures, or having a few people helping me making a large sculpture in some fragile and/or heavy material.

These days I think a lot about entropy, geology, ghosts and various super slow movements; also threshold moments and other in-betweens, different ways of mourning and making sense of the world. I've been thinking a lot about hospitality and care in relation to art. Most of my work comes to me in that moment when I'm about to wake up from a nap, when the furniture and sounds of the room blend with my dreams. Objects, images, and sounds pass in and out of recognition – unfamiliar yet familiar shapes and visceral experiences that I don't yet have a spoken language for.



C-P: Tell me more about the materials you engage and work with in your practice as a sculptor. You have a most canny ability to juxtapose seemingly very disparate elements together which I find so compelling.

SJ: I work with precarious materials – substances that are on the verge or at the limit of what they're capable of sustaining. Materialities and objects are constantly present in how I experience the world. I don't think so much about how to use them in sculpture-making necessarily, but more about how they relate to my body, their surroundings, temperature and entropy, what value they have been given at different times, their origin, their role in written history and contemporary life.

When a form or substance stays in my mind for a long time it usually makes its way into my studio and starts to exist, transform, and blend with the other materials and narratives going on in there at the time. I usually work with materials that have some sort of pre-established value, or function, or that are part of a larger system. Often paper towels, glass, or stone. And

when I work with them I want the materials to shift slightly, and start working together, and create new ways of being experienced.



C-P: With *Slow Wave*, your project with William Rickman, the breadth of your practice also extends to music. The sound is always so ethereal and evocative. Do you distinguish your sculptural and musical practices as vastly different ventures?

S-J: I don't distinguish anything that is or has been part of me as being very different from other parts, really. I tend to include everything in everything, you could say. Music is great for narratives and lately I've been making sound or music for my sculptures.

C-P: *Slow Wave* has had a long-term collaboration with visual artist Santiago Mostyn, as seen through his fantastic video work *Delay*, presented at Moderna Museet in 2016 in the exhibition *The New Human*. What is this collaborative process with him like?

S-J: Santiago and I are usually very engaged in each other's projects, and the collaboration with *Slow Wave* is an ongoing exchange of thoughts. With *Delay*, the song came first, but what inspired part of it was actually conversations on Skype with Santiago.



C-P: Lastly, what's next for you in 2018?

S-J: I'm working on an artistic research project called *The Gender of Sound* with one of my favourite artists, Cara Tolmie. The title comes from Anne Carson's pivotal text of the same name and will culminate in a multifaceted music, art and performance event that presents some of our findings. I'm also preparing for two exhibitions that will take place later in the spring – one solo exhibition at Marabouparken, and another one at Erik Nordenhake Gallery, where *Slow Wave* has been invited by C-print as curators to exhibit in a gallery context for the first time.

Image credits:

1. Portrait of Susanna Jablonski by visual artist Santiago Mostyn
2. Rebecka (2017), Glass and cobblestone; Photograph by Jean-Baptiste Béranger from *Most Ghosts Hold Grudges*, Galleri Mejan, Stockholm, 2017.
3. Untitled (2017), Asphalt and cherry wood; Photograph by Santiago Mostyn
4. Untitled (2016), Paper towels and aluminium; Photograph by Jean-Baptiste Béranger
5. Installation view Susanna Jablonski MA show, *Most Ghosts Hold Grudges*, Galleri Mejan, Stockholm, 2017

**Lap-See Lam**

C-P: Your artistry appears notably informed by notions of diaspora and your cultural background. In particular, Chinese culinary establishments are brought to the forefront in a thought-provoking and beautiful way. What brings you to these restaurants in your art?

L.S: My parents and grandmother owned a Chinese restaurant for 30 years, and besides them, one can track down our relatives through restaurants all over Sweden. My ambition has never been to write about the Cantonese migration in Sweden, but rather to use the notion of Chinese restaurants as an interface and a metaphor to approach certain questions.

The Chinese restaurant is a trace of a wider global Chinese diaspora – a trace that is both something familiar in our cities, but at the same time holds the identity of ‘the oriental other’. The difference between the local guest and the ‘serving-other’ is a dichotomy that has been central to the creation of this type of business. As a second-generation Canto-Swede, I find myself navigating these cultural in-betweens, with access to both the internal and external gaze.



C-P: With your art it's as though we're seeing something novel, perhaps due to the use of 3D-scanning and 3D-animation in storytelling, to its fullest potential beyond just aesthetical and technical value.

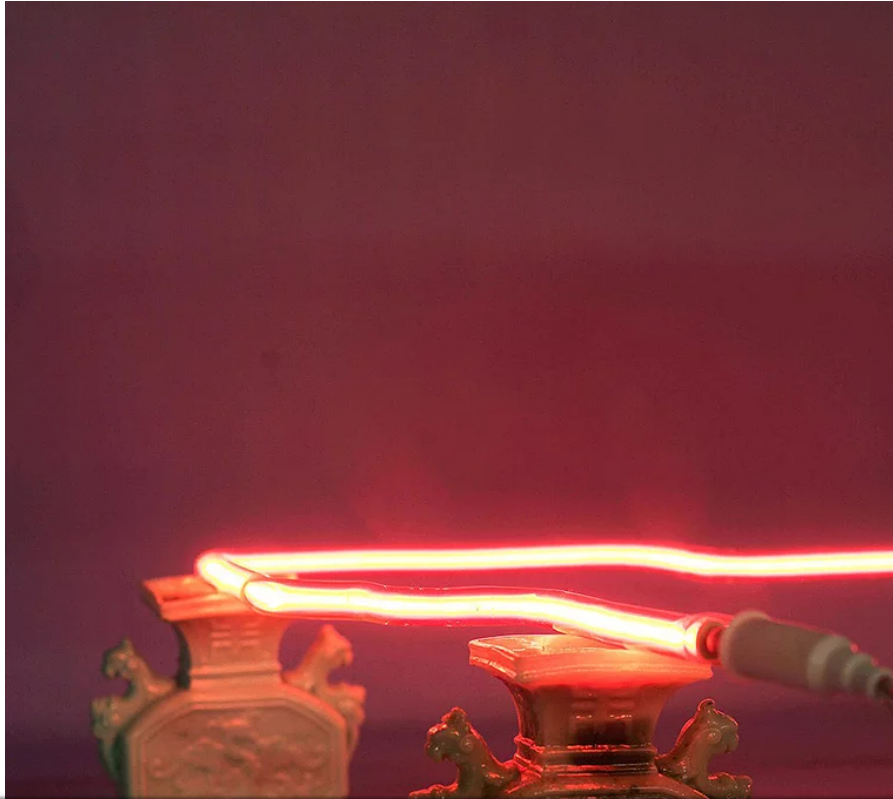
L.S: I try to use the medium that has the potential to immediately reflect the core of the content. With Oriental Travesty I chose laser 3-D scanning, since I knew that this type of rendering, in contrast to a place that in general is considered outdated, would force the viewer to see it in a new light. The 3-D scanner collects huge amounts of point data in the distance between the scanner and object, and these create a three-dimensional surface. Applying a photo on the surface creates the illusion of a three-dimensional environment, a 3-D model. Therefore, the technique itself is based on the mathematics of distance, and reflects the sense of movement and displacement, which I wanted to access early in the process.



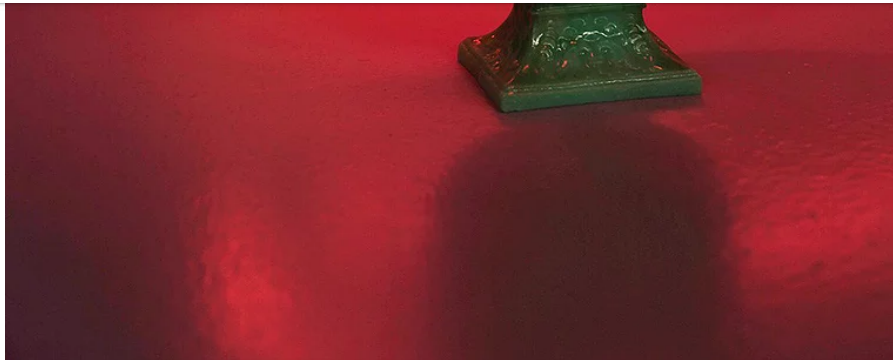
C-P: Mother's Tongue, your recent collaborative art project with filmmaker Wingee Wu, produced by Mossutställningar, presents an app-based experience of visual storytelling. Apps as a platform for art still appear quite ahead of time I would think.

L.S: Our choice to frame the work in an app follows the tradition of tourist-guide apps, where one is guided to discover famous or alternative stories of a city. We used this framework, but turned the gaze around – instead, the viewer is a tourist at the sites, guided by a perspective that has emerged into the shape of a subjective consciousness belonging to the Chinese restaurant, a ghost from the future. What happens if a place of projection suddenly looks back at us?

We wanted to play with the linear time perspective. The first narrative takes place in the past on a site that once was a Chinese restaurant. The second story is one about a former owner that takes place in 2018, in a hybrid Chinese restaurant. The final story, of a grandmother at an old Chinese restaurant that looks like the first ones traditionally did, takes place in 2058. The voice-over narrative follows the logic from past to present, but is interrupted by the dramaturgy of the actual sites. In addition, the work is performed in real time, with your physical experience at the actual sites guided by the spectator from the future.



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C-P: What's in store for you in 2018?

L.S: In March, Olle Norås and I will exhibit at Bonniers Konsthall as the recent recipients of the Maria Bonnier Dahlin award. Also, Wingyee Wu and I are developing Mother's Tongue into a short film.

Image credits:

- 1) Portrait of Lap-See Lam, courtesy the artist
- 2) Oriental Travesty; photograph by Jean-Baptiste Béranger by Lap-See Lam
- 3) Mother's Tongue; photographs by Anna Drvnik by Lap-See Lam
- 4) Mother's Tongue; photographs by Anna Drvnik by Lap-See Lam

This group interview feature originally appeared in Issue 14 of The Forumist, penned by C-print's editor-in-chief.

