

The Useless Mouths

With Sigrid Holmwood, Moa Franzén/Kajsa Wadhia/Tove Salmgren, Django Giambanco, Åsa Norman, Linda Persson, Jannica Sandström

This year, Art Lab Gnesta celebrates 10 years. But instead of summarizing those years, we turn our gaze back many centuries. The exhibition *The Useless Mouths* brings together artworks that suggest other ways of making history and offer opportunities for both resistance, submission and restoration.

The title of the exhibition is borrowed from the play *Les Bouches inutiles*, which takes place in a besieged city in Flanders in the 14th century where the city's ruling men decide to sacrifice women and children as hunger draws ever closer. The play was written by the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir during the Nazi occupation of France in 1943 and has inspired us to reflect our time in another, to explore how historical thinking and free speculation can give us new tools to move forward through time.

In the entrance hall we present Åsa Norman's video work *Mechthild's clothes*: here the medieval mystic Mechthild from Magdeburg is placed in contemporary time when we see a woman performing everyday chores wearing a medieval costume. The work was produced in 2019 in Art Lab Gnesta's residency before the artist's solo exhibition *The Sun Shines Different Depending on the Weather*, which examined a couple of actual and fictional women's strategies for creating space to work and live free from men's control during the 13th century. Next to the video hang elaborated sketches of medieval garments seen from above, like maps of another time. The fragile tissue paper, the plastic beads and the digitally printed fabrics, accentuates the relationship to the bodily experience, something that Mechthild always put in the center of her writings.

Knowledge also exists beyond words, something that is also actualized in the sound work *From a throat of flesh* by Moa Franzén, Tove Salmgren and Kajsa Wadhia. From the small dark room, one can hear roars, humming and humming, sounds that resonate through all of the exhibition rooms. In this work, the artists examine the voice beyond language, and form a polyphony of sounds that have been used to categorize people as barbaric, brutal and hysterical.

A lone foot protrudes from the bag on the woman's back in the painting *Cannibal Peasant*. In Sigrid Holmwood's folk art-inspired paintings and textile prints, the peasant woman is a resistance to ideas about progress in Western modernity. "Peasant" has become a derogatory term in Western European culture, something representing the past. The position and possibilities of the peasant woman changed violently through the witch trials of the 16th and 17th centuries, to make room for the new world and its capitalist order. A patriarchal world where women lost influence over their social position and where their work remained unpaid. Even today, there are still millions of peasants who are in conflict with what modernity has brought with it. Influenced by, among other things, Amerindian traditions, Holmwood allows her artistic work to extend into the production of her own plant pigments and their botanical backgrounds.

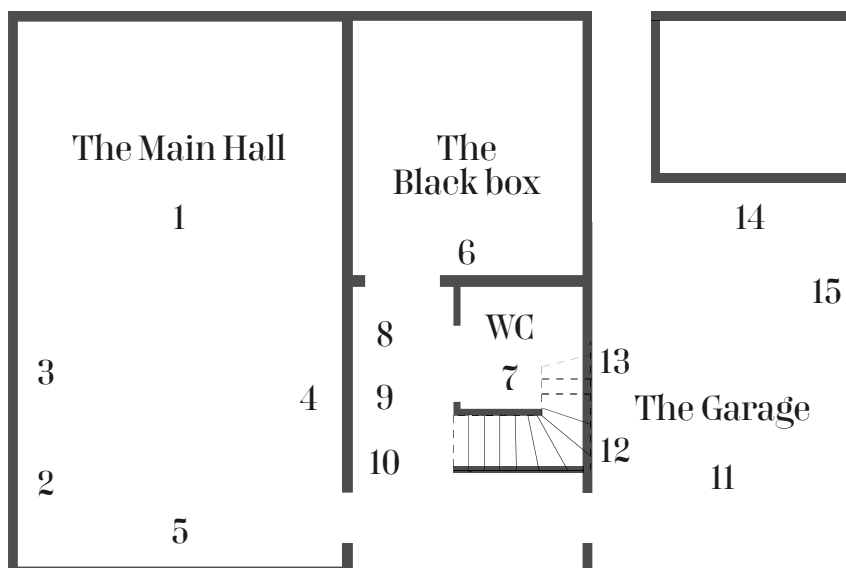
In the main hall rests Django Giambanco's three meters high *Mjukt beskriver hårt* on thick pillows, and seems to want to talk about memory, art and time. The sculpture is a monumental meeting between wool and memory foam, that has been embossed with the help of parts of an older, and harder, relief. Here you can sense a motif of people in draped clothes where some possibly younger characters seem to sit and listen to the older ones, but we never get the whole picture. The work has been put together using materials from the Gotland farm where the artist grew up, both those left by previous owners and materials that are there today.

In her extensive work *To Breathe Through The Bones Of The Dead*, Linda Persson has worked with the memory of the women who were accused, tortured and killed during the witch trials in Småland 1550-1626. Several of the works are made of mouth-blown glass, as in *The Last Breaths* where the shape of the glass is reminiscent of lungs to represent eight of these women's last breaths. In *The Naming*, their names are etched by hand on bright little glass baubles. Ancient symbols recur in the installation, symbols that are said to protect against witchcraft and sorcery, but which the artist has now etched and stamped into the glassworks, as if to protect the accused women. In the accusations, it was often said that these women were in special contact with animals: they had been seen riding naked on a wolf, or evoked crowds of snakes on Sundays instead of visiting the church. Under the glazed plywood where the glass bottles in *The Last Breaths* rest, the porcelain snakes are waiting, as if they were on their way out into the room.

In Jannica Sandström's world of images, women and animals, both the fictional and the more actual, have been intertwined in hybrid bodies that seem to want to expand the understanding of what a human being can be. Usually the pictures are tattooed on to human bodies, but here they are shown in the form of temporary tattoos, for the visitor to use on their own body.

Speculation has guided Art Lab Gnesta since we opened the doors in October 2011, and with its help we have asked questions about the nature of the world, not only about how it is or has been, but also how it could be. At a time when the usefulness of free art is being questioned, we continue to make room for the exploratory, the potential and the speculative. The useless mouths have spoken.

Caroline Malmström, curator



The Main Hall

1. Mjukt beskriver hårt

Django Giambanco, 2020-2021
Wool, memory foam, foam, polyester
300 x 228 x 170 cm

2. Cannibal Peasant

Sigrid Holmwood, 2021
Titanium white, Mayan blue, raw umber, orange earth, buckthorn berry yellow, and green earth in egg tempera on calico printed with brazilwood and madder
194cm x 106cm

3. Our House has been on Fire for Five Hundred Years

Sigrid Holmwood, 2021
Titanium white, cochineal, madder, green earth, raw umber, Maya blue, and buckthorn berry yellow in egg tempera on calico mordant printed with brazilwood and madder
120cm x 120cm

4. Cannibal and Witch Eat the Rich

Sigrid Holmwood, 2021
Titanium White, Mayan Blue, Indigo, Buckthorn berry yellow in egg tempera on calico mordant printed with brazilwood and madder.
90 x 90 cm

5. Bones

Sigrid Holmwood, 2021
Brazilwood and madder printed onto calico
800cm x 96cm

The Black box

6. From a throat of flesh

Moa Franzén, Tove Salmgren och Kajsa Wadhia, 2018
32.43 min
Recorded and mixed by Robin Jonsson.

WC

7. Drawings

Jannica Sandström, 2021

The Entrance

8. Huvudduken

Åsa Norman, 2021
42x59 cm
cotton yarn, silk paper, cardboard and digital print on viscose textile

8. Kjorteln

Åsa Norman, 2021
42x59 cm
cotton yarn, silk paper, cardboard and digital print on viscose textile

8. Manteln

Åsa Norman, 2021
42x59 cm
cotton yarn, silk paper, cardboard and digital print on viscose textile

9. Mechthilds kudde

Åsa Norman, 2019
Installation onto plexi shelf 50 x 50 cm Pearl embroidery. Wool, silk, padding, acrylic and glass beads.

10. Mechthilds kläder

Åsa Norman, 2019
Video, 5 min och 29 sek
Photo and editing: Marius Dybwad Brandrud

The Garage

11. The Last Breaths/the Circle

Linda Persson, 2019
painted plywood, hand blown glass, porcelain snakes

12. Tools for Sorrow

Linda Persson, 2019
7 glazed porcelain objects, 3 porcelain chains with finger hook

13. Witches Womb

Linda Persson, 2019
hand blown glass, metal, black rope

14. The Naming

Linda Persson, 2019
12 handblown and etched glass baubles with opaline, 12 porcelain finger, LED light, shelf

15. Witches Marks

Linda Persson, 2019
hand blown glass, metal, glazed porcelain, synthetic hair

The exhibition is shown 4/9 - 10/10 2021, Fri-Sun at 12-16.

www.artlabgnesta.se

Filmed tour of the exhibition with input by the artist Linda Persson and curator Caroline Malmström is shown on the toilet. Filmed and edited by Emanuel Hallklint.

Curator: Caroline Malmström

Artistic leaders: Signe Johannessen, Caroline Malmström and Erik Rören

Exhibition design and installation: Erik Rören and Mikael Jonasson

Communication: Emanuel Hallklint

Intern: Isabelle Ribe

