

On site

In the secret room of the bee hive, the sun is transformed into food. Contact with the outer world takes place via the alighting board at the hive's entrance. This is where the bees land upon their return from gathering nectar.

Gunilla Bergström takes an interest in rooms. And in growing. And in animals. Her art can smell of hay, shoot sprouts, and form labyrinths. Her pieces often hang or balance, in such a way that also the surrounding air space is activated.

Fly-float is comprised of thin Japanese paper stretched around a u-shaped frame of plywood. It is hanging at eye level in the outer room at the gallery Mors Mössa (Mother's hat) in Gothenburg. As I enter, I am surrounded by white. Or trapped. Most of Gunilla Bergström's pieces carry this dualness of embracing security and fear of suffocation. A paradox built into all in-depth relationships.

Several years ago she found an ad in a mail order catalogue for farmers. It showed something as incredible as a life jacket for newborn and hypothermic little pigs. The idea was for the piglet to be immersed in a bucket of warm water with the life jacket on, until it reached normal body temperature. Gunilla Bergström copied the ad thoroughly in a sketch and framed it in plywood. The life jacket resembles the shape of the *Fly-float* sculpture and at Mors Mössa the two pieces were shown together with another hanging *Fly-float* sculpture in the same shape as the frame around the sketch of the piglet. Another piece at this show is *The Island*. It is comprised of a flat wooden board on wheels upon which a bunch of crocheted shapes, filled with wheat and resembling worms or sprouts, are fighting for space. One of the sprouts is on its way to leave the board. This particular one was watered during the show so that the wheat would start to germinate. Again, the thematic pairs individual/collective, security of belonging/fear of suffocation are activated. What strength is required to coil off from the safe and secure? Ironically, the wheat sprouts that were watered began to mold...

The sketch of the little pig is as much about humans as about pigs. About life and death. Both in an existentialist way and in a very pragmatic way. The piglet is saved in order to live long enough to reach slaughter weight.

Gunilla Bergström grew up on a farm in the county of Sörmland. To her there is no contradiction to take good care of animals and then to slaughter and eat them. It's a natural part of man's existence that we in today's society more and more have come to abandon.

When she exhibited her piece *Ko-kong* ("Cow-coon") in the highly arched Bergrummet (Mountain Room) at Konstepidemin in Gothenburg, the hanging hay-filled containers made of sail cloth resembled slaughtered animal bodies, sand sacks for boxers, big cocoons, or feed bags for giant horses. There was a homey smell from the hay, but at the same time the hanging shapes sent uncomfortable shivers along my spine. Nature is no paradise and Gunilla Bergström doesn't shy away from the horrid.

Her art swings between earthy ground contact and poetic surprises. At the same time as she made *The Island*, with the wheat germs, she was working on *Islands Outdoors*, three lead islands. The light softness of the crocheted piece was posed against the grey heaviness of the lead. These sculptures are also mounted on wheels. Mostly they resemble three little transportable lakes. The marble sculpture *Pinus III* was named after a pine that had grown crooked around a rock at the farm. Also this piece has the light and the heavy built into its shape. Smooth as a baby, it is balancing at the edge of a table in Gunilla Bergström's studio. One pointy end is hanging off the table edge while at the other end another point is aiming toward the ceiling. The middle part is however round and heavy. The stone has a warm lustre but cold blue veins, making me want to cradle it in my arms and rock it – although it seems to be doing quite well on its own. Other stone sculptures she has made resemble tools. They sit well in your hand, can be hung or put on a shaft. At the same time they are unusable.

Gunilla Bergström prefers to work in her studio. It is not very big and most of all – it has a normal size door. This means that she has to calculate carefully and come up with clever puzzle solutions for the large pieces. One person can often carry her sculptures alone. Her pieces are thoughtfully conceived and has an obvious precision that can be achieved only after considerable thought, trial and work. As far as material goes, she has used most everything from embroidery yarn to marble. The pieces and the circumstances decide what is suitable.

In the world of bees everything seems completely practical. In front of the hive entrance they dance to tell their fellow bees where the nectar filled flowers are located. Guardian bees see to it that no obtruders are let in. Inside the hive the queen bee reigns. She produces 175,000 eggs annually that the worker bees take care of. It's a honey factory with a strict division of labour and hierarchy. An activity that man has observed and utilised for centuries upon centuries. When Gunilla Bergström was on a Grez sur Loing grant in France for two months in the spring of 2003, she found a bunch of bee hives in a lost forest glen. She returned to the site time and again. In her studio, she began to build hives of sticks and strings. They are like drawings in three dimensions. She also made reliefs in paper and thread of the hive entrance and of the bees' dance. In her studio hangs photographs that are waiting to become part of new pieces. Other finds from the stay in France are ripening on the shelves. In the secret town the bees await spring.

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