

Mens et Manus

Skånes konstförening, Bragegatan 15 Malmö

Opening 6.5 6.30pm

6.5-29.5

Participating artists:

Sarah Browne

Peter Kädergård

Magnhild Øen Nordahl

Curators:

Hans Carlsson och Ellen Arvidsson

Mens et Manus deals with questions regarding craft, practical knowledge and the relationship between the hand and the machine. The exhibition also addresses issues such as the right to the means of production, and to the knowledge of the world that surrounds us – as it appears in the body's relationship to making.

A distinction was made early on in the arts, when it began to appear as an autonomous field in the late 1700s. This distinction separated autonomous objects (made to be experienced and seen) from craft products and other everyday objects (to be used and handled).

It is, however, also possible to trace a parallel tradition in European art history - one aiming at aestheticising labour as well as the world at large. Not least did this tradition find ground as a reaction against growing industrialisation. William Morris, a prominent figure in the Arts and Crafts Movement, argued in 1889: "The purpose of applying art to articles of utility is twofold: first, to add beauty to the results of the work of man, which would otherwise be ugly; and secondly, to add pleasure to the work itself, which would otherwise be painful and disgusting."

William Morris was a staunch socialist, occupied with the problem that only the upper layer of society was able to afford an everyday life filled with beauty.

Morris is not an exclusive example of how a demand for control of the means of production and handicrafts, has been linked to the will of a group in its fight for inclusion or to

obtain recognition of its labour. An example from the arts, in the 20th century, is the exhibition *Kvinnfolk*, which took place at Malmö Konsthall in 1975. Its curators wanted to give recognition to the art, craft and work of women from the beginnings of industrialisation until the present time. The organisers stated the aim of the exhibition was to "begin to remember, to retrieve knowledge, collect strength and inspiration from history, to then move forward with full force and recapture our lost culture. Thus it is not the old handicraft we are recapturing, but the tasks and the tools. Through control over the work we create we will then shape the culture we want to have."

Mens et Manus partly addresses the same territory as the aforementioned references, here, however, the question is perhaps first and foremost, where the practical knowledge is actually located, and only secondly how this knowledge is accessed (and by whom). A discussion taking place not least in the light of the emergence of new digital production capabilities, increasingly linked and continuously available to more and more people.

An example of this is Magnhild Øen Nordahl's video, *How to Make a Utah Teapot* in which we see a highly experienced ceramicist, during her making of a "Utah Teapot", a standard reference object for 3D modelling. The object, which is virtual in origin, is materialised in the real world with traditional craft techniques through the potter's hands. Nordahl is interested in this type of transformation of knowledge: from an analog to a digital world. In her installation *Occupational Knots* she combines allusions to the importance of knots in various craft techniques, with references to the scientific use of knots, both metaphorically and in scientific research.

The last words in Sarah Browne's film *The Invisible Limb* reads "Can we redeem beauty For Use?". The voiceover poses this closing question subsequent to the main narrative, which partly reflects on why the sculptor Charlotte Posenenske ceased making art, instead working as a sociologist with a focus on wage structures and the work environment. The voiceover states that this happened due to a distrust of art and its visual surface, a surface that tends to hide other realities: crafts, work and unfair production conditions. Is art nothing but a dream of avoiding work? A dream inherited from ancient philosophers who let slaves and women maintain the daily workload, allowing themselves to engage in contemplation and creative activities? The subject of the narrator's polemic invocation specifically concerns the

question about whose actual work is valued (and whose work deserves to be called art or craft), and on what grounds.

Peter Kädergård's visual world, on the other hand, offers perspectives on what industrial society can actually offer in terms of access to creative making. His imagery appears somewhat dystopian, constituted by a mix of broken machines and technical devices, given new meaning through the installation format (not without a certain absurd humour). However, the functions of these installations (such as creating repetitious music-like sounds) are, to an extent, also being controlled by someone with awareness and pathos enough to self-define their own performance as a craft.

Notes:

Kvinnfolk, Utställningskatalog, Malmö Konsthall, 1975.

William Morris, "The Arts and Crafts of To-day", 1889. Quotation from www.marxists.org

Sarah Browne

The Invisible Limb

Film, 20 min, 2014

Credits:

Directed, written and edited by Sarah Browne

Featuring: Cynthia Moran

Cinematography: Kate McCullough

Camera: Kate McCullough, Sarah Browne

Voiceover: Amanda Elena Conrad

Composition: Alma Kelliher

Choreography: Fearghus Ó Conchúir

Research assistants: Christin Müller, Laura Wünsche

Archives: Hessischer Rundfunk, WDR mediagroup

Translation: Petra Gaines

Colourist: John Beattie

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Commissioned by basis, Frankfurt.

The Invisible Limb is the third in a series of works that address issues of gendered labour and representation. This latest film is partly addressed to deceased Frankfurt artist Charlotte

Posenenske, renowned both for her rigorous artistic oeuvre and her eventual cessation of art production in favour of practising sociology, focusing on the study of wage labour conditions and factory processes. Browne works with another artist of Posenenske's generation, one born in the same year; Irish sculptor Cynthia Moran, who followed an entirely different political and artistic trajectory. Shot partly on location at the Giant's Causeway, Co. Antrim, the film stages a series of unlikely correspondences through sculptural objects and ideas of mimesis, technology and the magic of apparently costless production.

Sarah Browne is an artist based in Ireland. Her research-based practice investigates the materiality of knowledge, attending to the intersection of invisible structures of power with bodily experience. This sculptural practice includes writing, publishing, performance and public projects, encountered both within and outside gallery environments, as well as extensive collaboration.

Peter Kädergård

A Source of Uncertainty

Mixed media installation, 2015

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Without a Mind My Body is Dumb and Blind

Mixed media installation, 2015

You Say I Am Mean Like a Machine, But What kind of Machine Do You Mean, #-8

Collage, 243x137 cm, 2014

A Source of Uncertainty is a machine/sculpture: a "multi -media machine" playing audio-visual material. The work is composed of found objects, ranging from cassette recorders, video recorders, computers and even furniture. *A Source of Uncertainty* is combined with collages from the series *You Say I am Mean Like a Machine, But What Kind of Machine Do You Mean*, which is made up of pictures of various mechanical devices and structures. Also in this case, the fragments are combined into new objects - 2D mechanisms, inspired by dystopian doom machines.

Peter Kädergård works with mixed media installation, video and collage. He is based in Helsingborg and Gothenburg. Kädergård works with the experiences of Western popular

culture; and how imagination can be reconsidered through its reconstruction. Kädergård's art often lingers between the non-functioning and complete failure. His collage-based method often results in kinetic art: moving, reverberating, mechanical sculptures, which together constitute a surreal imagery, turning low tech into high tech and vice versa.

Magnhild Øen Nordahl

Occupational Knots

Installation, 2014:

- 1. *We think of the string as having no thickness.* Polyester , pine. Dimensions of box: 33x19x75 cm.**
- 2. *Trivial, Nontrivial, Impossible.* Aluminium, acrylic tubes, pear tree wood, steel, synthetic rope, cotton rope, pigmented concrete, carved linden wood, pine. Dimensions: 170x62x111 cm**
- 3. *Alternating out here.* Synthetic rope. 400 cm x 1,8 cm**
- 4. *Looking at axis from all different vantage points.* Led-framed glass, painted pine.
Dimensions of pink frame: 33,5x31x3 cm**
- 5. *The knot is infinitely far away.* Plaster, styrofoam, painted pine, cotton rope. Dimensions of blue structure: 187x83x67 cm.**
- 6. *Twist Untwist Unpoke Poke Slide.* Spray painted steel tubes, synthetic rope, cotton rope, painted spruce. Dimensions of grey box: 56x21x21 cm**

Pb?You?He?

Fanzine shown on flat screen. The fanzine gathers pages from *The Ashley Book of Knots*, diverse books on topology and mathematical knot theory, and step by step guides for different knots, 2014

How to Make a Utah Teapot

Video, 10.55 min, 2016

Filmed by Anders Hultgreen

Produced with the kind support of Bergen Centre

for Electronic Art and Bergen Kommune

Occupational Knots is a series of sculptures based on knots, as they appear in the encyclopaedic guide *The Ashley Book of Knots* (1944); more specifically a chapter in this book, featuring knots particularly suitable for various professions. The book's author, Clifford W. Ashley, describes how various professional practical problems can be solved with the

help of knots, for example for the artist, whom might have to attach her easel to a stone on a windy day. The Fanzine *Pb?You?He?* made in relation to the series of sculptures, is a fanzine which consists of materials from practical, as well as mathematical knot theory. The mathematical knot theory, which the sculptures also take their titles from, arose as a result of the hypothesis that the world is made up of the same matter, though shaped differently, as different knots at a nanoscale. The mathematical knot theory did eventually give way to a better functioning atomic model, and it was not until knots were discovered in human DNA a hundred years later that scientists were able to take advantage of this research.

The video piece *How to Make a Utah Teapot* shows ceramic artist Anne-Lise Karlsen wheel-throwing a Utah Teapot, a standardised reference object common in 3D modelling software. The model was developed by computer scientist Martin Newell in the mid-1970s and the computer-generated teapot has, since then, achieved a unique cybercultural status due to its widespread usage as a standard option in the feature libraries of 3D modeling software.

Magnhild Øen Nordahl lives and works in Bergen. She works with sculpture, installation, text and video. Thematically her work often revolves around various craft traditions. Øen Nordahl's art can also be said to discuss views on knowledge and how this is a product of craftsmanship and practical skills, as well as theoretical scientific traditions of thought and systems of classification.