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LIVING ON VIDEO

MOVING IMAGES FROM SWEDEN

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FOLLOWING THE BREAKTHROUGH of video art, art some ten years ago and it didn't take artists long to develop an active attitude to the video image. They either refused to interfere with it, offering a 'direct' look at reality and mediating as little as possible between life and the observer or, on the other hand, they asserted their control over representation by manipulating electronic pictures or generating their own fictional worlds.

In the1990s, a generation of strong Swedish video artists emerged, who developed a few radically different relations to the notion of reality being a key issue. Some of these artists focus on what can broadly be defined as human behavior, and they mainly stick with the 'reality framework'; from Annika Eriksson's ideas of the work as a 'filter of reality' or Annika Ström's 'video collages' to Annika Larsson's constructed and charged close-ups. Others use the video medium for formulating their own notions of space: from Jonas Dahlberg's architectural objects on film or Magnus Wallin's generated bodies in apocalyptic environments to Katarina Löfström's elusive projections of atmospheres, Gunilla Klingberg's hypnotic visuals or Tobias Bernstrup's 'performative' stagings.

All these artists use different strategies and work on various levels of intensity, developing different permutations of the observed and the invented. Their positions can be connected, in a criss-cross way, and this would become a mapping of the Swedish 'scene.' Any scene, of course, is constituted by individual achievements. Today is clear that 'video art' has matured to accommodate a variety of specific artistic approaches, and to serve them well.

The international audience has seen Jonas Dahlberg's work (*One-Way Street*) at Manifesta 4 in Frankfurt last summer. Dahlberg describes his work as architectural comments on film and his pieces are usually placed in a particular space for a staged act of observation and become something of a cleansed architectural object in an exhibition space. The situations on show are filmed images of repetitive movement through rooms as in *Untitled (Vertical Sliding* (2001), and streets as in *One-Way Street* (2002). These are footage of three-dimensional models that Dahlberg builds and in some cases exhibits alongside the films, like in his latest exhibition at the IASPIS Gallery in Stockholm. For the viewer Dahlberg creates atmospheres of controlled claustrophobic repetitiveness in which, after a while, you stop expecting the unexpected to happen.

Currently Berlin-based Gunilla Klingberg also works with the repetitive, bringing it all the way up to the hypnotic. She became internationally known with *Spar Loop* (2000), which arranged commercial logotypes into hallucinogenic ornaments. This piece takes your mind away, at the

From top: ANNIKA STRÖM, Ten New Love Songs, 1999. Video stills. Courtesy Charlotte Lund, Stockholm. ANNIKA ERIKSSON, Staff at Malmö Museer (from left: Göran Christenson, director of Malmö Art Museum; Gertie Svensson, responsible for the archival collection), 2001. Video stills. ANNIKA LARSSON, Pink Ball, 2002. Video stills. Courtesy Cosmic Galerie, Paris.







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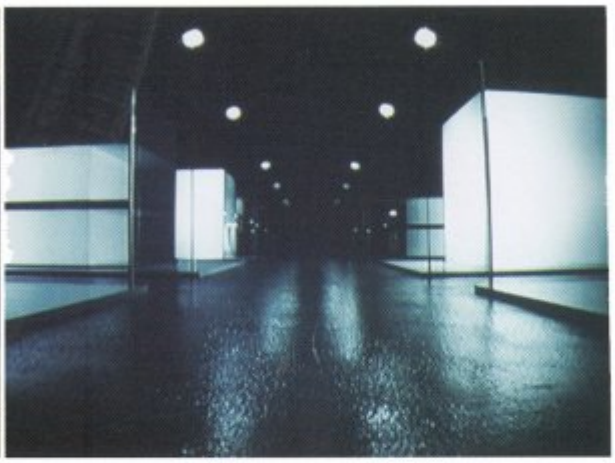


same time focusing your attention to commercial messages that are repeated again and again. Klingberg's work strongly comments on the ways commercialism penetrates our everyday lives in visually attractive and intrusive ways. Extatic vibes are also created by her other works. *New Delhi* (2000-2001, in collaboration with Peter Geschwind, music by Monolake) is a sound and visual loop that includes 30 layers of one-minute views filmed day-by-day in the same location in New Delhi. Everything seems to happen at the same compressed moment and creates the experience of total pleasure.

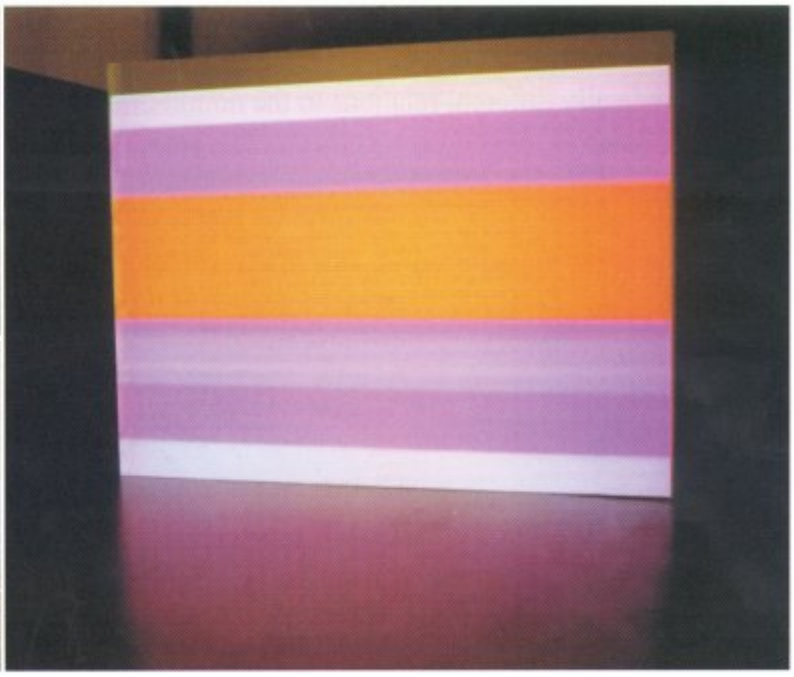
Annika Ström films the everyday world around her developing a very private set of themes. Ström says that she works with video images almost as if they were paintings, creating collages of moving pictures. She composes songs that usually go together with the visuals, as in her well-known piece *Ten New Love Songs* (1999). Ström's work often comments on insider matters and the creative and contextual processes of artmaking. The latest piece, *Been in Video* (2002) is self-referential even in the context of Ström's own work: it consists of interviews with some of the people who have featured, almost featured or never featured in her films. Annika Ström brings us along to very private and quite intimate episodes of her interaction with people and places and even if her subjects are other people, they always "reflect" her own presence in an inter-subjective connection.

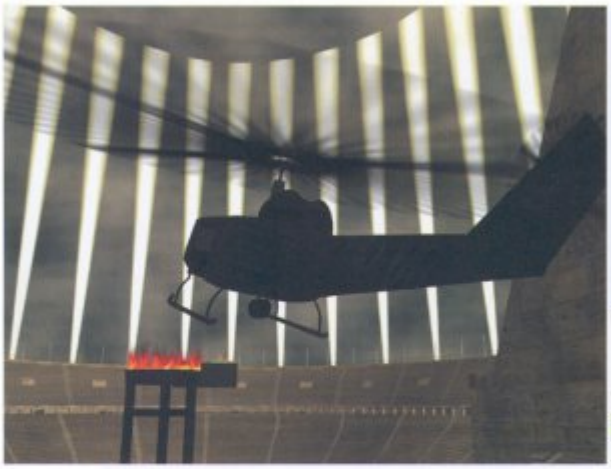
Top, from left: TOBIAS BERNSTRUP, Friedrich Passage, 2001. Computer animation. Courtesy Cosmic, Paris. JONAS DAHLBERG, One Way Street, 2002. DVD Installation. Bottom, from left: GUNILLA KLINGBERG, New Dehli, 2001. Video stills (with Peter Geschwind). KATARINA LÖFSTRÖM, Hang Ten Sunset, 2000. DVD Still.

Annika Eriksson develops her video footage in a different way. She looks at real-life people calling her work a "filter of reality" and intentionally doesn't cut her











Top, from left: MAGNUS WALLIN, Limbo 1999. 3D animated film still. Courtesy Nordenhake, Berlin; CECILIA LUNDQVIST, Rebus 1999. Animated video still.

films, in order not to disturb the representation of uninterrupted time in them. She lets people perform the specific activities that they like to engage in. Usually these subjects are what we call normal people who show their "side" engagements, such as collecting or playing in brass bands. Quite a few of Eriksson's pieces present the inside structures of art institutions and museums, exposing the people who make that place function (Moderna Museet in Stockholm, the Malmö Art Museum etc.). *Staff at 25th Bienal de Sao Päulo* (2002) is a person-by-person presentation of all the staff of this event. People simply introduce themselves expressing their public personas but also in a certain way uncovering the "invisible" parts of their personalities and relations with others. This becomes a documentation of the performances of your own self.

Selecting a different approach and not quite following the path of reproducing real-time reality, Annika Larsson constructs characters that perform roles rather than present their social personae. Larsson takes a very close look at selected objects around us, discovering (or uncovering) their most dubious aspects. She focuses on a detail that becomes a representation of an actual or simulated obsession, a passion and usually carries fetishist overtones. (*Dog*, 2000; *Poliisi*, 2001). What might seem like a tennis game or a walk with a dog become homoerotically charged episodes. The viewer may construct a story line from a succession of looks at things or moves that have coded and associative meaning. Larsson's situations have little to do with representations. Rather, they completely construct and manipulate them.

Magnus Wallin creates spaces that are entirely computer generated and bring us into situations of extreme physical experience, playing on basic human fears and desires. An extensive body of work by him was presented at the latest Venice Biennale and that got them well known for art audiences. The scenarios of the films are reminiscent of nightmares, combining ecstasy and death drive. You can't help relating his work to the ideologies of social engineering, the creation of perfect bodies, perfect humans and wonder about place of imperfections in these constructions. In works like *Exit*, (1997), *Physical Paradise*, and *Limbo* (1999) or *Solo* (2002), computer-created characters move in-between spaces and are taken to the variety of physical tests and dangers.

Katarina Löfström is an upcoming artist who may be situated in the crossover of two contemporary contexts — club culture and visual art. Her video work like *Hang Ten Sunset* (2000), *Whiteout* (2001), or *Red Light* (2002) of interchanging hanging colors and abstract shapes can also be seen in relation to the abstract painting of the 1950s. Löfström produces visual and sound ambiences that constitute projections and mutate in shape and color together with sound evolving into something of a bodily experience. As Carsten Höller writes about her work: "It is not the image that is subjected to an acoustic detournement in Löfström's films; rather, it is the music that is made visible and thus abducted from its world of darkness."

Cecilia Lundqvist works exclusively with animation and as she says, for her, drawing is a way of telling a story. The exact narrative lines are not really obvious when you see them and allow you to read in your own interpretation. However all of the narratives express experience of some kind that comes from artist's memory or an act of observation. *Rebus* (1999) is a video that consists of a few short stories where each of them reflects on certain diagnoses of diseases. *Souvenir* (1999) illustrates an unforgettable memory while *Emblem* (2001) deals with the visualization of power struggles in a domestic setting.

Tobias Bernstrup used to work with computer animation in collaboration with Palle Torsson. In 1996–1999 they made a succession of computer-game pieces around the virtual demolition of a museum (for Arken in Copenhagen, CAC in Vilnius and Moderna Museet in Stockholm). Later, Bernstrup became known as a performer of dark, sensual songs in the style of the early 1980s. He related to the drag-glamour visuality of that period. In the most recent pieces like *Untitled (Friedrich Passage)* (2001) or *Tobias Bernstrup Tonight Live* (2000) we are taken into quite sinister worlds accompanied by his own music. The spaces we see are often based on real places, but the locations get twisted into a dodgy experience: the known is turned into something unrecognizable.

Different artistic positions require different modes of production and interpretation. On the face of things, there seems to be no such thing as easily describable "video art" any more; nor is it easy to detect any coherent "Swedish scene". Still, moving images are quite dominant segment of the contemporary art world, and Swedish artists do have a few things in common. Perhaps we could call it a passion for creating and re-creating life. And this is certainly true about the works that accentuate "virtuality" over reality. But paradoxically, even those works that present us with seeming reflections of real life operate with constructed illusions and frame-works of real-ness. These artists project us into the worlds — the parallel worlds — of seeing, reflecting and living. The video image is their tool for bringing about this displacement. ■

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