

Introduction

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The Dutch artist *Rineke Dijkstra* has made a video-work with the name "Weeping woman". It shows a group of British students of around eleven years old, wearing gray and white school uniforms with red ties. They stand in a light room, facing the same direction, and discuss something. It is clear for the viewer that they are looking at an image. They are describing what they see and they suggest possible interpretations without trying to agree on one. The image is Picasso's painting "The Weeping Woman". The children study it thoroughly and take turns describing what they think it wants to say.

I have thought a lot about that video. Now when i am mulling over *Ida-Lovisa Rudolfsson's* picture stories i think about it again. Rineke portrays in a simple way both our innate willingness to communicate through images and the many-layered ways in which images reveal themselves. It is a communicative tradition in which *Ida-Lovisa* partakes. A picture story that is in intimate contact with our perpetual search for context and meaning. She presents me with familiar subjects; a specific chair, a cinnamon bun, rope, cables, trees, houses and people doing things. People who are prepared for unforeseen circumstances, who do the best they can. Who coexist tentatively, prepared to respond to each other's unpredictability, or alone, busy with chores. They are inside and outside. Saturated evening light gives the images a time line, a course of events. I recognize myself, taking an unfocused look makes me feel like i have seen it all before.

But the story moves inside the language of images. With small offsets the images recreate the familiar in perpetually new ways. Art gives us the possibility to broaden our innate capacity for language. It gives us tools to, besides using words, tell what we see and experience.

Writing is such a broadening as well. We do not think about this too often, for it is completely embedded in everyday life. We have come to regard it as fundamental and necessary. Faltering literacy worries us. But there is no widespread unrest about how we handle the images that surround us every hour, every day. Wherever we go we meet an omnipotent commercial use that does not doubt the ability of images. But even though we live in this roaring flood of images we do not worry much about the conditions for the language of images. The Minister of Education does not propose specific measures. Children go to school to learn to read and count. But the language of art, within all fields of art, that takes different routes, we rob ourselves of.

The images continue, but we do not make ourselves 'literate', even though this is easy. There is of course no understanding without effort. Without effort there is no possibility to feel. But the effort, in this case, does not demand comprehensive studies or theoretical frameworks, but it demands space, context and encouragement.

Rineke and *Ida-Lovisa* show, from different perspectives, that we live with this opportunity. And that it is forever coming closer, more accessible than we believe.

The serious play

Sune Tjernström, Art historian

At first glance *Ida-Lovisa Rudolffssons* textile collages can seem almost pedestrian: Focused, sewn on, a bewildered person that seems to have left a casual, contemporary surrounding: The person has left a house, finds himself between trees, with a grid of streets in the background. In the immediate vicinity of the person we see symbols of everyday life like a grill, a hammock, a Volvo, a tent, a caravan, a bed, a chair, a lampshade, a cinnamon bun. The idyllic Swedish Folkhem is a logical first impression. *Ida-Lovisa* is a painter of everyday surroundings, here people will not be found in mundane lounges or in the enclaves of the *nouveau-riche*. Quite soon our imaginations surrounding *Ida-Lovisa's* collages fly away in at least two directions – that of seriousness, and that of play.

The seriousness is in the social criticism, that which chafes with the idyll. *Ida-Lovisa's* art is in my opinion conceptual, the ideas behind the collages are just as important as the aesthetic impression. A number of themes can be seen: Care for nature, plants and animals; the vulnerability of the small person in a modern civilization; the uncertainty about what we are doing, where we are going – existential questions that engage each and every one of us. The trees in *Ida-Lovisa's* work are most often devoid of life, no leaves, branches or fruit, just naked trees. The tiger is in danger of going extinct and can be seen as a symbol for *Homo Sapiens'* overexploitation of large mammals.

The people are not happy, one almost feels sorry for them, they seem abandoned and their status symbols not all that auspicious. They have left, but it is unclear in which direction their journey will continue. Hardly back to where they came from, but neither forward towards happiness. They dig, plant trees, look up, everything without immediately making a success of their lives. Maybe they are part of the group of people that has become especially vulnerable when permanent employment becomes scarce and security on the job market disappears into thin air. *Ida-Lovisa's* conceptual art is not programmatic, does not follow current petitions or slogans. Her political world of thought takes shape in the dialog with the beholder and is staged like stories, a bit like *Richard Yates* novels with unsuccessful people as the point of focus. Her exhibitions can thus be viewed as a collection of novels, kept together by one or more themes.

The playfulness may not be immediately apparent to the viewer. But sometimes it appears unexpectedly; it can at first seem threatening, but it appears as elements in a subtly surreal frenzy. Sometimes something is on its way out from the hole, a stretched-out hand can pose a threat, but can also help. In what I perceive as a central work in *Ida-Lovisa's* production, '*Mot kvällen uppklarnande*' one can see who is digging the hole, maybe it is the artist's mother.

She has dug a large number of holes, the tiger looks confused at the multitude of these interventions of nature, the football player wonders how their shoes will come out of the tree; she once dug a hole as an art project. Holes also connect with the international art scene, i.e. *Claes Oldenbergs* famous exhibition in Central Park in New York, 1967, where a hole was dug and filled up again after a few hours.

Another playful aspect is the trees, hoses, cables, paths; they swerve ambivalently through the workaday motives. They denote movement through space, travels on the road of life, they connect a source of energy with a consumer, (take shortcuts on the way), they ensnare the chair someone is sitting on like a poacher's trap, they are stretched like clotheslines for a little girl's teddy bear, they connect but sometimes seem to keep people apart.

Maybe the threads are the connecting link between playfulness and seriousness in Ida-Lovisa's art. They are part of the social criticism, the conceptual, but they also weave their own paths. Maybe they are the work of a ghost, a ghost that has taken the tool of the artist, lines, and went on a walk, to allude to *Paul Klee's* line play.

The threads also connect her earlier and later work. They are a part of Ida-Lovisa's artistic expression, which has been surprisingly constant over the past years. The threads have, like the holes, become part of her signature. The workaday symbols are recurring characters as well, some are reemerge in the latest works, like the cinnamon bun, bed, lampshade, chair, table, shoes and suitcase.

The theme of leaving things behind is recurring, as are helplessness and despair. Mushrooms, hardly edible, make appearances here and there, next to neatly arranged shoes.

The latest works also show evidence of change, of development, of growing maturity. Most of this comes from a bigger concentration, the novels are condensed and the collages show the punch line instead of the whole story. The surrounding forests have, in a number of works, been replaced by a dark mass instead of details of abandoned nature. The chicken-man sits isolated and ensnared on his chair, unclear how he got there, an unsure fate awaits him. A saturated motive, but at the same time a subtle one. The man and the woman with the party hats sit alone at the same table, the rope binds them together and keeps them apart. They are not alone, but they do not cooperate. Nature is pictured as a withered Christmas tree in the corner. Forests of trees have, in the latest collage, been condensed to a few stumps that have to be protected from a definitive destruction; here the smoke from an industrial chimney gets to symbolize environmental threats.

The aesthetics may be a sideshow to a conceptual artist like Ida-Lovisa. She nevertheless does clearly work with the shape, color and lines of the work. The textile collages are well-composed; they lead our thoughts to the filmmaker *Roy Andersson* and his "complex images", compositions that are thoughtful narratives, where no part is without meaning for the bigger picture. The color composition symbolism is clear, from hopeful light

nuances to dark fields that blanket the happier parts of the story. Perspective is used to indicate a sort of distance in time and space, to the surroundings the person is leaving, to suburbia, to the old industrial production, to the modern technology, to the everyday cheerfulness, to family, friends and acquaintances. They all take place in the wings, while the lonely person takes the center stage. It is not the modernity, the industrial production, the destroying of the environment, the high-rises, that the artist relates to. What she wonders is what these modern phenomena do to the individual person. How are people affected by modernity? What can we do about the negative effects that come in the wake of development? How long can we support a nature that is falling apart? Can we unravel the threads of life and form them into a neat skein? How many holes do we have to dig to find ourselves, or happiness?

The people in Ida-Lovisa's stories are lonely. What they miss is a belief in collective collaboration to support each other, to work together against bigger powers, modernity, technology, environmental destruction, animal husbandry, globalization, vulnerability, bullying, loneliness. Is this absence of coherence an expression for the late modern individualism, for today's faltering trust in collective action, or a reaction against the contemporary political ideas of concurrence and the blessing of globalization?

I like to see Ida-Lovisa and a few of her contemporary art colleagues, for example *Vanna Bowles*, *Patrick Nilsson* and *Jockum Nordström*, as

beholders and interpreters of the living conditions and attitudes of their generation. We viewers maybe need a little distance in time to clearly realize what they saw, what they felt, what they reacted to here and now. It does feel obvious that they each battle with their own artistic vision in their examination of our age. And that they use aesthetics to herald demands for increased engagement for all the living things, for balance in an insecure society, for humanity and warmth in an age swept by cold winds.

Ida-Lovisa shows art that engages and entertains, enchants and seduces, horrifies and encourages, evokes memories of a recent past and raises thoughts about the future. The lines and threads give a little hope, they do not end. As in life it is not the goal that is important but the things that happen along the way. Wherever you are there is some where you can go.¹

All textile collages are easily recognized as Ida-Lovisa's; they are novels written in her own language, varied and interspersed with neologisms. And this language carries within it the sharp smell of things burned, like a reminder of how easy idylls go up in smoke.

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¹ Literature about lines: Tim Ingold, *Lines. A Brief History*, Routledge, 2007

Artist

Ida-Lovisa Rudolfsson

Ida-Lovisa Rudolfsson was born in 1979 and grew up in Stenungsund, but now lives and works in Gothenburg. Ida-Lovisa took her Masters degree in Textile Arts at the Högskolan för Design och Konsthantverk in 2010. In her final work '*Sju sorters ensamhet*' (*Seven kinds of loneliness*) Ida-Lovisa researched the seemingly happy modern society. Loneliness, the insecure and the lost made up the frame and the individualistic inhabitants played starring roles.

In the autumn of 2010 Ida-Lovisa's first solo exhibition '*Sju sorters ensamhet*' was shown at the Nationalgalleriet in Stockholm.

The vantage point of the subsequent suite of images, that were shown in Galleri 21 in Malmö in 2011 and at the Eskilstuna Konstmuseum in 2012, was a sentence she overheard on the tram: "What the hell does one do in nature. I've never been there, i don't even know where it is?" The lonely and lost people still had the leading parts but there was also a clear fascination with their ambivalent relation to nature. The big existential questions were looking for answers between the trees while the people tried to figure out what they were supposed to do.

Ida-Lovisa Rudolfsson has received a number of grants, including Kerstin Lind Pafumis Stipendium in 2010 en the Artist Council's one-year working grant in 2011.

www.idalovisa.se