

Ola Pehrson Retrospective

2 Sep – 8 Nov 2009

In Ola Pehrson's art we are confronted with media representations and digital symbols as we move swiftly between our physical reality and parallel, virtual worlds. Central to his work is human behaviour, what governs it and how it can be manipulated. His interest in how we perceive reality and how this perception then forms our patterns of movement and behaviour was manifested early in his career when Ola constructed a pair of glasses that transformed our human perspective into that of a field bird. His fascination for perception also resulted in works that in different ways deal with media and documentation and the mechanisms that make us judge something as trustworthy or not. In this way, Ola's practice has strong connections to cognitive science and in a number of his pieces he returns to one of our time's most conditioning powers, global capitalism: this fluid, many-headed and seemingly omnipotent power. An entity that we all have become part of and that sometimes protects us – yes, makes us fly, only to suddenly send us into free fall. Often deceptive, Ola's works always transcend mere satire and frequently move into surreal borderlands where they explore the nature of existence and the concept of truth. While taking us out on philosophically deep waters he nevertheless always brings us back to the "little world", and more precisely to his childhood home and to the people who once lived and still live there. This suburban villa appears in different shapes throughout his work, in which it seems to float around in a mysterious universe where the spirit of capitalism exists as one of many ungraspable powers and conditions. At times, the perspective is pulled far back into a position seemingly located outside our human realm, while in the next moment it enters the kitchen of the artist's mother and travels even further down into the mysterious corridors of the subconscious.

Ola Pehrson was born in 1964 and trained at Idun Lovén and the Royal University College of Fine Arts in Stockholm. He received his major breakthrough in 1999 with the work *Yucca Invest Trading Plant*, presented at Tensta Konsthall and Moderna Museet, Stockholm. At the time of his death, in April 2006, Ola Pehrson's art had attracted considerable international interest. His work had been shown on three continents and what came to be his last piece, *Hunt for the Unabomber*, received great attention at the Istanbul Biennial (2005) and the São Paulo Biennial (2006). The piece was acquired by Moderna Museet, Stockholm, in 2006 for its permanent collection.

Curated by: Joa Ljungberg and Saša Nabergoj
Project Management: Anneli Bäckman, Ola Pehrson Foundation and Färgfabriken

On the opening night, *NASDAQ Vocal Index* will be performed by Ensemble Macogall under the direction of Erik Hellerstedt and in collaboration with Hans Lindetorp and Olle Essvik.

SHORT INTRO TEXTS TO THE WORKS:

Birthday Party, 2000

Birthday Party (1:10) is a reconstruction of the party of the artist's mother's 65th birthday on March 16, 2000. Ten cameras documented the party, and the films were later screened in the windows of a wooden model of the suburban villa. The model is covered with photographs from the exterior of the house to give an impression of a three-dimensional photograph. Sounds from the party pour out of the windows and create a party-like atmosphere. Through the small windows you can see the artist serving wine and helping out in the kitchen.

Desktop, 1999

Desktop is a 1:10 scale model of the Windows 95 interface. The two parts of the installation are facing each other. Polystyrene sculptures of desktop icons are suspended on fishing lines in front of a monochrome "Windows" painted wall. On the opposite side there is a camera filming the arrangement and screening it in real time on a computer monitor placed on an office desk.

Plates (& bowls), 2002

This video informs us about plates and bowls and some possible ways to relate to them. A synthetic voice reads trivial facts about these highly common objects. The facts form a story about their history and presence, appearance and function. Plates and bowls are morphed in a round projection on the wall where they form a pumping hypnotic image. The factual and objective tone of the voice sometimes become unexpectedly personal and aggressive while the information about plates and bowls shifts into more loaded statements about ownership and possession.

Autopoet, 1995-1998

Autopoet is a poetry-generating machine. Its vocabulary encompasses 15,000 words taken from the works of ten celebrated 20th century Swedish poets. The words are incorporated into a thousand combinable grammatical "tracks" that are made up of codes and grouped into grammatical sequences as per the original versions. The frequency of the words in the database corresponds to their frequency in the selection. The computer programme randomly generates short text fragments out of this database and thus produces poetry on its own.

Marxist Suit, 1997

The first chapter of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* printed as stripes on wool fabric and re-edited by the fabric being tailored into a two-piece suit.

Winfile.exe, 1997

Winfile.exe is a three-dimensional interpretation of the “Winfile” icon from the Windows 3.x menu. As an icon it represented a 2000 square centimetre storage space for digital storage vessels, while its design alludes to a simple office furniture. The transformation into the present wooden shape serves as a reversed creation of the physical object, which ought to have been the model for the icon.

Selected paintings from 1999

Paintings exhibited at the artist's first solo show at Gallery Axel Mörner in Stockholm.

Yucca Invest Trading Plant, 1999

All living organisms, plants as well as animals and humans, constantly emit electric impulses. The currents of the *Yucca Invest Trading Plant* were transformed into currency, as signalled to a computer to buy and sell shares on the stock market. The welfare of the *Yucca Invest Trading Plant* was generated by itself according to market logic, as the financial outcome of the transactions was converted into a plant's essential currencies – water and light. This was an attempt to stimulate a market-adapted habitus, similar to that which years of financial transactions develop in the experienced stockbroker's nervous system.

Paintings from the series *Everything*, 2004

Paintings made during the artist's residency at Nordic Artists' Centre Dalsåsen (NKD), Norway.

NASDAQ Vocal Index, 2003-2004

A vast amount of information in the shape of index graphs is constantly being created at the different stock markets of the world. In the project *NASDAQ Vocal Index*, the graphs of companies listed on the NASDAQ stock exchange are transformed into music. Computer software converts the graphs to sheets of music, and the scores are presented online on a projection screen, to be read and sung by members of a local choir. Every company has its own voice and together the choir vocally interprets the current situation on the market. The project has been performed in the Tirana, Albania; Yamaguchi, Japan; and here at Färgfabriken in Stockholm, among other places.

Sjur, 2003

The stock market index of the water corporation Vivendi is converted into tunes that are sung by a young boy [Sjur] standing in front of a waterfall in a Norwegian mountain landscape.

Birthday Party (1:20), 2000

Birthday Party (1:20) is a smaller reconstruction of the artist's mother's 65th birthday party. The artist speculated on future versions in even more reduced scales: "Just as with memory, the scale and the sound diminish. In the end, it [*Birthday Party*] may turn into a small black-and-white matchbox house!" (Ola Pehrson, in a lecture held at the Royal Academy of Arts, Stockholm)

Cookbook+, 2003-2004

During the last 45 years, the artist's mother collected menus from every dinner party she gave. These documents contain a vast amount of very precise information as regards to guests, food and drinks. The project *Cookbook+* takes its point of departure in these menus, and develops into a grand multimedia epos about eating, social conventions and behavioural patterns, detectable through the registering of data.

Mori Twins, 2003

"This is not really a work yet but I have made a documentation while being on a scholarship in Japan. After two weeks, two twins named Mori arrived. They were identical twins, but in a Japanese family there is a big difference between being the firstborn son and a younger sibling. The oldest brother, sitting to the left, thus radiated much more responsibility and authority than his half-an-hour younger brother. I found this quite interesting, how so much time could be contained only in half an hour." (Ola Pehrson in a lecture held at the Royal Academy of Arts, Stockholm)

Paintings from the series *Japanese Scientists*, 2003

Paintings made during the artist's residency at Akiyoshidai International Art Village (AIAV) in Yamaguchi, Japan.

Interview, 2002

Three monitors present the same interview with a Japanese man. The artist, who did not have a clue what the man was saying, made up different versions of subtitles. On one monitor the man appears to be explaining various interpretations of Kafka's strange figure Odradek, while on others he seems to be lecturing about diverse subjects ranging from the cultivation of hybrid tomatoes to the role of women and sexuality in 12th century society.

Salon II, 2003-2005

A video shot of an empty interior of a hyper-designed studio room. Occasionally a synthetic voice comments on the interior. The film was recorded in Akiyoshidai International Art Village (AIAV) in Yamaguchi, Japan.

TV, 2002

The documentary *TV* tells a subjective story about the phenomenology of television. The film is projected onto a plastic dummy resembling a flat-screen monitor. Two additional dummy monitors appear to be turned off beside it. The cables from the monitors are cut off by the sidewall.

Johnny & D, 2003

A masked man mimics his own movements of torturing prisoners of war, in an armed conflict in the mid 1990s.

Hunt for the Unabomber, 2005

Hunt for the Unabomber is a reconstruction of a Discovery Channel documentary about the American terrorist Theodore John Kaczynski – code-named “The Unabomber” by the FBI – a former professor of mathematics, who, from 1978 to 1995, carried out a bombing campaign against people who, in one way or another, were connected to technology. Using simple materials such as play dough, cardboard, pieces of plastic and various forms of junk, the artist recreated the individual scenes of the documentary as three-dimensional objects. He then filmed the props in the correct order of appearance, and in the interview sections he himself appears, dressed and disguised, as the interviewed police officers, psychologists, etc. The result is a homemade reconstruction of the original film in which only the original soundtrack remains intact.