



**SAL
TYK**

**CAR
SCHN**

**II
CON
SAT**

CARRIE SCHNEIDER Thanks for meeting with me, Salla. I asked you to talk with me about my work because we've met roughly every month since I arrived in Helsinki last August. So you've seen my progress—or at least my process—every step of the way. I'm so in the midst of making this body of work, I was afraid I couldn't write my own artist statement [for the exhibition [Elaborate Flirtations](#) at Galleria FAFA, Helsinki, May 6–11, 2008].

SALLA TYKKÄ Maybe you won't see all of the connections at the moment, but maybe you will see them after three years, or four years, or even after ten years. But about this new work, I really admire that when you came here that you had this plan: you wanted to work on this relationship with Finnish nature and yourself. I think in your previous work with your brother [[DereLict Self](#) 2006–2007], you looked more to



[Untitled \(Tub\)](#), from the series [DereLict Self](#), 2006–2007, 76.2 x 91.5 cm, c-print

the past. And now you're working with the present, with something that is around you all of the time.

I never thought of it that way, but that's true.

You had this plan and now you are fulfilling that plan.

Weirdly. But at the same time, I didn't think that I necessarily needed to—at the time I needed to just write out a grant proposal [for a Fulbright Fellowship], but honestly I didn't feel like I needed to fulfill the plan once I got here. I'm a bit surprised that working with myself in nature became what I was actually interested in doing.

So do you think that the work you've made is what you planned? Or do you think it's more abstracted?

Definitely more abstracted. I think my work has always been about construction or a kind of fiction, but here I've really let myself get more playful, and [weirder](#).

Of the works of yours I've seen, they're cinematic, but not in a Hollywood way. Maybe like more of an indie film? [[laughing](#)] But with this new body of work, it's also cinematic, but more [Ingmar] Bergman—something more classically Scandinavian.

Hmm. That's a big compliment. I was definitely thinking of Bergman, and I was also thinking of Joseph Beuys, and even Matthew Barney. I was thinking about constructed personal mythologies and connecting oneself to timelessness through allegory or something. All of the work we're mentioning is so [male](#)—and maybe my version of that is more awkward, and definitely with less bravado.

So when you had the idea for the first film [[Untitled \(Utö\)](#)], did you write it down like a



[Untitled \(Utö\)](#), 2008, 16mm film, 5:00

tale or more like a script?

It seems like it started with the turning point—where the character splits into two beings. But from there I think I was trying to make sense of my ideas in terms of a more familiar narrative structure. Even though my photographs as a series tell a sort of story, the narrative aspect of filmmaking is much more daunting for me. So maybe I ended up constructing the narrative in a way that was a little more traditional.

But it's not traditional. If I were to compare it to my own work, for example, my work is more like a stream of images. Maybe there isn't so much logic, per se. But in your film, the events and the structure are just a frame, but it's about something else—like a mood, or the psyche. It's more like the way you work. It's not pretentious at all, because in a way it feels really [easy](#). I think it suits very well in the line of works that you've done. I mean, despite the fact that the visual language is different, the scenery

is different, and it's not like the normal way you would work with your brother, it's still a continuation, in a way, of the photos.

But maybe it isn't so obvious that I made that film with my brother, because you never see his face. But at the same time it was important to me that it was just the two of us—a two-person cast and crew alone on that island. And as much as I was inspired by Bergman, Beuys and Barney, it's true that I was also riffing off of my own work—specifically the video I made with my brother [[Big Brother's Sweater](#) from [Family Videos](#), 2006] where I'm inside his



[Big Brother's Sweater](#) (still), from the series [Family Videos](#), 2006, digital video, 2:30

sweater. So the film became about wanting to be so close to someone that you're embodying them, or something like that, but then also desiring escape or separation.

And how do you see this newest work [[Dress of Good Weather](#)]? It's not related to the Utö film



[Dress of Good Weather](#) ([How Not to Fall](#)) 2008, 16mm film, 5:00

at all, except that it's set by the seaside.

Well for me what ties together all of the work of the exhibition is that there is this lone character contending somehow with nature, and she's wearing a costume that allows nature to also become a character.

But that is quite literal to say it like that. I don't even consciously think about the fact that there are costumes in all of the works in the show. Maybe it's that you need to have a costume, like a suit, that sort of brings you closer to the environment that you should know?

I think you're right. Pointing to the costume is literal, but I think it's a formal element in all of the works that becomes a symbol for assuming an identity. I mean, it's playful but it also reflects my own desire of wanting to be somewhere strange but also feeling displaced by it.

I remember when I spent six months in Argentina [on exchange in the mid-1990s as an undergraduate student at the Kuvataideakatemia], and at the time I was still using myself in my photos a lot. But when I was there, I couldn't make any pictures of myself. I think it was because I felt so displaced. My aesthetic was so different from the aesthetics of the environment. And then only like two months before I was supposed to go home, I started making some self portraits, but with titles like [The Life of an Argentinean Woman](#) or something like that. Very childish. I bought shoes that I saw many women wearing, and I tried to dress up like an Argentinean woman in order to make photos because I thought I couldn't be myself. Not that you're ever 'yourself' when you make work using your own face or your own body, but still I felt that in a way, my appearance wouldn't fit into that environment.

Hmm. That's funny. Because in a way it feels like that's exactly what I'm

doing. Particularly in [[WE \(Baltic Version\)](#)] where I used Marimekko



[WE \(Baltic version\)](#), 2007, 147 x 177 cm, c-print

fabric without even knowing that it was! It's at once the most obvious and awkward thing that I could do, but it also makes perfect sense in a way, you know? I was actually inspired by walking in Koskela [a northeastern Helsinki neighborhood] where I used to live, along the Baltic, where I saw all of these birds that where really graphic. They had all of these beautiful black and white stripes on their shoulders—and they looked so out of place in the summer but I imagined that in the winter, they'd be better adapted. So I got inspired to contrast this man-made, formalist thing with this lush Baltic nature—and even found [laughing] the "perfect fabric" at the store! And I brought it to my friend Ida who was going to help me with some of the mechanics of sewing the mask, and I took it out of the bag and she said, "Oh! Marimekko!" And everyone who's seen it since, who is Finnish I mean, that's the first thing that they say.

[Queen of this Island (Utö)—did I



Queen of This Island (Utö), 2008, 90 x 110 cm, c-print

tell you that was inspired by the pictures of the traditional Finnish wedding crown?

Yeah. But I haven't seen any wedding in Finland using that kind of crown. [laughing]

I've only ever seen a few historical pictures, but I was SO blown away. It was so crazy intense amazing. Like, where would that tradition come from? It is the strangest, thing, no?

I have no idea—except maybe, you know, some northern tribe?

Yeah!

[laughing] But I understand what you're saying about producing objects just to create an illusion short-term for something else. I think that's the freedom of photography and film. When you don't show the object, it's not in anybody's way, it's not occupying any physical space in the world. When you show it, it can fill people's bodies and minds with emotions and ideas. When you turn it off, it's not there to disturb anybody. Do you think you're going to continue to work with film?

I already have an idea for a film that I want to do next—and it takes place here in Finland. So I know I'd like to continue to work in film, but I've just been so concentrated on producing work, that I don't know exactly what it is yet, in a way. Making a photograph versus making a moving image is just so different—I don't know how to articulate it yet, for me. Right now I'm occupied with this idea that it's possible to make a body of work in both still and moving images. But it's kind of a scary place to be in, particularly because I'm still so new at making films.

But it's really brave to show it. In a way, when you're still in the middle of the process of creating these works. Can you see yourself continuing this kind of approach? Or, when you return to Chicago, do you see yourself trying to connect with nature there?

In a way that's where this all began. In the summer of 2006 I made those Fallen Women photographs [From Here and In the Pines], and when



In the Pines, 2006, 147 x 177 cm, c-print

I first showed those, people would say to me, "your work looks so Scandinavian." [laughing] To me, they're so very Midwestern [US]. But those off-hand comments were what made me look to come to Finland in the first place, to see if I actually had some kind of affinity with Nordic artists. And the fact that I am partially Finnish—my father's mother immigrated to the States as a child—was also another big reason I wanted to come here. But I don't know if when I go back to the US if I'll need to make work like this. It's funny—because for the first few months I was here, I couldn't make anything. I was still just settling into Helsinki, and the only ideas I had were of photographs to make with my brother! And then the day that he came to visit in January [to help shoot Untitled (Utö)], I stayed up all night just writing in my notebook. And that's when I got the ideas for both of the films—the day he arrived and was sleeping off his jetlag. Only then did I come up with the storyline for the film we shot on Utö a few days later, and I also found the resolution for Dress of Good Weather. It all came at once. So, as soon as he was there, I didn't have to think about making work with him anymore!

He gave you the security.

Something! It's maybe a little too clear to see how that was the case.

Yeah, psychological.

But I don't know—maybe when I go home I won't need to work with him either. But also, I'm trying to stay here in Finland at least for a little while during the summer. I've had all of these ideas for things to do here that are in the same vein as the work in Elaborate Flirtations: constructed, psychedelic or surreal scenarios. Or something.

Yeah, it's difficult to see your work while you're in the process of making it. It would be nice to just be able to make the work and not think about what I'm making! But you're conscious all of the time. It can make the creative process full of these thoughts: "Can I make this? Does it look like my work?" And at the same time you're still trying to push all of those limits. Re-defining your identity in a way, not just as an artist, but also as a human being. But I think you're just in the middle, at this point in your career, where you can just encourage yourself to break your own rules, or the rules that your environment puts on you. I think it's really important to feel uncomfortable sometimes, and to make work that doesn't look like your work, at least in the beginning, but then to see how it converts into something else. Because, then, you are changing with the process as well.

Exactly. But it's a little scary to think that I wouldn't be comfortable if I were, uh, comfortable... [laughing]

You could have just continued with the old aesthetic that you began in the States, for example, I think it's really brave that you've been making these new films. I think it's always really great to test a new technique. It lets you see what you're doing from another perspective.

—
WHOLEHEARTED THANKS TO: Russell Schneider, Jr., Elise Rasmussen, Sarah Gerats, Yala Juchmann, Elina Tuhkanen, Erno Enkenberg, Salla Tykkä, Greta Polo, Brian Bress, Eijja-Liisa Ahtila, Irmeli Kokko, Riikka Stewen, Aura Seikkula, Minna Långström, Ida Kirkkopelto, Ewa Górzna, Riikka Kuoppala, Filippo Zambon, Lina Tegman, Jussi Niva, Whitney Tassie, Monique Meloche, students & staff of Kuvataideakatemia / Academy of Fine Arts Helsinki, KUVA Department of Time & Space, J. William Fulbright Foundation, The Fulbright Center Helsinki, Lois Roth Foundation, & Neil Donnelly.



Queen of This Island (Suomenlinna), 2008, 90 x 110 cm, c-print

You combined two very nationalistic symbols—the landscape and Marimekko.

Yeah, I know. I don't know if it's embarrassing or not—because no Finnish person would do that, right?

No.

Unless they're doing it for a national marketing campaign...

Or a fashion shot done in nature... but it's obvious that it's not fashion photography. But how is it important to you that you're working in photography and film and video and not working with objects, for example? Is it a very intentional choice for you?

I like the illusion I can create in an image, like how very simple elements can be put together to make something that's more than the sum of its parts. Like just putting my hand on my brother's hand, in a photograph it can be charged with all of these meanings but in reality it's just a simple gesture. And I think that's the line that I try to tread with my work—and I think I've kind of pushed this more since I've been in Finland. Like, what additional elements I will kind of allow myself to throw into that mix? For example, making this big crown out of juniper

LLA
KKÄ

+
RRIE
EIDER

N
VER-
ION

Carrie Schneider
Elaborate Flirtations

7-11 May 2008
Galleria FAFA
Lönrotinkatu 35
00180 Helsinki

www.carrieschneider.net

