

brave and pathetic is better than drowning in shame

Josefin Arnell, Max Göran

Opens Thursday 7th December 2023, 6-9pm
8th December 2023 - 25th February 2024
Open 12-6pm Thursday-Sunday

In their first UK two-person exhibition, *brave and pathetic is better than drowning in shame*, Josefin Arnell and Max Göran present new moving image installations featuring truckers, horse girls, and the police, all caught up in yearning for their lost and unattainable objects. Whilst the exhibition brings the artists' individual practices in dialogue for the first time, its title stems from the motto devised by Arnell and Göran in 2014 for their long-standing collective work under the alias of 'HellFun'.

Spanning two floors, the exhibition is set up as a showdown between the horse beyond reach, and the emancipating, CO2-emitting automobile. It begins with a daytime party murder scene and a policewoman's search for her perfect horse (Josefin Arnell, *Beast and Feast*, 2023). Upstairs, an artist-cum-trucker journeys through unending days at a place where the sun never sets (Max Göran, *Dieselina Dreams*, 2023), and on a Mitsubishi Carisma's last day on earth, it returns from dusk to dawn hopping on and off Berlin's landmarks and unremarked side views (Max Göran, *Mitsubishi Hop-on, Hop-off - Grand Finale*, 2023).

Both in their individual and collective work, the artists use humour, class references and absurdity, mining their own life facts, to fictionalise themselves into versions of the Self unhinged from the super-ego or guided by a childlike Id. The horse and the car, recurring symbols and motifs in Arnell and Göran's respective practices, often become containers for newly-found agency, affection, obsession, melancholia and tainted power. In the exhibition, these appear as indispensable prostheses to fantasies of a life lived in freedoms, or fitting in.

Leaning into the downstairs gallery space's past life as a horse stable, Josefin Arnell's campy blend of B-Movie gore and shaky-cam realism, *Beast and Feast* follows the inner and outer dramas of its main protagonist, police officer Annina. Juggling many things, she is a single mum navigating a sometimes overwhelming life. Annina wants to fit in, to feel the love and validation of the police, i.e., her colleagues. Gradually she becomes fixated on the perfect horse as the singular solution to her torments and discomforts. To find her way, or at least, her horse, Annina must undertake a series of quests: to deal with emotionally abusive co-workers and fight the stable girl aka life coach to the sound of Stina Fors' 'Baby Girl'. Intoxicated by Baby's farts, she goes through sulphuric hell (the chicken house aka the womb). Will she live up to our, and her own, expectations?

Arnell's *Beast and Feast* navigates cycles of violence, employing characters in shifting positions of power over another, wherein the abused may become the abuser, shunning the narrative formula of stable 'good' protagonists and 'bad' antagonists. Here, the police horse, or horsegirl's happy hardcore 'little white pony', stands in for the ultimate symbol of a living being co-opted and coerced for power. When the public is orderly, it is an approachable interface, and when the public is not, it is here to intimidate and crowd-control you. Shot in a breeding stable for Arabian horses, revered for their beauty and stamina, while Arnell was pregnant with her firstborn, the filmic environment is a stage for pent-up fixations – impossible desires for one thing to sort one's life and 'correct' the world.

Upstairs, in the 16mm road movie *Dieselina Dreams*, Max Göran's protagonist, a not-yet money-making artist, yearns to be a trucker. His psychoanalyst says it is a symptom. So far, unclear of what. It all begins inside a truck with a 'real trucker', who talks about being a trucker and plays trucker music from different corners of the world; cheesy, rowdy and cinematic music.

In remote parts of Sweden, where Summer light never ceases piercing through the clouds, lines between fantasy and reality come undone. They first pass a haunted hill, then a ghost fox, and the story tangles. 'Be confident, you got this', assures the instructor. The real trucker turns out to be an artist. As the night finally sets in, the real artist transmutes into a trucker too. A sunset is a postcard but also a screen back reflecting emotions – a sky sublime, painfully beautiful and indescribably sad. Passengers catch it through the side window while we drive towards disaster in diesel fumes.



In late Summer 2023, having previously left a job he hated in a gay sauna, Max Göran went to Katastrof Trafikskola (trans. Catastrophe Driving School) to become a licensed trucker. His latest film, produced in late Autumn 2023, was shot in 16mm colour film, honing in on the trucker profession and its waning twentieth-century mythology of freedom. *Diesel Line Dreams* features a rendering of Fred Eaglesmith's 'Trucker Speed' by Stix Omar (vocals), with Anette Nordmo on church organ.

The backstory is the back gallery. In June 2020, Göran obtains a driver's licence in the small town he grew up in and purchases a 1999 silver Mitsubishi Carisma for €600. He drives it down from Sweden to Berlin. The car turns into a substitute for a more permanent sense of home, a place to smoke and listen to music. The same summer it has to be assessed for roadworthiness by the EU and does not pass the test. The night before it is to be 'killed' at the scrapyards, Göran and two friends take one last ride into the sunrise in Berlin. This is the time-space of *Mitsubishi Hop-on Hop-off – Grand Finale* (2023). The edit hops on and off Berlin's landmarks and unremarkable night lights abruptly, shaping a moody, stuttering DJ set of last year's radio hits and eternal classics. The night turns to dusk, the moon's high up, eclipsing 19th-century military heroes. For a longer moment Marvin Gaye cries out 'What's Going On?', and the night drive's mood is shifting into a slow, viscous, psychedelic momentum. Mitsubishi runs out of gas, last supper and we go again. The morning sun rises. We do not see the car die.

Curator Adomas Narkevičius

Josefin Arnell (Ljusnedal, Sweden) lives and works in Amsterdam. In 2015 and 2016 she participated in the residency programme at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam. In 2018 she won the Theodora Niemeijer Prijs for emerging female artists in the Netherlands. She is nominated for the 2023 edition of Prix de Rome Netherlands. In addition to her solo work, she is involved in multiple collaborations and together with Max Göran she forms the artist duo HellFun. Places where her work has been shown include: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; WIELS, Brussels; UKS, Oslo; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem; Athens Biennale; Moscow International Biennale for Young Art; Auto Italia, London; Kunsthalle Münster, Rencontres Internationales, Paris/Berlin and IDFA International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam. Josefin Arnell's 'Beast and Feast' (2023) is commissioned by Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, and presented in group exhibition 'Fever Dream', 17 November 2023 - 3 March 2024.

Max Göran is an artist and filmmaker who lives and works between Berlin and Sweden. He holds an MFA from Goldsmiths (2020-2022), and has studied with professor Josephine Pryde at the Berlin University of the Arts (2015-2019). His first solo exhibition was at Jenny's Gallery in Los Angeles in 2019 and his work has also been shown at festivals and in group exhibitions at galleries and institutions such as Galerie Neu; CPH:DOX, Kasseler Dokfest; the 7th Edition of the Athens Biennale; New Contemporaries; Kunstverein München, European Media Art Festival. Together with artist Josefin Arnell he forms the duo HellFun.

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