

Anastasia Savinova at Bonniers Konsthall

Elemental Encounters

Born near the Ural Mountains in the former Soviet Union, Anastasia Savinova currently resides in the serene landscapes of Sweden's northern region. Her studio in Umeå, a quiet university town 400 km below the Arctic Circle, is just a short stroll away from the forest and river—the ideal setting for focused work. Summers bring endless days and unique light, while winters offer stillness and slow walks through the frozen landscape.

Her work spans across mediums—sculpture, installation, drawing, photography, collage, video, found objects and performance—and is heavily informed by her background in architecture, which brings together her love for construction with her fascination for the natural world. She finds solace and inspiration in the mountains and the sea as well as the myriad of life forms inhabiting these environments. Seeking to capture the essence of nature and connect to its power, her pieces evoke feelings of tranquility and urgency simultaneously.

Savinova's upbringing with her father, a priest and a mountain walker, instilled in her a deep reverence for the universe and a profound respect for the natural world, themes that permeate her practice exploring wonder, freedom, and eternity. Summers spent swimming with her mother in the Volga River also influenced the artist's sensitivity to nature, nurturing a connection with the elements.

Her sculptural works often resemble multi-species habitats. Evoking images of earthly and otherworldly beings, she seamlessly blends natural and industrial materials merging the real with the fantastical. Shells, fishing boats, seagrass, buoys and mooring ropes mingle with driftwood, weathered polystyrene, fossils, bones and feathers, forming monumental installations that address the beauty and fragility of ecosystems amidst mass extinction. Feeling a strong affinity to the water, Savinova challenges conventional perceptions of the aquatic world, emphasizing its significance through collaborations with researchers, biologists, and sound artists.

In her performance practice she integrates wearable sculptures, often obscuring her face with materials like stone, bones, or masks crafted from plants and foliage. This transformative ritual blurs the lines between artist and landscape, symbolizing her intimate connection to the natural world. Immersing herself in the primal energies of the elements, the artist seeks to unravel their mysterious power—a process she documents through photography and video. In her entirety, Savinova's work is rooted in 'more-than-human' ecologies, a perspective she brings powerfully to Bonniers Konsthall.

As you enter the museum space, *Geosmin* surrounds you with an earthy, evocative atmosphere, invoking the indefinable scent of rain-soaked soil—a sensory connection to the natural world's forces both ancient and future. Large-scale graphite drawings, so finely detailed they appear to hover off the wall, create a shadowy play that contrasts with dark, dense suspended sculptures:

Savinova's signature cocoon-like forms crafted from soil, grass, hair, and other natural fibers. The work's raw materiality evokes primordial mysteries, inviting an intimate dialogue between humanity and nature that embodies both the untamed and the vulnerable, highlighting the dark allure of the unknown.

In *Dialects of the Deep*, the main gallery becomes an oceanic sanctuary, inviting viewers into an atmosphere thick with dim light and a visceral soundscape that echoes the depths of the sea. As you step into this space, the sound of cod—recorded over years of dedicated research by marine biologist Rebekah Oomen and sound artist John Andrew Wilhite—fills the air, pulsing and vibrating through the aged wood of hanging sculptures, made of salvaged fishing boats from the Barents Sea. These monumental bodies resonate with voices that speak of connection, fragility, and continuity. Together, sculpture and sound weave a nearly sacred experience—one that reframes the underwater world as a place alive with language and rhythm, urging us to listen and to recognize the delicate interdependence between human and marine life.

Tidal Gatherings guides visitors through a long, almost ceremonial passage, leading them toward a luminous moving image of water in the shape of a Vesica Piscis—a form that anchors the space like an altar. Sculptures crafted from shells, fish skins, sand, plastic debris, and other materials found in or near water line the path, evoking water beings that might appear along a shoreline walk. The ascending light beacons at the gallery's end, mirroring both a pilgrimage and a meditation on the fragility of nature in a changing world.

As one navigates Savinova's work, it becomes undeniably clear: in her exploration of coexistence and the exchange of life's forces, energy, and physical matter with proximate and distant Others, she reveals our interconnectedness within a larger whole.