

In his photography, films, and videos, John Skoog (born 1985 in Kvidinge, Sweden, lives in Frankfurt am Main) combines research into history and everyday life with a poetic and fictional atmosphere that is grounded in the film and literary traditions of Scandinavian modernism. At Art Basel he received the Baloise Art Prize, with prize money of 30,000 Swiss francs, for his 2014 video *Reduit* (Redoubt). This work is the centerpiece of his new solo exhibition in Vienna, entitled *VÄRN* (Defence) and showing three of his film works for the first time in Austria. The artist presents *Reduit* (Redoubt) embedded within an installation on the museum's Level -2. At the same time mumok cinema is screening the films *Sent på Jorden* (Late on Earth, 2011) and *Förår* (Early Spring, 2012). Together these three works form a trilogy that is not merely set in rural surroundings but also addresses the economic exploitation of the natural world. The artist also draws a picture of social realities that dispenses with any notions of rural innocence and security.

#### *Reduit* (Redoubt): a Story of a Personal Cold War Fortress

The exhibition focuses on *Reduit* (Redoubt), a 2014 film that presents the idiosyncratic behavior of one individual as a reflection of historical conditions. Located in the sweeping south Swedish flatlands, this film revolves around a small cottage that its owner Karl-Göran Persson converted with trash materials into a fortress and refuge for himself and his neighbors, by way of precaution in the event of a Russian invasion during the Cold War. The exhibition title *VÄRN* cites the word that Persson painted in large and clumsy letters on the outside of one the doors to his dwelling and that was intended to show his neighbors the way into the protective interior of the building in case of emergency. This word thus stands for protection and defense in the light of an imminent threat as well as for the preservation of personal integrity and traditional values.

Persson's behavior may seem anachronistic at first, but it was at least partly caused by brochures entitled *om kriger kommer* (When the War Comes) that the Swedish government distributed over many years in order to advise the population on the proper course of action in the case of a Soviet invasion.

In this film, the camera closely inspects the building's battered walls so that viewers only gradually get a feel for its shape, while the voices of Persson's former neighbors and acquaintances are heard talking about him off-screen. In the decayed walls we can see the heavy trash that Persson used up to his death in 1975 and that stands as a physical witness to his fear. Later the camera pans away from the building into the surrounding landscape, showing the expanse and isolation of the location. *Reduit* (Redoubt) is presented in the form of an installation at mumok. This contains reused, rough and ready wall elements and floor markings that trace the ground plan of the dilapidated fortress and together refer to its now fragmentary character. A series of color prints is taken from illustrations in the brochure *om kriger kommer*, showing the historical reality behind Persson's personal obsession.

The installation also includes a photograph of the farmer himself.

On the request of John Skoog, the exhibition is enhanced by the work *Pieces* (1989) by American artist Laurie Parsons. Placed adjacent to *Reduit* (Redoubt), it consists of all kinds of collected trash, in a reenactment that displays parallels to the subject of Skoog's film.

#### A Trilogy that Dispenses with Notions of Rural Innocence and Security

*Sent på Jorden* (Late on Earth, 2011) and *Förar* (Early Spring, 2012), both on show during mumok's opening hours at mumok cinema, address natural processes of transformation and moments of transition in human lives, such as the transition from childhood to adulthood. They do this completely without romanticism or idealism.

In *Sent på Jorden*, the title of which refers to the poetry of the Swedish author Gunnar Ekelöf (1907–1968), Skoog portrays a rural community at fall-time, in the form of a number of thematically interlinked episodes. This film is set in the scenes of his own childhood and youth, in Kvidinge, a small village near Malmö. All the scenes take place at dusk. In his choice of twilight and the fall season, Skoog is concentrating on natural scenes of transition that seem to be inscribed with the coming adulthood of children and youth as a form of social awakening.

In *Sent på Jorden* evening and the approaching year's end form the backdrop to the action, while *Förar* is grounded in an early spring landscape and environment. The Swedish word "förar" is taken from the language of farming, where it denotes the period just before sowing and work on the fields begins. The theme of the film is, however, not an early spring idyll. The still barren and frozen landscape is often shrouded in thick fog. The film tells the story of a young redheaded girl whom the camera follows as she wanders through her village. Scenes with her friends are frequently accompanied by acts of aggression and force that show that the serious side of life is already evident in children's play. The film's final sequence is a good example—the girl is seen walking down the village's main street, carrying a hunting gun that is much too heavy for her.

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