

*in the skin
there is the lust...*

We can find the lust on the skin, and we can find the ecstasy in the eyes. In *Ek-stas* (2017), by Åsa Ersmark, a woman looks at us with a serene gaze glancing in her eyes, coloured by the violent relaxation of the post-orgasmic state of being. Imagery representing and depicting female sexual pleasure, in art history and in the wider realm of visual culture, is still almost non-existent. In her practice, Åsa Ersmark has plunged into the deep waters, creating her own imagery by drawing from depictions of religious ecstasy, utopic psychedelia, psychoanalytical apertures in dream worlds, affectionate, affective and affirmative notions of womanhood considered as ideal, and the leaking associative cracks in all of these notions.

This imagery and this language may not pre-exist, but women's desire and lust does. Always has, always will. To discuss it, Ersmark creates a language, which allows us to confront and embrace a female sexuality that will not be detained or controlled. Here, the world and the phenomena existing within it, is seen beyond patriarchal power structures. They have no significance; they do not exist.

One form of female sexuality and desire manifests in Ersmark's oeuvre through the notion of ASMR (an abbreviation of autonomous sensory meridian response). Something of a para-scientific phenomenon, this experience is described as a physical soothing and pleasurable tingling sensation, beginning at the top of your head in and on your scalp, making its way towards your spine and your limbs, like a lover's gentle touch. ASMR is mostly triggered by auditory and visual stimulation, such as soft whispers, or looking at someone doing something very carefully.

Typing ASMR in a YouTube search engine gives you hundreds and hundreds of videos, where mostly women are whispering and breathing close to the microphone, performing roleplays where they comfort and affirm the viewer with 'personal attention', or where they are meticulously scratching, tapping and fondling objects and materials. The movements and whispers are soothing and sensual, yet not necessarily sexual. ASMR resembles auditory-tactile synaesthesia, where a physical reaction is created in and on our bodies as a reaction to something we hear or see.

We can encounter intersections between ASMR, sensuality and sexuality in several of Åsa Ersmark's works. In the photographic work *Mermaid's Trick* (2018)

we see an unusual hand gently touching an ear, a central actor in the ASMR experience. The photograph captures a short moment and a small gesture, a loving one, fleeting yet significant to those involved. Also in the video piece *Snow* (2015), Ersmark plays with the capability sounds and images have in resonating in and on our bodies. The viewer witnesses a rain of sugary snow slowly falling on female genitals. The piece offers a visual depiction of an experience, an abstraction of female sexual pleasure and joy.

...and in the darkness there are stars

In the film *Hekate Rising* (2018), a whispering female voice invites the viewer to a dreamlike world, with its own order of things. The artist herself describes the work as a psychedelic love story about eternal love, originating in a feminine and prehistoric power. In Greek mythology, Hekate was the goddess of magic, witchcraft, ghosts, the night, and the moon. In Ersmark's film, we are guided by the whispers and the fragmented love story through forests, deserts, blue moon nights, and kitchens, to the moment of Hekate's appearance – the switching between what was before, and what will remain.

Hekate's glasses (2017) links to the moment of a utopic new world order taking place. Mica is a shiny silicate mineral, found as minute scales in granite and other rocks, or as crystals. Viewed through the mica mounted in the spectacles, the kaleidoscopic view on the world is not short-lived, but something we should properly experience, something we may pursue. We are led towards a more permanent kaleidoscope vision, a new order of things, where the structure of the reality, or the home, is not built through patriarchal rules or standards. Rather, as Ersmark suggests, they originate in a feminine power.