

## TIME AND SPACE

In the autumn of 2010, the exhibition “My name is not Susan” was shown at Norrtälje Konsthall. Curator for the project was Lili von Wallenstein (Susanna Ericson Wallstén), with the exhibition title borrowed from the 1991 Whitney Houston song of the same name, in which the female first-person voice expresses dissatisfaction with her boyfriend mistakenly calling her by his previous girlfriend’s name. The curator saw the song lyrics and Whitney Houston’s female public persona as a depiction of the structural complexity regarding the power relationship between man and woman, how men’s ways of categorizing, labeling, interpreting and asserting dictate both existence as a whole as well as on an individual level. The “not” in Houston’s as well as the exhibition’s title indicates a negation pointing to an opposition and an active intention of achieving another form of order. But the opposition, according to the curator, must not let itself be classified under prearranged templates, formats or expectations. The feminist opposition must be allowed to be complex and ever-changing. There must be an opportunity for women artists to tentatively test the waters and problematize without being judged by preconceived notions. One of the curator’s choice of artists was Åsa Ersmark. And in my role as director of Norrtälje Konsthall back then, this marked the start of my collaboration with Åsa Ersmark. Included in the exhibition were the video pieces *Volcano* and *Sunset*. These works respectively featured a woman’s breast and a man’s scrotum, but as images, they also represented a smoking volcano and a grassy knoll in an archipelago sunset. The connotations are wide-ranging and force us to keep several interpretations in mind at the same time. Charged body parts are combined with the Swedish National Romanticism of Bruno Liljefors and the countless paintings of Vesuvius from the 1800s. That in itself creates an uncertainty allowing for a more diffuse and subconscious experience to become perceptible. The third piece in the exhibition, entitled *Path*, was a forest path cast in latex, another image that not only offered a broad array of associations reminding us of the complexity of existence, but also underlined the importance of direction. Back once again to Norrtälje, now in the fall of 2012, with an exhibition of her own, this time in collaboration with the curator Elina Suoyrjö. A central piece in the exhibition space was the video installation *Lunatic*, a loop of approximate six minutes with various moon phases emerging simultaneously in a stroboscopic flow to music by Simon Mullan and Theodore Trottner. The piece surrounded the viewer, and the experience was an extensive one. The alternating images of the moon were beautiful, the rhythm suggestive, and the electronic sound and music captivating. It felt as if one were sucked into the work, as if in a trance or ritual, while at the same time existing in a conscious state with thoughts of the

moon as a symbol – the night, emotions, the negation of day, and wisdom. Lunacy and irrationality. But also time, marked by the phases of the moon from new to half to full.

Fast-forward now to the autumn of 2018 and Uppsala Art Museum. New works have emerged. The magic is still there. Here we still find a strong desire to examine traditions, patriarchal structures and rigid conceptions with regard to freedom and opportunities. Not to mention insights into sexuality as well as the subconscious locus of our actions and standpoints. It is these situations that are handled with considerable poetic precision, and where the material consists, on the one hand, of symbols, legends, narratives, mystery and cultural heritage and, on the other, of aesthetics and the capacity of the visual arts to create new form. The piece *Hekate Rising* is a psychedelic, 16 mm film serving as an invocation of Hekate, the Goddess of, among other things, the night and moonlight in Greek mythology. The piece is strongly evocative, and we are slowly ushered forward by a veiled voice through poetic images. The exhibition also features the long and ongoing series of watercolours of toadstools painted with the artist's own menstruation blood. As in many of her works, here we find different layers of symbolism, but also Ersmark's own physical presence and time-dimensioned participation. Newly produced photographic works are *Ek-stas*, *Mermaid's Trick* and *With Bluebeard Inside*. The latter includes the recurring mushroom theme based on the story of Duke Bluebeard's latent cruelty, that, like mushrooms, can undesirably pop up and flourish in different contexts. The manly figure in the bearded chin and throat of the image also bears the shape of a mushroom, as well as that of a phallus. The bared throat, however, emphasizes the fine line between strength and weakness.

Åsa Ersmark's works are multi-dimensional. They offer a wide variety of narratives and interpretations. They hint at alternative levels of consciousness and reality connections, they problematize and analyze. And it is with the craft and magical power of art that all this can take place.