

“Ekonomi / Economy”
Leif Elggren's Solo Exhibition
Belenius
Jakobs torg 3, Stockholm, Sweden
November 25–December 23, 2016

I meet with Leif in his studio where he provides visual explicatives. But Leif and I don't really require visuals; it's a formality. Inevitably, artists, curators, gallerists and critics get to know each other in insular community X. They become acquainted with the asked personalities, svelte styles and stubborn signatures of those both fancied and lamented; they watch (likened to some out-of-body experience or gladiator match) the phenomenon unfold. I have faith in the notion that being one's own detective (i.e., not depending upon others to catch cohorts arm-deep in the muck) still works. Yet as quickly as a king or queen becomes a fool (and vice versa), Power proves to be a crafty shapeshifter waiting behind the curtain.

Leif explains a selected work which he refers to as his “first creative impulse.” It is a small wooden fish which he placed, as a boy, in a jar inside a larger jar (double-glass creating the illusion of depth in water) with faux seaweed floating. His parents denied him his wish to own an aquarium, so he made his own. I reveal to him my coinciding memory as a child raised in the South. Even though it was/is taboo—as soon as I was old enough to walk—I was allowed to roam fields and forests alone. I wanted to be able to take photographs of animals and scenery encountered, but I was far too young for my mother to justify such a lofty gift (it was the 80's). In parallel, I made my own “camera” out of a block of wood. I carved a deep gash into the block; I placed a paper scrap into the hole which I would pull out to use as a mini-canvas. I sketched what existed within my immediate frame. I replaced the drawing back inside the hole and pulled it out *again*—as if the image was a real photo from the “camera,” never rendered by my own hand. It was both a sloppy magic trick and utopic model. But this self-made toy wasn't *my* first creative impulse; it was my first “impulse to rebel” against an authority telling me that I couldn't have what was desired. From mutual experiences of rejection and marginalization, DIY modes tend to thrive. With Leif's stacked bed frames, contemplate a strained collective consciousness—where Freudian dreams ripple and reflect, packed like sardines—which compliments the artist's largest inscape on Earth: an otherworldly zone for those who view any wall, objectified, as an absurd jest or sorrow.

Individuals doing anything worth doing may find themselves at a crossroad; such lives are not easily mapped on a Cartesian plane displaying a “regular” sine curve. The value of an action may align with the value of art or an ideal, or it veers off into *another* space where intuitive navigation is paramount. Moving along this grid, one is guided by voices: Plato (- *Then, isn't to produce justice to establish the parts of the soul in a natural relation of control, one by another, while to produce injustice is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature? - Precisely*); Niccolò Machiavelli (*One therefore needs to be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to dismay the wolves*); or Emma Goldman (*Emancipation should make it possible for woman to be human in the truest sense. Everything within her that craves assertion and activity should reach its fullest expression; all artificial barriers should be broken, and the road towards greater freedom cleared of every trace of centuries of submission and slavery*). Leif displays the ghostly head of Swedish king Carolus XII; today, messages from notably flawed icons emit white noise, but tomorrow: syllables may conjoin, aligning words into coherent phrases with logical directives. Every other century or so, an upgraded “crude genius” appears; a more astute, deft anarchy may trigger the metaphorical equivalent of a dictator's failed invasion during a winter freeze.

And now, ignoring whispers from high-brow editors (*stick to the art—let's not get personal or political*): I wrote another draft before US election results which now seems frivolous and insensitive. I'm an American who immigrated to Sweden—out of repulsion, due to topophilia and a thirst for *The Other*. I reside in some peripheral overlap, wavering in-between, on the cusp; Leif's practice cultivates and protects this realm. With the ambition KREV (Kingdoms of Elgaland-Vargaland) in collaboration with CM von Hausswolff, etc., their actions enforce that auxiliary territories continue to flourish and eclipse—with no one's permission but the most virtuous of shepherds, shamans and drifters. In its own right, the borderland of KREV infinitely expands—immunity is granted, exile desists. There is no glass ceiling to shatter here.

—Jacquelyn Davis