

THE SEA

Environment,
mythology,
loss
and
movement



Kalmar konstmuseum

12.6 –
26.9 2021



THE SEA

Environment, mythology, loss and movement

The Sea revolves around four nodes: environment, mythology, loss and movement. The participating artists, eleven of them contemporary and a few selected from the museum collection, all approach the topic in their own, particular way. We move between history and the present day, through science and environmental questions, movement and travel, into the imagination and the fascination for the depths of the sea.

We all depend on the sea for trade, transport and food. It has also played a major role in our history and for our culture and identity. But the importance of the sea is even greater than that. It affects the weather, the winds and our climate. The sea has a levelling effect to avoid extreme fluctuations in these phenomena and it has also helped to cover up the strain we have put on our planet. As with all nature around us, we cannot separate ourselves from the sea. Just as we cannot ignore the fact that the climate crisis is inextricably linked to questions about social and economic justice.

Apart from its ecosystems providing us with food, energy and recreation, the sea has always been a source of human creativity, dreams and imagination. Few other topics reoccur as often in art, music and literature. Our long relationship with the sea also includes mythology. Sea monsters that have swallowed ships, encounters with mermaids, creation and deluges. In the mythological tales, fiction and reality meet humanity's capacity for imagination when facing that which has no simple explanation. Perhaps we need an updated mythology and common world views more than ever right now. But what would they look like?

In the submarine world, transportation, movement and rhythm is constantly in motion – effects of the tides, of sea temperatures and thousands of other processes and flows. All of this interlinked in intricate patterns developing over millions of years. Patterns that we only know fragments of. *The Sea* is an attempt at using art, texts and conversation to enter into dialogue with history as well as our present-day, and explore a small part of this big blue.

Marjolijn Dijkman
&
Toril Johannessen
Still from the film:
Reclaiming Vision
2018

Cover image:
Lotta Törnroth
*Jag väntar som
ett fyrljus III*
Photography, 2013

Sara Hemmingsson & Karl Magnus Petersson
curators

ARTISTS

Marjolijn Dijkman, Toril Johannessen, Birgitta Silfverhielm,
Filippa Arrias, Mårten Nilsson, Cecilia Mellberg, Lotta Törnroth,
Johan Thurfjell, Jonas Dahm, Nuutti Koskinen and Nils Lagergren

MARJOLIJN DIJKMAN & TORIL JOHANNESSEN

Reclaiming Vision, 26:37 minutes (HD, Stereo), 2018

Reclaiming Vision is a reflection on the relationship humans have to their environment, and the things we can't see with the naked eye. Microorganisms from the brackish waters of the inner Oslo fjord and algae cultivated at the University of Oslo have been filmed through a microscope. At the end of the film, all participants are listed with their scientific names in alphabetical order. It is fiction inspired by reality and an experiment using the nature documentary genre. The music, by the composer Henry Vega, emphasises the unfolding drama. Algae and microorganisms are a prerequisite for all life, they contribute oxygen to the sea and air, and they absorb carbon dioxide. These life forms are simply vital for ecosystems, the climate, and by extension, for human existence.

Marjolijn Dijkman, born in the Netherlands, lives and works in Brussels. Toril Johannessen, born in Norway, lives and works in Bergen. Through different collaborations they have combined an interest in scientific research with artistic methods. They are interested in the co-existence between science and other parts of society and how they, as artists, can allow themselves to experiment with genres. Approaching subjects from different angles can be key in making people understand how ecosystems work. In *Reclaiming Vision*, Marjolijn Dijkman and Toril Johannessen turn perspectives on their head and let the marine world take on a, for many, new role. It can seem simple at first, but the observer is asked to pause, enter the narrative, be carried away by the drama and leave behind the idea that humans, in their dominance, size and strength, are superior to anything, even something that small.

BIRGITTA SILFVERHIELM

Upplösning I – II, Spant, Spann, Par, Vaka, Sarg, Sköld, Märke, Far, Samling, Väg, site-specific installation, mixed media, 2021

The sailing boat *Sländan* (the dragonfly), built 1946, is the starting point and the nave of Birgitta Silfverhielm's installation. The boat is on loan from the National Maritime Museum's collection. Only eleven versions of the type *Storslända* (large dragonfly) were ever built, drawn by the Norwegian-Swedish shipbuilder Jac M Iversen. Birgitta Silfverhielm owned this very boat herself between 1979 and 1983, her first own sailing boat. She was not allowed to make any changes to *Sländan*, which is now a museum piece. Birgitta Silfverhielm decided to split the installation into two parts: one cultural-historical tale of *Sländan* and other memories from the sea, as well as an installation which reflects over the longing for freedom, processes of change and openness versus closeness. Contrasts between the static and that which is in dissolution and traces of that which exists or is about to disappear.

The material for the installation at Kalmar konstmuseum comes from an old boat (a Scandinavian "snipa") that was beyond repair and destined for the junk yard – a disarmed boat hull on its way to return to nature and in its own process of change. The full picture can be seen as Birgitta Silfverhielm's homage to *Sländan*. She who once took her out on adventures is now lying in state, unsailable. Sooner or later, everything returns to earth or sea. Birgitta Silfverhielm has returned to these existential and eternal questions throughout her artistic career. She works in Stockholm and apart from her work as an artist she is also an art consultant for the Public Art Agency, Sweden. She is a dedicated sailor and works part of the year as a sailing instructor.

Birgitta Silfverhielm

Upplösning I

Upplösning II

Mixed media, 2021



FILIPPA ARRIAS

Bananrepubliken, oil on canvas, 2020. *Les Antilles – Les îles inutiles*, oil on canvas, 2020. *Artificial Sunset I–IV*, oil on canvas, 2021

In *Les Antilles – Les îles inutiles* (*The Antilles, The useless islands*) the observer stands in front of a large ultramarine landscape, a section of that which we call land and sea. In this work, Filippa Arrias has used her own biographical past as a starting point. She follows traces of her own family history, traces she wasn't aware of. It's about a colonial experience, and how different personal areas of interest happened to merge in the small country Suriname in South America. Traces, history, interests and fantasy are put into a larger perspective and a global history. Fragments from tales and the search for previous generations and experiences have turned into a projection surface for a series of paintings that is still in progress.

Is it a place or a mirage? *Bananrepubliken* can be interpreted as either. Here the observer is standing in front of a yellow, vibrating landscape. The title can refer to a democratically defunct state and is generally used disparagingly. There is a duality here, a place of alluring beauty that over time becomes blurred by less pleasant connotations. Is it a paradise beach? But is the paradise beach not always an illusion and a chimera? A place existing isn't enough, it must be used for something.

The paintings are a part of Filippa Arrias' ongoing research project at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, with the title: *Paramibostorken flög sin kos för att aldrig återvända – Transformationen som den Andre* (*The Paramibo stork flew away never to return – the Transformation as the Other*). Filippa Arrias, who works in Stockholm, has made several public works and is together with Britta Kjellgren Jäger currently working on one for the new psychiatry building for Region Kalmar län (the regional authority of Kalmar).

Filippa Arrias

*Les Antilles –
Les îles inutiles*
Oil on canvas, 2020
(Detail)

Uppsala
konstmuseum



MÅRTEN NILSSON

Spaced light ground: Magenta, Ochre, Sap green, mixed media, 2019

Mårten Nilsson has been working on the project *Spaced light ground* since 2014. The technique and materials consist of crocheted tablecloths and bedspreads bought in flea markets. He cuts out parts, colours them using acrylic paint and then builds up the shapes using a spiral of wire at their centre. This makes it possible to reshape the objects. Mårten Nilsson doesn't lock his sculptures into a final form but remains open to transforming them. The method relates to the dialogue with nature that the sculptures are evidence of. Nature in itself is not static but changes and shifts depending on the environment. The organic shapes are reminiscent of gnarled trees or branches, but also of water-living organisms such as seaweed. A number of elements below the surface are similar to those on land. Branches, roots, some algae and the tentacles of an octopus all have corresponding shapes above the surface. All of this is hidden to us humans as we go about our daily lives, but here, interpreted by Mårten Nilsson, they become fully visible in the high stairway of Kalmar konstmuseum.

The choice of material can be seen as a homage to the anonymous, to the tactile and elaborate handicraft that doesn't have a high financial value, but that has still required many hours of work. Mårten Nilsson works in Malmö. He has a background in graphic design and is inspired by graphic works of patterns and repetitions. Ten years ago, he started working more three dimensionally, he was drawn to nature and attracted by shapes that had been broken up. For the exhibition *The Sea* he has morphed the organic forms of the sculptures to give the sense that they are located beneath the surface.

Mårten Nilsson
*Spaced light
ground: Magenta,
Ochre,
Sap green
Mixed media, 2019*



Cecilia Mellberg
Still from the film:
Havet Är, 2021

CECILIA MELLBERG

Havet Är, 18 minutes, 2021. Text: Anna Lytsy, music: Caroline Giertz

Cecilia Mellberg has met many oceans on her travels around the world, but the Baltic Sea has always had a place close to her heart. It is from the eastern coast of Gotland, between Katthammarsvik and Ljugarn, that the material for *Havet Är* (*The Sea Is*) has been gathered. During five years, throughout the seasons, she has gone there, in her wetsuit and with her camera to follow the movements of the waves and the life of the sea. The film also has an accompanying text that can be listened to via headphones. The narrative is not synched with the image so can be listened to at any time, if one wishes to. Here, Cecilia Mellberg, shares her experiences and the events through which *Havet Är* has come to be.

Five years ago, Cecilia Mellberg fell seriously ill. She was between life and death, and the doctors could not find what was wrong. She was hospitalised for five weeks. During this time, her consciousness left her body. She was in a different place, as far away as it is possible to get. When she returned to her friends and family a new process began, to try and understand what she had been through and to find a way to share her knowledge and condition. She went to the sea, and through it she could remember. *Havet Är* is a meditation over the wave, the sea, shifts, life and everything in between. The wave can be seen as metaphor for movement and our seeking. Another trace found in the work is trust. Trust in a process, in what has happened, and in what is to come.

Cecilia Mellberg is a photographer, born and raised on Gotland, she lives both there and in Stockholm. For the past 25 years she has worked with documentary photography on different assignments and as a feature and press photographer. After her life-changing experience in 2015 she started taking photographs in new ways, with a new motive. *Havet Är* is her first artistic project with this starting point and this is the first time it is shown to the public.

LOTTA TÖRNROTH

Imaginära Öar, nine photographs, 2017–2020. *Jag väntar som ett fyrljus I–VI*, five photographs, 2013–2014, shown both at Kalmar konstmuseum and Bergkvara Sjöfartsmuseum

The series *Imaginary Islands* is an ongoing project where parts have taken place on Greenland – the world's largest and most scarcely populated island. The work started in 2017 during a two-month long studio residence at the art museum in Nuuk. Lotta Törnroth has since returned to Greenland several times. Some of the pictures are portraits, for example *Carla & Labradorhavet* (*Carla and the Labrador Sea*) 2017. The project covers themes such as longing and borders, in relation to the sea. Oceans can be what separates people. In Greenland, dual nationality, being a Greenlander and/or Danish, is a part of life. In the distance between the two countries, the sea is like a barrier, and family members can be located in different countries.

In the second part of *Imaginary Islands*, a centrally placed person can be seen carrying a light, close to the border between land and sea. These are tales told at dawn or dusk with a human figure alone in the great landscape. The sea, man and light on the verge of the dangerous. The figure is Lotta Törnroth herself. She is in dialogue with her environment, moments that might have taken place nearby and are connected to the fateful feeling that can emerge in the space between darkness and light.

To find a motif Lotta Törnroth often starts from real historical events. She then detaches the original story to create fantasy, presence and contemporaneity in the imagery. In her work with the series *I wait as a lighthouse I–VI* one of her starting points was the ship *Fru Margaretha* (*Mrs Margaretha*). It sailed from the port at Gävle to Åland in 1808, despite being in very bad condition and colloquially known as “the Death”. The journey was ordered by the Royal crown, but the ship sunk and at least 100 of the crew lost their lives. For Lotta Törnroth the story continues with those who remained on land.

Lotta Törnroth is an artist, based in Stockholm. She works with photography, sculpture, watercolours and text.

Lotta Törnroth
Fyren
(*Nuup Kangerlua*)
Photography,
2017

JOHAN THURFJELL

Dead Calm, 16 watercolours on paper, 2008

Drama and destiny, nothing is revealed about either of them in these pictures. It isn't until the observer reads the descriptions that the last jigsaw piece falls into place. Perhaps for some of us it is the title *Dead Calm* (*M/S Estonia*) that evokes a sense of disaster. But each ship, its crew, passengers and load, has its own destiny and its own tale. These watercolours show ships that have disappeared in fires, storms and after running aground. The ships are depicted as they were when they were still in use. They have a name, their own history and a before and after. The whole series consists of thirty ships that have all met horrific ends, 16 of them are shown here.

It is possible that the paintings also reflect more than what we see – that which came just before or just after. The moments before the catastrophe hit, radio communications, speculation, hearsay and witnesses. Conflicts, misjudgements, carelessness, bad luck or desperate pirates prowling. We must also remember that man does not rule over the weather. The still water *Dead Calm* can quickly change character as a storm comes in.

Johan Thurfjell, based on Tullgarn outside Vagnhäräd, strongly believes in the observer's own capacity for imagination. He charges his works with an energy and with tales that are not always easily described or depicted. Over the years, Johan Thurfjell's art has become ever more toned down and sculpture has been the dominating form in many of his latest exhibitions. He has discovered an interest in the worlds of mythology and folklore, returning to themes such as dreams versus reality.

Johan Thurfjell
Dead Calm (*Farah II*)
Watercolour, 2008

See picture on p. 35



JONAS DAHM

Underwater photography of wrecks from the Baltic Sea

Everywhere on earth there are traces of human activity, not least in the sea and on the seabed. The Baltic Sea has cold depths with low salinity which preserves shipwrecks better than anywhere else in the world. About 20 000 wrecks have been discovered, but considerably more are yet to be found. The bottom of the Baltic Sea is like a large museum below water, hidden to most of us but made visible through Jonas Dahm's and his diving team's ambitious project.

Through his photographs of wrecks, Jonas Dahm wants to tell the stories of these ships and the people on board. He highlights historical events by focusing on different details. It can be everyday objects opening up a new window to the past. Through the photographs, we get an opportunity to see the ships as they are on the seabed. The light, sharpness and the details of decay combine into a unique world with a very particular colour spectrum. Jonas Dahm and his team work with great respect and sensitivity for the fact that in many cases these are places of disasters, suffering and loss of life. The Baltic Sea has a long history of trade, migration and conflict.

Entering this world is a strange and at times eerie experience. History has been preserved and locked in, at the same time it is moving. It is hidden in the dark, and yet it is clearly there when the diving team shine their lights on it. Everything is a reminder of the fact that there have been people here, people who have touched these objects, walked the boards and stood on the decks.

Jonas Dahm is a diver and submarine photographer. He works with a large team to find and document wrecks. The historian, photographer and diver Carl Douglas is part of his team, he is also the founder of the organisation *Voice of the Ocean* working to promote research, education and communication of the sea, its ecosystems, environment, history and present. Jonas Dahm and Carl Douglas have worked together for over 20 years. This is the first time that the public can experience their photographs in a larger format.

Jonas Dahm /
Voice of the
Ocean
Otto Cords
Photography

NUUTTI KOSKINEN

Talk About Society, 18:04 minutes (HD, Stereo), 2019

Nuutti Koskinen is interested in raising questions about people's relationship to society, and how that relationship is shaped by the language and images of power. What effect does a polarised society have on its citizens? The film *Talk About Society* is set up in three acts and depicts a dangerous journey, the results of a disaster and eventually an awakening. The ship could be seen as a symbol of a sinking society. But parallel to a sense of doom, the atmosphere builds towards a bright ending. Dream and reality stand side by side and the music makes *Talk About Society* reverberate through the body.

The sea as environment and mythology is a returning feature in Nuutti Koskinen's work in which he combines installation, film, photography, animations and music. Nuutti Koskinen is based in Helsinki and also works as a graphic designer, he has founded a residence for artists on the island of Örö in the archipelago of Hiti in Finland.

Nuutti Koskinen
Still from the film:
Talk About Society
2019

NILS LAGERGREN

Ghost Liner, sculpture, wood and metal, 2018

Ghost Liner is a part of the ongoing project *Vessels: Ghost Fleet* in which Nils Lagergren investigates concepts such as time, decay and transformation. He builds his ship sculptures with materials he finds in his surroundings, it can be cans, old metal sheets or matches. The ships are then sunk in a bay in the archipelago outside Stockholm where they turn into wrecks. *Ghost Liner* has aged on the bottom of the sea for four years. What has it experienced? What fantasies and tales are activated when it transforms and later is shown to the world?

Nils Lagergren has always been fascinated by ships, both his father and grandfather were model ship builders. His interest in the ritual, the concentration, craft and technique in the modelling came to him early. It has continued into adulthood, and he lets himself dream of Atlantic steamships. In this project nature becomes his co-creator and decay becomes part of a slow process.

Nils Lagergren is based in Stockholm and also works with paper collages where he creates fable-like tales with references to and inspiration from series, children's books and travel literature.

Nils Lagergren
Ghost Liner
Sculpture, 2018

See picture on p. 31



MARJOLIJN DIJKMAN

Navigating Polarities, 24:02 minutes (HD, Stereo), 2018

Navigating Polarities investigates the history of navigation and the natural forces of polarity and magnetism present in the physical world. The work takes the Earth's geomagnetic field as a starting point, how animals and humans synchronise their behaviour within inherent laws of nature. All matter is bound by forces, difficult or impossible to control. *Navigating Polarities* is a film installation that allows the observer to view that which is hard to grasp. Marjolijn Dijkman combines scientific and historical material, for example how animals navigate, magnetic fields in space, diagrams, maps and compasses from different cultures and times in history.

Transportation takes place between the different poles and the globe shaped projection surface enhances the sense of being drawn in or part of something much larger and complex. From extensive references, a tale is formed of the different systems of the universe, and how humans have systematised, made comprehensible and transferred knowledge. That process has often taken place in pursuit of material gains, and in some instances have initiated a process of conscious or unconscious destruction. This is a difficult dilemma, though hugely important for our future, to learn from our mistakes and be humble in the face of the consequences of imbalances caused.

Marjolijn Dijkman
Still from the film:
Navigating Polarities
2018



ESSAYS

Lotta Törnroth, Birgitta Silfverhielm
and Karl Magnus Petersson

Ann-Marie Larsén
Landskap
Oil on canvas, 1947
(Detail)

THE SEA KNOWS NO LIMIT

Lotta Törnroth

It is as though I have closed my eyes, darkness surrounds me and the surf thunders towards the cliffs. The seascape in front of me only exists in my memory, a scenery drastically changed by darkness. I have been longing to come here, to the sea. At the same time, I am afraid, afraid of what is hidden in the dark, afraid that the waves will carry me out to the vast darkness. There is a sense of being exposed that is internalised in my body, a vulnerability originating in not feeling safe. A feeling I seek and return to time and again. I stand at the shore in the early morning to take photos. The waves come rolling in, across the beach and over my feet, the cold bites my body. It is easy to romanticise the large mass of water stretching out in front of me, but in the darkness, I don't get the feeling that the sea is benign. The sea feels enraged and without compassion.

In her book *The Sea Around Us*, the writer and marine biologist Rachel Carson writes that man originated from the sea, and that the saline solution in our blood vessels can be seen as an inheritance from that time. Unconsciously we are drawn back to the sea. Carson writes: "Standing on its shores, he must have looked but upon it with wonder and curiosity, compounded with an unconscious recognition of his lineage. He could not physically re-enter the ocean as the seals and the whales had done."¹

With those words in mind, I stand there in the dark listening to the swell. They are like inhaled and exhaled, a pulsating breath directed by the moon. It feels as though I'm standing before a living being that I'm not sure I want to get to know. I come here because I have heard about the destinies of those who have perished out there. Those who dreamt about a better life on the other side of the ocean, dreamt of adventure or fled from war. The sea holds many tales, and a long human tradition of creating more of them. The waves bring many different fates; bringing me to the sea tonight are the ones about those who wait in vain, with hopes of once again seeing their beloved. It is a story hard to recount. I begin with myself, with my fear of disappearing out there in the dark, or someone close to me facing that prospect. I see my photography as a sort of gamble, the important thing is not that I leave with some pictures, but rather my experience of the agitated landscape. In his book *Death on the beach* (Swedish original *Döden på stranden*), Per

¹ Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*, (1951), p. 24

Oscar Hullgren
Bränningar
Oil on canvas, n.d.
(Detail)

Högselius writes "we often imagine the past as a dark mass of water, a sea of events, dense drops of everything we have been but can never again become."² We are shaped by the ocean of events and the drops become part of the history I seek to recreate.

A sea with limits, that is what we are taught. I think about the shipwrecks that happen during war because non shipworthy vessels are sent out to sea, boats that are sunk because borders have been perceived as threatened. Or ships that disappear after running aground when waves of a storm become all too real. All the souls lost because man is convinced of his own greatness. Carson writes in *The Sea Around Us* that there is no sea water that is only from one ocean, but that deep currents unite all the world oceans into one.³

The sound of the waves continues, loudly, I have been standing on the beach for nearly two hours and the light is slowly returning. My feet are cold, my body frozen. When I can see the landscape again, as it was in my memory, I come to think of the writer Italo Calvino's character Palomar. He is standing next to me on the beach, trying to separate one wave among many, he sees one wave in the distance and wants to isolate it. An impossible task. There is too much swell. It is dizzying to think that waves can come rolling from somewhere completely different in the world, to ebb away on the beach where I'm standing. I have been looking at the surf for so long now that it feels like I am part of it. Part of the breath. The saline solution in my body makes me want to stay by the sea, to surrender myself to it. In less than two hours the entire landscape has changed, my fear transformed into awe.

The photograph I bring back to the studio is quiet, none of the anxiety I felt out there is noticeable. The picture manipulates the viewer into thinking that the light was already there. The waves that became my own breath are erased by the long exposure. The experience of the restless landscape now only exists in my memory.

(The title of this piece is inspired by Johan Tralaus' book *The broad back of the sea* ((Swedish original: *Havets väldiga ryggar*)).

² Per, Högselius, *Döden på stranden*, (Ellerströms: 2020), p. 139

³ Carson, *The Sea*, p.178

ROOM TO TRAVEL IN

Birgitta Silfverhielm

Behind the large, heavy desk in the living room, there are shelves for books and folders. There they are, the photo albums with small black and white pictures of men climbing rigs. Who pull anchor winches and gasket sails. They wear white uniforms and dashing caps on their heads. The father explains that he took the pictures, that he was there. It doesn't matter that it was a hard life, that of an aspiring officer on Jarramas and Najaden, those images stick, stay with her. Some years later she reads several of the books from the bookshelf in the desk herself. The first depictions of long-distance sailing, around the world sailing, single-handed sailing. She has a legacy to continue. She knows that she too will.

It is easy to take for granted that a boat at sea represents freedom. Those narratives are common. But in my sailing life I have also experienced the opposite – such as depending on people I don't trust and can't communicate with. The writer Inger Alfvén, author of *S/Y Joy*, a classic thriller about long-distance sailing, says that life in a boat at sea has nothing to do with freedom but only restraint. She refers to the fact that you can't go ashore, that you're depending on the people who are in the boat with you, and that you are completely at the mercy of the weather. I think she is evoking an experience based on being forced to put your life in someone else's hands, needing to trust others that you might not be willing to depend on, combined with not being able to command the boat on your own. It is easy enough to understand. In a situation like that, the soul is compressed and screams to be let off. There are some who have jumped into the sea.

My experience of situations like that has instead spurred me on to build my own security, to rely on myself to get where I want. Own keel. Own reliance on my ability and knowledge, and on the boat, which must be mine. To have an internal weight that will always keep you upright. That can manage heavy sea and setbacks. That will get through. Rigging that will hold. Being capable of judging your own capability in relation to the given conditions. Good seamanship. Friendship that can grow. Contact. A connection with that which is life – and life is in the sea, comes from the sea. Here is everything we know.

*

In August 1968 the Frenchman Bernhard Moitessier started his non-stop around the world sailing, alone without assistance in the first ever ocean race of this kind. He sailed his red ketch *Joshua* around the world without having any radio contact with his competitors, so he didn't know how well he was doing. He actually lost interest in contacting others. Instead, he became one with his boat, and found peace and a calm that he didn't want to give up.

When he was on his way across the South Atlantic, heading back to Europe after rounding Cape Horn, he made a crucial decision. He put a message in a film canister that he sent over to a passing ship using a slingshot. The message revealed that he didn't intend to return to Europe and a commercialised ocean race "because I am happy at sea and perhaps to save my soul". Then he turned south again, rounded the Cape of Good Hope for a second time and sailed on to Tahiti before dropping his anchor. There he stayed for a long time, growing vegetables on the beach and continuing to live on his boat.

In the book *The long run* (original: *La Longue Route*) Moitessier describes how his emotional state changed during the non-stop sailing, one and a half times around the earth – a journey that took ten months and that was carried out in some of the world's most difficult and cold seas, south of all the capes.

*

The hull separates me from the deep. I have always liked lying there, inside the hull, in the shell, the carrier. The shape that holds itself and me afloat, constructed to carry me across the surface, from land to land. From port to port.

It has always entailed a certain amount of worry, a nerve, a consciousness about the danger: the wind that can change and accelerate, the rocks under the surface that must be avoided, the orientation among the islands for which I must keep my attention alert. It has shaped me. It never passes, it is always there, that awareness of possibilities. To get stuck, get hit in the head by the beam, stumble and fall overboard, slip on a wet rock, or wake up at night to find that the

wind has turned, and the boat is hitting sharp rocks. To accidentally drop something important overboard. Lightning strike, rigging breaking, leaks. Leaks are probably the worst, that there is a leak, and the boat fills with water. That everything I own and live for sinks from underneath me. That the keel disappears down in the deep. And yet. I am drawn out there by powers I don't control. Desire, pleasure is stronger than fear. To take my life and my boat in my own hands, sheet the sail in and feel the power carrying me. To know lots. Be on your own. Learn about mending things. Learn about weather, about winds, about directions and angles, about navigation and currents, about protected waters and bays, about caring for the boat. Caring for that which carries. Varnish, surfaces, the hand that learns to feel, the senses that draw in smells and sounds.

Tarpaulins that cover and hide and protect over winter. Back in the day heavy brown or green, smelly weaves repeatedly mended. Later lighter ones, with eyelets that broke in the first autumn storm, the flapping of cheap plastic. I have lived through decades of tarps and spring warmth under their protection. Arranged, made, mended, mounted and launched. Screwed, felt and test started. Rested in the reliance on my boat. My boats, that have shown me the world.

In the care lies salvation.

*

Someone who leaves in a boat learns along the way. The sea teaches, and challenges. And leads on. It never ends. It just changes its shape.

Birgitta Silfverhielm
Sländan /
Storsländan
1946

Sjöhistoriska
museets samling



THROUGH STORM AND CALM

Karl Magnus Petersson

It is a misty autumn day at dusk, I am eight years old walking the gravel road flanked by dry stone walls back home from a friend. The monotonous sound of the fog horns carry across the straight and the dense fog seems to enhance the autumnal smell of ploughed soil and mouldering leaves. I enjoy that fateful sound of the fog horns, it stirs your imagination but is also a bit eerie, reminding you that the sea is not far away. Out there, ships are moving along the sea-lanes, slowly gliding through the milky haze. The fog horns keep calling, as if they wanted me to turn around and head in the opposite direction, down towards the sea. I resist the temptation and continue home. This time.

The sea has always had its allure and attraction. It drove our forefathers out on dangerous and precarious voyages. Some never returned, others did – with broadened horizons. Over time, the curiosity and adventurousness of individuals became jigsaw pieces in humanity's understanding of the world. The interconnectedness of land and water started to take shape; islands, countries and whole continents were discovered. Maps were drawn and little by little the blank spots were filled in.

My great grandparents owned a farm in north-eastern Blekinge. It had vast beach meadows used for grazing. My grandfather's mother Ida never went down there, she refused to ever see the sea again. She had emigrated to America as a teenager. In New York she met her future husband, the Swede Karl Magnus who had worked on construction sites and then started a small haulage firm. Once they got married and had their first child they chose to return to Sweden. The worst kind of immigrant ships were gone by the time of their return, but a voyage across the Atlantic still took several days and could be stormy enough, full of anguish. The journey would forever taint Ida's perception of the sea, she wouldn't go there.

Things turned out differently for me.

I'm about to turn seventeen, about to have my first real encounter with the sea. I've been in London for a week with some friends and we have booked a cabin on the ferry from Harwich back to Gothenburg. Our cabin is of the cheapest kind, furthest down in the ship. We share

it with an undertaker, who despite his profession turns out to be a cheerful man. Little by little, the wind picks up. The waves grow in size and when the ferry dives into the troughs of the wave you experience a sense of free falling as the floor disappears from under your feet. The communal areas become increasingly empty, the only thing moving on the disco floor are the fallen bar stools rolling back and forth. Going down to the cabin is not an option, my friends are there but seasick and the undertaker has barricaded himself in the toilet. So I remain at the bar with my legs locked around the floor-fixed bar stool, parrying my White Russian while the North Sea hurls its water cascades against the ferry windows. I realise that I have got off lightly, perhaps I have a gift for being at sea.

Storm and calm are opposite states of the sea. In the storm you are forced into being present in the moment, things can tear, you parry, balance. Everything is focused on solving the problems that appear when a boat or ship is thrown around on the raging sea. Such critical moments etch themselves into your memory, become images of moments when you were fully living in the present.

The calm is different. In the best case, a feeling of peace descends, but still water also carries with it a sense of sorrow and melancholy. Time, or perhaps the absence of it, becomes tangible. In the calm you have only yourself to fight, your own demons to face. Fog also carries these sentiments, leaving you exposed to the existential. Are we meeting a vessel out there, an old ship with worn rigging that slowly appears out of the mist? Quietly, without the slightest little creak. The old man stands by the helm in his oilskin jacket, gazing emptily towards a coastline he will never reach. Perhaps the walls of time are thinner in the mist, like Japanese paper walls exposing shadows from adjacent rooms. Through the mist sail those who never reached their destinations. The sea carries so many feelings, myths and imaginations shaped throughout history.

It is early autumn and I have been accepted as conscripted chef on the signals intelligence gathering vessel *Orion* after initial military training at the naval base in Karlskrona. We follow Soviet activity across the Baltic Sea, it is 1990 and we witness the swan song of the

previously so mighty. A year later the Soviet Union would collapse. The atmosphere on board is nice and friendly. The food is expected to be of the highest standard and we serve three courses on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Officers and the rank and file are served the same food, as are the men from the FRA (the National Defence Radio Establishment) who are in charge of the actual signals intelligence. We don't know anything about it, neither are we supposed to, but at night we can hear strange, coded messages monotonously dissipate into the ether. I stand on the bridge and the officer in charge suggests I take a look through the night vision binoculars. The night is pitch black, neither stars nor the moon is visible, the only shining light is our green starboard lantern. The binoculars are mounted on the bridge wing and in their green flickering light a number of Soviet warships appear. We are on international waters so they can't drive us away. Even in daytime the Soviet fleet can be seen, rusty and worn with lots of people onboard. The captain tells us that the conscripts are brought from distant corners of the vast empire, to make them feel insecure and alien, and therefore obedient.

Humans have used the sea since time immemorial in both peace and war. Sometime in the distant past, someone carved out a log, launched it into the water and set off. Somewhere else someone tied together sheaves of reeds, launched the simple raft, and left. The very water that had previously been an obstacle had become a possible route.

For almost three hundred years, the Vikings dominated the northern seas, but they were also frequently seen in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Their ships were supple with strong, clinker-built hulls. Their shape, beauty and elegance were on par with the clippers of the 19th century. The ability to construct good, seaworthy ships has been closely linked to a country's military, political and mercantile position throughout history. During the 15th and 16th centuries, Portugal and Spain were the dominant seafaring nations. In the wake of exploration followed an often brutal exploitation of the newly found land, at the expense of the indigenous peoples. Later, the Netherlands and especially Great Britain came to dominate the world seas resulting in further colonisations. The 19th century became the century of the polar expeditions, with explorers from different countries competing in the unexplored Arctic and Antarctic to be the first to reach the north and south poles. The struggle for world domination on the seas has continued, through war and peace.

The year after my conscription service I got my diving certificate. The First Engineer on *Orion* had told me about his diving adventures

and inspired me to try. Diving in the Baltic Sea does not provide any technicolour experience, it is dark, turbid and cold. But it does have one great advantage, the absence of shipworm. This wood-eater can't survive and breed if the salinity is too low, with the result that wooden wrecks are preserved much longer here than in saltier waters. The Baltic Sea is thus one of the world's best marine historical archives.

Scuba diving was developed by a French naval officer, Jacques-Yves Costeau in the 40's. This new diving method made the world below the surface of the sea accessible to a wider number of people. Costeau's submarine films became important eye openers to a lot of people and created an understanding of the sensitive eco systems of the sea. He showed the consequences of pollution on sea living animals



Nils Lagergren
Ghost Liner
Sculpture, 2018

Private collection

and plants and highlighted polluting scandals with legal proceedings against unscrupulous companies following. Costeau was a pioneer within the growing environmental movement. His documentaries raised questions about the human effect on the environment, decades before the beginning of any wider awareness.

It is 1st April 2002 and we're on the training ship *Astrid Finne* at the lighthouse at Vinga. In the evening, some of the crew follow the path winding its way between the rocky outcrops towards the lighthouse and the beacon. We lie down on the ground and look up on the beam of light sweeping across the sky. Adventure awaits. This is the first stage in *Astrid Finne's* long-distance sailing, and the North Sea greets us with sleet and a gale. Frozen and soaked through the watchmen leave their sodden clothes near the gas stove, hoping that they will have time to dry somewhat before their next shift. Days like that it's an advantage to work down in the galley, the only place on the ship where it's nice and warm. After four days' cold and windy sailing we reach Dover where we rest for a few days. The weather improves the further south we get and after meeting spring in the English Channel we find early summer in the Bay of Biscay. You can feel the presence of history in these waters; the evacuation at Dunkerque, the Normandy landings, the defeat of the Spanish Armada and so on. The turbulent past is there in the names on the nautical charts and a plethora of wreck symbols, but also physically there on the bottom of the ocean. There are ships that have sunk with enough bombs and ammunition to blow up entire towns by the Channel. A British naval officer once told me that these wrecks used to be inspected, but that is now deemed too dangerous which means the wrecks remain undisturbed with mere hopes that nothing will cause a detonation. This is one of the less pleasant aspects about the wrecks. All around the world there are wrecks whose shiploads are ticking environmental bombs. Ships sunk with their tanks full of oil and poison. The wrecks slowly deteriorate, and sooner or later those tanks will start to leak with devastating consequences for the environment and the local ecosystems.

After days on the Bay of Biscay we spot the Tower of Hercules in La Coruña. This lighthouse was built in the first century AD and is the oldest one in the world still in use. For almost 1900 years it has shown the way for sailors and fishermen on the bay. Once at Vigo, near the border with Portugal, I sign off while *Finne* continues through the Strait of Gibraltar and into the Mediterranean. My next stage starts on Sicily. The air you breathe out is at times cooler than the one you breathe in down in the galley. We go through the Corinth Canal and into the Greek archipelago. History runs even deeper in these waters.

If you're lucky you can still find amphorae on the sea floor that the Greeks used to pour their wine. On a crossing to Crete, I experience one of my worst storms at sea. The waves build up and we reef our sails. The water washing over us is warm but cools us down after the hot day. The waves keep building, we're now in heavy sea. We set up wires along the deck to attach our harnesses to. Everyone must be attached, anything that goes overboard will not be found in this weather. Just before midnight I make a soup before we change the lookout. A huge crash is heard and water floods down the companionway. I think of scenes from the Titanic movie. Water everywhere, bulwark broken, and the electricity short-circuited. Some of the crew were flushed overboard but saved by their harnesses. One of the sailing instructors says she's counted the participants, everyone is soaked through and a bit frightened, but luckily, they are still onboard.

After sailing across to the Caribbean, *Astrid Finne* has continued north. We are at St. John's on Newfoundland. It's the week after midsummer, but the lilacs are in full bloom. *Finne* is to be stocked up with enough goods to last all the way home in case ice makes it impossible to reach Greenland. After a week's sailing up the coast of Newfoundland we head out on open sea, our goal is Nuuk. This is the most spectacular part of the long-distance sailing and it will last for two months. While staying close to shore, it is possible to imagine that the sea must feel vaster on an Atlantic crossing. But that isn't the case, the horizon remains the same given boundary as always, a defined Near and Now.

The lookouts go on and off duty, it's a nice rhythm, silent apart from the creaking of the rigging. We see icebergs in the distance. Sometimes a group of curious whales follow us along and at night, a bat who moved onboard in Newfoundland, keeps us company. In meeting the icebergs and the Arctic waters around Greenland, geological time becomes more tangible than the historical one. Human effects on nature have previously been small here. Paradoxically though, it is here that rampant global warming is most noticeable, where animals who have lived here for hundreds of thousands of years are threatened by the melting ice. It's not the scarce Inuits who have caused this, yet they must pay a high price for the overconsumption and unsustainable systems of others. It is with mixed feelings that I sail through these waters, so grand, so beautiful, yes sublime in their barrenness, but how much of it will remain in the future?

We find out that the ice situation is "good", making it possible to pass through the Prince Christian Sound on southern Greenland. It has never been surveyed so we go through very slowly with a constant

lookout for shallows. The sound is surrounded by “young” sharp peaks that remind you of Gothic cathedrals. Through this “Lord of the Rings” like landscape we travel towards the eastern side of Greenland. Once there, we find a Danish weather station on a mountain, reached by suspension bridges and endless stairs. We are offered coffee and a chance to write in their guestbook, which was begun in the 60’s but is still only half full. On this windswept outpost they aren’t spoiled with visitors. Back out on open sea, the journey continues towards Iceland and Reykjavik where we hand over to the crew of the last stage.

There are so many experiences; cold, salty lookouts on the North Sea, warm pitch-black evenings on the Mediterranean with wine and tapas on deck in some little harbour. A lonely fishing village in Newfoundland and an abandoned mining village in Greenland, all of them linked by the same water and accessible with the help of the wind. It brings a sense of hope, after all, hope because the opportunities offered by the sea and the wind exist and will remain even in the future. In the waves there is energy, in the streams, the tides, the wind.

There is something comforting in the realisation that so much of the seas are still unexplored. Down there in the deep, uncountable species of plants and animals, amazing creatures comparable to the illustrated sea monsters on old maps. There are animals that produce their own light, shining and twinkling like funfairs down there in the dark. Even the historical traces in the seas are largely unexplored. In numerous anonymous places, ships that never reached their destinations have come to rest. With the technological advances of the last decades, it is becoming possible to look for them.

It’s a sunny day east of Öland. The survey ship *Triad* is a short distance from the red buoy and the divers are getting ready to enter the water. We are a little excited this time. The sonar image shows a larger, partly decomposed wooden wreck. I can’t help saying what the others are probably thinking: is it *Mars* down there, or perhaps *Svärdet* (the Sword)? The divers descend and I move restlessly between the galley and the afterdeck, it’s a long and impatient wait. Divers at the surface! The RIB boat makes its way to the buoy. The diver removes his mask, and his smile says it all, they have found something special. – The cannons are sticking out of the cannon ports, it’s huge... This could be one of at least two ships; *Mars*, which sunk in 1564 during the Northern Seven Years’ War, or *Svärdet* (the Sword) which sunk in the same battle as *Kronan* (the Crown) in 1676, we still don’t know which one it is. It later turns out that we have found *Svärdet*. The same summer another group of divers finds *Mars*. For me, this is a childhood dream

Johan Thurfjell
Dead Calm
 (Farah II)
 Watercolour, 2008

come true, something I’ve been fantasising about since I was little and read about Anders Franzén and his diligent search for the *Vasa* using a simple plumb bob.

The wrecks can tell us about our history, about trading routes and about war, but also, and this is what touches you emotionally, about the individual destinies onboard. Often, we can only just about make them out, they are like shadows drifting past, but sometimes they appear with greater clarity. On a few occasions I’ve had the fortune of speaking with people who have survived shipwrecks. On the 70th anniversary of the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, I meet some of the survivors at a memorial service in Lübeck. One of them, a man in his



eighties, tells me: – I usually celebrate 30th January as my second birthday, I did survive. He was one of the just over 900 people who were saved from the sinking *Wilhelm Gustloff* on a stormy and biting cold January night in 1945. About 9 000 people were onboard, mostly women, children and elderly who had fled the approaching East Prussian front.

The sea is connected to us, in our imagination or in our daily lives. The sea is a home to all the species living there, we are welcome to visit them. The sea is an unexplored archive of things we have forgotten, or chosen to forget, echoes of our history rest there, together with all of those who never reached shore. The sea is a grave. But also a birthplace – that of life. We have a responsibility for the sea, a responsibility that can only be asked of humanity. Humans, not fish or birds, have caused the problems, the imbalance. We must find the solutions. The sea offers solutions, offers power, in the wind, the tide, the waves.

My sailing continues yet another while. Where to and for how long, I do not know. I sit on the afterdeck and follow the vanishing wake. A glowing, red sun is sinking into the horizon and day gives way to evening. A lighthouse has been lit, its beam sweeping round and around, as if it wanted to lure me back on to land. I resist the temptation and continue out.



Lotta Törnroth
*Jag väntar som
ett fyrljus I*
Photography,
2013

BERGKVARA SJÖFARTSMUSEUM

The Sea – extended exhibition space

The coastlines of Småland and Öland have seen a lot of maritime traffic throughout history, with all that it entails of shipyards, ship building, maritime pilots and trade. All these places and harbours have been junctions of their own, points in a sprawling network. Things look very different today, but the places and the memories remain. Since 2000 a collaborative organisation exists called *Sjöfararkusten Småland – Öland* (the Seafaring coast, Småland – Öland), they provide a map of the whole coastline and information about museums along the way.

Bergkvara Sjöfartsmuseum is one of these places and we have chosen to extend the exhibition at Kalmar konstmuseum to Bergkvara. During the summer, part of Lotta Törnroth's serie *Jag väntar som ett fyrljus* (*I wait as a lighthouse*) will be shown there. The meeting between contemporary art and cultural history is a method to widen circles and create new contacts. The location works well as a setting for Lotta Törnroth's photographs and the themes she works with. From the upper floor of the museum, the lighthouse at Garpen is visible and one is in close contact with the sea.

Bergkvara Sjöfartsmuseum is located in a hundred-year-old warehouse by the harbour with wide views of the sea. On nearby Dalaskär is an intact ship smithy that is also part of the museum. The coastal parish of Söderåkra was for a long time one of the most reliant on maritime activity in the country. Since the early 19th century there have been shipyards at Bergkvara, Djursvik, Grämkulla and Skeppevik. The whole coastline of Småland was important for transporting products from the forest and the farm. Bergkvara is only one example of these important junctions. The village grew around the industries. An example of an important export good between 1850 and 1930 was so called pit props – barked timber of pine or fur that were used in English coalmines. The ships returned with coal, which replaced wood as fuel on the Swedish side.

THANKS TO:

Participating artists

Bergkvara Sjöfartsmuseum

Kalmar Sjöfartsmuseum

Stranda hembygdsförening

Sjöhistoriska museets samling

Private lenders

Uppsala konstmuseum

Galerie Nordenhake

Curators: Karl Magnus Petersson
Sara Hemmingsson

Exhibition design: Karl Magnus Petersson
Sara Hemmingsson

Construction /
technicians: André Lindahl
Daniel Strand
Karl Magnus Petersson

Editor: Sara Hemmingsson
Artist biographies: Sara Hemmingsson
Translation: Isabel Mena-Berlin
Graphic design: Johanna Strand

FOLLOW US
ON SOCIAL
MEDIA

@kalmarkonstmuseum

JOIN

Kalmar Art Association
and get free admission
to exhibitions and 20 %
discount on books in
the museum shop

CONTACT US

0480 - 42 62 82
info@kalmarkonstmuseum.se

www.kalmarkonstmuseum.se

