SOLASTALGIA

Klimat och framtid

Kalmar konstmuseum

25.2 – 23.4 2023

Omslagsbild:
Imorgon blir det nog bra (röd)
(detalj)
2016
Ella Tillema

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Catrin Andersson, Eline Kersten, Nils Kreuger,
Niki Lindroth von Bahr, Ella Tillema, Michael Wang

Klimatkrisen är en komplex utmaning och den är här och nu. Det handlar om fakta, rapporter, siffror och diagram men också om känslor, existentiell oro och förluster. Debatten om klimatet intensifierats hela tiden, larmrapporter och klimatkonferenser avlöser varandra. För den enskilda människan kan man fråga sig om det är möjligt att möta framtidens utmaningar utan att tappa greppet om tillvaron? Hur ska världens befolkning långsiktigt balansera med jordens naturresurser?

Utställningens titel kommer från ett begrepp myntat 2003 av den australiska ekofilosofen Glenn Albrecht. I sin forskning undersöker han bland annat förhållandet mellan miljöförstöring och försämrad mental hälsa (sorg) för de som bor nära områden som förändras. Glenn Albrechts forskning har kommit att användas inom såväl tvärvetenskapliga diskussioner som inom film, litteratur och konst. I verket *Solastalgia* har den nederländska konstnären Eline Kersten (f.1994) använt begreppet som utgångspunkt för att undersöka hur människor berörs av nedläggningen av ett kalkstensbrott i Nederländerna. I filmen visas hur en omvandling skett från industri till naturområde och olika röster lyfts fram från berörda människor. Eline Kersten visar hur en plats kan bära på många olika minnen och hur sorgen och berättelsen kan se olika ut beroende på vems perspektiv som beaktas.

Hur kommer framtidens landskap att se ut? Två konstnärer som gestaltar människans relation till naturen är Ella Tillema (f. 1983) och Nils Kreuger (1858–1930). För Nils Kreuger var naturen mycket viktig, inte bara att avbilda utan att aktivt ströva runt i. Vid sekelskiftet 1800–1900-talet var städerna på frammarsch och många konstnärer fann en uppgift i att spegla det öppna och fria landskapet. Nils Kreugers nationalromantiska målningar över öländska landskap står i kontrast gentemot Ella Tillemas samtida verk, *Imorgon blir det nog bra (röd)* (2016) och *Peak* (2020). Kreuger och Tillemas måleri är storslaget, vackert, sorgligt, melankoliskt och kraftfullt. En sak blir dock tydlig – människans underläge inför naturen. Vi står oss slätt i jämförelse. Samtidigt är människan också natur, det går inte att skilja oss åt.

En annan aspekt i klimatfrågan är sambandet till konsumtion, ekonomi och vardag. Vilken väg är bäst att gå? Hur skapas en rättvis fördelning? Går det att bryta invanda mönster? I filmen *Min börda* (2017) har konstnären Niki Lindroth von Bahr (f. 1984) skapat en modern fabel med flera lager. Fiskar, apor och möss spelar olika karaktärer som är satta i igenkännbara och känslomässigt laddade situationer. De utspelar sig till exempel på ett långtidshotell, en livsmedelsbutik och en hamburgerrestaurang. Tonen är vemodig och samtidigt komisk. Stundtals är det väldigt ensamt, som ett rop på hjälp ut i ett oändligt universum. Karaktärerna tycks låsta i sin tillvaro i det moderna samhället som både ger och tar.

Ett verk som är mer svårtolkat, men som i sin tur bär på referenser långt tillbaka i tiden, är filmen *The Drowned World* (2020). Den amerikanska konstnären Michael Wang (f.1981) arbetar i sitt konstnärskap med film och installationer kring klimatförändringar, resursfördelning och global ekonomi. I *The Drowned World* ser betraktaren djur och plantor relaterade till flora och fauna från karbontiden, för cirka 350 miljoner år sedan, och bildflödet varvas med två berättarröster. En av texterna kommer från J.G Ballards science fiction-roman *The Drowned World* (1962), ett litterärt verk som förutspådde en framtida klimatkollaps. Michael Wangs film inleds med en trollslända, en av de äldsta insektsordningarna bland nu levande insekter som härstammar från karbontiden. På ett poetiskt sätt reflekterar filmen över vad tid är och ger svindlande perspektiv över jordens historia.

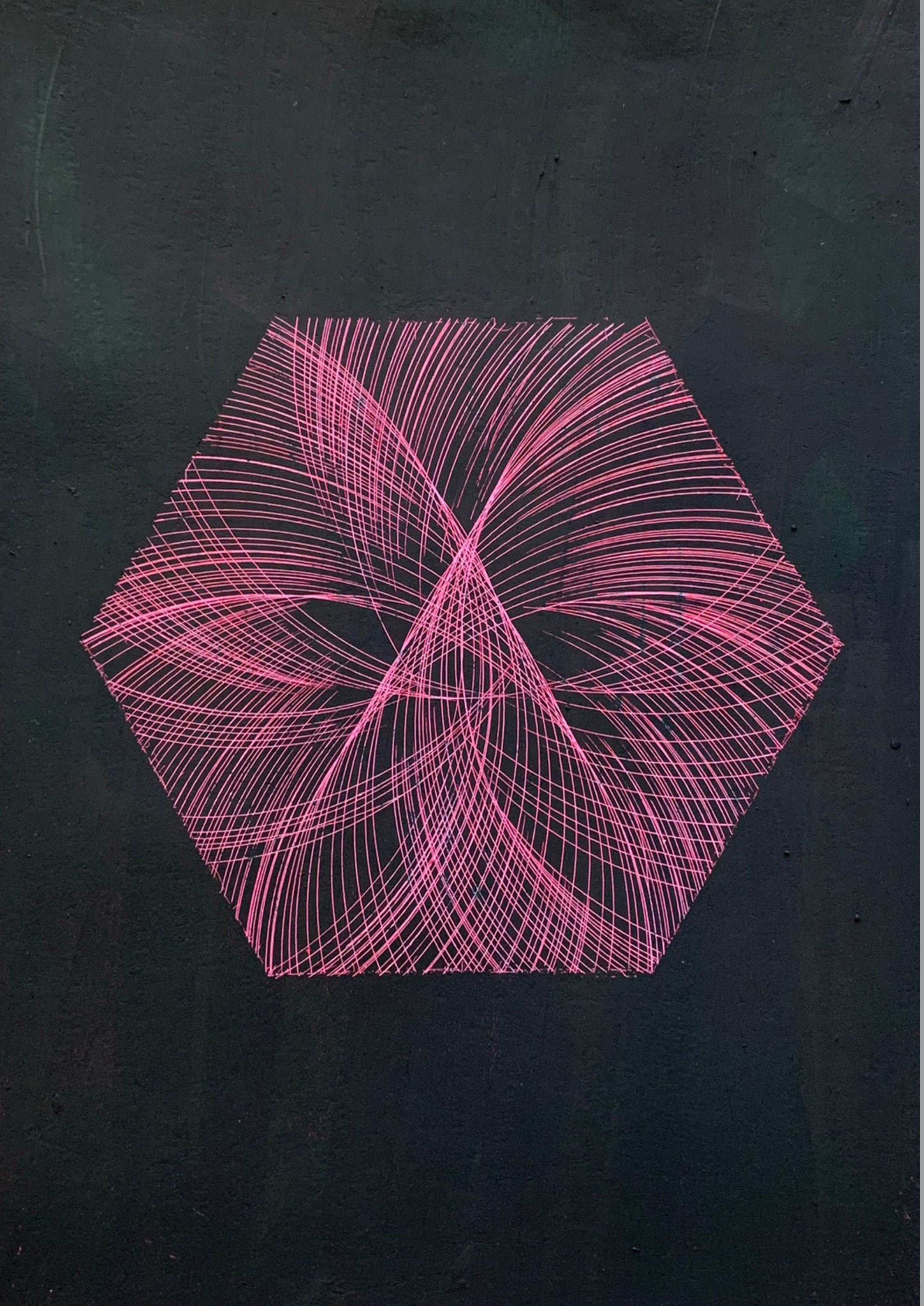
Catrin Andersson (f. 1974) bryter i sin tur ner detaljer från vetenskaplig forskning och visualiserar det synliga och, för det mänskliga ögat, osynliga världar i teckningsserien *Glaciären (Sara Ugma)* (2022). Hon intresserar sig för händelser som påverkat eller kommer att påverka naturen. När hon hörde om en skogsbrand som våren 2022 härjade nära glaciären Sara Ugma i Himalaya ville hon omsätta det i bild. Forskare uttryckte oro över hur sotet från elden riskerade medföra negativ snösmältning från glaciären. Parallellt läste hon om hur extremtemperaturer blir allt vanligare och att färgen röd inte längre räcker till för att markera den varmaste zonen – en färgblandning av magenta och blåviolett har fått läggas till för att illustrera temperaturer mellan 51–54 grader. Catrin Andersson visar även verket *Ancient Blue* (2019) där utgångspunkten i stället varit forskning om glaciärer och is från Antarktis.

Heidi Hart, curator och konsthistoriker, har bidragit med en essä som du finner i den engelska delen av den här katalogen. I *Emergency in Reverse: Moments in Climate Art History* betraktar hon samtiden genom konsthistorien. Det blir tydligt hur konstnärer i alla tider kommunicerat tolkningar av samtiden, må det så vara nödvändigheten att bearbeta vardagliga händelser eller världsomspännande katastrofer. Heidi Hart reflekterar över konstverk och installationer hon mött genom åren och väver även in verk av Nils Kreuger och Ella Tillema som visas i *Solastalgia*.

Upprinnelsen till att Heidi Hart bidrar med en essä är att hon är del av arbetsgruppen som arrangerar den tvärvetenskapliga konferensen *Environmental Emergencies Across Media* på Linnéuniversitetet (LNU) 16–18 mars 2023. En av huvudfrågorna för konferensen är hur klimatkrisen och dess konsekvenser kan kommuniceras. Utställningen *Solastalgia* är del av ett samarbete mellan LNU och Kalmar konstmuseum inför konferensen. Samarbetet ger en möjlighet att utbyta erfarenheter och låta vetenskap och konst mötas.

Sara Hemmingsson
curator

Anneli Berglund
curator



Glaciär I (Förlopp)
2022
Catrin Andersson

Courtesy
Catrin Andersson,
ELASTIC Gallery

SOLASTALGIA

Climate and future

Catrin Andersson, Eline Kersten, Nils Kreuger,
Niki Lindroth von Bahr, Ella Tillema, Michael Wang

The climate crisis is a complex challenge of pressing urgency. It is about facts, reports, numbers and diagrams, but also about emotions, existential angst and loss. The climate debate is ever intensifying, alarming reports and climate conferences following one after the other. To the individual, the question becomes if it is even possible to meet the challenges of the future without losing a hold on reality. How will the world's population balance the natural resources of the Earth in the long run?

The title of this exhibition is taken from a concept coined in 2003 by the Australian eco-philosopher Glenn Albrecht. In his research, he investigates the relationship between environmental damage and declining mental health (grief) among those living near areas of change. Glenn Albrecht's research has been used in interdisciplinary discussions as well as in films, literature and art. In the artwork *Solastalgia*, the Dutch artist Eline Kersten (b. 1994) has used this concept as a starting point for examining how people are affected by the closure of a limestone quarry in the Netherlands. The film shows the transformation from industrial area to nature reserve and voices of people affected in different ways are being heard. Eline Kersten shows the many different memories contained within one place and how grief and tales differ depending on whose perspective is considered.

What will the landscape of the future look like? Ella Tillema (b. 1983) and Nils Kreuger (1858–1930) both portray human relationships to nature. For Nils Kreuger nature was crucial, not just depicting it, but actively moving around it. At the turn of the last century cities were expanding, and many artists found a calling in showing an open and free landscape. Nils Kreuger's paintings of the landscape on Öland in a style of national romanticism stands in contrast to Ella Tillema's contemporary piece *Imorgon blir det nog bra (röd) [Tomorrow will probably be fine (red)]* (2016) and *Peak* (2020). Kreuger's and Tillema's painting is grand, beautiful, sombre, melancholic and powerful. One thing becomes abundantly clear – humanity's inferiority to nature. We pale in comparison while at the same time being inseparable from it.

Another aspect of the climate question is its relationship to consumption, economics and the every day. Which way is the better one to choose? How do we achieve fair distribution? Is it possible to change our habits? In the film *Min börda [My burden]* (2017) the artist Niki Lindroth von Bahr (b. 1984) has created a modern fable of many layers. Fish, monkeys and mice play different characters in recognisable and emotionally charged situations. Among the settings are a long stay hotel, a supermarket and a hamburger restaurant. The tone is sorrowful yet amusing. Occasionally it is very lonely, a cry for help in an infinite universe. The characters seem trapped by their existence in a modern society that gives but also takes.

The film *The Drowned World* (2020) is less easily interpreted but carries references that go a long way back. The American artist Michael Wang (b. 1981) works with climate change, resource distribution and the global economy through film and installations. In *The Drowned World* the viewer sees animals and plants from the flora and fauna of the Carboniferous period, some 350 million years ago. The flow of images alternates between two narrative voices. One of the texts is from J.G. Ballard's sci-fi novel *The Drowned World* (1962), a literary piece which predicted a future climate collapse. Michael Wang's film starts with a dragonfly, one of the oldest among living insects which dates back to the Carboniferous period. Poetically, the film reflects over the meaning of time and gives a vertiginous perspective on the history of the Earth.

Catrin Andersson (b. 1974) breaks down details from scientific research, visualising both the visible and the, to the human eye, invisible in the series of drawings *Glaciären (Sara Ugma) [The Glacier (Sara Ugma]* (2022). She takes an interest in events that have affected or will affect nature. When she heard about a forest fire ravaging an area close to the glacier Sara Ugma in the Himalayas in the spring of 2022, she wanted to transform it into images. Scientists expressed concern about how soot from the fire risked causing snow on the glacier to melt. Simultaneously, she read about extreme temperatures becoming increasingly common and that the colour red is no longer enough to indicate the hottest zone. A colour combination of magenta and violet blue has been added for temperatures between 51-54 degrees Celsius. Catrin Andersson also shows the work *Ancient Blue* (2019), where the starting point was instead reserach on glaciers and ice from Antartica.

Heidi Hart, curator and arts researcher, has contributed an essay to this catalogue. In *Emergency in Reverse: Moments in Climate Art History*, she considers the present through art history. It becomes clear how artists in all ages have communicated interpretations of the present, may it be the necessity to process everyday events or worldwide disasters. Heidi Hart reflects on artworks and installations she has encountered over the years and weaves in works by Nils Kreuger and Ella Tillema that are shown in *Solastalgia*.

The reason Heidi Hart is contributing this essay is that she is part of the working group that organises the interdisciplinary conference *Environmental Emergencies Across Media* at Linnaeus University (LNU) 16–18 March 2023. One of the main questions for the conference is how the climate crisis and its consequences can be communicated. The exhibition *Solastalgia* is part of a collaboration between LNU and Kalmar konstmuseum before the conference. The collaboration provides an opportunity to exchange experiences and let science and art meet.

Sara Hemmingsson
curator

Anneli Berglund
curator

The Drowned World, 2020
Stillbild från video
Michael Wang

Emergency in Reverse:
Moments in Climate Art History

Spores: Seeding a New Art History

Images of Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* seem to pop up like mushrooms in today's fevered climate of ecological, medical, and political crisis. The key image for a 2021 conference titled *The Garden and the Dump* (a Bosch detail showing a headless scorpion devouring tiny humans) invited ecocritical thinkers to a virtual Aarhus, Zooming in on "more-than-human entanglements" from Hildegard von Bingen's botanical visions to the travesty of the American lawn.[1] A new interpretation of the Bosch-verse made news in 2022, from the perspective of "bad weather and moldy bread" – linking the cold and hunger of the Little Ice Age not only with the "religious malaise" of the late Middle Ages but also with rye bread infected with ergot rot.[2] The hallucinogenic tangle of Bosch's tableaux has also inspired South African artist Simphiwe Ndzube to re-imagine their flora and fauna in terms of water scarcity and toxicity. Where Bosch painted a polluted canal to indicate the boundary of Hell, Ndzube shows a viscous orange flow from a fish's mouth.[3]

These re-framing efforts reflect ecocritical interest in historical images, an established area of study with new focus in light of today's palpable effects of global heating. The term "climate art history" is useful in exploring what a sixteenth-century Wunderkammer or a nineteenth-century seascape might reveal about climate conditions in its time, as well as what these all-too-human creations left out. This approach brings up inevitable questions of extractivism, not only in the postcolonial sense but also with a newly respectful eye toward the rights of nonhuman beings captured under glass or in a field recording. Attention toward otherness in this way can feel like a radical re-orientation. As Lia Purpura has noted in an essay that touches on Bosch, "the action's all tripping, spilling, and cracking – all the bent bodies make a writhing mosaic – but no one is watching anyone else." Being "unseen"[4] might be as terrifying for humans as the more tangible tortures of Hell, especially in this age of online hypervisibility. Seeing outward instead, taking in land and shore, iris and ibis, bee and bitterroot with a less anthropocentric gaze, even in human-made images, takes time and some humility.

This essay uses three broad thematic categories (shorelines, still lives, and stones) to practice climate art history with an approach that Thomas Pfau has called "phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiry"[5] – an embodied way of finding out what, and *that*, images reveal. This is not a "hermeneutics of suspicion," or an effort to decode what the image does not say; my readings wait for what emerges as strange, what stops or strikes me, in the context of climate emergency. Scientific research on botanical pressings and changing habitats informs my writing, along with art-historical perspectives that link image to ecology. Continuing with the Bosch assemblage (in Anna Tsing's "fungal" sense),[6] I find an example, though not focused on climate, in Marina Warner's 2006 essay on Bosch's triptych *The Haywain* (1512–15). Warner explores the image of hay and its dried-out forms as straw or chaff, not only in its biblically symbolic sense but also in its function in the cycle of harvest and survival. "If grass is not left to be scorched by summer's breath, if it is reaped in time, it becomes fodder," she writes after a reference to the foreboding "All flesh is grass" line in Isaiah.[7] Seeing the giant, teetering load of hay in Bosch's panel, in a year in which record heat, drought, and the war in Ukraine have threatened grain supply in many places, I pay less attention to the scene's resident demons and more to the desperate humans prodding the hay from below. Hell is not waiting in the next panel; it is already here.

Shorelines

An imaginary landscape hangs over our fireplace. My husband bought the unsigned print decades ago at a consignment store, for its pastoral stillness and painterly skill. To me it looks like a Dutch realist's familiar agricultural characters – a hay wagon driver steadying his abundant (but not monstrous in this case) supply, several dairymaids in drooping hats – superimposed on an idealized lake shore. This could be the Bodensee or Lake Constance, a common source of inspiration for northern European painters. Grass slopes to the water from a Hobbema-style tree, a village church spire in the middle distance, with softly outlined mountains further away still.

Before we moved out of the drought-stricken American West, I would focus on this gentle, domesticated scene, recalling Simon Schama's note that in Dutch pastoral painting, "the human design and use of the landscape ... *was* the story, startlingly sufficient unto itself."[8] At the same time, I had one eye out the window at an equally constructed if far more alkaline shore: a reservoir that had once filled the valley's bottomlands and now left mudflats and an old road open to the sky, its water level down to 13 percent. The costs of human domination of any landscape had become painfully clear. In the summer, wildfire smoke from California filled the valley, stinging our throats, making the mountains across the reservoir visible only as a pencil-like suggestion. Global heating bore down on the mud and mountains with such force, it was no longer the "hyperobject" Timothy Morton had called it in 2013 – an abstract idea so large, it's difficult to sense in a palpable way.[9]

Since that summer in the "megadrought," we've had the luxury of leaving the high Utah desert, taking the Dutch landscape with us. Looking at it now, in the greener if still rapidly warming North Carolina piedmont, the image still makes me strangely thirsty, recalling its counter-shoreline outside our former window. The phenomenology of looking – being startled by qualities of an image – can be a whole-body experience. Our first addition to our new home was a bayou-inspired abstract painting by a local artist, with swampy depths that trouble me for other reasons: the memory of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the threat of monster storms each year now, so many we forget their names. The painting's reflection in the mirror across from our bed seeps into dreams.

When working in Scandinavia, I've started noticing my physical reactions to the windy shorelines of the Skagen painters, knowing the Danish coast will flood, buffeted by rising seas and climate-chaos storms. Often I feel a jolt instead of the awe or peacefulness that these North Jutland paintings have traditionally evoked. I think of Dorthe Nors' recent book of essays on the famously unstable North Sea coast, where she has learned that "[w]hen a landscape is in motion, people and buildings are compelled to follow."[10] A case in point is a church so dangerously close to a seaside cliff, it was partially un-constructed in 2008, leaving only the walls in place. Nors writes,

> From the site up north where the Mårup Church had stood for centuries, and where now only half the churchyard remains, the dead also sift down into the sea at regular intervals and frighten tourists. Sometimes remnants of bone are left devoutly placed on top of the gravestones. Some considerate person disposing of the evidence. You can end up with too many calls to the police when a churchyard is drifting into the sea.[11]

This haunted coast reads like a post-apocalyptic (or post-Anthropocentric) prophecy, if one imagines humankind swept into future layers of geologic time. Malthusian population-control fantasies can be as dangerous as the climate crisis itself, but the world as privileged humans know it is already fading into memory. Looking at paintings is one way to track this shift, moving backwards from the current state of emergency into scenes that show, if not exact replicas of past geographies, at least traces of their imaginative force.

In 2021, the Princeton University Art Museum published a series of critical essays that grew out of a symposium on nature in American art and developed into one of the first anthologies in the emerging field of climate art history. *Picture Ecology* takes a conservative approach, with more attention to paintings than to more multi-dimensional responses to land, water, air, and their many resident life forms, but the book is a good start. A chapter on nineteenth-century seascapes shows the contrast between contemporary anxieties about water's agency (even "a sense of catastrophic frenzy") and the ways "painters of a previous generation remind us that the sea is a durable entity, alive with energy and matter."[12] This chapter also shows how seascapes served as invitations to follow the image to the actual shoreline, for ordinary people to learn about the intertidal richness that is in some cases (the Pacific Northwest in the U.S. in summer 2022, for example) dying of heat waves today.

This perspective guides my consideration of two paintings in Kalmar konstmuseum's collection, shoreline scenes by Swedish artist Nils Kreuger from the early 1900s. Having moved from *plein air* painting to Romantic nationalism (à la Herder and the Brothers Grimm) during the nineteenth century, and then from influences such as Van Gogh and Gaugin to a more pointillist approach in the early twentieth, Kreuger mirrored European shifts in and away from realism during his lifetime. Some of his work, notably his 1894 *Oktoberafton, Apelvik [October Evening at Apelvik]*, shows a proto-Expressionist intensity of color and colliding forms. The two shoreline paintings, *Regnbågen, Öland [The Rainbow, Öland]* (1910) and *Pojke rider i vall [Boy Riding in Meadow]* (1902), take a looser, more pointillistic approach, each landscape foregrounding the shore with the sea at mid-point, dividing land from sky. Despite the rocky, grassy mounds where the boy brings two horses away from the water and toward the viewer, the land itself is so flat in both paintings, it perhaps too easily calls up thoughts of future flooding.

Seeing the sea from a turn-of-the-last-century perspective, on the other hand, takes patience and some intentional forgetfulness. A rush of clouds that might signal chaotic turns in today's warming, wavering jet stream seem instead to press the boy homeward before a predictably seasonal maritime storm. The seagrass in front of him ripples in the shadowed light, becoming a lively presence that dominates the scene. This is not a solitary ego surveying its domain, as in Caspar David Friedrich's famous *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818) but a post-Romantic shrinking of the human figure, embedded in the landscape not in a self-consciously ecological way but simply by virtue of a day's work. Looking at the painting in this way is oddly comforting, as a reminder that Earthly awareness is as old as Anthropocentric domination. At the same time, the ordinariness of a late-summer storm also communicates lost innocence about seaside weather – however dangerous it always had the potential to be, before the obvious complication of global heating.

No human figures appear at all in *The Rainbow, Öland*, a scene located on the island across from Kalmar. Like many landscape paintings of the nineteenth century into the twentieth, when industrialized cities threatened clean air and water, this one offers its own proto-"solastalgia" for open space. Dark, exposed flats press into the bright spring grass, the low-tide sea barely visible against a sky dotted with rain. A double rainbow arches across the left side of the frame and disappears beyond it. Stones set in the ground recall the "stone ship" Viking burial site on the island. Also known for its dramatic wind and limestone houses, Öland is a popular tourist attraction for those who, even today, long to escape the city. A bridge links the island to the mainland, though an ice bridge made crossing possible during the Stone Age. In Kreuger's painting, the quality of light on this "island of the sun and the winds"[13] is iridescent, almost feverish. The receding sea is not a comfort here; the intertidal zone hovers between magic and menace.

For all the speculation about double rainbows and spiritual transformation, or about the rainbow as an ancient Norse bridge from Midgard to Asgard, from earthly to godly dwelling, a painting like this is best left to its material mystery. As Marina Warner has cautioned,

> It would be a mistake to imagine that the ghost stories and fairy tales associated with certain places are primordial and static ... Landscapes breed stories, and people make them up among themselves; memories shift over short periods of time; there is no priesthood to determine the canon.[14]

Here on the Öland shore over a century ago, land and sea and saturated air interact with their own intertwining agencies. Grass presses into muddy sand, which presses back, creating a waving mesh across the painting's foreground. Perhaps this is all the painting does. Still, though the intensity of Kreuger's colors predate Instagram filters by what might seem like geologic time, it comes across as almost frighteningly contemporary. This landscape, more so than its 1902 counterpart in the museum, strikes me like an accidental premonition of a future in which sky and sea force human attention with the clarity of an emergency signal.

In the current exhibition at Kalmar konstmuseum, the Kreuger paintings are juxtaposed with Ella Tillema's contemporary work, *Imorgon blir det nog bra (röd) [Tomorrow will probably be fine (red)]* (2016), which shows a female figure in a balaclava lying in a field, the whole scene filtered in emergency red. Though the contrast between peaceful landscape and post-apocalyptic fantasy may shock at first, a closer look links the two artists' visions. The glow of Kreuger's *The Rainbow, Öland* is as uncanny as Tillema's filter. Both works unsettle what the viewer might expect in a landscape, from the cusp of the violent (on a global scale) twentieth century to the bleeding edge of climate collapse in the twenty-first. Without conflating these two historic thresholds, the almost science-fiction lighting of Kreuger's shoreline makes the known world strange; viewers of Tillema's *Tomorrow will probably be fine (red)* already know it probably will not be, an estrangement most humans live with every day.

Nature morte. Still life, dead nature. The title of Swedish artist Emilia Bergmark's 2019 photograph, an archival pigment print taken in ultra-violet light, recalls the paradox of the genre in its seventeenth-century glow. The photograph re-imagines *Still Life with Flowers and a Watch* (1660–1679) by Abraham Mignon, a German-Dutch painter whose works are as well known for having been looted by the Nazis as they are for their realist precision and delicate treatment of *vanitas*. Bergman's vision of the still life combines poppy, tulip, lilac, and other hothouse blooms from the current Dutch flower industry – flowers that can be bought cheaply all year, making seasons irrelevant – and images of insects from Lund University's entomology collection. Many of these insects are endangered today, as Bergman's description explains, framing the centuries-old impulse to collect and preserve in a climate art history perspective. The vivid purple-on-black image (taken by photographer David Stjernholm, with the flowers arranged by florist Rebecca Nørgaard) gives "an impression of how a bee, which unlike humans possesses the ability to perceive ultra-violet light, would see the flowers."[15] In this vision of nonhuman perception, the watch is a playful reminder not only of time's passing but also of human technology, with a linked metal band and green-glowing face.

Nature Morte relates to Bergman's sound installation *Burnout* (2019), which imagines a humorous but also sobering conversation between a worker bee and a bumblebee amid Colony Collapse Disorder. Much of Bergman's other work moves beyond framed paintings and photographs, to question past artistic and economic practices in light of current ecological crises. Her 2021 installation *Narrative Container (Tulipomania)* recalls the still life genre with three-dimensional ceramic vases and fresh flowers, one for every week of the exhibition at Arken Museum near Copenhagen. Each vase holds an engraved image narrating the Dutch tulip crisis (the acceleration and collapse of "history's financial bubble" in 1634–1637[16]); the lilies, roses, and orchids in each arrangement tell their own stories in the once elaborately codified "language of flowers." Like *Nature Morte*, these arrangements recall seventeenth century still life tropes with a critical twist. In this case, the flowers do actually die.

Today it is difficult to see Dutch realist scenes (even the placid print over my fireplace at home) without wincing at their colonialist costs. Likewise, the practice of collecting "wonders" and "curiosities" in mirrored cabinets and transmediating these (in illustrated form) into thesaurus volumes was as much a form of plunder as was extracting "natural resources" and cultural practices abroad. A seventeenth-century Italian volume of bird images made from real feathers, for example, drew on Spanish conquistadors' knowledge of "feather art as it was done in Central and South America."[17] A century later, Albertus Seba's richly painted and often fanciful *Cabinet of Natural Curiosities* (1734–1765) raised the ire of those in the more scientifically informed Linnaean school of classification,[18] but no one at the time questioned the extractivist mindset behind either approach. Today, leafing through still images of creatures in unlikely combinations (a scarlet ibis calmly pulling a worm from the soil amid roiling pythons, in a space as perspective-free as a golden Gothic heaven) I am struck by another paradox. On the one hand, these scenes defy any sense of ecological logic, and many come across as pure exoticizing whimsy, but the same time they are so attentive to each feather and scale, each talon and tongue, that they show a reach of human care into nonhuman realms it hardly understands – but wants to, like that of the Romantic seascape painters returning again and again to the shore.

"Still life" (in a broad sense) paintings and collections can do more than open a window into past ideologies, economies, and moments of curiosity. In a climate art history sense, they can also do more than offer the strange, embodied experience of looking backward from the perspective of current emergency; they can provide concrete information about ecological change. In the nineteenth century, for example, seaweed pressing was an artistic form of research practiced not only by taxonomists but also by amateur collectors. Queen Victoria, George Eliot, and many other women (for whom it would have been considered unladylike to dissect animals) preserved and examined seaweed from the coasts of England to gold-rush California. These images, mediated in an onscreen article, appear like floating botanical ghosts with the delicacy of ruffles, lace, and feathers. The ornamental aspect of the pressed algae – long separated from the nutrient-rich bath which is as much a part of them as their own skin, which blisters when exposed to air – is of course extractivist. At the same time, the images take on an iconic quality in the sense of showing more than themselves, not something numinous in the religious sense, but a fragile link in the ocean's rapidly disintegrating web.

A collection re-discovered at the Monterey Bay Aquarium in 2016 includes delicately arranged kelp, sea lettuce, grape tongue, and numerous other samples on white cards with India ink descriptions. Emily Miller, who manages the collection, noticed that it included the tough and varied gelidium, which depends on nitrogen in the ocean to thrive. Using these and even older samples found elsewhere in California, Miller has been able to link changing nitrogen levels to cycles of upwelling and resulting fishery collapses along the coast, such as the "sardine crash" that drives John Steinbeck's novel *Cannery Row*. This research has added complexity to historical studies of overfishing that relate to current biodiversity loss, as well as showing the effects of global heating on once predictable warm and cool cycles in the ocean. Another researcher, Kathy Ann Miller, has explained the far-reaching potential of analyzing historical specimens that also function as art: "seaweeds, which we think of as fragile and gooey, actually hold ... history, not in their DNA, but in their tissues."[19]

Another example of historical taxonomy tracing environmental change has complicated a land restoration project in the American West. At the site of a brutal winter massacre of several hundred Indigenous men, women, and children in 1863, survivors' descendant and Northwest Shoshone tribal leader Darren Parry is collaborating with a local university to restore native plants to land purchased by the tribe near the Bear River in Idaho. Parry's grandmother's drawings and descriptions of plants used for food and medicine in the area has become a valuable source. Unlike the collections of Linnaeus, Seba, and the seaweed gatherers, these drawings came from oral history and life-or-death necessity. In a high-desert region, even literally bitter roots ("Gunga-ga-na") growing on "dry rocky slopes in open areas" became essential for stored nutrition over centuries of summer gathering and winter camps. The bitterroot sketch shows fanned petals and the textured, split root from which flowers can grow even when it appears dead, "still life" also in a literal sense. The description reads as follows:

> Flower is a deep rose color. After the flower drops its petal it appears as papery petals with tiny black seeds. The seeker for roots can follow these ghost flowers and dig for its roots. Roots are like forked radish, with bitter covering. Roots are soaked in water to soak off bitter covering, then dried they are ready for boiling. Root taste like rice with a bitter after taste, dried and stored for future use.[20]

As the Northwest Shoshone and ecology consultants from Utah State University have begun the land restoration project, removing invasive Russian olive trees from the Bear River site, Parry has been surprised to find that some of the plants in his grandmother's sketchbook may no longer thrive in the area due to global heating and decades-long drought.[21] Sofia Koutzoukis, a Ph.D. student in wildland resources, has performed data projections on the native plants that were once integral to Indigenous life in the area. "Some species will have major decreases in [habitat], some have uncertain projections, and some species will likely see increases," she has said. "If the tribe wants arrowleaf balsamroot to really succeed, they might need to continually replant that species, or think about watering. Whereas, they might not have to for milkweed."[22] This intersection of wildland research and climate art history is also a form of "witnessing," in which "art is not an alternative to the natural world but an intensification of its operations," as past observers like Goethe, Ruskin, and Cézanne understood.[23]

Stones

To return to Nils Kreuger's shoreline paintings, the stones that jut up from the water's edge – whether natural outcroppings or old ceremonial placements – take on a "still life" quality that seems surprisingly fragile, if seen with future sea level rise in mind. Stones are as much "vibrant matter," to use Jane Bennett's term,[24] or "inorganic others," to use Rosi Braidotti's,[25] as their organic counterparts in seaweed pressings or museum vases. When moved and arranged for human purposes, as in the rock-ship burial grounds on the island of Öland, stones can create a "dynamic" and even *"disorienting"* encounter, an experience of "being hit by the enduring stoniness of stone and its declaration of the abidingness of story," as Jeffrey Cohen has described it in a study of stone's cultural-material histories.[26]

If even story-ing stones are in danger of vanishing under the waves, they become unsettling in a different way. "Abidingness" can easily signal a wish for a return to innocence about the natural world, or a sense that whatever else changes, one's grandchildren can touch the same stones, someday. On the other hand, the premonition of already lost stone in a vision *of* stone can be an exercise in criticality, in the sense of Theodor Adorno's testing for "nonidentity" through negative dialectics. As Jane Bennett puts it in less Adornian spirals, “Nonidentity resides in those denied possibilities, in the invisible field that surrounds and infuses the world of objects.”[27] This not-there-ness does not mean nonexistence, however. In the context of rising seas, Kreuger’s painted stones already hold their future secrecy underwater, no less real for being “denied” to the human gaze – and forcing the humility of letting that gaze go.

Away from the Baltic coast, other changes shape my sense of stone. Having lived off and on near Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* since its construction in 1970, the year before I was born, I have sensed this artwork’s presence at the north edge of the Great Salt Lake for as long as I knew it existed. In flood years (1983 as the most dramatic example), it completely disappeared. The last time I visited, at the height of the Covid-19 lockdown in spring 2020, the landmark made of basalt and salty soil was completely exposed. The drought-stricken lake had begun shrinking to a silver on the horizon, its bed of toxic dust from decades of mining operations threatening to rise into the already polluted sky. Crowds of visitors escaping their indoor confinement filled the parking lot and the surrounding flats, where miniature, imitation spirals had cropped up since the lake started receding. My husband and I teetered along each curve of what seemed like a secular labyrinth drawing hundreds of pilgrims in need of nobody knew exactly what.

Though hardly a contemplative experience, this encounter with Smithson’s once-ephemeral artwork had the opposite effect as seeing Kreuger’s stones that almost float on the Baltic island’s bright shore. I didn’t already miss the rocky forms I might not see in ten or twenty years, or the very need to see them. The stones did not mark an old Viking grave or solstice calendar, but they did have a name with some significance. “Jetty” refers to a structure designed to protect a harbor by influencing the water’s flow. In today’s state of climate emergency, the word takes on more meaning. The irony of a jetty unable to function during extreme drought – where in a coastal zone it might communicate some positivist effort to hold back the rising tides – left me with a sense of futility. No wonder an end-of-the-world party atmosphere filled the site. The “abidingness” of Smithson’s work, more of it than he ever intended, felt like a relic of soon-to-be-lost time.

The intentional erosion of Beverley Buchanan’s *Marsh Ruins* (1981), mounds made of cement and tabby with embedded seashells on the coast of Georgia, signals more humility than the monumentality (however elusive in past flood years) of Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*. Especially in the wake of newly intensified hurricanes along the southern U.S. coast, the mounds are difficult to find. They “retreat from view, hiding among the vegetation, blurring with their surrounds, gradually crumbling into the wet, unstable ground” reads Amelia Groom’s 2020 introduction to the work.[28] Inspired by urban decay during her work with an African American artists’ collective in New York, by her resulting 1970s *Walls* paintings, and by the process of placing an ephemeral stone sculpture behind Kronborg Castle in Denmark in 1980, Buchanan was never hoping for “abidingness.” She wrote in a notebook in 1977,

> Not weak in the sense of an instant falling apart at the seams. Rather – it is made to eventually crumble. How fast or slow it becomes a “ruin” is unknown. How long do modern paintings last?[29]

Buchanan’s work avoids the aesthetic delicacy of Andy Goldsworthy’s outdoor installations, which come across as more self-conscious in their impermanence. Her stones and mounds enact (in retrospect) a climate art history of ruins in that they are already makeshift, worn, and hard to find, even more so with each grinding hurricane. Like the words in Buchanan’s notebook, they question the longevity of human-made art in general, beyond current concerns about sustainable materials. Located in an area full of now-fraught Confederate iconography, *Marsh Ruins* also reflects the less obvious evidence of enslaved people’s homes and histories, stone foundations and old middens that will be submerged before long, too.

Even with the adaptations that climate emergency requires (changing water policies to funnel agricultural supply to the Great Salt Lake, for example, or building oyster beds to resist rising tides in the New York City area), some coasts will flood, and some lakes and rivers will dry up for good. Back across the Atlantic, drought affects even the seemingly eternal Rhine and Danube rivers. “Hunger stones,” or hydrological markers of drought and famine from as early as the 1100s, have gained fame in the past several years of record heat and drought. A stone along the edge of the Elbe in the Czech Republic reads in German, “If you see me, weep.”[30] Though these stones have become as much a tourist trap as Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*, their exposure marks a moment in geologic time, and in climate art history, that calls for serious reckoning. With the embodied attention that artworks still invite, even a stone can move humans toward criticality and action. Even the simple act of looking – at an image of a starchy root that no longer thrives in the desert, or at a painted shoreline lit after rain before vanishing underwater – is also an act of care.

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Solastalgia, 2016–2019
Stillbild från video
Eline Kersten