

Katja Aglert



The breath between the rustle of dead leaves and the shadow of a tale

Opening | Saturday 30 January 2pm to 5pm

Biologiska Museet, Stockholm
Curatorial | Anabelle Lacroix

The exhibition is on view Jan 31 - Feb 21, 2016

Public Program

Tuesday 2 February, 6pm to 8 pm

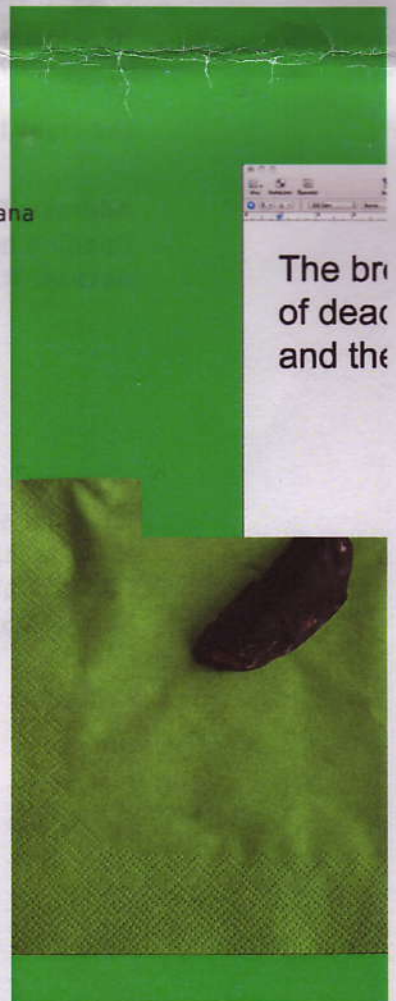
Katja Aglert, lecture-performance, *Untitled (Fox, fox, FOX)*, 2016
Dominic Redfern, lecture-performance, *Wasting*, 2016

Saturday 20 February 3pm to 4:30 pm

Tora Holmberg, lecture (in Swe) *Plats för djur? Om djur och odjur i urbana miljöer*, 2016



The br
of deac
and the



Public program

Tuesday 2 February - 6pm to 8 pm

Katja Aglert, lecture-performance, *Untitled (Fox, fox, FOX)*, 2016
Through a combination of images, video excerpts, internet searches and live performance, Katja will develop the broader context of her project, with particular attention to questions of invasiveness and co-existence, nature-culture, animal control and museology.

Dominic Redfern, lecture-performance, *Wasting*, 2016

This lecture-performance problematises the nature of aesthetic pleasure and its origins in the natural world. Dominic will create an inventory, or re-mapping, of the environment immediately encompassing Biologiska using live video. This process re-calibrates scale and time to focus attention on unofficial and overlooked expressions of the natural systems that suffuse, and indeed compose, our environment.

Saturday 20 February 3pm to 4:30 pm.

Tora Holmberg, lecture (in Swe) *Plats för djur? Om djur och odjur i urbana miljöer*, 2016

Cities are inhabited by an array of species, contributing to urban life. But urbanization comes along with conflicts over space; who should be allowed where? Who is involved in processes of multi-species politics and who gets the right to define the meaning and function of a particular place?

Address: Djurgården, Hazeliusporten 2, 115 21 Stockholm, Sweden

Opening hours: 12pm to 3pm, Tue. to Fri., 11am to 3pm Sat. to Sun.

Access: Tram 7 or 44, name of stop is Nordiska Museet.

With the support of Biologiska Museet; Beata Brummers stiftelse Konstfack; Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet in Stockholm; Nordic Artists' Center Dale in Norway; RMIT University in Australia.

This exhibition follows Katja Aglert's residency in Melbourne in March 2015.

Foxing

A woman in a suburban train is deep into her novel. I am sitting opposite her and I watch her read as we are moving towards the city. The landscape is changing around us. As she starts crying she reaches into her bag to grab some tissues. Outside I see piles of plastic bags under a bridge and I think about the animals, foxes—who must get to it at night—are they there now, watching? She is really crying. Her eyes are set on the pages and she mechanically pushes back up the drops on her cheeks with her tissue. I think about the world of her novel, the deeper meaning of the fiction and its characters. It's a world parallel to ours, like the world outside the train. Considering whether it is real or not doesn't really help us in anyway, I'm a character in the novel and the fox is too. What matters is a path within a coexistence of things, often a personal journey that brings to consideration the difference between what is being told—a story—and what may be. Is this difference relevant, or does it tell us more about how we inhabit this world?

In 2015, Katja Aglert came to Melbourne with a camera to capture some samples of the million red foxes that live in the city. There were approximately 20 per square kilometre in 2014¹, that is twice as much as in 2011. Co-habitation between humans and foxes has different flavours in Stockholm and Melbourne reflecting the environments of Sweden and Australia, and more importantly the fox's tag as native on the one hand and invasive on the other.

The question of what might be considered invasive, and how, is a longstanding research interest in the artist's practice. For this exhibition, Aglert's works are open-ended visual essays that address the questions: has the fox been asked to be there in Australia? What are the criteria for being invasive? What do we perceive as naturally given? What can this story tell us about multi-species timing? When identities are shaped in the politics of speciation? Are these identities stable or performed? These questions are explored through the notions of nature-culture and human-animal relation by including the perspective of the fox.

With Green Screen, an installation within the diorama of the fox at Biologiska Museet Diorama: *A love letter to the last fox*, a video and *Untitled (fox, Fox, FOX)* a lecture-performance, the artist's work acknowledges its own stage within a cultural, and historical context that clearly signals an awareness the anthropomorphic approach, with an account for the more-than-human and demands from the viewer to acknowledge his own perspective.



Fugitive, invasive or subversive?

It is not all that often that something can be taken for something else but the fox is one instance, being considered natural and also perceived as foreign in various places at the same time. For the purpose of this project Aglert makes the fox as a *virtual object* in her research, an object that 'can guide and perform analytical work as both a hypothesis about reality and as an object of inquiry'². Here the fox slips from being the *subject* to the *object* of the project.

Of European heritage, the fox in Sweden is part of society's order—even though it may be hated for killing chickens or other animals, it's a privilege to spot one in nature—it generates a sense of wonder. It is part of museum collections and ongoing acquisition policies. Whereas in Australia, the fox was imported for the purpose of hunting, 'as entertainment for gentlemen'—the artist explains in the lecture-performance *Untitled (fox, Fox, FOX)*—it's an invasive species. Being invasive generates another kind of attention, and another industry: a pest control economy.

In the artist's *Letter to the last fox* she writes 'stories of humans, and human conception has crossed my path'. Searching for the fox, an animal well known for being hard to spot, the artist saw two things: structures of control and a human story rather than foxes'. Knowing that foxes have inhabited these spaces for hundreds of years, the question of place of origin is left hanging. After so many generations, will they ever be seen as integrated? When does the other become a threat? What do these structures mean for us as humans? We start uncover some of the power structures of the human-animal relation and complex questions of overpopulation.

Sociologist Tora Holmberg proposes the notion of human-animal crowding to understand cohabitation between humans and animals in cities. For Holmberg, 'crowding is about transformative powers, [...] human animal crowds identifies the flow between bodies, transforming human-ness into animality or de-humanizations. Similarly animals may be humanised while being given human positions: being in control, taking over, deciding, as well as acting more very animal like³. Questions of identity are central to the human-animal relation and cannot be fixed. It is a 'flow' between bodies and environment. The identity of the foxes themselves—and our identity shaped by our relationship with them—can only be heterogeneous.

From installation to occupation

In the light of new materialisms that consider all relations and communication between things, our understanding of site-specific intervention and museology is renewed. With *Green Screen* Katja Aglert intervenes in the diorama of the fox at Biologiska Museet, home of the first diorama in the world visualising nature, including backdrops painted by Swedish artist Bruno Liljefors (1860-1939). Museum display will always convey how history is told and the diorama is particularly charged, as a specific type of display. Dioramas aim at giving as many perspectives as possible to the viewer by providing a context to the subject of the diorama. Here the diorama aims at presenting the fox in its natural habitat, but other settings exist elsewhere for human themes such as historical events.

The green screen placed by the artist acknowledges the fox at the centre of the stage by creating a stage within its own stage that opens to infinite perspectives. As a cinematic prop, a green screen is a placeholder for an environment or animation to be added in. Furthermore, the screen also brings attention to the materiality of the stuffed fox and its place *in* or *as* art. It stresses the fox's own fiction, as taxidermy gives the impression that the animal is at once alive and dead, 'anthropomorphised as if he could talk'⁴. For art historian Giovanni Aloi, stuffed animals in art signals a relational mode in which the space shared between the animal and the viewer helps us to rethink our relationship with them⁵. The politics of space, occupation and co-habitation are truly enacted within this intervention. Not only it shines light on the fox as a found object, but also looks further at the staging of the diorama itself, and its significance in showing our own history of representing nature. The diorama as a 'psychological composition for what is unknown'⁶ becomes fully activated.

In *The Wretched of the Screen*, artist Hito Steyerl develops the idea of occupation as political action and its role in appropriation and colonization. For Steyerl, occupation 'is imposed by the occupier on the occupied, who may or may not resist it. The objective is often expansion, but also neutralization, stranglehold, and the quelling of autonomy. Occupation often implies endless mediation, eternal process, indeterminate negotiation, and the blurring of spatial divisions'⁷. We can see the presence of the fox itself in Australia as a form of occupation, spatial and temporal, and as a political act in the form of resistance. Back to the diorama Katja Aglert's green screen act to occupy the fox's environment, an occupation of the diorama that certainly reproduces the problems it seeks to expose by imposing its presence and conditions for being there. It does so in all openness, not aiming at an external point of view but acknowledging that all points of view are charged and come with their own framework. In this way it narrates the limit of our relationship with animals.

Performing materiality

In discussing methods and decisions with the artist for the realisation of this project, Aglert explains her approach as moving beyond anthropomorphism with the aim of giving the works their own 'rhythm' or 'states'. This can be seen in the works, formally with the video *Diorama: A love letter to the last fox* but also in the artist's notion of performing materiality. For Aglert, performing materiality 'manifests and reflects the interchanges between practice based research, contextualisation and critical reflection'. It takes place as layers of interpretation between objects, that traditionally hold cultural knowledge, and contexts, the diorama, the museum, and our contemporary context. For me it attempts to answer the question posed by art historian Clémentine Delisse at the base of her experimental work in *Ethnography Museums: how to create thought-provoking environments for comparative knowledge production rather than merely cultural consumption?*⁸ How to generate models that question the object / subject relation.⁹

Aglert nonetheless reminds us that such an approach needs to be considered, thinking about how this environment 'can avoid reproducing the static order it attempts to critically reflect?'¹⁰ Using the fox as *virtual object* Aglert chose a performative account for knowledge to be enacted away from representationalism with a necessary rethinking the notions such as identity, matter, discourse and agency that performativity comes with.¹¹ A process of re-evaluation of a collection and an enabling of personal interpretation is key for Delisse, as a voyage between past and future¹². This process is necessarily a movement between past views—allowing a historical account and speculations on what the relation between objects and a world, present and future may mean. It obliges a position of unrest, of constant renegotiation between objects, categories, contexts, identities, points of views, and stories.

Anabelle Lacroix



1 Michael Green, "Little fox big problem" in *The Age*, July 3, 2014, see <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/little-fox-big-problem-20140703-3bboh.html>.

2 Tora Holmberg, *Urban Animals: Crowding in Zoocities*, Routledge, 2015, p14.

3 *ibid*, p124.

4 Stephanie S. Turner, 'Relocating "Stuffed" Animals: Photographic Remediation of Natural History Taxidermy' in *Humanimalia: a journal of human/animal interface studies*, Volume 4, Number 2 (Spring 2013), p5.

5 Giovanni Aloï, *Art and Animals*, London: I.B. Tavis, 2012, p31.

6 Clémentine Delisse, 'Performing the Curatorial in the Post-Ethnographic Museum' in Maria Lind (ed.), *Performing the Curatorial: within and Beyond Art*, Sternberg Press, 2012, p62.

7 Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, Sternberg Press, p117-118.

8 Clémentine Delisse, « Between material and cognitive collections
Published in *6(0) Ways, Framing Culturally Diverse Practices* », Ed. Braak,
Dutch Foundation for Visual Arts, Culture and Diversity, NAI 2009, p239.

9 Clémentine Delisse, 'Performing the Curatorial in the Post-Ethnographic Museum' in Maria Lind (ed.), *Performing the Curatorial: within and Beyond Art*, Sternberg Press, 2012, p61.

10 Katja Aglert, Abstract for conference, 2015.

11 Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter' in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2003, p801-824.

12 Clémentine Deliss, 'Between material and cognitive collections'
Published in *6(0) Ways, Framing Culturally Diverse Practices*, Ed. Braak,
Dutch Foundation for Visual Arts, Culture and Diversity, NAI 2009, p240.



Biographies

Katja Aglert

Katja Aglert's practice is interdisciplinary in nature and includes both individual and collaborative projects. The concepts and research that she works with as part of her practice, are rooted in a wider interest related to examinations of dominant tendencies, and orders in society. Fields that she find specifically interesting to engage with relates to the more-than-human world, the culture of nature, intersectionality, failure, performativity, ecology matters and history(ies). The choice of medium that she works with are directed by the context, site and research of each specific project.

She exhibited in Sweden and internationally, solo exhibitions include *Winter Event-antifreeze* curated by Stefanie Hessler at MAC Museum of Contemporary Art, Santiago, Chile (2015) and at FLORA ars+natura, Bogota, Colombia (2015). *On Invasive Grounds*, curated by Helena Selder, at Marabouparken (2014). Recent group exhibitions include *Voyage to the Virtual*, curated by Tanya Toft, at Scandinavia House, NYC, USA (2015); *Uppehåll!*, curated by Bettina Pehrsson, at Marabouparken, Sweden (2014).

Dominic Redfern

Dominic Redfern is video artist working at the intersection of site, screen and identity. His work with identity has increasingly focused on narratives of place and the history of natural history. The status, currency, and possibility of beauty in art as well as the idea of the 'natural' as a cultural construction have become interests for Redfern. Self-conscious of his approach to the technology and culture of video, the screen is both subject and medium for his work, which gives critical expression to the complexity of screen-mediated experience.

Recent solo exhibition include *WIRE*, WWI and ANZAC Day Centenary Commemorative Exhibitions at Mildura Regional Arts Centre (2015) and group exhibition include the Guirguis New Art Prize, Ballarat Regional Gallery (2015), the Incinerator Art Prize, Incinerator Art Space, Melbourne (2015) and performances as part of *Ephemeral Cartographies*, Rio de Janeiro (2015) and at Tokyo Wonder Site, Japan (2012).

Anabelle Lacroix

Anabelle Lacroix is an independent curator living in Melbourne and program manager at Liquid Architecture, a sound art organisation. As a curator she presented projects mostly in Melbourne at Mars Gallery (2015), Blindside (2015), RMIT Project Space Spare Room (2014), Arc One gallery (2014), Kings ARI (2013), West Space (2012) and at Careof (2014, Milan, Italy). Lacroix graduated from the International Program in Curating Art at Stockholm University after completing Masters by research in Art History at University College London and a BA in Art History and Anthropology from University Paris X Nanterre.

Tora Holmberg

Tora Holmberg is Professor in sociology at the Department of Sociology and the Institute for Housing and Urban Research, Uppsala University, Sweden. Her research interests include human-animal relations in biotechnology and in the city, and her cultural sociology approach combines animal studies with STS (Science and Technology Studies) and feminist theory, eg. in *Urban Animals. Crowding in ZooCities* (Routledge, 2015). Holmberg is chair of the Cultural Matters Research Group (CMG), Uppsala University, founding member of the HumAnimal group at the Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala, and facilitator of the Nordic Human-Animal Studies Network.