
Discrepancies with G.G. by Leonor Antunes
1.6–24.9 2017

BUILDING
OTHER
WAYS OF
SEEING

Tensta konsthall

The minimalist and yet sensual installations of Leonor Antunes reveal traces of twentieth-century modernist architecture as well as how materials move across the world. Antunes' works often allude to figures that for many different reasons have been neglected within the context of art history or architecture, while also re-creating shapes and patterns from specific sites. In her research-based installations, furniture designed by for instance Eileen Moray Gray (1878–1976) and buildings by the architect Lina Bo Bardi (1914–1992) function as points of reference for new work. The atmospheric installations are also inspired by the specific context in which they are staged, the characteristics of the space itself. Another recurring feature is how techniques and materials which travel long distances and thus become part of global trading appear in the work, for example hemp, cork and wood. At one and the same time, the installations activate the space and act as tactile and evocative encounters between the architectural memory and craft history of certain places, and patterns of movement.

In the case of Tensta konsthall, the show is informed by the work of Swedish designer and architect Greta Magnusson Grossman (1906–99), for example her 1959 Villa Sundin in the Northern town of Hudiksvall. Having studied furniture design at Konstfack and architecture at the Royal Academy of Technology, both in Stockholm, Magnusson Grossman set up her own studio, called "Studio". Tables, chairs and lamps, for example the well-known spindly "grasshopper" came out of the studio. In 1933, as the first woman ever, she won the Furniture Design award from the Swedish Society of Industrial Design. Seven years later, she moved to Los Angeles and set up a new studio focusing on lighting and slender

furniture with unusual combinations of materials, now with her husband Billy Grossman. In addition to making interiors for Greta Garbo and Ingrid Bergman, she designed numerous villas, combining features connected to Southern Californian lifestyles and European modernism.

In the exhibition, Antunes is also exploring the notion of "acrotony" which is the tendency of most trees and plants to give nutritional priority to the lateral shoots nearest the apex of the main shoot. A number of the sculptural elements hold plants at their "top" – unexpected extensions looking like wigs in what is essentially portraits by people, for example "Sergio", "Charlotte" and "Franca". The plants, like many of the other materials, come from far away places like South Africa, the Antilles and mountainous areas in South Asia. None of the elements is functional in the sense of furniture, but instead a new kind of object is created. The title "Discrepancies with" is at once a nod to some modernist architects and designers, and marking a difference to them. Nevertheless, both the animate and inanimate things are bearers of histories, and cultures and therefore also of possibilities.

The exhibition is acting as a point of reference for the konsthall's so-called Art Porch, a handicraft-based drop-in activity scheduled for July and August. Attendees range from children to the elderly, mostly women, who try out various techniques and materials under the guidance of a range of specialists.

As part of the exhibition, the feminist initiative Hall of Femmes arranges the series L'hommage, talks that highlight and visualize women's contribution to design and architecture. On three occasions, architects Eileen Gray, Léonie Geisendorf and Greta

Magnusson Grossman are discussed. Hall of Femmes promotes an exchange of experiences between places and generations, and their book series includes texts about Ruth Ansel, Lillian Bassman, Janet Froelich, Carin Goldberg, Tomoko Miho, Paula Scher and Lella Vignelli. www.halloffemmes.com

Leonor Antunes was born in 1972 in Lisbon. She studied at the Lisbon Theater and Film School and at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Lisbon. She currently lives and works in Berlin. Antunes has had solo exhibitions at CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, France; KIOSK, Ghent, Belgium; The New Museum, New York; Pérez Art Museum Miami; Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland; Kunstverein Hamburger Bahnhof, Hamburg; Kunstverein Düsseldorf; Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; and Museu de Serralves, Porto, Portugal. Her work has also been featured in numerous international group exhibitions, including Slip of the Tongue, Punta della Dogana, Venice; Sharjah Biennial 12: The past, the present, the possible, United Arab Emirates; 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art; Beyond the Supersquare, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; Decorum, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Textiles: Open Letter, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany; The Language of Less (Then and Now), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and Singapore Biennale 2011: Open House.

The exhibition is a part of the collaboration They Were, Those People, a Kind of Solution with WHW (Zagreb), eipcp – European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (Vienna) and Centre for Peace Studies (CMS) (Zagreb). With support from the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

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List of works

1. Grid

2015

Nylon rope

Net-like structures appear frequently in the work of Leonor Antunes. Sometimes they function as spatial dividers; at other times they operate like perspectival grids.

2. Grid

2015

Nylon rope

3. A secluded and pleasant land in this land I wish to dwell #2

2014

Wenge wood and white cotton string

The designs of the architect Lina Bo Bardi (1914–1992) have influenced several works by Antunes. Here, Bo Bardi's creative experiments with form and proportion have influenced a series of screens made from the African wood wenge cut into vertical pieces and threaded together with white cotton rope. These forms are based on a wall design made of concrete slabs that Bo Bardi built in 1988 for the Casa do Benim in Salvador de Bahia in northeastern Brazil. When placed side by side, Antunes's screens measure the exact length of Bo Bardi's original wall.

4. A secluded and pleasant land in this land I wish to dwell #5

2014

Wenge wood and white cotton string

5. Charlotte I

2017

Walnut, Tillandsia usneoides, plastic pot, potting soil

This obelisk-style standing work includes the plant Tillandsia usneoides—also called “Spanish moss”—which grows from the South-

East of the United States (from Virginia to Louisiana) to Argentina. No soil is necessary—nutrition is carried by suckers which retain water and nutrients. The work is a “portrait” of architect and designer Charlotte Perriand (1903–99), who promoted low-cost housing and serial production, often using metal and glass as she worked with both Le Corbusier and Jean Prouvé. She spent 1940–46 in Japan and Vietnam, partly as an advisor for industrial design, which triggered her interest in woodwork and weaving. The structure which holds the plant is reminiscent of benches designed by Perriand for a resort in Les Arcs in the French alps. Like in several other works, Antunes has enlarged her own structure compared to the point of reference, thereby creating an entirely new object.

6. Discrepancies with Lina #1

2015

Concrete, brass

The sculptures entitled Discrepancies with Lina are reminiscent of low tables with brass legs and concrete tops. The tops refer to the cloud-like shapes of the windows in architect Lina Bo Bardi's (1914–92) extensive SESC Pompeia in Sao Paulo, completed in 1982 as a renovation and extension of an old factory. The popular community center, which encompasses a library, an exhibition space, cafés, a swimming pool, a basketball court, and a football field, reflects her interest in Brazilian vernacular architecture and culture, expressing her commitment to the social potential of both architecture and design.

7. Discrepancies with Lina #2

2015

Concrete, brass

8. Discrepancies with Lina #3
2015
Concrete, brass

9. Discrepancies with Lina #4
2015
Concrete, brass

10. Discrepancies with Lina #5
2015
Concrete, brass

11. Discrepancies with Villa Sundin
2016
Leather, nylon yarn, foam, and hemp rope, in two parts

The dimensions of this sculpture are related to the façade of Villa Sundin, and the leather sections refer to the structure of its surface. The villa was designed in 1959 by Greta Magnusson Grossman for the Sundin family in the Northern Swedish town of Hudiksvall. The Californian-style villa was immediately noted for its daring treatment of light and color. An open plan with a generous glass wall towards the garden challenged the idea that glass architecture does not work in northern climates. The blue mosaic floor of the villa is echoed in Antunes's blue floor at Tensta konsthall.

12. Franca
2017
Polished steel, teak, Rhipsalis puniceodiscus, plastic pot, potting soil

Franca Helg (1920–89) was active within the fields of industrial design and architectural planning, often collaborating with Franco Albini. Among the architectural features which stand out in their buildings, which include the department store La Rinascenta in Rome and Palazzo Rosso in Genoa, are the spiral staircases. Helg frequently used both teak and polished steel. Antunes's portrait of Helg is referencing lamps which were made by Albini and her.

13. Franco
2017
Polished steel, teak, Rhipsalis puniceodiscus, plastic pot, potting soil

14. Sergio
2017
Polished steel, teak, Tillandsia usneoides

This hair-like plant—also called “Spanish moss”—is part of a portrait of the designer Sergio Rodriguez (1927-2014), known for his robust furniture made of jacaranda and peroba. Sometimes called “the father of Brazilian furniture,” he retained a certain playfulness, expressing a relaxed lifestyle.

15. Discrepancies with Backus House
Leather, nylon yarn
2015

Backus House is a villa designed in 1950 by Magnusson Grossman in Bel-Air, Los Angeles, commissioned by actors Jim and Henny Backus. Antunes's leather straps correspond to the measurements of a partition made of wood and glass by the entrance of the house.

16. Lamps
2015
Light bulbs, electrical cable, brass, iron

All works courtesy Air de Paris, except Discrepancies with Villa Sundin, which is courtesy Kurimanzutto, and the Leonor Antunes.

Conversation between Leonor Antunes and Maria Lind

Maria Lind: How do you come to decisions about which materials to use?

Leonor Antunes: Through a necessity of establishing a certain presence in the space or on site. I look for materials which express certain contexts and uses. For example, I often use brass. Brass for me is linked to sound and acoustics. But it is also linked to a certain time, and use, such as furniture and architecture. I tend to think about materials the same way as I think of people, how they age and tarnish. The same goes for leather; it crackles and shrinks and needs a certain daily care.

ML: I like the comparison between how materials and people age. What is the function of craft and the labor of the hand in your work?

LA: As an interest in a specific knowledge of craftsmanship. There are skills that one only acquires through time, within a routine and dedication. Working with wood or leather requires a certain sensibility but also a very specific know-how. I think about the manufacturing and the crafting of a specific object that only a very specialized knowledge is able to shape.

I find that Japanese culture deals most remarkably with this notion of passing knowledge, historically speaking. If we think of old Japanese shrines, they are dismantled every 20 years and new ones are built on adjacent sites to the exact same specifications, so the buildings will be forever new and forever ancient and original. They are rebuilt in the same way in exact detail, with the same type of wood which was planted

in the same spot as the former ones were cut, using ancient carpentry skills, and using no nails. This specific knowledge of carpentry is not lost either, and it's transmitted within the families.

ML: This is an example of how you relate to historical techniques and methods and there are many more. You are also interested in indigenous and sometimes remote ways of working, ways which are hard to find today in the Western art world. What does the notion of "faraway" mean in your work?

LA: I am interested in the dialogue that the indigenous knowledge establishes within a certain perspective of modernity. How certain architects and designers dealt within the vernacular using the modern "vocabulary." I appreciate Lina Bo Bardi's passion for new engineering solutions and for the handicrafts of the complex ethnic and racial demographics of Brazil's regions. As an interest which is not based on a nostalgia for a world before modernism, but rather a legacy regarding a belief in the artwork as representing an ongoing engagement in a process.

ML: You are often working in relation to female architects and designers, for example, Lina Bo Bardi but also Eileen Grey, Clara Porset, or Greta Magnusson Grossman, and their work. Can you tell me more about this?

LA: My interest does not only regard a question of gender, but also a history of forgetting. Most of these people, who in our times are fortunately well-known, were in their time working in a very isolated scene in a male-dominated scenario.

Think about Annelise Albers who attended a weaving workshop because she was not allowed to frequent design classes in Bauhaus. It turned out that she discovered herself through her work as a weaving artist, but it was not what she wished in first place. I recently started to become more familiar with the work of Greta Magnusson Grossman, in particular her architecture in Los Angeles. I knew about her furniture but didn't know until the last few years that she had built so much in California. She was not fully qualified as an architect, so she was never referred to in articles (although she had a lot of publicity around her work) as one, but as an industrial designer. Several of the houses she built were for herself and her husband, then she would later sell them, and be able to construct a further one. Through this process, she managed to have a series of commissions.

ML: The way you describe the process of the artist Annelise Albers, where an obstacle turned out to generate something unexpected and productive, made me think of the fact that Greta Magnusson Grossman often designed houses on "impossible plots of land." Locations which other architects might have avoided. What is your relationship to obstacles, and constraints?

LA: Obstacles are potentially very productive. They avoid going through multiple directions which can lead to a misreading of the work.

ML: Can you elaborate on how multiple directions can be misleading?

ML: There is often a sense of soft repetition in your work. Shapes and materials recur, without "declaring" repetition, and yet there is a feeling

of soft repetition. Can you speak about this approach?

LA: I think part is due to the type of research I do. In finding different designers and architects who worked in the same time frame in very different contexts and searching for the similarities. I started doing sculptures related to weavings done by Annelise Albers when I did an exhibition in 2013 at the Kunsthalle Basel. The show was titled "the last days in Chimalistac," and it was very much thought around the work of Clara Porset. That was my starting point, let's say. Clara Porset was a Cuban industrial designer who emigrated to Mexico City. She studied at Black Mountain College, and there she became very close to Annelise Albers. In another way Clara Porset makes me think of the work of Lina Bo Bardi: they both emigrated to other countries where they established themselves through their works. They were both interested in popular art, and in designing displays for exhibitions which they curated on popular arts and crafts from Mexico and Brazil respectively.

This is I guess one part. But most of all the idea of repetition its related to a specific time in the history of art. It is used to relate space, scale, and materials and serves as an end rather than as a metaphor for human experience.

ML: In my mind this relates to your principle of "overall," i.e. installations with objects which "people" a particular space in such a way that they sit everywhere, rather than being, for example a Gesamtkunstwerk, although you employ both architecture, design, and sculpture. Does this reading resonate with you?

LA: The architect Walter Gropius contended that artists and architects should also be craftsmen. I do believe that in order to be able to produce one has to know how to do it. I build my sculptures, but I also work very closely with people that have certain apprentice. It is complicated for me to show singular object sculptures in one space. It then becomes all around that piece and that work. I did a few works, for example, where sculptures were paired in the same room, but each placed in a different way. Or folded differently. I am interested in the space which is generated between those two objects. I think that is where sculpture is activated.

ML: What is the function of functionality in your work?

LA: In the activation of space.

ML: Your installations tend to carry references to overseas trade with materials being exported and imported, as well as other forms of exchange. What is the significance of this feature?

LA: If we look back, very few of the ancient bronze Greek sculptures have survived, since they were melted down to make weapons or ammunition in times of war. Later marble copies were done during the Roman period, using marble existing in the region where such sculptures were done. This is for me the most remarkable quality of sculpture. To be able to be continuously reactivated, I think this is in the base in everything I do.

ML: Can you please tell me about the significance of “acrotony” and what it means for your recent work?

LA: The title for my exhibition Acrotonie at Air de Paris earlier this year works here as a metaphor. It

also reads as looking to something, in that case, a certain type of plant, in a scientific way. I was not particularly interested in the meaning itself or in plants that had that specificity. I was looking and examining the plants scientifically speaking so to say, once I had them in my hands. I needed plants that would fall down by their gravity. And plants that grew well without the need to cut.

Acrotony has to do with how they grow, the direction and dispersion of the type of growing. I was working with a botanist in Paris, and she advised me of plants I should look at. We went on a tour and we discussed the origins of the plants. I told her I was looking for plants that would not look like plants, but rather hybrid living things. I was also looking into plants that were brought to Europe by either the fact that countries were colonized by others, or that simply were the subject of a study. I was interested in the flux, the immigration of plants rather than looking at them as normal plants. My interest relied on the fact that, by being in Europe but looking outside of it, I have always seen art as something one should take care of. Taking care here meaning in the literal sense. As we take care of ourselves, our bodies and others. If we do not feed the plants, they die. But at the same time, we shouldn't over care, that's why those plants don't need so much attention. Or they might die to! It's about regulations, priorities, and making precise decisions.

ML: What did you think of the villa which Greta Magnusson Grossmann designed in Hudiksvall (which you visited two years ago)?

LA: For me that project acts like an alien in that landscape and its surroundings. I like the story behind it. The couple who commissioned it invited another designer, Bruno Mathsson. His project consisted of a glass house which was difficult to maintain the temperature in such context. After he realized he didn't have the time or energy, he recommended his Swedish friend based in Los Angeles. So the couple visited her, and together they looked into her work. Greta Magnusson Grossman's project feels the needs of her previous projects in LA, not completely different from the other projects I have seen. She often built on hills, but this house is built on a flat piece of land. So it has more of a 'humanistic' scale. It is also particularly beautiful since it's more preserved, and therefore takes into consideration the original project.

ML: You have talked about the potential in obstacles of triggering a different way of thinking. Can you speak about this in relation to the exhibition space at Tensta konsthall, for example, the color of the floor and the relatively low ceiling?

LA: Each space offers me new suggestions. I really like the idea of installing previous/ existing works in different settings. Most sculptures are made of soft materials so are easily adjusted. My works, in general, are open to that. I like the idea of bringing sculptures to a different site from the previous one. Again, I look at it as a time travel, or as an emigration. Each show is a new challenge in that sense, and the sculptures are generous enough to be absorbed by the different situations and contexts. I have never shown in Stockholm before—it's the first time—and this is already such a big challenge for me and my works.

The floor in Tensta is painted black, and more importantly, it's a work in itself made by another artist (Wade Guyton). When I showed the sculptures with plants, I installed a sisal carpet on the floor. And this would have been the ideal solution. I love the idea of step into sisal; it's organic and ruff! But due to budget, Tensta couldn't afford it, so I decided to paint the floor with the same color as the house in Sweden designed by G.G. Which is exactly the same floor and color that Lina Bo Bardi uses in Sao Paulo at the glass house! Again it was an interesting combination of elements and learning how to live together.

Maria Lind is the director at Tensta konsthall.

Part of this conversation was first published in the catalogue *I Stand Like A Mirror Before You*, The New Museum 2015.



Dates

Thursdays and Saturday, 14:00
Guided tours of the exhibition

Thursday 1.6, 14:00 Artist
presentation by Leonor Antunes

Thursday 15.6, 14:00 Guided tour
by director Maria Lind

Thursday 7.9, 14:00 Guided tour
by director Maria Lind

Thursday 21.9, 14:0 Guided tour
by director Maria Lind

Events curated by Hall of Femmes:

Wednesday 13.9, 19:00 L'hommage:
Charlie Gullström Hughes on Léonie
Geisendorf

September L'hommage:
Eileen Gray TBA

Staff at Tensta konsthall

Fahyma Alnablsi
reception and teaching
Muna Al Yaqoobi
assistance
Emily Fahlén
mediator and production
Asrin Haidari
communication and press
Maria Lind, director
Carl-Oskar Linné
exhibition production
Asha Mohamed
assistent
Hedvig Wiezell
infrastructure and mediation
Didem Yildirim
assistance

Hosts

Arazo Arif
Makda Embaie
Isabella Tjäder

Technical staff

Johan Wahlgren
Carl-Oskar Linné