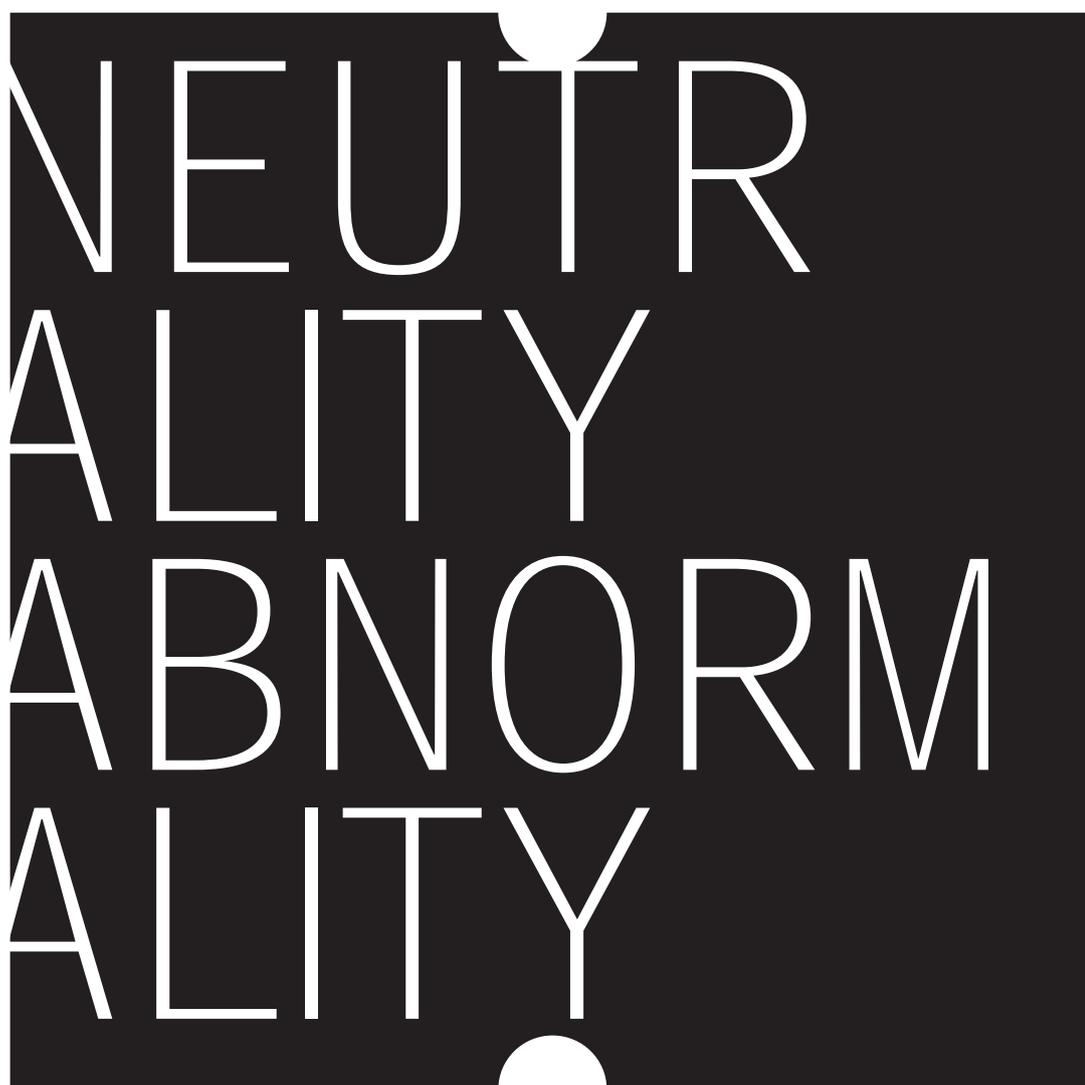

The New Hird by Ylva Westerlund
As part of Tensta Museum Continues
1.6–24.9 2017



Tensta konsthall

Borderlands, the future, and the relationship between the countryside and the suburb are the focus of artist Ylva Westerlund's watercolors and pen-and-ink drawings in the Tensta gallery entrance. The images depict depopulated environments in and around a paper mill community in western Norrland, and a well-known suburb and surrounding green areas of the Järva Field (Järvafältet). Every day, Westerlund walks through the forest between her home in Tensta and her studio at Eggeby Farm. The landscape of her commute forms the background for some of her drawings, and others depict creatures that form a new kind of troop ready to make contact with a changed landscape.

Between growing up in the small industrial community of Husum and living in Tensta, which has come to be Westerlund's home and workplace, the artist has developed a distinctly singular view of her surroundings. Both intricate details of the natural environment and panoramic scenes of urban landscapes reveal her engagement with local ecological processes. Her vision of the future through an ecological lens becomes most apparent in a series of cartoons that depict a large explosion devastating the Järva area. On first glance, the images appear dystopian, but in Westerlund's narrative, the catastrophe seems to ignite positive change by sparking the growth of other perspectives and new ideas. Eggeby Farm, where the artist's studio is located, has long functioned as a gathering place for all sorts of activities. In the past, the building was the vicarage for Spånga Church. Today, the property is owned by the city of Stockholm and is leased by Järva People's Park (Järva Folkets Park), and is home to horses, three dovecotes, bee hives, a theatre barn, a small sculpture park, and artists' studios.

Husum, best known for its paper mill, began to emerge as an industrial community at the end of the 1700s. At present, its population numbers less than 2,000 people and is steadily decreasing. Tensta's most distinctive feature is the large, late modernist housing area built between 1967 and 1972. The suburb's dwellings share space with iron-age graves, or rune stones. Tensta also contains a former military training ground from the early 1900s, which is now a conservation area known as the Järva Field. At present, around 19,000 people live in Tensta—a population that is rapidly increasing (whilst the social services are being dismantled at more or less the same rate). Both Husum and Tensta grew as communities during a period marked by strong political ideas about development. The factory settings in Westerlund's watercolors illustrate a process that begins with wood and culminates in the production of paper and cardboard. In Husum, political movements, individual identities, and society in general were built up around the factory. What parallels might there be between Husum and Tensta? What happens when places lose a significant part of their identity and function?

During the summer the exhibition at Tensta konsthall will expand into the Järva Field. In a collaboration with Stockholm konst (Stockholm Art), Ylva Westerlund will produce a new piece, Dream Wasteland, to be completed in September 2017. For the project, a continuation of The New Hird, sculptures of drawings will be placed in and around Järva Field, for example at the upper deck of Tensta water tower, on the edge of the Tensta allotment area, and at Eggeby Farm. The sculptures will function like small sign posts, or old boundary stones, for guided walks in the conservation area taking

place when specific species can be observed and mapped. This inventory is meant to give the sculptures a specific local context while the images add a dreamlike layer to the overall experience.

In collaboration with the Spånga-Tensta district administration, Westerlund and the Tensta-based poet Makda Embaie will work with young summer workers during the month of June. Together they will produce a new artwork for Tensta Swimming Pool, a project of *Många vägar hem* (Many Roads Home) supported by Kreativa platser and the Swedish Arts Council.

In addition, from May to September, Westerlund will run a series of workshops with classes of newly-arrived migrant students from the Tensta upper secondary school. Using the Järva Field as their workplace, they will create close studies of nature by way of drawings and cartoons.

The New Hird is a part of Tensta Museum Continues that follows up on the highly acclaimed exhibition *Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden about history and memory in Tensta 26.10 2013–13.1 2014 and 18.1–18.5 2014*. The exhibition traveled in the form of *Tensta Museum on the Move (2013–2014)* to Galerija Nova in Zagreb, to *Survival K(n)it 7* in Riga (2015), and Stockholm County Museum (2015– 2016).

Within the framework of Tensta Museum some forty artists, architects, local associations, performers, sociologists, cultural geographers, philosophers, and other practitioners have addressed the past in artworks, research projects, seminars, and guided walks. And it is through this that they simultaneously report on the condition of Tensta

today as a concrete image of what can be described as the New Sweden. Some of the invites participants also looks forward and proposing future scenarios.

The project is a richly contrasting patchwork stretching over four years, in which manifold interests and expressions together form a narrative. Tensta is an unusually multi-faceted and complex place, the collective memory of Tensta splits at numerous angles; it also means that tensions and conflicts erupt around questions of “whose history?” and “whose heritage?”. *Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden* also touches upon the concept of cultural heritage and the complicated matter of how it is used in Sweden and elsewhere in Europe today.

Ylva Westerlund studied at Malmö Konsthögskola, 1998–2003. She has participated in numerous exhibitions in Sweden and internationally, including, for example, *Contemporary Art Center i Vilnius, 2016*, *Malmö Konstmuseum 2016*, *Momentum 9th Nordic Biennial of Contemporary Art in Moss, 2017*, and *Galleri Krasny, Moskow, 2017*.

List of work

Left wall

- Den nya hjorden (The New Hird), 14 works, ink on paper, 2017
- Sulfate 3000, 15 works, ink on paper, 2016

Window wall

Upper shelf

- Gigant#7 1985, watercolor on paper, 2016
- Hon minns... (She Remembers...), watercolor on paper, 2016
- Eggeby gård, ink on paper, 2016
- Husumgården, ink on paper, 2016

Lower shelf

- F18, colored pencil on paper, 2016
- The Immortal Neobiocosmonaut, 3 works, print on paper, 2009
- Snabbt framträder mönstret på marken...(The pattern quickly appears on the ground...), ink on paper, 2014

The floor

- Excerpts from long forgotten comics, collage; paper, colored pencil, paint on board, 2017

Right wall

Upper shelf

- Skymning (Dusk), 7 works, wash drawing on paper, 2015

Lower shelf

- Överdäckningen, Tensta vattentorn (The Covering, Tensta water tower), watercolor on paper, 2016
- Husum, wash drawing on paper, 2015
- Bygge (Building), wash drawing on paper, 2015
- Hyperseparation, watercolor on paper, 2016

- A.I.D, watercolor on paper, 2016
- Läckage/våtmark (Leak/Wetland), wash drawing on paper, 2017
- Förbifarten/Hästa gård, wash drawing on paper, 2017

Conversation between Ylva Westerlund, Emily Fahlén, and Asrin Haidari

Asrin Haidari: Tell us about the title *The New Hird*.

Ylva Westerlund: *The New Hird* can be read as planet Earth with an old spelling, but also as a flock. My drawings and paintings sometimes contain a futuristic perspective—science fiction that takes place in a new era. The title also appears on the front cover of one of my cartoon series, in a story that is set on the Järva Field. Ideas about the “new” can also refer to utopian notions about the “new Man”, the new human being – an ideal. The English title, *The New Hird*, has a somewhat different meaning than the Swedish; it calls to mind the word “herd”, which means “flock”, but misspelt. “Hird” is an old Norse and Anglo-Saxon word referring to a personal band of warriors, a troop of guards that appear as creatures in the drawings.

Emily Fahlén: How was it that you started working with cartoons?

YW: I started when I was a child—it was a way for me to begin to draw. I was inspired by classic cartoonists like Alan Moore and Brian Bolland, and tried to imitate them. The cartoon format has permeated how I draw; I found my own figures, characters, and abilities—it became a way to visualize things and to think. There is a natural connection in cartoons between text and image, and you are able to incorporate a lot into a single frame. I’m also interested in how the so-called Situationists used pop culture in the 1960s—in how they would do a kind of *détournement* and turn material over to see another side of it, or put it together with something unusual, or unexpected. The Situationists’ strategy was to

confront consumerism and question a system through rereading it and finding its cracks.

AH: In the exhibition, we encounter different kinds of environments: Tensta and the surrounding Järva Field, the industrial community of Husum, and a new world in the process of dissolution. Why have you chosen to link these places together? What do these suburban and provincial narratives have in common?

YW: I think it’s partly that these areas were built during a particular time, when an optimistic attitude toward development prevailed. They have had a function: in the small industrial communities, for example, in relation to the employer and the organization of labor. I’d say that their position is different today: both the provincial towns and the suburbs have lost some of their identity because they no longer function as models for a social idea; the functions of welfare society have been dismantled and social services are moving to the commercial centers. Out-migration is palpable in the old industrial communities, whereas the opposite is more likely in the suburbs. At the same time, since people no longer find themselves “in the midst of development”, it may be possible to redefine places, to create a space to think differently. Or we must do this in some way and so self-organization becomes more tangible. We approach a kind of borderland, which is negative in many different ways, but it also offers possibilities...

EF: The borderland you talk about is evident in *The New Hird*. In your science-fiction world, society has reached its peak, and a new sort of Big Bang has occurred as a consequence of our consumption and our unsustainable relationship

to natural resources. Your drawings certainly constitute an ecological critique, but are the images only dystopic?

YW: My narratives have different timelines and contain elements of dreams and fantasy. They contain a free movement of thought. In the series *The New Hird* I refer to the established idea of the Big Bang as a singular event, when all time began and from which all development proceeded. Speaking in purely biological terms we are on the way towards altering the role of evolution—we can change our genes, for instance—so in some way our fundamental preconditions have changed. Gas clouds or the fumes we see in the images come from the motorway and recreate a new kind of primeval state, like during the Big Bang. In my images we see it happen again, but now in reverse. You don't know exactly what this is the beginning or the end of. I'm interested in portraying a breaking point; through image and text I try to get at something that isn't quite right, that doesn't really correlate—a crack, a fissure. You could find a "third" plan. "The third" is what I find interesting in feminism and in ecological debates—a relationship which opposes a dualistic world view.

EF: Yes, the idea that a catastrophe need not be entirely negative—it can also be the beginning of something new. I'm reminded of a book I have at home called *Paradise Built in Hell*. It's a study of what happens when civilizations fall apart as a result of natural catastrophes—tragedies in themselves—but these events also make possible a wholly new situation where people help each other and practice solidarity.

YW: Yes, the idea of a kind of cleansing through catastrophe

sounds both frightening and appealing; it contains both religious and revolutionary tendencies. But, yes, perhaps it could be interesting if the situation we observe in my work could also convey an awakened solidarity with natural forces, or the catastrophe, if you will. That the event functions as an opening for another, inclusive, relationship to processes in nature which we also are part of and influence. And are influenced by.

EF: It's also interesting how you work with toxins. It's not either exclusively bad; I mean, on the one hand, it can be devastating, but on the other, toxins can also offer possibilities, as for example, in hormone therapy, in medicines, etc.

YW: Exactly— if you think beyond simple negative consequences, it can be a potential opening for another relationship. I have also used flooding as an idea for this phenomenon. Fluidity and leakage have such different connotations even though they describe a similar movement. Fluidity has positive associations: a fluid economy, development and progress. Leakage, on the other hand, is considered to be something very negative—as in menstruation, waste, pollution—something uncontrolled. Nevertheless, the words describe the same things.

It's possible to trace feminist ideas about what is given value and what isn't, but also in relation to nature—all the systems we create to justify how we use nature and how nature should serve human society. I think we have to abandon thoughts of controlling nature, so that leakage becomes something we cannot control or protect ourselves from. Instead we must embrace the condition of things and the inevitable—for example, that we can take responsibility for

pollution that is released—it's already in the ground, it's here. We can't deny the waste we've been involved in producing.

Emily Fahlén and Asrin Haidari works at Tensta konsthall.

AH: And finally to land directly in our own immediate present...Just now Förbifart Stockholm (Bypass Stockholm) is being built. It is an extensive infrastructural project to create a connecting motorway to relieve the pressure of traffic into the central parts of Stockholm. We see how the landscape of Järva Field is changing, being strained, and environmentally exposed by this project. You also take up Förbifarten and its waste products in your work.

YW: Yes, my own experiences linked to places where I live my everyday life often form the basis for my work. I am often on the Järva Field, both because I have my studio there and because of my interest in bird watching. So purely geographically it's impossible for me not to relate to the road projects that are going on in the area. They have a loud voice which often drowns out the songs of birds. Motorways and car traffic are often described as prerequisites for free movement, exchanges between districts, and development. But to an extent, in my experience they have the opposite effect, creating barriers, stemming the mobility of people, plants, and animals, and hindering spontaneous patterns of movement. Car traffic to shopping centers is what benefits from more roads—roads generally function as economic arteries. Another aspect to all this is that making roads doesn't seem to favor human contact—taking yourself between two flats in Tensta by car is much more complicated than driving to Barkarby or Kista. It's difficult not to see car traffic as an educational project meant to point out important values in life. Had Pink Floyd's *The Wall* been written today, it would probably have been called "The Road".

Dates

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

Saturday 10.6, 12:00–15:00 Sketching
Saturday with Ylva Westerlund.
Drop-in for children and adults

Saturday 10.6, 15:00 Guided tour by
the artist

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

Friday 30.6, 15:00 Presentation of
new work at Tensta Swimming Pool

Saturday 26.8, 12:00–15:00 Sketching
Saturday with Ylva Westerlund. Drop-
in for children and adults

Thursday 7.9 Presentation of Dream
Wasteland at the Järva Field

Saturday 9.9, 12:00–15:00 Sketching
Saturday with Ylva Westerlund. Drop-
in for children and adults

Wednesday 13.8, 13:00 Inaguration of
Dream Wasteland and a walk on the
Järva Field. Meet at Tensta konsthall

Wednesday 20.9, 14:00 Walk on the
Järva Field by Ylva Westerlund

Thursday 21.9, 14:0 Walk on the
Järva Field by Ylva Westerlund

Tensta konsthall staff

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mediation and production

Asrin Haidari
communication and press

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