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**A Wall Becomes A Table With Candlestick Legs**  
by Anne Low  
at Tensta konsthall  
as a part of Sites of the Future  
20.6–7.10 2018

**Norra Sidan**

**Tensta konsthall**

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Anne Low's installation is an encounter between century old craft traditions and contemporary art methods. It includes hundred year-old working clothes, hand-printed wall paper, and a table that has been modelled on a wall of the author Moa Martinsson's cottage in Ösmo, creating a captivating installation entitled **A Wall Becomes A Table With Candlestick Legs** that links together the past, the present and the future.

Anne Low is based in Montréal. Her work is informed by textiles and historical craft methodologies which both form the material and conceptual basis for much of her work. Her ongoing study of handweaving techniques is central to her practice. At the same time, Low's art is not bound to a particular historical period but addresses contemporary subjects such as housework, the decorative, utility and taste.

As part of a residency in Tensta, Stockholm and Sorunda in February–April of this year an earlier version of this installation was shown at Sorunda Folkets Hus, in collaboration with Sorunda Local Heritage Association, Sorunda Arts and Crafts Society, People's Houses and Parks, the Stockholms County Museum and Tensta konsthall.

The installation, **A Wall Becomes a Table with Candlestick Legs**, consists of both newly-made parts and older borrowed objects. On one table with an unusually shaped table top lie work clothes from the turn of the 20th century, from Sorunda. The clothes, which come from Gilbert Hansen's (1921–2000) farm museum at Grimsta (presently closed) clearly show signs of use and currently belong to Ann Wahlfors. The form of the table top is patterned after a wall in Johannesdal in Ösmo, the cottage where Moa Martinson (1890–1964), the

novelist who depicted working women, lived for more than forty years. The table top is covered with new, hand-printed wallpaper, inspired by a pattern found in Luzzi Herzog's rich collection of wallpaper from the homes of the working people of the area and other simple dwellings in the district. Low has added apples to the existing pattern, as an homage to Martinson's novel *Women and Appletrees*. Turned wooden candle sticks from Sorunda have provided the shape for the legs of the table. Three mannequins in the installation wear local folk costumes, from the 1800s exemplifying how people dressed for everyday and for festivities. At the beginning of the 1920s Martinson was the first secretary in the newly built Folkets Hus, today one of Sweden's c 500 associations that run Folkets Hus and Parks, cinemas and other meeting places.

Even though weaving is historically important, this extremely time-consuming and - in Scandinavia - female-dominated occupation of making cloth has seldom been associated with any name. Low brings to light woven objects and combines them with other hand-crafted objects - and also ready-made elements - in such a way that her latest work approaches the surrealistic. Some of this surrealism is connected to her translating rather than practicing so-called cultural appropriation. Low's "translating" is in line with the post-colonial theorist, Homi Bhaba's ideas about how we always need to transform a thing to something else. In other words, it is not about asserting or upholding ownership rights but about immaterial cultural heritage, about in a temporary and subjective way, activating knowledge through a skill. In Low's case, this involves a continuous, often unrestrained and poetic, translation done by hand.

Anne Low's exhibition is part of the project *Sites of the Future*, which focuses on the parallels existing between the suburbs and rural communities in present-day Sweden. Despite what seem to be huge differences, rural communities and urban suburbs share

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many common denominators today: the closure of schools and other social services, the disappearance of job opportunities, and the fact that structural subordination is in the process of becoming entrenched. The parallel conditions between the suburbs and the countryside may be seen in a concentrated form in the county of Stockholm.

The project presents context-sensitive art in Hallstavik, Rågsved, Sorunda and Tensta. In addition to Low, the participating artists are Christian Nyampeta (Kigali/Amsterdam/New York), Hallstavik and the Ethnographic Museum in October; Suki Seokyeong Kang (Seoul), Rågsved Folkets Hus and Lerkrogen in Älvsjö in September, and Joar Nango (Tromsö), Tensta and Nälsta gård (Spånga Local History and Folklore Society) in February 2018. Sites of the Future is a cooperation between People's Houses and Parks, the Stockholm County Museum and Tensta konsthall.

#### Self-presentation

Anne Low lives in Montreal. Her work circles around narratives about the desire to form and give an individual character to surfaces, objects and one's own identity. Her most recent solo exhibitions include *Witch with Comb*, Artspeak, Vancouver (2017) and *Some Rugs and Blankets, The Taut and the Tame*, Berlin (2012). Her recent group shows include *Separation Penetrates*, Mercer Union, Toronto (2017); *Clive Hodgson & Anne Low, The Block*, London (2017); *Dream Islands*, Nanaimo Art Gallery (2017); *Ambivalent Pleasures*, Vancouver Art Gallery (2016), and *Reading the Line, The Western Front*, Vancouver (2015). Her collaboration with Evan Calder Williams, *A Fine Line of Deviation*, was shown at the Issue Project Room in New York in 2016. Within the framework for her ongoing project together with Derya Akay, Elaine, events have been arranged at AKA Artist Run Centre in Saskatoon, *Haunt* in Vancouver and Vancouver Art Gallery.

#### Book Circle: Moa Martinsson 2018

As a part of Sites of the Future, and to connect together the four different parts of the project, a book circle is arranged during the year. We will read Moa Martinsson's novels and study her life and work. Göran Eriksson, former head of the cultural section of ABF in Stockholm (Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund - The Workers' Educational Association) and member of the board of the Society of Friends of Moa, will participate. Maria Lind, director of Tensta konsthall; Makda Embaie, art student, poet and assistant at Tensta konsthall; and Fahyma Alnablsi, who runs the language café at Tensta konsthall, will lead the book circle together.

- Sunday 18.3, 14.00–17.00 at Tensta konsthall. Göran Eriksson will introduce Moa Martinsson's life and work, after which we will read parts of *Kvinnor och Äppelträd* (Women and Apple Trees) and watch an episode of the TV series *Mor gifter sig* (Mother Gets Married). If you wish to participate, please mail fahyma@tenstakonsthall.se

- Sunday 15.4, 13.00–16.00 Sorunda Folkets Hus and visit to Moa Martinsson's cottage at Johannesdal in Ösmo

- Sunday 23.9, 15.00–17.00, Lerkrogen in Älvsjö, Brännkyrka Hembygdsförening

- October (date to be set) in Hallstavik

#### The Mannequins' Costumes

1. Simple everyday clothes and work clothes. Green striped wool skirt, red/white striped cotton apron, red striped wool bodice, red/white checked head scarf and a simple shift. 1970s reproductions. Collection of Christina and Lars Andersson

2. Sombre dress: worn during the most solemn occasions in the Church's calendar and when in mourning. Green and blue striped bodice, blue striped apron, wool scarf and Örmössa. 1900s. Collection of Ann Wahlfors

3. Man's suit. Trousers, cotton shirt, red striped wool vest, silk neck scarf. 1970s reproductions.

Collection of Christina and Lars Andersson.  
**Conversation between Christina  
Zetterlund and Anne Low**

**Christina Zetterlund (CZ):** Could you tell me something about your background?

**Anne Low (AL):** I went to art school and was trained as an artist, after which I had a period where I didn't make work as an artist at all. In 2010, I moved back from London to Vancouver where I bought a loom. Through sheer determination I taught myself to weave, mostly through books and the internet. During that period, I went to a week-long course at Marshfield School of Weaving in Vermont. Going to Marshfield changed things for me, it was there I really learned to weave. I was taught how to weave with an extreme amount of precision and care, using traditional techniques and tools. After spending a week there I knew it was a place that I needed to keep going back to. The following summer I went there for a month to work specifically with linen. I was weaving a linen bedsheet on a loom from the late 18th century and I had an epiphany, in the truest sense of the word. I thought if I can make a textile that looks this way, in the sense that it reflects a certain level of skill, then I now want to think about textiles as opposed to just making them. Up until this point I had thought I would be only be a weaver and I had no interest in making art. But in that moment I realized I wanted to reflect on textiles both as a subject and material practice and from that moment on I started to make work as an artist again.

So in a way I came back to making art through weaving and it has deeply influenced the way I think about my work. I often approach sculpture through craft methodologies. It allows me to have a material approach where I don't have to figure out what a work will be from the beginning, in the sense that I can just begin by weaving a piece of cloth. There is a certain amount of freedom when all of my thinking is just at the level of execution as the one thing I do know at that stage is what I want the cloth

to be. Coming at sculpture through the side door of craft has allowed me this freedom, in that I don't feel the weight of authoritative narratives in regards to art making. I don't think I would be making work if I had not found weaving and craft methodologies as the basis for doing all this other thinking. Because I define craft within my work as a way of making something, I often work with other craft persons as there is a kinship there through an understanding and dedication to material process.

The material processes I am in interested in directly relate to subjects such as historical interiors and the body, as they are both sites that are particular to decoration. For me the history of decorative art is this encyclopaedia of idiosyncrasy that is sutured to the surface of a functional object. I look as much, if not more, at decorative art than I do to art because I am attracted to the extreme virtuosity of material technique that is present. I get so much inspiration from this. The impulse to decorate is something I am very interested in as it is a direct material expression of conditions that are harder to articulate and understand. It is also a thing that people use to individuate themselves, to understand one's self in relation to where one comes from, or how you express taste.

**CZ:** History seems to be an important ingredient how you think about craft and your work?

**AL:** How I think about history in relation to weaving is that it is more or less an anonymous history as up until the 20th century we do not have named weavers. We have named ateliers and named technologies but we do not have the names of individual weavers, cloth production is un-authored in this way. At the same time that cloth is un-authored in the historical record, there are also all of these really specific subjectivities that get expressed in every piece of cloth that is woven. They are subjectivities that come from the fibre at that time, the loom at that time, and the weaver at that time. 98% of that cloth is determined

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by how it is made and then there is this other 2% that is present. The affect of this 2% is hard pin down, but for me it is where a textile becomes about something other than it's literal material.

**CZ:** A dominant trope in thinking about textiles and history is the aspect of textiles connected to women history. Is this something that you can relate to?

**AL:** There is an irony there as in many cases historically men were weavers. There are of course exceptions to this, depending on the specific cultural context. It is important to make the differentiation between cloth that was woven at home for personal use and cloth that was produced for trade. If I speak about an era that I am particularly interested in, textiles that were produced in the UK in late 18th century and the period leading up to the industrial revolution, all the weavers were men. The perception of weaving as 'women's work' is to a certain degree historically inaccurate if you look at textile production as a professional trade prior to the industrial revolution. Within a western art context, it's not until you have the fibre art movement in the 60s and 70s that textile-based practices become deeply coded as feminine. I do not necessarily identify with much of this work as of it was often concerned with off-loom experiments using fibre in a myriad of ways and eschewing tradition. Of course, I find it interesting, but as an artist it is completely not my influence or reference. For me it is that river of anonymous weavers that I think about in relationship to what I do. When I learned to weave I wanted to learn how it was practiced as a trade, not as a hobby. This is an important distinction to me, as I am interested in siting the weaver within histories of work and labour.

**CZ:** How close can we come to history, to the historical objects?

**AL:** I think a lot about historical reproduction and how that is a fundamentally impossible endeavour. For example, if I began the process of reproducing a piece of linen based on a

historical fragment that I have seen, the process begins with the fibre but goes all the way back to the condition of the soil, as when flax is spun it can easily break if it was not grown properly. This is just one of many material conditions that exist even before you think about sitting down at the loom. The linen that we have now is not the same the linen that would have existed two hundred or three hundred years ago. There is also the obvious difference between hand spun fibre and machine spun fibre. And the loom itself, for example, if I am reproducing a cloth that was made in Norwich in the late 18th century but I am using an American-made cottage industry loom, the whole process of reproduction is already out the window. In my mind it is from the first minute of work that it is already impossible to reproduce something.

There is a particular stiffness in historical reproductions, where one can literally sense the impossibility of reproduction – you can see it and feel it. Within my own work, I formulate reproduction in terms of approximation. I want my way of thinking about history and tradition to be more fluid through a process of approximation where I can feel connected but at the same time express the impossibility of reproduction. I think there is a vitality that occurs through this process.

**CZ:** Here you mention something else that is important and that is the aspect of skills.

**AL:** Skill is a way of draining subjectivity out of an object, in the sense that something can be made so deftly that the hand of the maker disappears. Interestingly, however, when you look at the work of a craft person who has dedicated their life to the production of a particular object, their subjectivity reemerges and is moulded together with their skill somehow. Then you can completely recognise when a chair or a vessel etc., is made by someone in particular. That is something very specific to craft. My relationship to craft is really via the acquisition of skill, as I

do not want to be tourist to that world of material dedication. Weaving for me is serious endeavour and it's something I approach with humility, as I will quite honestly be a student of it for life. I have an incredible amount of respect for the people that I have learned from and for those that practice weaving as an autonomous practice, as its own craft. How this influences my own work is the textiles that are often components of my sculptures don't necessarily look like they were made by me, as my subjectivity gets dissolved into the skill that was used to weave the cloth.

**CZ:** Given the way that you described your process, coming here to make the work you did for Sorunda must have been quite different for you?

**AL:** It is a challenge to go a place and then imagine doing research and making a new work, all in a short amount of time. However, it was a challenge that I was up for because from the small fragments of information I knew about Sorunda in regards to weaving and garments, I was confident there would be a way to begin. My plan was to remain open as possible so there would be space for whatever sparks of thinking I might have to take form. Working this way poses interesting challenges that I do not necessarily get when I am working on my own in my studio. What is remarkable in this project is that I have had direct access to historical textiles that is in a way quite overwhelming. The hyper specificity of the textiles that are in the collections is very special as well as the fact that they are held in collections within Sorunda itself, via the Historical Society and the Craft Association. And so the work that I have ended up making is more than anything about being in a kind of material dialogue with these collections.

Before I came to Sorunda what I knew was that they had a significant collection of garments from the 19th century and that there was a strong weaving tradition there. The first places we visited were the Fattigstugan and the cottage of Moa Martinson. It was also on this first visit

that I met Luzzi Herzog and she loaned me a copy of her and Sigbritt Larsson's book *Arsenik och gamla tapeter: Tapeter i Sorunda socken perioden 1850-1940* about the wallpapers that existed in the cottages of working people in the region of Sorunda. It was from that first day that I started thinking about Moa Martinson and the wallpapers that Luzzi had researched in relation to the textile collections.

I consider the work that has since unfolded over the last two months to be a sculptural display structure, that will exist in direct relation to a selection of textiles from Sorunda. The display structure consists of a series of tables, whose dimensions come from four of the walls in Moa's cottage, so the tops of the tables are as though four walls of her cottage have been unfolded from an upright to horizontal plane. These table/walls are going to be papered in new wallpaper, that is combination of an approximation of a pattern from *Arsenik och gamla tapeter* and a hand painted composition. The legs are turned out of wood, based on a reproduction of a candlestick that I came across in *Arsenik och gamla tapeter*. The turned form of the candlestick has been stretched out to become a table leg. An essential part in the realization of this work has been working with other craftpersons based in Stockholm. The table legs were made by Paul Kovacs, the tabletops by Hans Berge and the wallpaper by Handtryckta Tapeter.

Serendipitously, before coming to Sweden I had already begun thinking about wallpaper for a project I am doing next year and so the realization of this new wallpaper has been really thrilling. The process of making the wallpaper involved a somewhat painstaking reconstruction, as the paper I wanted to approximate only existed in a fragment in *Arsenik och gamla tapeter*. I worked with my friend and artist Sylvain Saily to re-draw and digitize the pattern, wherein a flower that was in the original pattern was replaced with an apple, a small nod to Moa's book *Women and Appletrees* and to the apple trees

pattern will be printed by Handtryckta Tapeter as a wallpaper, which will then become the ground for another composition hand painted on top of the reconstructed pattern.

This series of tables were the surface on which a selection of textiles that come from Ann Wahlfors' collection were displayed. When I first visited Sorunda I asked if they also had any clothes that showed signs of wear and use, or of being repaired. Ann mentioned she had this collection of clothing that came from Gilbert Hansen, who had lived in Sorunda. In addition to the tables, three benches were made that borrow the shape from a bench in the Fattigstugan that has been inverted into a leg. On these benches were nine mannequins that were dressed in a selection of garments from both the Sorunda Hembygdsförening and Sorunda Hemslöjdsförening. These nine garments reflect categories of use, for example an outfit for summer, for mourning, for going into town, etc. In addition to these works, I was also weaving a curtain for the Folkets Hus, which is loosely based on a pattern from a woman's shawl that is typical to the clothing from Sorunda.

I was interested in making a display in which all of these textiles that have had different lives and uses will be gathered together in the same room. In this way I see my work as being in service of the consideration of these textiles that have miraculously survived. I think because any understanding of history is fundamentally fragmented, I want this work to be a constellation of references and approximations that might somehow come together to be a material thinking through of Sorunda.

Christina Zetterlund is craft and design historian active as freelance writer and curator as well as associate professor in design theory at Linneus University, Växjö. She works with social and material perspectives in craft and design history and how this history produces current practices. Her current work includes Craft in

Sweden that contains an anthology, an exhibition and workshops, Models for a system – exhibition and dialog at Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco created in collaboration with the artist Allison Smith and participating in creating an archive for jewellery artist Rosa Taikon at Hälsinglands museum, Hudiksvall.

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