



"Hanna-Maria Hammari & Vera Palme: Double," Galerie Deborah Schomoni, Munich, 2020, installation view

SAVE OUR SOULS

Ana Vogelfang on Hanna-Maria Hammari and Vera Palme
at Galerie Deborah Schamoni, Munich

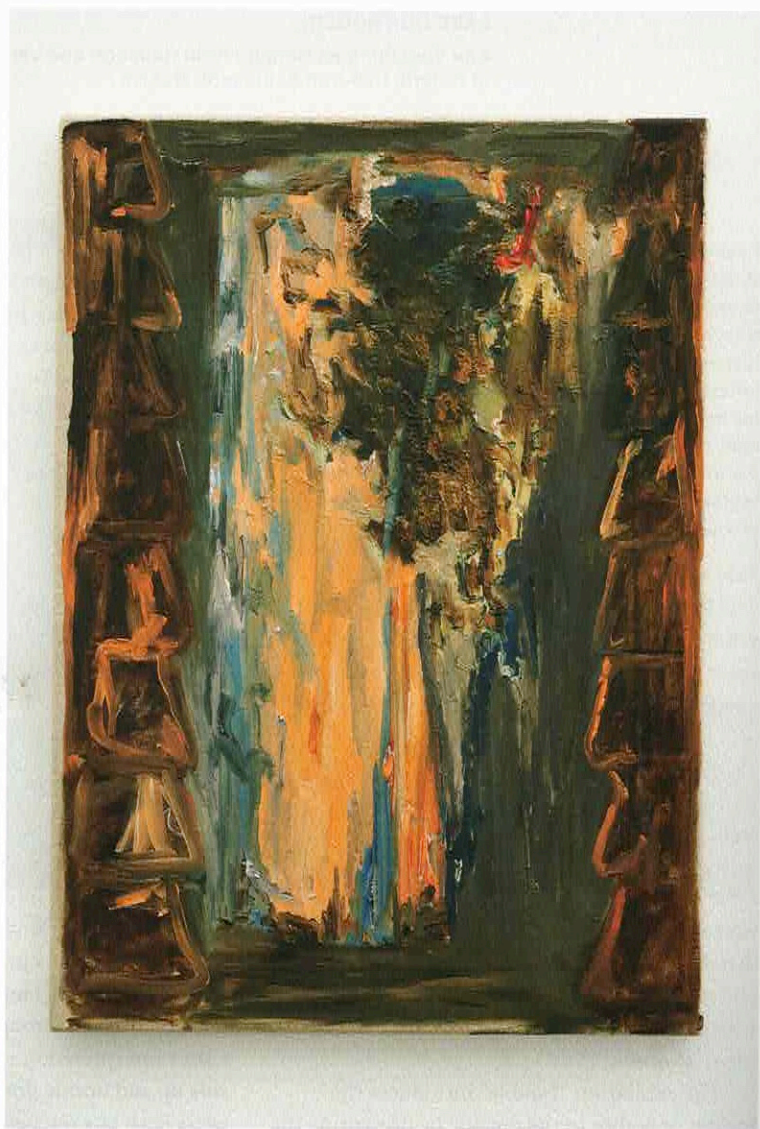
Desire, language, and scatology – the works of Hanna-Maria Hammari and Vera Palme sway within this triangle. Oscillating between bodily pleasure and object love, the death of the author is not pronounced here. Instead, the role of the subject becomes the matter of a reflection on the position of the artist who is not satisfying her own need but being subsumed by feelings of lack, pain, and shame. As Ana Vogelfang emphasizes, the works of Hammari and Palme point out that self-exploitation and narcissism are a common pairing in art production.

New works from Hanna-Maria Hammari and Vera Palme are on view at the Deborah Schamoni gallery's postmodernist house in Munich. The space relates to Munich's Englischer Garten from a self-contained position, being somewhat off the grid of the Bavarian capital's central art network circuit. Built originally as a family home, the gallery space retains much of that domestic feel and scale, underlining the idea of the body through its living-machinery form. Bodies confined to their domesticity (such as in the recent worldwide experience) are left to the whims of their metabolic functions. Secluded from their gregarious condition, humans undergo a change toward a heightened awareness of the drive of their physical needs.

The exhibition "Double" introduces the insides of bodies to the outside by presenting the combination of Palme's scatological paintings and Hammari's sexualized sculptures. In *SOS (III)* and *SOS (IV)* (all works 2020), Palme introduces large canvases dripping abstract spits of dense oily matter in frame-in-frame compositions rendered in shades of brown. Tubes in asphalt tones are squeezed and vigorously spread in *SOS (high)* and *SOS (hard)*, framing a grey abstraction that deepens at the center of the surface while leaving an enclosure of bare linen. The dyptich *SOS (I)* shows

two Chinese carved jade vases, in nuances of celadon and verdigris, with a leaking red, mostly poppy mixed with white, and a ruddy Naples yellow. Palme's works depict a *mise en abyme* of a painterly lexicon. The brush obsessively redraws the outer limit of the stretched surface, applying painting matter as a spiral force. The deliberate shift in scale from her older small-format works to these large canvases could be considered precisely the gesture of obscenity that characterizes the scatological. "The stretching of potentials and capacities (in times of apparent crisis)," as Palme herself describes her paintings in a written correspondence, "doesn't go without the flattening of arguments, reduction of complexity – a stylization. Insisting in – but also displaying a dissection of – substance."

Palme's obsession in grasping a painterly vocabulary extends a full length between language and *jouissance*. The *SOS* painting series on display is named after the international distress signal (out of official use since the late '90s), which originally was just a pragmatic combination of Morse code letters chosen for their 'simplicity.' It was popularized through the saying *save our souls* – a later interpretation – and can be read both right side up and upside down: *SOS*. So, painting appears both as a rescuer and in danger, between the Lacanian oral stage, as a demand to be fed, and its complete inversion in the anal stage, where the subject does not satisfy its own need but is for the satisfaction of another. In this metaphor, what the subject – in this case the painter – can give is identically tied to what she can retain: its (her) own waste, its (her) own excrement. The Lacanian theory relates feces with desire as it is flushed away in the excretory process. "Desire, literally, goes down the tubes."¹



Vera Palme, "The Pigeon," 2020

Furthermore, desire appears to be a centripetal force in the practice of Hanna-Maria Hammari. For instance, in her earlier work *Prestige* (2015), Hammari created a fake luxury brand that operated through rebranding existing luxury-item knockoffs as *Prestige* originals, cleverly playing on the desires of conspicuous consumption and the idea of great comfort, of elegance as

artifice, whether in luxury fashion or contemporary art. In recent works, Hammari's approach has become more overtly libidinal. Leaving conceptual installations behind, her interest in fetishistic objects has developed into meticulous and painstaking manual labor, often using base materials like clay with the charged intent to render the imaginary of aggressive, predatory sexuality;

combining it with materials such as fake fur, latex or chains. In this exhibition, Hammari's floor pieces consist of two wooden sculptures and a series of glazed ceramics. Demasculated two-meter-tall structures (both *Untitled*, 2020) rise erect from the floor and bend back down to the surface in a type of flaccid meander.

For these works, bleached ash wood was turned on a lathe, and the subsequent phallic shape sliced into discs that were then halved and attached with equidistant gaps along a canvas spine, achieving a certain mobility in the otherwise rigid construction. Consequently, the sculptures droop toward the floor. A few meters away from the fleshy solid wood sculptures lie the threatening but delicate ceramics; at first glance, they appear as cast iron or carved bone, dead and folding inward from a lack of internal air density. This contained void becomes more appealing as the gaze reveals the fictional potential of the materiality of these apparently sadomasochistic sexual props, shapes that can only be achieved by means of an orthopedic counter-shape that holds the clay in place until it becomes leather-hard, then fired and glazed to give the appearance of steel. These stylized and misleading quasi-vulvas counterpose the limp naked wood phalluses. However, their uncanny latent qualities and their alleged aggression become artifice at a closer approach.

In terms of desire, the works of Hammari and Palme present a dichotomy of narcissism and sacrifice: an opportunity to choose between bodily pleasure and object love. And so with the infant at an early stage via the process of defecation and its relation to the love object: excrement is the primordial gift, a part of the infant's body offered only upon the mother's insistence and as

recognition and manifestation of the child's love for her. Isn't it, in the end, what all this "merda d'artista" is about? Narcissist beings gifting their own shit to the planet?

Or is this exhibition around desire, language, and scatology pointing more to the fact that art production is only possible through feelings of lack, pain, and shame? A tautological reflection on the position of the artist being subsumed to a self-exploited bodily system of digesting and re-elaborating. In the name of love of art, it becomes clear that "love is giving something you don't have to someone who doesn't want it."²

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Notes

- 1 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VIII: Le transfert, [1960–1961]*, rev. 2nd ed., ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001), p. 246. The English translations supplied in this article are taken from: Jacques Lacan, *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*, transl. Bruce Fink, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015).
- 2 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan*, p. 159.