

“Season of the Double Bind”: Femme Group Exhibition
Belenius, Ulrikagatan 13, Stockholm, Sweden
June 3-June 22, 2017

Seasons wax and wane—as do male/female energies and their less easily categorized offshoots. Current events fill one's screen size of choice with confusions, cataclysms and stalemates, leaving a grappling populace with bittersweet options which do not necessarily enforce a viable tomorrow. Do we take the proverbial cookie now, or do we wait patiently like pre-schoolers given a lesson in conditioning? More cookies are supposedly available for those who follow rules, for those with manners, for those who abide by social dictations which can, in turn, impede and constrict. It's hard not to lead you, dear reader, into some dense forest:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;¹

Yet: what actually unfolds here is not an existential poem or reductive metaphor where one path proves to be more just or sound than another; rather, I give you reality—where you may find yourself wedged between a 'rock' and a 'hard place,' where you are *damned if you do, damned if you don't*. In this paradox, how does anyone, much less an artist, know whether or not to work with or against a system, and when does one decide to change or destroy it? Catch-22's flourish in this maze. Those who utter the words “I love you” might be the first to abuse. In this place, where words and actions do not conveniently align, it becomes increasingly difficult to be 'good' or 'right' or 'loved' when one must also fight to be one's self.

With any maxim or theory, there exists some equally alluring antithesis. Mixed messages ambush the senses, yet most options appear to be less than ideal. We may choose a non-committal middle ground. We procrastinate with consumerism and social media, all that culture offers (feeds?) or seemingly private diversions, or we can go inward towards a more accepting playground. Some might argue that this wavering indecision is jaded or queer, and others might declare that we are merely cowards who don't know how to move forward. We grow impatient; we hit another dead end. We continue to see: the outcome of choices which don't add up, indeterminate luck dished out, the greedy advance their position and svelte thieves flock together in twisted harmony. We observe patterns but often do not possess enough power to significantly alter them; this could be the essence of our plight.

*If you don't become the ocean, you'll be seasick every day.*² An ambitious woman in the corporate world can be viewed as a threat if she is too successful; she may be considered callous if she cares too much about her career. A woman in the art world is viewed in another context, but to an extent, one sphere (indeed) overlaps the other. Will the women in this exhibition be viewed as threats, and if not, what does that entail? Would you take a woman artist more seriously if she appeared to be dangerous? Would you hide from her—or hide from her work? Curiously enough, when you find yourself at that forked path, she might be your only oracle. In this world, we are not only presented with oversimplified 'zero-sum' games—where one person's gain is someone else's loss. Instead, even if temporarily, we may become entangled in some 'no-win' variant. Contradiction and ambivalence can either resolve or enforce conflict—at any rate, these traits are in bloom.

This exhibition displays a nuanced selection from five Swedish women (Lisa Trogen Devgun, Inez Jönsson, Klara Lidén, Hilde Retzlaff, Linnéa Sjöberg); each artist either supports or rejects the notion that they are products of their environment. Do they manage to escape influence—or lasso it? Trogen Devgun's work emphasizes risk-taking and the machination of identity incorporating readymade materials; Jönsson persuades one to reconsider perspective and dissect structural components—objects can be reframed in one sweep; Lidén's imperfect collages highlight the layered nature of social conscience; Retzlaff's concrete sculptures insist upon lexicons of communication which better suit desires; Sjöberg weaves personas and hybridizes processes until they become fluid and unfettered. In this brutish era—where a call promises no reciprocation of good will—their self-consumed forays are nourishment before another decision must be made.

—Jacquelyn Davis

¹ Robert Frost, 'The Road Not Taken', *Poetry Foundation*, 1-5.

<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/44272>> [24 May 2017]

² The words of Leonard Cohen.