

“One should open one's eyes and take a new look at cruelty [...] Almost everything we call 'higher culture' is based on the spiritualization and intensification of *cruelty*.”  
—*Beyond Good and Evil*, Friedrich Nietzsche

Many contemporary artists find themselves adopting an absolutist, staunch position in response to an increasingly volatile world—serving as possible fortress against instability. In contrast, one may feel relieved when confronting the adaptive work of Julia Bondesson. Her artistic decisions predicate an inconclusive stance and the sheer necessity of an open-ended gesture; one is not forced to ingest sweeping judgments or rule out options. An inclusive spectrum of prospects remains alluring; more importantly, all options are allowed—even if sometimes deplored. Similar to a chameleon's talent for changing hue, Bondesson responds to shifting conditions and variables without apology.

The artist exhibits work which appears weathered and distraught yet *subtly* ferocious in form—as if the signifier awaits the signified. This splintered brutality is invitation into a more visceral sphere where polarity is questioned—the powerful morphs into the powerless, the worshipped becomes reverential, the bound: suddenly unbound. “Art is seduction, not rape. A work of art proposes a type of experience designed to manifest the quality of imperiousness. But art cannot seduce without the complicity of the experiencing subject.”<sup>1</sup> In this case, accordance is a prerequisite for any sought-after satisfaction or recognition, yet one might still require that an idea or act dominate with the expectation to be obeyed. The uncomfortable question stands as to whether or not one must submit to, rule or usurp this tyrannical side of art. With heightened awareness of a sly thief, one is apt to either collude or not with conspiring energies to reach a goal. Is cruelty located within the details of a contract, or does it stem from blatant rejection of authoritarian persuasions? The permissible versus taboo motivates an appreciation (or aversion) for the visual—in part, dependent on limitations of personal taste and aesthetics. Artists such as Bondesson walk some fine line between the authentic and fictional—careening between expressing something, or: creating the new. Yet without consent, there can be no agreement. One *must* choose to enjoy the ride.

As grotesque possibilities and painful monstrosities show themselves, one may become callous or numb—resigning to raw simplicity for respite. Most, if not all, artistic and literary voices are under scrutiny, and the quest to pinpoint *genuine* authorship proves to be tedious. And with no author, there can be no signature. Some voices dodge repetition in method or practice, instead enforcing an indeterminate alternate persona. Bondesson slides between prepackaged assumptions—employing a slight fragment, poetic motion, sculptural anomaly—skipping over presumed traps of projected value. Suspended figures hang, blunt and disorienting; her landscapes cajole the viewer into ethereal worlds echoing nature or untapped dreamscapes. The artist incorporates puppetry as probable reminder of an eternal power play of tension and magnetism; she falls in step with other women (e.g., Elfriede Jelinek [*The woman's tongue is a dress that covers everything*], Chris Kraus [*She wants to lose herself in order to be larger than herself*], Sylvia Plath [*To believe beyond heart's flare / No fire is, nor in any book proof / Sun hoists soul up after lids fall shut; / So she wills all to the black king*]) who have dignified their craft as means to unleash and exalt that which aches to independently exist.

Between moments of actualized desire, there are slower periods of stasis and recovery. To seek therapy in whatever shape it may take—is this a sign of weakness, or more so: that the era itself is warped and, regrettably, retrogressive? After exposure to redundant waves of “shock and awe,” one might feel nothing, or: one might admit to nothing at all. When any language is stripped of significance, some choose to place stock in the remainder of a fundamental sensory experience. When language ceases to cause change (or incite *justifiable* violence?), other creative realms take precedence. “They forgot that for something to be universally accepted, it must become as banal, as non-threatening and ineffective as possible [...] Radical change is scary. It's terrifying actually.”<sup>2</sup> In the wake of an insufferable alienation and struggle, certain manipulations remain strong—others: muffled. Between climactic points of extremism, here lies an enticing lull where transitional frequencies hum in late-summer light.

—Jacquelyn Davis

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1 Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London, UK : Penguin Books, 1961), 22.

2 Jessa Crispin, *Why I Am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto* (London, UK : Melville House, 2017), x-xi.