

BYT Interview: Maria Friberg

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Maria Friberg is a Swedish based photographer. A traditionally trained artist, she moved her medium over time from large-scale painting into large-scale photography. Her show "Transmission" is currently on show at Conner Contemporary from March 20 – May 8th, and features photographs larger than life making the audience sucked into them almost instantly. She's exposing the vulnerabilities of men and further exploring how those vulnerabilities are, in fact, attractive. Friberg contrasts power suits and exposed poses in order to open a discussion on "how men think they should be" versus "how they truly feel". This makes the men in her work not so much human beings but "signs of men", trying to find their place in time of turmoil.

Maria Friberg is still in Sweden and doesn't plan to move to the U.S. any time soon (Sweden is (still) apparently the happiest place on Earth). However, she was kind enough to participate in an email interview with us. Allow me to indulge my amateur photographer status, and figure out what makes her tick.



Lets start out with the classic 1st question – when did you know you wanted to be a photographer?

I know I wanted to be an artist early, when I was around 10. There was an artist living with me and my mother and I thought he had a great life.

Was it a straightforward choice, or did you take detours in other areas of visual expression?

Then I took a detour and was thinking to become a dancer. Modern dance, that is.

When did you get started doing art professionally?

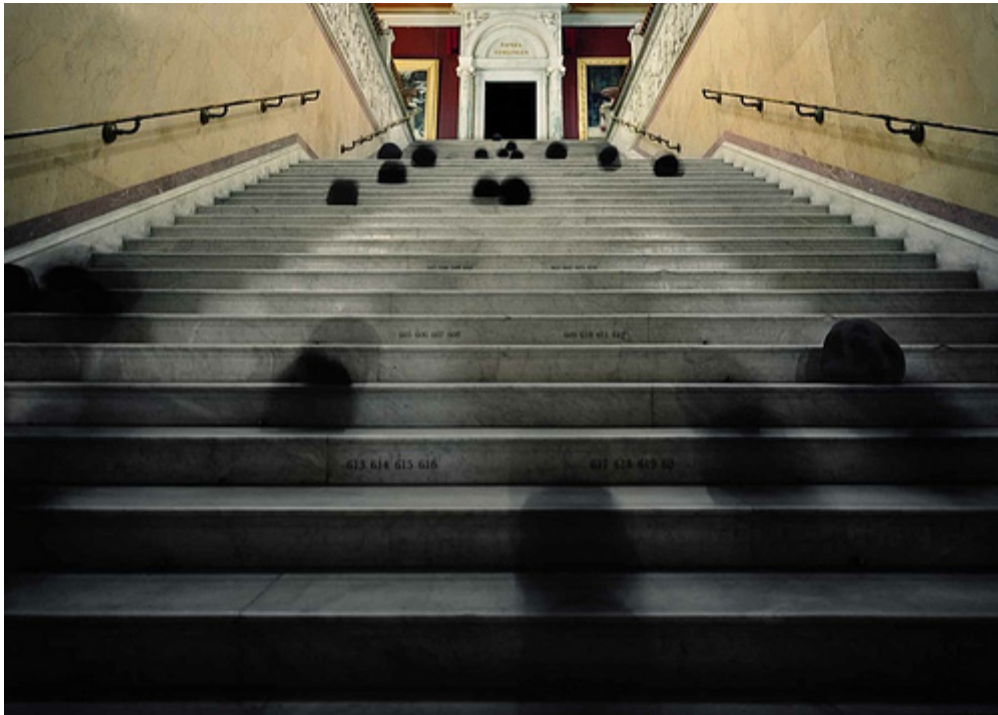
I started just after finishing the Royal Academy of Art in Stockholm in 1995.

What is your inspiration for this show?

The "transmission" project started as an idea when I was living in NYC in 2002. I was trying to imagine what it would be like to see all the traffic from underneath. And now, in 2010, our symbolic relationship to cars seems even more interesting and more complex. In the "transmission" video and photo series I show a very well-known object from an unusual perspective, challenging you to think about it in a new way. The cars look more vulnerable, almost like a body or an insect turned upside down. The video projection, where the cars drive in the sky, feels even more abstract, the vehicles somehow seem liberated from reality. You can also imagine them falling to the ground. In that sense, the piece is a poetic farewell to the era of gasoline cars.

What does this show mean to you? It seems to be part of a bigger picture, a life's work focusing on men and their strength and vulnerability?

Yes, the car used to be a symbol for male potency and power. Now, the symbolic value of cars has changed. Large muscle cars are sold for close to nothing, they pollute the world, and the car industry is going down. These days, most people prefer to embrace new ideas, like smart cars that are better for the environment; for the future.



As a woman- what do you find most appealing about men?

Their vulnerability and a balance between male and female characteristics.

Do you think men are trying to be what society says they should be?

It's of course a big pressure on men to become a man, but the society is slowly changing so men have a better chance to become more different types of men. > – Why nature? Nature is very important in Swedish society and in art history. City life is usually balanced with life in the country side. And nature is always considered something good and positive, a place where you can be free. In many of my works I have placed city men in uncontrolled situations in nature.

Lets talk a little bit about the work process- How did you relay your concept of the photograph to the models?

I ask people in the street, so I don't really know the models. Basically, I just direct them the way a movie director would. Where to stand, how to move, etc.

Did you collaborate with the models if they had ideas?

No, my basic idea is already finished when I ask them. But they do add something with their presence. Since they are not professional models or actors they can not be totally controlled, which is a good thing in this case.

Is there are particular reason you chose to do large scale photography?

I started as a painter, and love large -scale paintings that still have a relation to the human body, the viewer, like Mark Rothko's paintings for instance.

Is there any significance to the scale?

The scale is very important. I like that the viewer can be a part of the photo physically. They are not windows that you're supposed to peep into.

What kind of camera did you use?

I rent different large-format cameras, old-fashioned analog cameras. I need to get as much information into the negative as possible. Then I scan the negative and work with it in the darkroom and in the computer, if necessary. But most of the time I try to finish the photo on location.

Do you create art in other kinds of mediums?

I do videos as well. The "transmission" video was shot on 35 mm film to get the best quality with as much detail as possible.



How did you and Conner Contemporary find each other?

Nancy Westman who was formerly the Swedish cultural attaché in Washington DC put us in contact when I was living in New York.

Tell us a little bit about the relationship you have with the gallery and how it functions?

We have a straight-forward relationship. It makes the collaboration so much easier for me, since we speak different languages and have different cultural backgrounds.

What is it like putting on a show in DC when you are home-based in Sweden? Challenging?

We need to work harder on the installation of the show since I have not been in the gallery room a lot. I have seen the new space, but it's the first time I show my work in the space.

Terrifying since some of the motions are out of control?

I'm trying to let go of my need to have so much control. It's impossible to have full control, and maybe not so interesting. I think more and more that it makes the art works too predictable, and that we need the uncontrolled. It's a slow process for me since I like to have control of the whole process. It's interesting, since sometimes the reactions to the works are different in the US than in Sweden or Europe. Now I'm eager to understand the reactions on my video with the cars from an American perspective, since the entire car culture comes from the US.

Who are the artists that you admire?

Caspar David Friedrich, Vermeer, Rothko, John Bauer, Helene Schjerfbeck, Ann Edholm.

Is there anything that inspires you to do your best work?

My life, mixed with art history.

Favorite movies to relax with?

"Brokeback mountain", Ingmar Bergman's "The Silence".

When are you at your happiest?

Doing my yoga practice and being out in nature.

+++Check out Maria Friberg's exhibit March 20- May 8th at Conner Contemporary

