



Maria Friberg Creates a Profound Monument to Erna Hasselblad

Stephen Dillon

July 6, 2015

Swedish artist Maria Friberg currently presents a contemplative show of one video and one photograph at CONNERSMITH. gallery. Storied 20th century Swedish manufacturer of specialty medium-format cameras, Hasselblad AB commissioned the two works, which commemorate Erna Hasselblad, wife of the company's founder and a little-recognized force in the development of its most famous camera.



Maria Friberg , *Trace*, 2014 CONNERSMITH.

The company manufactured the cameras used during the Apollo missions, the only spaceflights in which humans have walked on the moon, none of which included a woman. With this example of gender inequality as her jumping off point, Friberg sets symbols of femininity—in this case, high heels—against a moon-like backdrop—

Iceland. The video, called *Erna* (2014), runs about five-and-one-quarter minutes and depicts two discarded heels that sit close to the water's edge. As the video progresses, waves roll in, soaking the shoes and covering their outer edges with sand. With the arrival of a slightly larger wave, they are covered completely and disappear.

Rendered in rich blacks and whites, the video brings to mind the steady passage of time and life's inherent ephemerality. It could be mistaken as an allegory for death or for the debauchery that follows a party: champagne and lost shoes on a beautiful beach. In many ways, the image is as powerful as a Romantic representation as a tragic one. Such narrative is important to Friberg, who explains, "It's fun that art gets to be more multifaceted, burlesque, symbolic and personally narrated. The art feels more important and politically inclined in a more complex way."



Maria Friberg *Erna*, 2014 CONNERSMITH.

An accompanying photo, *Trace* (2014), shows the shoes from above, sand pulled into an alluvial fan around the pair as the water rushes back out to sea. This still moment before the withdrawal of the tide is meditative and composed. Like other photographers, such as Henri Cartier-Bresson and Edward Weston, Friberg captures everyday moments of beauty and drama, part composed and part incidental. In them, allegories about the past, and the way histories are written, come to the fore. Her evocative work remembers a little-recognized heroine of photography—and stands as an overarching emblem for forgotten female innovators of the 20th century.