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Interview with Kim Einarsson

Marti Manen: Let's start talking a little bit about MFK (Free University for Women in Malmö) project at Konsthall C, the way it works, two different platforms, exhibition space...

Kim Einarsson: MFK stands for Malmö Free University for Women in Malmö, and it was initiated by the artists Johanna Gustavsson and Lisa Nyberg. Our dialogue started already two years ago without any specific goal. It was before I started at Konsthall C. What I found interesting in their way of working is the combination of activist, artistic, pedagogical and academic practices. Also how they have been working with one space but also as a mobile project. I found it interesting that they had chosen the institution format of a university, as Konsthall C is a kunsthalle, and plays with that kind of tradition. The university plays with the role of education. I think education and pedagogical methods are interesting platforms to work from. As you point out in one of your texts education can be a way of coming together, not based on identity politics, but actually as way of curiosity.

Since I got here at Konsthall C, last year, I have been thinking very much about how to use an exhibition space in a way that feels relevant and valid, and also about bringing political issues into this room. What does that mean? How can we do it? Is it only through representation or it is also through action? And if we talk about action, what is then action? I'm not sure I'll ever be able to answer these questions, but that is what motivates my work.

I see my work here as an on-going investigation. Inviting MFK was an important part. It is not just me inviting them, I see it more as a collaboration and we have been discussing what this means. Is it a collaboration between two institutions in a way where Konsthall C is one part and MFK is another part? Or is it an art institution inviting artists? There are very different expectations on different working relations, so it has been very important for us to discuss these issues.

MFK, in their turn, wrote a handbook as a way of summing up their way of working but also as a way for them to move on to the next step, which also happens within the framework of this project. They have invited other people to be responsible for different parts of the program and use their handbook. This means that there is kind of chain of different expectations. On a practical level there are all kinds of routines and non-verbalized expectations on who is responsible for what and what to expect from whom. That comes out very clearly in this collaboration, sometimes in quite painful ways.

MM: On a practical level, MFK (or you) are using the exhibition space and the exhibition itself as a place for the events.

KE: Yes. We were discussing if it is an exhibition or what is this, and it is too easy sometimes to hide behind the title "project". I see it as an exhibition, although the exhibition is open only when the actual events are taking place, or when something is programmed. What I also think is interesting is that MFK chose to invite Konsthall C to do an event based on their handbook. So it is not only we who invited them. It makes the boundaries for this collaboration even more blurry and unclear but also interesting for us. It is not really obvious who is hosting whom.

MM: This collaboration puts Konsthall C in a special position, as the traditional idea of the institution is that you have an exhibition space and you fill it with exhibitions and then you can invite the visitors to come in. But in this case is different.

KE: Yes, it is. We still invite visitors to come here but in this case the exhibition space, or maybe the art institution or art as a field has become something else. We had for example Leila Khaled, the Palestinian activist who got world famous for hijacking planes in the 70s, here to give a talk as part of the artist Annika Eriksson's work. What became clear for me is that this could only happen because we did it within an art context. If Leila Khaled would be invited for another context she would probably be having more problems to get a Swedish visitor's visa. So it is also about using the infrastructure of the art system as a way of redistributing or relocating money or resources. From an artistic perspective you can maybe be cynical and think that Leila Khaled was exhibited, as a readymade that you put into the exhibition.

In this case it was us inviting MFK, who invited Annika Eriksson, who in invited her student at the Malmö Art Academy, Celie Ekholm who invited Leila Khaled. The Arts Grants Committee financed the event. So, who is responsible for what? And what are the motives? In this chain I'm pretty sure that we had very different reasons for our invitations, and I think that's what makes this process interesting.

MM: Does it mean that the art exhibition and the art institution works in this specific case as a political tool that is more functional than other classical political tools?

KE: Yes. But then, on the other hand, tool for what? Because, as I said, we all had very different expectations and then we could talk about instrumentalizing ourselves, but I'm not so sure if anybody's agenda actually got fulfilled. For instance, Leila Khaled said some things that I guess if you would be a Palestinian fighter would not be inspiring at all. So I guess the Palestinian activists in the audience were quite disappointed. In that sense she wasn't instrumentalized for

a political cause, but of course she was an instrument and a tool. But I think that there were all these different kind of expectations within the chain of invited guests as well as from the audience.

MM: You were talking about the collaboration with MFK. As a curator, you have been collaborating quite a lot with artists like Goldin + Senneby, Petra Bauer... and you have had a "special" position: as a curator you were taking part on the creative process and had some visibility on it. The curator is not just thinking about the exhibition but in something more during the creative and production processes.

KE: Exactly. In most of the collaborative processes with Petra Bauer and Goldin + Senneby it was actually them inviting me. Maybe who is doing the invitation put certain kind of power relation... the thing is that we have been doing the research together and you are not really sure where this research will go or if it will end up in a result. In the case of Goldin + Senneby, we have been working outside the gallery space. Their work is not site specific but maybe system specific. So you are never really sure what place and where in the system the work will be made public. I think it is very important as a curator to be involved in the entire process. Of course you can work in other ways but for me it has been much more interesting to work close to the artist and take part in the artistic research process, because it is will be important for the public presentation of it. For me, it is impossible to separate research from presentation, and mediation from research and this is also why it becomes important for me to be part of the entire process.

MM: There is all this process, the investigation, documentation and presentation and usually, correct me if I'm wrong, Goldin + Senneby use other formats than the traditional exhibition. As you have been part of the process, with a curatorial view, can you explain the reasons behind it?

KE: I think that it is really according to the logic of what they actually are exhibiting. Because if you, as they are doing, are investigating contemporary finance and offshore industry - these are kind of ephemeral and nonphysical processes and, I guess for them, to think how to make those processes visible they have somehow chosen to play along with that whole system. As an example, the project *Headless* is published as a fictional novel, a detective novel and playing along with that kind of narrative that already exist. They have chosen a number of narratives and images and they play along with that. For me it really makes sense not to try to depict this, as the work is not about depicting or describing, it is a way to act within. And then by starting and interfering with certain processes, it would be very hard to put them into the exhibition space. They have done that a couple of times, as well, but for me their work is more interesting when it is actually happening outside of the white cube.

MM: In terms of authorship, how it is for you as a curator? They are artists, they are working producing an artwork, but you have been all the time participating and following the process. What is the position of the curator in this case? Is it relevant to talk about authorship?

KE: In that particular case I'm just one of many who they have outsourced their creative work to. I feel like the graphic designer, the cultural geographers, and actors they have been working with. We are this bunch of people filling the project with different kinds of content. I just see myself as part of that. I very rarely have a need for authorship, so it fits me quite well.

MM: You have been collaborating quite a lot, and here at Konsthall C the whole idea of the institution is probably more important than the people behind it, to put it on an institutional level.

KE: And that is maybe the problem with Konsthall C, as we are so few it is closely connected to Anna and me, the ones working here. But ideally if we had a bigger budget it would be great to be more like a collective.

MM: You have been working and in contact quite a lot with music. What about the connections between the art world and the music world? Is the exhibition a format for the experimental music?

KE: I haven't been working so much with sound art. What I have been interested in, when it comes to music, is the live situation or the non-live situation. It started out from a very private feeling because I'm so bored with concerts and I started to ask myself why. I like performances but I don't like concerts. But also being interested in electronic music, in the 90's all the electronic acts you saw were always guys sitting behind the computer and you always felt that it could be so much more than that. I never worked with sound installations even though what I love is to listen to things together with other people. I think we listen too much individually nowadays, but there is something with the collective listening and that's why I been more attracted to club music than staged music. But still I feel like there are quite separate discourses and scenes but I'm quite interested in using it. If I would use the exhibition space it would be more around this think about bringing people together and listening something together. What it is interesting with exhibitions is that they are spatial experiences and how it works with listening to music, or experiencing music not just passively listening. I think that it is also valid when it comes to video, how to use the space to the audience take part on something.

MM: In a way it relates to the beginning, the MFK project getting some people at the exhibition space that will become participants.

KE: maybe it all comes together in a way. I really like to use the space; otherwise I would be a writer. For me it makes sense to work in an exhibition space, even

though I'm not totally sure of exactly how to use it, but I think there is something with the physical space, which people can return to.

What is nice with Konsthall C is that the architecture of the space still has much of a communal laundry, so you could work with this nonspecific idea of the space.

MM: But then you have to "fight" with the whole idea of the art centre for itself as a concept. Probably some external visitors are coming here to visit an art space, and it doesn't matter if it is white or not. We find the aura of the exhibition space and it has a definition *per se*. As an exhibition space it has some hidden rules...

KE: Yes, it is of course what we quite often experience here. It is very seldom that you come in here and you actually "get" an exhibition in that sense. It takes a lot of mediation from our part. It is always discussed how many visitors do you have and so on, I think we have enough visitors in the way that the projects here need quite a lot of explanations and you need time to talk to the visitors properly. We couldn't have a too big audience, it wouldn't be possible. But the whole idea to name the place a kunsthalle, that is from Per Hasselberg who started Konsthall C, it was a kind of a play with the whole idea of the kunsthalle in the municipality or in the neighbourhood in the Swedish model.

MM: Talking about concepts, like the Swedish model or the kunsthalle, how to redefine this space? Is it necessary to do it? With MFK it is closed when there is no activity going on, what would be for you the definition of the exhibition as a format? And the institution? Is there a model to fight against or for it? Is it important for you to have a predefinition of what an exhibition is to modify it?

KE: I think it is not so important for me to try to find a new definition. I think my practice, the way I have been doing projects before is very much just kind a reaction against how things usually are done. And it is not necessarily that it has to be going in conflict, it is just that you question what would happen if we do it a little bit different. I really like to go to exhibitions, it is not that, but for me is more intriguing to find out other ways.

I have been collaborating with artists interested in exploring the possibilities with an art space, but I think a lot of the way we program and how we work in institutions is very much defined by the way the financing system looks like. When you fill an application it is a lot about how many exhibitions will you make, how many artists will participate and how many works... according to a very specific format that keeps things on a special order. I think it would be much different working with a collection and stuff like that. Quite often I work with a group of people and then you develop things by doing, and you never know what the result will be. I think it is another way of curating that if you know what works will you show and maybe the artists are even not alive. I think it is a

totally different process. What I'm not so interested in is this way where you feel that the exhibition space becomes a container that you have to fill four times a year with a show. "What shall we do now? It's empty now, what shall we do?" It is quite easy to get into that logic as all the parameters around you are pushing you on that direction, but I try not to think in that way.

MM: It was interesting when you were talking about the finance as a part of the definition of the exhibition. You were talking about the artist, the curator, and the institution as well. We have all this elements and the audience. In what way is the audience defining?

KE: Especially in project like this one with MFK the audience becomes very important, as it is kind of interactive.

I'm pretty sure that there are more players, for example the public support for cultural finance is based in the idea that you should come up with new formats, and this become quite important in the way we talk about projects. I also think that is important the kind of institution or how the structure looks like and who has a say. Being an independent association like Konsthall C gives us the opportunity to work quite freely, in comparison with other art centres. The form of the structure is important in what you can do or cannot do.