

On strategies of combination in the work of Kristina Müntzing (S)

What do the Black Panthers from the USA and English mee-mawing

have in common? Not a lot, at first sight. In the artistic cosmos of Swedish artist Kristina Müntzing, however, these phenomena are linked – or more precisely, they are interwoven. Following deconstructivist logic, at the start of the working process suitable visual sources, symbols or as Derrida might say in general terms, “text”, are sought out and then chopped up, usually into strips, and finally recombined in a fresh way.

Here, Müntzing employs the traditional craft of braiding or weaving. She discovered that this technique – far more than that of traditional collage – gave her the possibility of combining historical facts with each other to turn them into a unity. The outcome are hybrid patterns of a newly created (better) reality, which no longer seems to recognize hierarchies, as the original items of picture information, reassembled in new ways, coexist adjacently on an equal footing. Thus she produces original works of extrapictorial spatiality, sculptures completely independent of the wall’s surface.

In terms of content the artist is interested in social, socialist and politically radical movements, which she examines with respect to alternative forms of communication, above all to “secret languages”. Müntzing arrived at her project Mapping Panther Politics (2014) through a group of young people from Biskopsgården in Göteborg, who stood up for their rights like their role models from the USA, becoming engaged, for example, in efforts for more safety at their school, and reminding politicians of their related responsibilities. Parallel to this, Müntzing researched into Kenya, where she was to be working for a year – and discovered that the Black Panthers had been inspired by the anti-colonial independence movement “Mau Mau”, which opposed the rule of Great Britain in the 50s. In turn, Müntzing connects the phenomenon of mee-mawing with England, something that is linked for its part with the artistic technique of weaving that she favours. Mee-mawing refers to a form of communication developed in Lancashire woollen mills during the 19th century, in order to hold private conversations that others – above all the bosses – could not hear. It evolved without sound among the ear-splitting noise of the weaving mills, simply using exaggerated movements of the mouth. The Makwayela, a dance by former mine workers from Mozambique, functions via a similar type of exclusion. Here, a song is sung about the fall of capitalism, in Portuguese but also in Fanakalo, a language developed especially for the mines of South Africa, which is understood only by the initiated. Makwywla (1978) is also the name of a short film by anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Roch and the Mozambican cultural attaché at the time, Jacques D’Arthuys – which the artist showed in the context of a spatial installation made for the “Open House” tour of Künstlerhaus Bethanien in November 2015. The film was presented by Sunshine Socialist Cinema, actually a solar-powered outdoor cinema that Müntzing runs together with artist Kalle Brolin, whose programme adopts a clearly left-wing political position. A woven mee-mawing “carpet” – set into motion by a fan – as well as two Blowing Sculptures (2015), which thrust through the space in an aggressive manner, apparently imitating the weavers’ language in a kind of pantomime, completed the installation.

Kristina Müntzing combines the visual material of (left-wing) political movements from various epochs and countries, reassembles facts about oppositional communication in new ways, and so creates inventories of current life and work spheres, which – some more, some less – reveal utopian content. Everything remains in an associative flow, as the artist – following side paths and detours – discovers forms of expression that function completely without words, merely through movements of the body, facial expressions, patterns or other secret signs. Müntzing makes a specific selection and rearranges this material to develop an artistic language that il-