

THE ARTIST WHO PREFER SPUNK

Should art be only serious, or are you allowed to add a humoristic twist? Linda Lothe says – Yes, thank you. I prefer both.

Humour is the joy of life, but the clown's sad face adds a tragic dimension to our laughter. Still, there is too much seriousness in art. After modernism had its breakthrough a century ago, phantasy and humour has been an underestimated measure in art. The serious bunch is in power, but Linda Jansson Lothe prefers to be included in the joyous crowd who are doing their best to lighten up life.

Therefore she might call an exhibition “Spunk” – named after the peculiar word Pippi Långstrump (Pippi Longstocking) invented. Since the figure from the Swedish children's books, written by the author Astrid Lindgren, did not know what spunk was, Pippi went out into her village, together with her two friends Tommy and Annika, and asked shopkeepers and people they met if they had spunk. Since nobody knew, it can be defined – with inspiration from Pippi – as courage, or the ability to carry on with good cheer and strong heart. Spunk might also be explained like this: “When you are having a tough time learning to do something, but you persist and keep coming back and trying again, this is an example of when you show spunk.”

Linda Jansson Lothe has a lot of spunk. As a Norwegian ceramist she has persisted to follow her humorous approach to art. She builds sculptures and figures that are both sweet and serious, sometimes only funny, other times quite ambiguous in the stories they tell. She is nearly always figurative in her approach, but often more surrealistic than naturalistic. And there is often a twist to what you experience: What you see on the outside might differ quite seriously from what you find on the inside.

The ceramics of Linda Jansson Lothe are made in different techniques. Some are made with the terra sigillata-technique. It is a sort of fine porcelain slip that is applied on the dried porcelain clay objects before firing. It gives a fine, eggshell-like surface that does not attract grease marks when touched. Other times she adds colourful, glossy glazes that gives the objects a shiny surface that make them look like candy.

To say that Linda Jansson Lothe is a Norwegian artist is only partly true. Originally Swedish, she was born and bred in Gothenburg, Sweden's second biggest town. She started her artistic education at Konstfack, The university college of arts, crafts and design in Stockholm. She attended the programme for ceramics and glass, and she spent two months at the school of glass at the famous glassworks Orrefors. But the seductive character of glass did not appeal to her, because she could not handle it with her hands. She chose clay as her preferred material because of its slow working methods and its raw manageability. Then, after only a year, she moved to Norway and Oslo for an exchange year. She liked it so much at SHKS, Statens håndverks- og kunstindustriskole (The university college of arts, crafts and design) that she stayed to finish her master's degree. She has lived in Oslo ever since.

For her first solo exhibition at the renowned Stockholm-gallery "blås & knåda", in the autumn of 2016, Linda Jansson Lothe found inspiration in the culture of the upper classes and the nobility of the Swedish capital. But not in the most obvious way: In Norway we have a proverb, "To put a lid on things", used when you want to keep something in the dark. As a consequence she added mouth-blown glass-lids (by the renowned Norwegian glass artist Vidar Koksvik) to some of her vessels, in order to make them resemble the bonbonnières of the bourgeois culture. But she did not keep the lids closed, but made them transparent so that you could study the richly decorated, internal landscapes of the porcelain vessels. The insides comment on other aspects of this décor-loving culture, like the figurines of the Meissen porcelain factory.

Coming "home" to Sweden was of course a turning point for Linda Jansson Lothe. Usually a huge part of her production is made up of sculptures where everything is visible on the outside. Going "home" made her turn her gaze both inwards and outwards. She had to relate to the differences in history between her two home countries (unlike Sweden Norway had and has close to no nobility). This had an effect on what she was producing for the exhibition at "blås & knåda". Exhibiting in the capital of her native country did something to her objects that I, and others who have followed Linda Jansson Lothe through the years, are looking forward to follow in the coming years. Hopefully she will make a lot of spunk also in the years to come.

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