



ONLINE PORTFOLIO REVIEW 2020

presented by Aarhus Billedkunstcenter / Aarhus Center for Visual Art



Katja Bjørn

www.katjabjorn.dk

Katja Bjørn (b. 1967) lives and works in Aarhus, Denmark. She is a self-taught video artist with a Master's degree in Study of Religion and Art History from Aarhus University. She is a member of the gallery, Spanien 19C (since 2004) and served as a member of the Danish Arts Foundation (2014-2016). Recently she chaired the municipal think tank for cultural policy on the visual arts.

Katja Bjørn's works unfold thematically between the conglomerations of body, nature and culture. The human is represented as a crossing of the primordial body, and a string of cultural divisions in a fluctuating simultaneity of form and world. The works deconstruct the body-in-nature in ways that challenge the symbolically embellished and invisibly artificial images of the body – especially the female one. The body is loosened from its traditional symbolic forms and allowed to unfold (in video and sculpture) in all its naked savagery, finality and humanity. Nature is always a conceptual interlocutor in her works, and man's relationship to it is often explored as something essentially unstable. Nature thus becomes an asymmetrical mirroring of the human in its basic nature, the substrate of which we were once part but which we now claim to dominate.

A Ride on the River

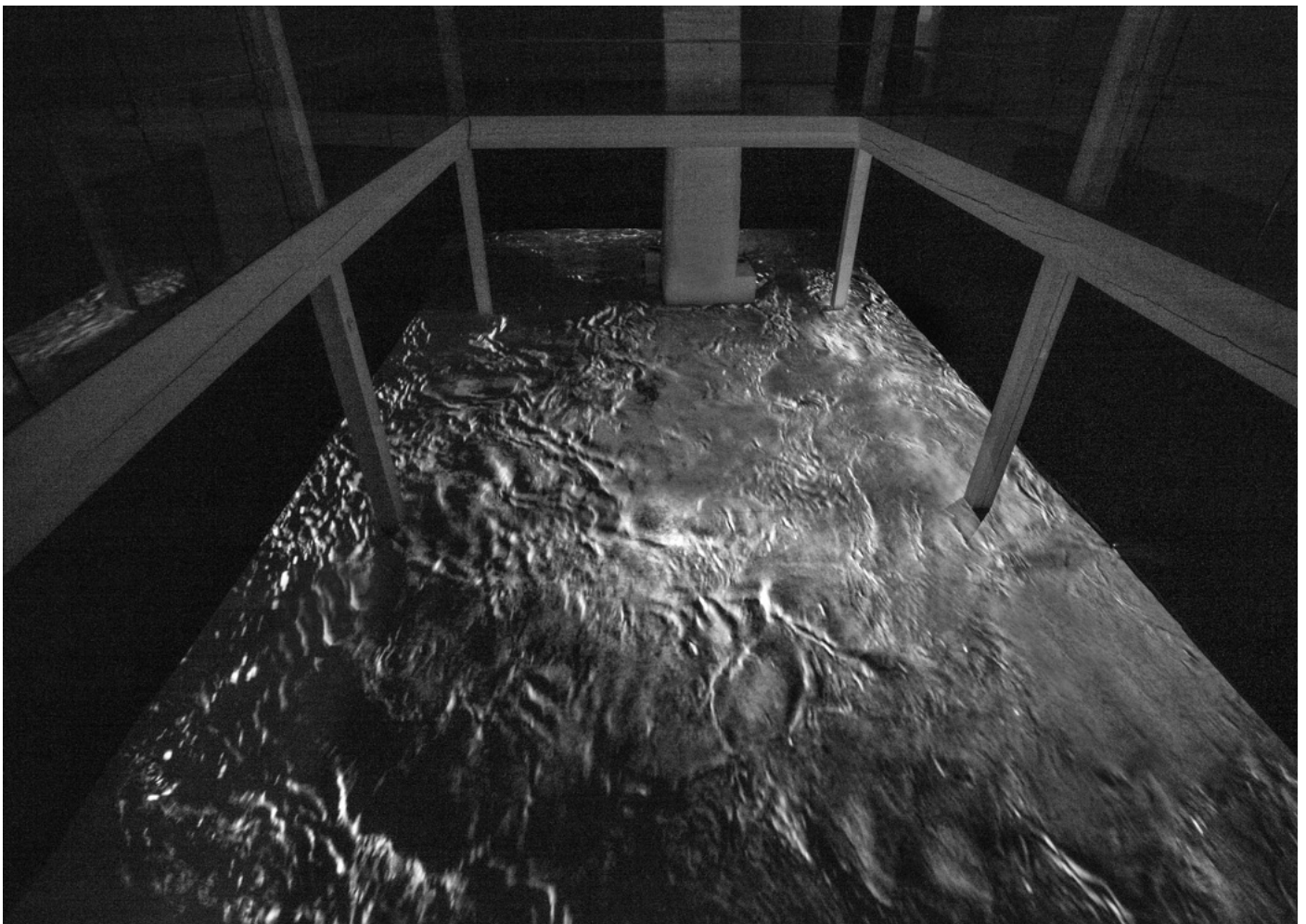
2019, Viborg Kunsthall (Viborg, Denmark)

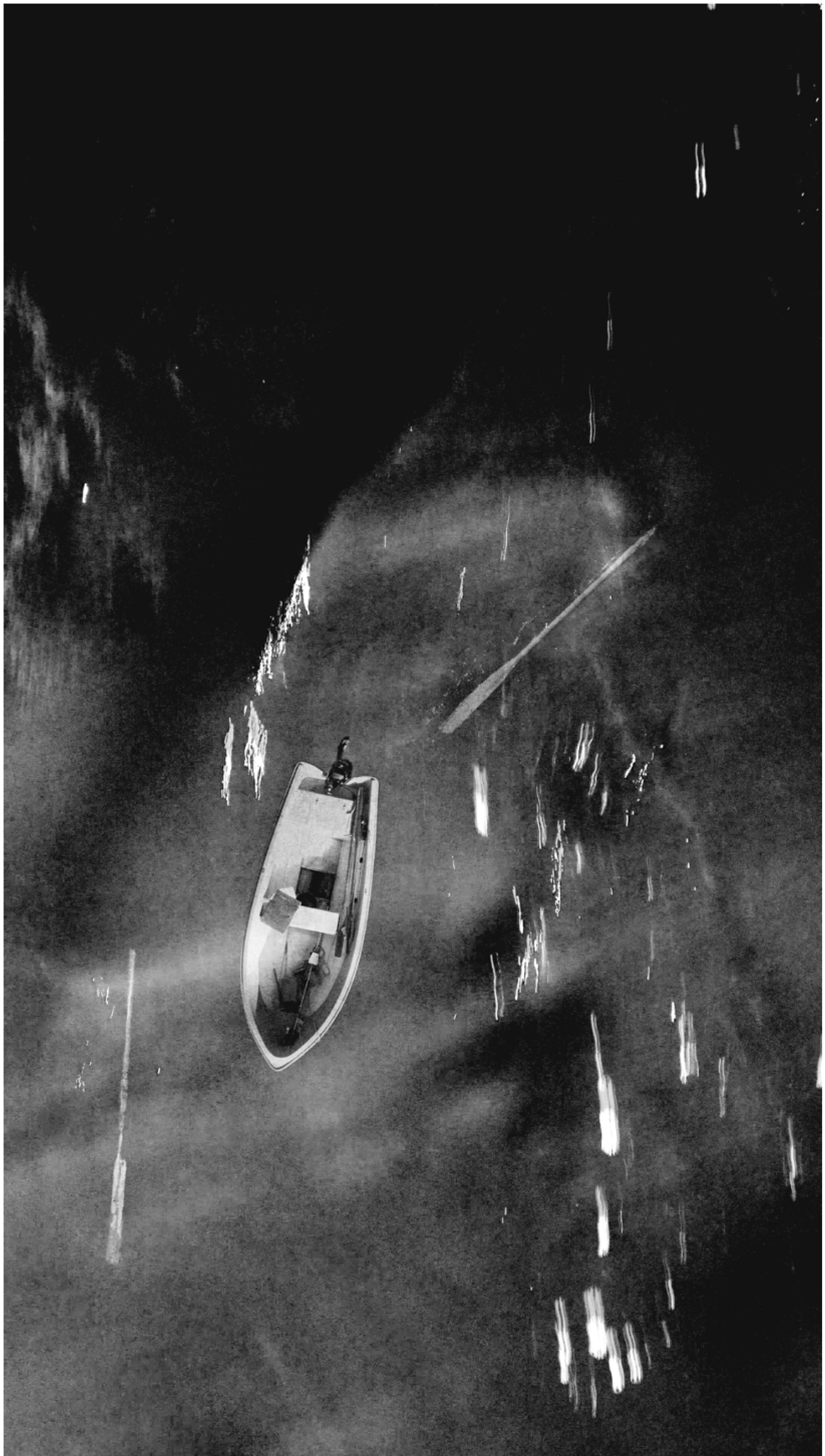
Video, 28-minute loop, 4K, with surround sound; installed with 14 projectors

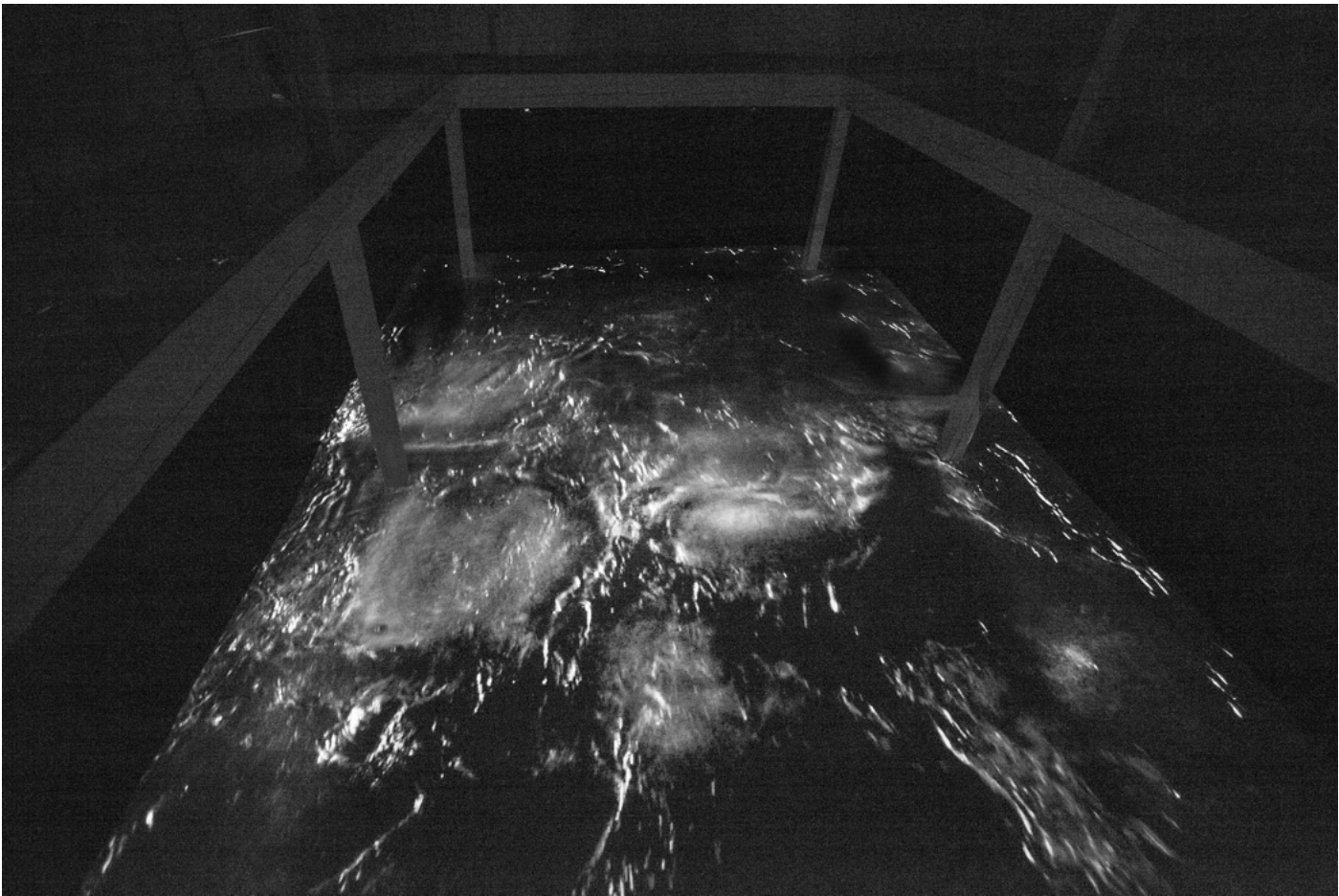
The Greek philosopher Heraclitus described the world and life as a state of eternal creation, decomposition, and transformation. You can not swim in the same river twice, he said, because the water moves and you yourself change in every moment. Each time it is a new body enclosed by new water molecules. Life itself is also a river, we often say, and preferably one you have to swim upstream in: If you “float with the current” you are a conformist, we say, a person who does not take a stand, someone who does not choose life.

But the river metaphor can also be understood in reverse. To be led by the current can also be to surrender to the universal movement, to accept the change and the inevitable in the confidence that it will lead to something good. From this perspective, going against the flow becomes an image of fear of life, of turning to the contingent and the random instead of the essential.

In *A Ride On The River*, the river and the stream are seen as a picture of the changing power of creation that leads us - and everything else - from where we are to where we want to go. The work highlights the possibility of having confidence in the movement of life, in the insurmountable and yet elegant rhythm of everyday life, in its stream of surprises and repetitions, and asks what it means to lean confidently into the life process as something to be chosen; something we can take part in, or let go of. We can expose ourselves to life and everyday life with confidence in its movements, its fluctuations and feverish journeys as well as its constant and infinite continuation.







New Human

2018

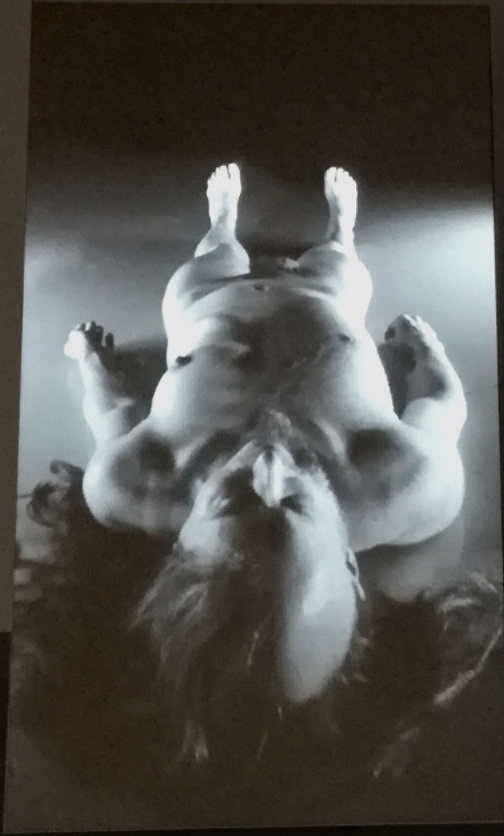
Two-channel projection, 8 min Loop, with sound

Text by Sarah Maske:

Katja Bjørn's *New Human* (2018) is a two-channel projection of eight minutes duration. In it, Bjørn experiments with the human body as the material of a sculpture, presenting it in a video.

Her playful handling of the symmetrical shape of the human body challenges the concept of a binary order of the sexes. In the exhibition, two videos are on display, each showing a front and a back of a body. But it is not a body of one sex. Bjørn recorded both a female and a male body, then digitally cut them apart on their vertical axis, and reassembled the opposing halves in the video image. Thereby, the perception of a bodily unity emerges that is only slowly being toppled in the minds of the recipients. At first sight, it seems to be a body of one sex, but it becomes ever more visible that it is a patchwork body. The video body moves only slightly, nevertheless, the off-balance synchronicity of the breathing and the movement of the eyes and the limbs is noticeable. The coordination and speeds of the movements varies in both body halves and at times make them appear like puppets, completely detached from one another.

This leads to a questioning of the concept of the body as an integral and defined form and tries the idea of the "natural". Oftentimes throughout the history of body sculpture, lasting materials such as stone or bronze have been used, caused by the desire to transcend the temporal limitations of human bodies. Bjørn's choice of the moving body, communicated and altered through video, achieves just the opposite. She defies the classic reproduction of female and male bodies, has them pass through changes during the creative process and in the exhibition space and looks for exits from the binary perception of the sexes that is still prevalent.





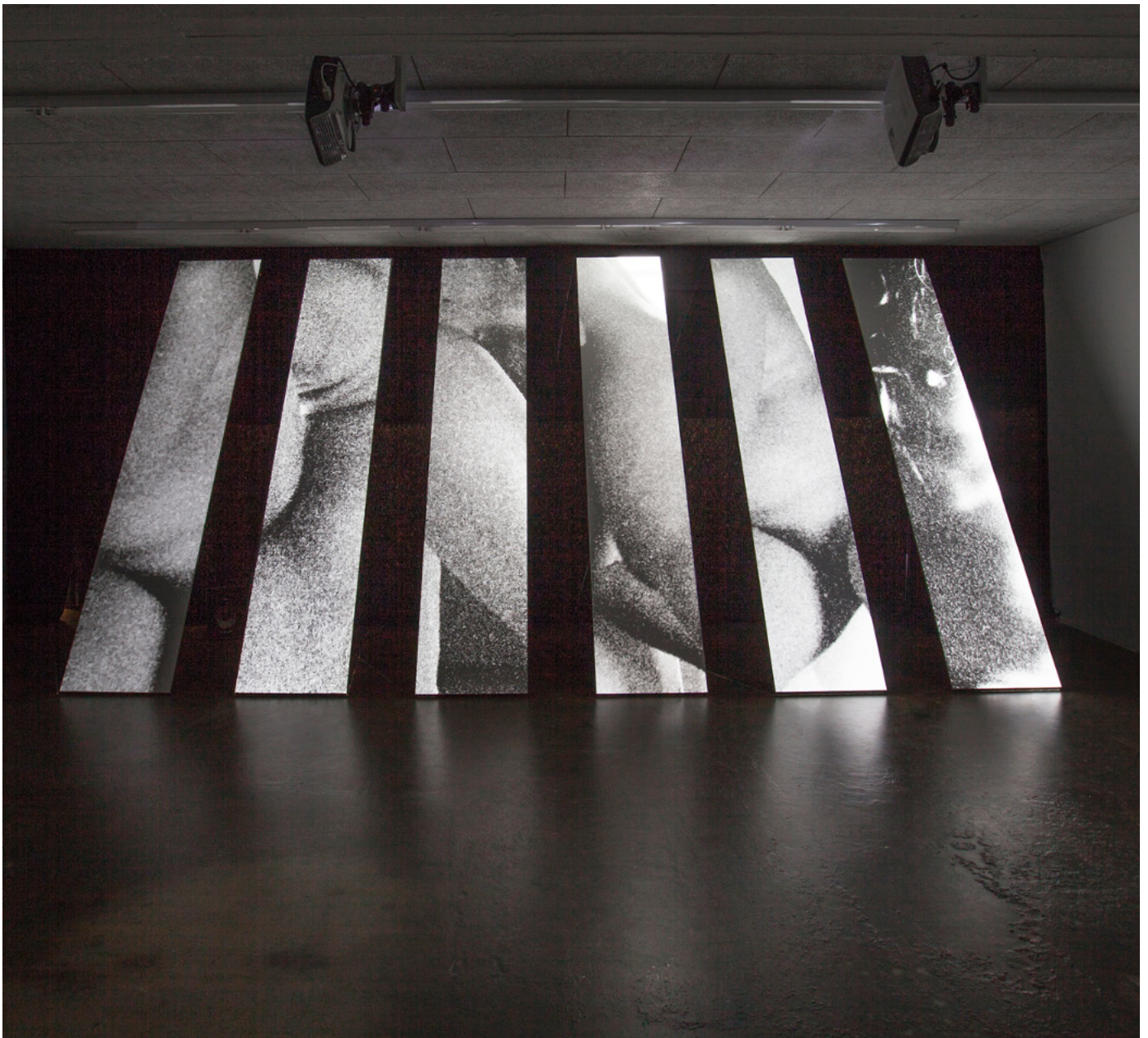
Involved

2017

6 canals video, 28 min loop, with sound

Involved tries to give shape to the movement of life. Life is movement; not a journey from A to B, but a continuous interpretation and modulation of our form of being. The work highlights this involved-itself, this peculiar beauty of this move-itself - that the very act of moving on, on someone, on something, whether it has a purpose or not, contains a value that can be considered and which has a peculiar aesthetics.

It is the enrollment and the aesthetics of commitment that uncover the structure of the movement as a form of perception. It is at the same time the eternal push and pull of everyday life and the nature of life as movement that is highlighted. Movement lies, as a primordial substance, before our gaze and becomes enlightened and experienced only glimpsed when the movement occasionally becomes conscious of us. Life is not something we move through; life is eternally to be in the trembling of movement.





Cave Woman

2012

Single-channel, 4½ min. with sound

The 'Cave Woman' is known as the busty, dinosaur-battling superwoman in Budd Root's alternative comic series of that name. It is also a somewhat antiquated female archetype, implying savage and unmotivated rage, rampant unpredictability and sexual fury. It is a figure of emotional excess, applied to no identifiable ideology and not directed towards a meaningful end; in other words, a binary opposite of the equally antiquated figure of the civilized gentleman.

In the video installation piece, *Cave Woman*, Katja Bjørn elaborates and negotiates the figure of the archaically furious woman, and how it relates to our understanding of nature. A naked female body emerges from the still ocean off a small pebble beach, looks around, and then starts screaming and throwing rocks in a profoundly savage and elementally infuriated fashion. Her face contorts with anguished fury and her whole body trembles with rage as she pours out every ounce of available energy unto this otherwise tranquil and appealing landscape before she returns, exhausted, into the still water. The scene is reminiscent of Kubrick's famous bone-wielding apes from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and draws upon the same emancipatory theme of a violent struggle for survival and domination. There is, however, no splendor or any real power to this outburst, nor any real beauty. Instead, this woman's rage appears as a kind of fluke, almost, at first glance, as a freak of nature. The emotional excess is contrasted with the shrill and distorted sound of her screaming, making the scene almost comical.

The woman emerges from a calm water surface, enters a space of tranquility and disrupts it with an unadorned and unsung violence. It is a violence that serves no purpose, but one that nonetheless needs its day, one that demands its place in the visible space of nature and culture. By exhausting her inherently violent energy, this symbolic woman is also asserting herself as something powerful, something that has a right to exist. She affirms that all-consuming rage has a rightful place in nature, even if it is gritty and ugly, and that every once in a while, we need to confront it.



CV

Katja Bjørn lives and works in Aarhus, Denmark.

Autodidact, Master of Arts (MA) in Religion and Art History from Aarhus University, 1999.

Curator and member of artist run exhibition space Spanien 19C, Aarhus since 2004.

Public collections

ARoS, Randers Art Museum, Horsens Art Museum, The Women's Museum Aarhus, The Danish Arts Foundation, Aarhus Municipality

Upcoming exhibitions

2020 Charlotte Fogh Gallery, 30th of May
Historier om mødre, Nivaagaards Malerisamling, September

Solo exhibitions

2019 *Involved*, Horsens Art Museum
2018 *A Ride On The River*, Contemporary Art Centre Viborg
2017 *Involved*, Charlotte Fogh Gallery, Aarhus
2017 *Envy my Love/The Pleasure of Envy*, The Seven Death Sins Skive Art Museum
2016 *Gargoyle Room*, V1 Gallery
2016 *AS/ IS længselslinier*, BETON art space
2014 *Honey* solo display, ARoS, Aarhus
2014 *Sov Min Elskede*, Horsens Art Museum
2014 *The Source*, Charlotte Fogh Gallery
2013 *Unspoken Stories*, The Women's Museum, Aarhus
2010 *Canned Mermaid*, Randers Art Museum

Selected group exhibitions 2010-19

2020 *The Process of Becoming*, Viborg Kunsthall
2019 *Tærskler*, Tom Christoffersen Gallery, Copenhagen
Terrain, C4projects, Copenhagen
Art and porn, ARoS and Kunsthall Charlottenborg
The Process of Becoming, Könerpark Berlin
En Duft af Evighed, Nivågaard Malerisamling
Sticky Business, Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, Netherlands
2018 *Mødet*, Skulpturlandsby Selde
EAT ME, Trapholt Art Museum, Kolding
2017 *Everyday Images*, Randers Art Museum
2016 *Casablanca Billboard Festival*, Morocco
2014 *Jorn Lab*, Art Centre Silkeborg Bad
Overwhelmingly Ordinary, *The Neurosis of Everyday Life*, Museum Bäregasse, Zürich
Focus, curated solo program, Contemporary Art Centre Nikolaj, Copenhagen
2013 *Sculpture by the Sea*, Aarhus
Malmö Nordic 2013, Skåne Art Union, Malmö
2012 *Written Room 2012*, Contemporary Art Centre Brænderigården, Viborg
The intimate AUTUMN: Behind the Façade, Contemporary Art Centre Aarhus
Honey, Tom Christoffersen Gallery, Copenhagen
The geography of the wilderness, SKULPTURI, Copenhagen
2011 *Living*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk
From Andy Warhol to Katja Bjørn, Randers Art Museum
Sculpture by the Sea, Aarhus
Focus, Contemporary Art Centre Nicolaj, Copenhagen
2010 *Water*, Randers Art Museum
Mitä meri? – What's up Sea? Rauma Biennale Balticum 2010, Rauma Museum, Finland

Selected grants

Marie and Haagen Müllers fond, Jens Ejner and Johanne Larsen's Foundation for Young Artists, Danish Centre for Culture and Development, The Danish Arts Council, The Danish Arts Foundation.

Selected committee memberships

Member of Committee for Kunsten.nu 2006-2008; Censor at KP, artist Easter exhibition 2012, Aarhus Art Building, Centre for Contemporary Art; Member of the Danish Art Foundation 2014-16; Chairman Aarhus Think Tank for Art 2016-16; Board Member of DJK 2016-2020 / Chairman from 2019; Board Member of Den Frie since 2018; Chairman of Aarhus Art Council 2018-2022.