

In the spring of 2019 an art space in the ABF-house is brought back to life. For thirty one years the bottom floor housed the legendary Sveagalleriet, which opened on February 25 1961, in the then brand new ABF building on Sveavägen. According to the statutes agreed upon on October 10 1960 the aim was, among other things, “to promote the ambition for further education in art, handicraft and industrial art.” Sveagalleriet closed down in 1992. Now the space is resurrected under a new name: *Mint*. Initiated by Emily Fahlén and Asrin Haidari, in cooperation with ABF Stockholm, Konstfrämjandet Stockholm and the Swedish Labour Movement’s Archives and Library. Exhibitions, study groups and happenings will take place over the course of 2019. As the practice of a museum relates to – and is in dialogue with – its collection, *Mint* allows its program to be inspired and directed by the history of the building and its events, struggles, organisations and cultural expressions. The initiative is in many aspects collective, and happens in dialogue with a newly-formed study group focusing on workers’ art as a concept both historical and contemporary (Margareta Ståhl, Masha Taavoniku, Christina Zetterlund, Rikard Heberling and Ingela Johansson), curator Jenny Richards’ research project *Outsourcing the Body* at Konstfack, researcher Christina Zetterlund’s project on collective design histories, the association Arbetskrivarna (Proletarian writers) among other individuals and organisations. The vision is for *Mint* to become a collecting meeting place for art, education and struggle for a new time, and for art to reclaim its space in the activities of the ABF building.



## *The air which the autonomy of the people breathe*

12.4 – 12.5 2019

*Mint*’s first exhibition looks at a subject fundamental to our lives – both as critical beings, and for our recuperation: time after work. The different works relate to the theme in direct and indirect ways, through both documentary and abstract expressions. They are about transformation, hobbies, reading and resting. They are about stretching, furnishing, educating oneself and remembering. Quiet reflections on the materials and settings of leisure but also the societal premises which enabled them in the first place. Pension, holidays and time off are the fruits of the struggles of the workers movement – the basis of rest was won by fighting. The exhibition could be seen as a situation of different ideas being started, a place which, like leisure itself, is allowed to chose its own strange roads – perhaps unclear, maybe meaningful, perhaps in time becoming crucial. Or in the words of Gregor Paulsson, initiator of a significant 1936 exhibition of ideas about leisure in southern Sweden: “Leisure is the premise of freedom, the air which the autonomy of the people breathe.”

Participating artists: Giorgi Gago Gagoshidze, Patrick Kretschek, Susanna Jablonski, Ruben Nilsson, Måns Wrangé, Erik Öberg, Margareta Hallek, Hans Tombrock & Bertolt Brecht, Helena Lund Ek, Enno Hallek and unknown artist.

### PROGRAMME

Wednesdays	15:00	Guided tours of the exhibition
Wednesday 24.4	18:00	<i>Learning through struggle: Swedish dockworkers union and the right to strike</i> with Benj Gerdes, a representative from Svenska Hamnarbetarförbundet and Michele Masucci
Sunday 5.5	14:00	<i>The Hand at Work: A film screening and discussion</i> curated by Sarah Browne and Jenny Richards
Torsdag 9.5	18:00	<i>Painting and Poetry at People’s House: A meeting between vagabond artist Hans Tombrock and playwright Bertolt Brecht while exiled in Sweden</i> with Ingela Johansson, Margareta Ståhl / Arbetskonstgruppen

Do you want to visit the exhibition with a group? Email [info@m-i-n-t.se](mailto:info@m-i-n-t.se)

Giorgi Gago Gagoshidze

*The invisible hand of my father*, 2019

HD video, 24 min

In the newly produced work *The invisible hand of my father* (2019) artist Gago Gagoshidze (b. 1983) paints a personal portrait of his father and his right hand. Born 1953 in Georgia, Gagoshidze's father belonged to the wave of migrants who after the fall of the Soviet union came looking for work in the countries of Western Europe, mainly Portugal. As a construction worker, the hand played a pivotal role in his economical and social life, and supported him and his family during the decades that he worked in different locations across Europe. The film takes place in an altered state, as it is recorded after a workplace accident in which Gagoshidze's father lost his hand in a cement mixer. As a result of the accident he returned to Georgia and settled in a cabin in Racha, owned by his family for generations. There he now lives a quiet life made possible by a monthly pension for the disabled provided from Portugal. The hand hovers like a spirit over his retired state in the magnificent surroundings in the Caucasus mountains, it reminds us of the premise of life in the mountains and the fact that the accident took place 'in the right time', just before the 'invisible hand' of the global market lost its grip. Thus the hand functions as an image of shifting economical landscapes – from the fall of the Soviet union to the global financial collapse of 2008 – of a symbolism being renegotiated through history, and a prosthetic with which a meaningful relationship cannot be formed.

Ruben Nilson

*The History of the Workers' Movement*, år okänt

Oil on wood panel

The monumental painting *The History of the Workers' Movement* has been permanently installed in the basement of the ABF house since 2004. The painting shows a large demonstration empowered by the workers of the basic industries; timber rafting, mining and forging as well as agricultural work. Straight cubist lines extend through rooftops and across the diversity of images from the workers' lives. Each individual motif has its own space within the larger whole. Ruben Nilson (1893–1971) was a sheet-metal worker for many years, but also pursued his artistic work which involved painting and writing ballads. Nilson was a socialist and socially engaged. His pacifist standpoint appears in his two ballads *Den okände soldaten* and *Hitlertysk paradmarsch*. The motifs in his paintings were dominated by scenes from Stockholm and Hagalund as well as landscapes from Värmland and Norrland, where he travelled to paint.

*The History of the Workers' Movement* was for many years stowed away, but in 1984 Nilson's old trade union – Bleck och Plåt – bought the painting and the following year it was hung in the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) school Hasseludden in Nacka. When the school closed down, the painting was saved by Kjersti Bosdotter and Lars Starkerud from LO who made sure it ended up in the ABF house for public view. Here at *Mint* it is included in the exhibition *The air which the autonomy of the people breathe*.

Susanna Jablonski

*Circle*, 2018

Glass

*Coral pillar*, 2018

Coral, paper clay

*Fountain*, 2015

Ceramic, Carrara marble, water pump

*Elin*, 2018

Dried grass

*Posthorax*, 2018

Newspapers, rubber band

*Hand Towel*, 2019

Paper clay, stainless steel

Objects carry memories, like containers of a time from the past. Do you remember the sound of the rippling stream in the forest where you might have played as a child? The slippers in the hall of your friend? Susanna Jablonski's (f. 1985) sculptures are reminiscent of things found in everyday life; in the home, on holiday or on the street. Sometimes objects, sometimes processed fragile materials that create abstract forms. A pair of dried grass slippers, a kidney-shaped coral from Tobago, a mini-fountain in clay. In the concurrence that arises between memory, object and looking, the processes of disappearance also become tangible. The floating dove-blue ring in thin glass, with a diameter so large that it almost reaches the breaking point of the material, creates the illusion of being painted directly on the wall. Jablonski has a special sensitivity to the significance of the movement of objects, and the relationship between her sculptures and their surroundings. With an ability to trigger memories and convey indescribable emotions, the sculptures visualise the shifts that can occur between different emotional states.

Patrick Kretschek

*Bokstugan – scenes from a library*, work in progress

HD video

These scenes by Patrick Kretschek (b. 1977) were recorded when the library Bokstugan (1906–2013) still remained at Brunnsvik's folkhögskola (people's higher education) in Dalarna. Brunnsvik is the first folkhögskola in Sweden driven by a popular movement, and over time it was also considered to be the workers' movement's bildningsskola (adult learning center). This was where the initiative for the Workers' Educational Association (ABF) was introduced by Rickard Sandler in 1912, and where the first Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) school started in 1929, as part of the school's activities. Within the workers' movement, people talked about 'the Brunnsvik spirit'; a special cohesion and community that included midsummer celebrations, practical and theoretical education, outdoor life, a school songbook, performance and cultural nights. In the 21st century, the management of the prestigious folkhögskola have met financial challenges in the running of their large facility. Spending cuts, poor election results and re-prioritisations hit hard. The library had existed for more than a hundred years in various forms – the book collection contained about fifty thousand books and constituted one of Sweden's largest collections of proletarian literature. Christina Garbergs-Gunn was in charge of the library for its final 30 years. After this, the library was unstaffed for three years, but kept open for students at the school. Garbergs-Gunn's presence still remained strong. This work is a documentation of a library that gradually ceases to live. It is also a story of a movement and the change or crisis that it goes through, depending on who defines the events at hand.

The sections shown are part of a larger body of footage which will be shown at Arbetarrörelsens Arkiv och Biblioteket during 2019–2020. [www.bokstugan.info](http://www.bokstugan.info)

Måns Wrangé

*The Wonderful World of Hobbies*, 1988–1995

Off-set print on paper

*The Collection of Interior Portraits*, 1992

9 used chewing gums, installed with small nails in glass and oak frame (45 × 55 × 7.5 cm) similar to a collection of minerals or butterflies

At the beginning of the twentieth century, with the eight-hour working-day reform and the implementation of paid holiday for all employed persons, people were introduced to a new concept: leisure. But while this new phenomenon has led to profound social changes it has been studied remarkably little by professional academics. ‘Labour’ has remained the key concept in the social sciences as well as in politics since Locke, Smith, Hegel and Marx.

In this perspective the project *The Wonderful World of Hobbies* may be seen as an alternative history of the realisation of the Modern project in Sweden with the focus on leisure rather than on work. Måns Wrangé’s (b. 1961) project takes its point of departure in three – in many respects contradictory – historical trends in the hobby phenomenon: hobbies are the antithesis to the alienation of paid work in the form of an alternative micro-utopia of non-instrumental creativity and self-fulfilment. Hobbies are also a consequence of reforms in working hours in which the new leisure is to be channelled and used for ‘useful’ and ‘edifying’ purposes in order to gain legitimacy in the rational society. Finally, hobbies act as a safety-valve for a socially acceptable form of madness where it becomes acceptable, within the limits of a hobby, to collect bottle tops or to build model railways.

The exhibition includes two parts of the project: An excerpt *Hobbyns estetik, filosofi och politik* (1995) where documentary material on the hobby phenomenon from the 1930s to the 1970s has been compiled and combined so that the quotes create tension between gender and class, society and the individual, the instrumental and the spiritual. The second work, *The Collection of Internal Portraits* (1992), is part of a collection of stylised versions of classic hobbies where each hobby constitutes its own thought system, with a biographical text about the hobbyist and their hobby.

“In my youth I was employed as a cleaner at various workplaces and much of my time was occupied in removing chewing gum. In time I became fascinated by the fact that every piece of gum was, quite literally, an impression of a person’s interior – a sort of realist portrait, but having an abstract form – so I started to collect them. When I have time, I like to sit with my collection, choose one of the pieces of gum and imagine the person who, in the space of a few moments, gave the gooey substance its unique and beautiful pattern. Over the years I feel that I have developed a certain talent for discerning someone’s personality and temperament by studying how the gum has been treated, where it was found and how it was placed. The outer form of each piece of chewing gum as for life itself is given, but is then formed by each individual into something unique.”

Erik Öberg  
*despair of desire*, 2017  
Mixed media

Is the sculpture going somewhere? What shapes its prerequisites? In Erik Öbergs (b. 1987) unique object relations are loosened, like the one between vegetation and body, or between death and life. Here the tensions between formation, movement and insertions appear. Also the time is strange: An execution indicating meticulous control coexists with a feeling of a quiet chaos and a state of being unable to be controlled. In *despair of desire* an artistic practice focused on the handling of materials appears: single butterflies become a tightly knitted fabric, the textile a corporal pattern, the solid vase is sewn with needle and thread. The piece begs so many questions that it becomes a myth in itself. And the premise of these questions is the fact that the work is yet to be solidified.

Hans Tombrock  
*En läsande arbetares frågor*, 1939  
Pyrography on wood

Hans Tombrock (1895–1966) came from a family of miners in the Ruhr area of Germany and was a self-taught artist. When Hitler came into power in 1933 he fled first to Spain and then to Sweden. His imagery consisted mostly of political motifs depicting vagabonds, famine and sometimes war-torn Spain. He sought out locales of the Swedish workers' movement and offered the organisations active there to buy his works, which they often did. *En läsande arbetares frågor* (The questions of a reading proletarian) has a long history. The motif is drawn for a poem by Berthold Brecht, who also was exiled in Sweden between 1939–1940. They met in 1939 at a gathering of Germans in exile. The two began an artistic exchange and dialogue by correspondence, in which Brecht influenced Tombrock's imagery and artistic directions. Together they developed a mutual form of image-text-paintings for different Folkets hus (community centres) around the country. Brecht encouraged Tombrock to make the painting large, so as to highlight the greatness of the worker, because "it is important that the Folkets hus are reminded of their strength" (Brecht to Tombrock, August 1939, *BBW*, Volume 29). The piece belongs to the LO-school on the island of Runö, from which *Mint* has borrowed the piece.

Margareta Hallek  
*Insikt*, 1964  
Woven textile and tapestry

Over there, the sunset! Margret Halleks (b. 1932) work *Insikt* (Insight) from 1964 is a weave in double layers with a repeated evening blush. Apricot and orange-red streaks depict the grand final minutes before the orb sinks below the horizon. The weave is a textile painting, for Hallek the material carries a disarming potential. Unlike the solemn materials of traditional painting, the cloth is familiar to the viewer and thus perhaps less threatening. Hallek is a prominent figure in experimental textile art in Sweden. Her breakthrough came in 1964 with the Swedish handicraft associations exhibition *Form, fantasi* (Form, imagination) at Liljevalchs konsthall, where critics were horrified by her unconventional handling of material, like the fragments of terry cloth in appliqué. Hallek is famous for her distinctive solutions and peculiar works which often invite the viewer to change and affect them. In *Insikt* the sunset horizon is visible in the first layer of the piece and as a view seen through a cut-out window. The horizon carries countless connotations, its places beyond where we are, perhaps a place where we one day hope to be, the horizon is always a 'not yet'.

This work was also shown at Sveagalleriet 1991 in a solo exhibition.

Helena Lund Ek

*Surface*, 2014

Emulsion and oil paint on canvas, stainless steel, rope

Helena Lund Ek's (b. 1988) work is painted on a large scale cotton cloth with emulsion and oil paint. The painting is a self portrait after a long winter. The figure in the bottom is stretching itself out, portraying an aspiration. What is not seen in the form of emotions is woven together with the corporal and material. So the elongated format (the painting is over 5 metres long) is just as much a motif as the portrait itself, the form just as much content. Awaking from the cocoon of hibernation, the figure still lies in a resting pose, the head is above the surface and the feet point to the sky, perhaps the head is filled with thoughts. According to artist Mladen Stelinovic (1947–2016), who portrayed himself laying in his bed, the premise of rest is central to art: laziness, to stare at nothing, to sometimes barely even think – all these are the crucial conditions of creating.

Enno Hallek

*Fisk med blå lina*, 1980

Oil on wood

*Oso*, 1961

Oil on wood

The fishes of Enno Hallek (b. 1931) are neither paintings nor sculptures, they are fishes. There is a clear connection to his past in Estonia and in Blekinge, where he from time to time worked as professional fisherman; therefore the fish is not an abstract figment but something that belongs to his life. He himself says that he never wants to paint anything as it looks, but as it is. "Everything I do are really portraits" he says, "but the significance in what is being portrayed does not appear until, like in the fable, they are disguised in animal form". That is one explanation of the fish. Another one is that in Blekinge small pieces of wood drifted ashore where the twigs had been soaked to the point of falling out, making holes like fishes' eyes, and as the pieces of wood came from the ocean, it was natural for them to become fish. On the surface it might appear as an artist's hobby, but there is no difference between the fish and the paintings. It is about the same thing: portraits of people, images of their lives, hardships and joy. "Everyone who wishes to be an artist", says Enno Hallek, "make your own fishes!" By that he means, see the actual situations and do not leave them to others.

A shortened version of Beate Sydhoffs text 'Ennos fiskar', Konstrevy nr 1, 1970

Med stöd av Stockholm stad, Kulturrådet, Goethe Institut Schweden

*MINT*

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OPENING HOURS

Wed–Fri 12–18

Sat–Sun 12–16

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