

TETRIS - FACT LIVERPOOL, 2009
 OBJECTS FROM THE STORAGE ROOM AT FACT LIVERPOOL.
 DIMENSIONS: 2 X 3,2 X 1,5 M.
 INSTALLATION VIEW: FACT, LIVERPOOL (UK)

NEXT PAGE:
 GHOST II, 2009
 WHITE OBJECTS.
 DIMENSIONS: 2,9 X 2,9 M.
 INSTALLATION VIEW:
 GALLERI ARNSTEDT, ÖSTRA KARUP (S)

Art should not be about competing, name-dropping or demographics; it should be about making an impact. It should be about executing ideas in a unique manner, it should be about making the mundane special and beautiful. And that is exactly what Swedish artist Michael Johansson does. With an almost autistic sense for order, he stacks and arranges objects of the every day life in a kind of 3D-Tetris-style until aesthetics and social comment form an almost holy bond. Luckily for us, he somehow squeezed a quick Q&A for Lodown into his exploding schedule. Tack så mycket.

MICHAEL JOHANSSON

Postmodern hunter-gatherer

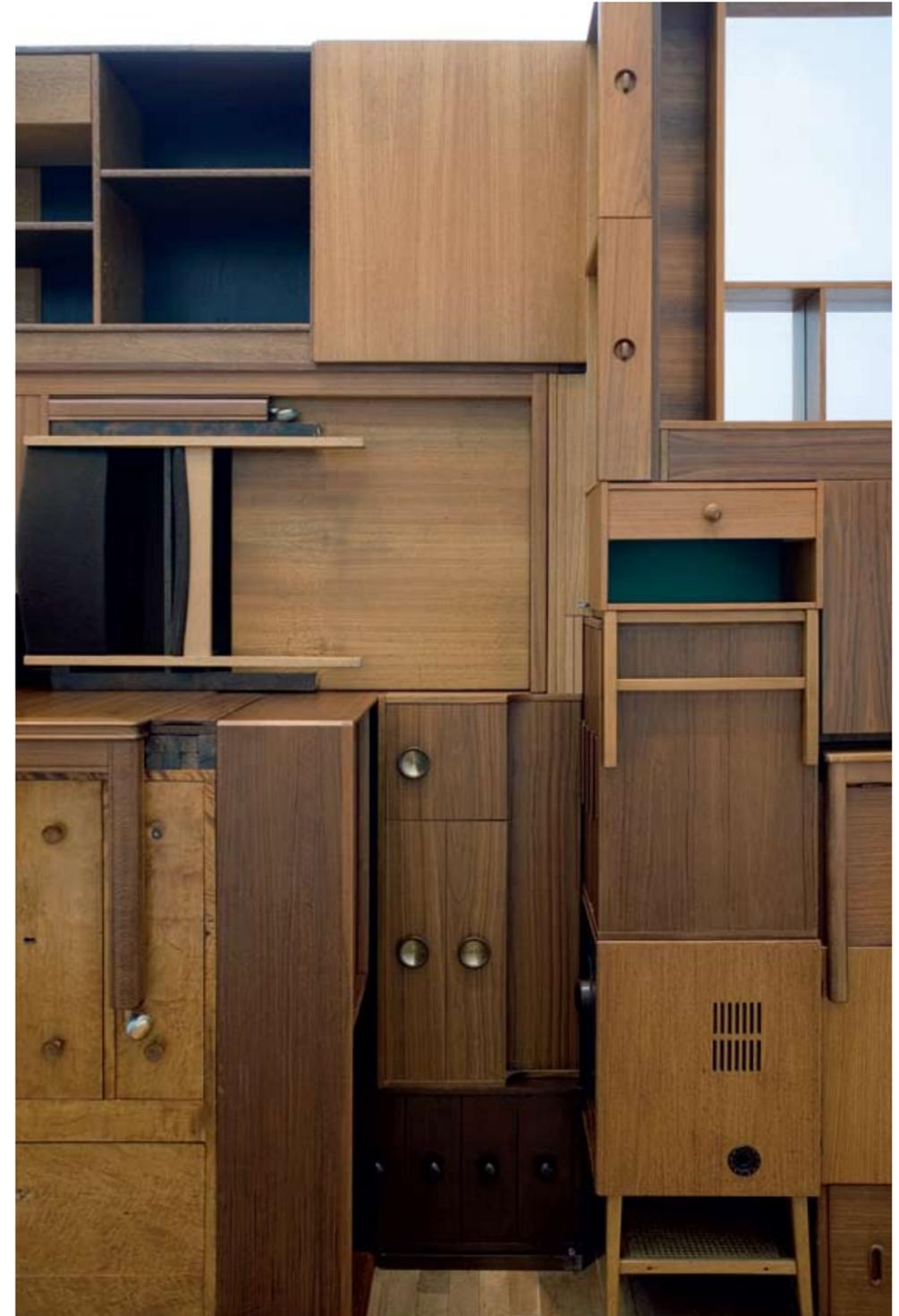




FRUSNA TILLHÖRIGHETER, 2010
(FROZEN BELONGINGS)
ARMCHAIR, TYPEWRITER, BOOKS, BOXES, CLOCK, ETC.
DIMENSIONS: 0.55 X 0.8 X 0.55 M.



OPPOSITE PAGE:
FYRAHUNDRA NYANSER AV BRUNT II, 2010
(FOUR HUNDRED SHADES OF BROWN II)
WOODEN FURNITURE.
DIMENSIONS: 2.5 X 2.8 X 2.5 M.
INSTALLATION VIEW: HANINGE KONSTHALL, HANINGE (SE)





Michael, how was it growing up in Trollhättan... Or “Trollywood” as some ironically name it, and when did it become clear that you follow the call of Fine Arts?

When I grew up in Trollhättan the film-centre “Trollywood” didn’t exist and culture did not yet have a prominent role, so I left town for art school almost directly after finishing high school. But I don’t think you can say that I knew I would follow the call of Fine Arts back then, even though that’s probably what I would’ve told you if you asked me at the time. At the beginning I had a very classic view on art. I was making naturalistic drawings and felt that the only step for how to proceed to become an artist was to learn how to paint. I bought a lot of paint, brushes, and canvases in the belief that this was the media I had to choose to become an artist. Despite all of this I couldn’t convince myself to become a painter, and maybe this inability was what made me overcompensate in the material way. For the annual exhibition my final year at the art academy, during my last days in school, I sold all the painting equipment I had bought throughout my early art education that I had kept stored in my studio until then. It was a lot. I called the work “Boulevard of Broken Dreams”. Finally I found a way to use the purchased material in an art piece, but maybe not in the way I had in mind at the time that I bought them. I sometimes think about how it would be if the person I were at the very start of my studies would’ve been encountered with the work I do today. I am not convinced that I would’ve appreciated my own work that much.

What made you decide to study at Berlin’s Kunsthochschule in Weissensee in the early 00’s?

The school where I took my bachelor degree, Trondheim Academy of Art in Norway, had very few exchange programs and Kunsthochschule Berlin Weissensee was one of them. At the time I studied in Trondheim the school was not in its prime and I was very eager to get away. Since I had some friends living in Berlin it felt like the right move. I can’t say that Weissensee was a better fit for me educational-wise, but I loved the city and ever since graduating I have been thinking about moving back. So far I haven’t been

able to make it fit, there has always been something else getting in the way, but it is still in my future agenda.

When I found out that you actually studied in Berlin, I immediately wondered if your installations are the result of having received a hint of German accuracy in terms of bureaucracy while you lived here?

I am honestly not sure if the Swedish bureaucracy is so much easier to deal with than the German. But sure, you don’t need a copy of your tenancy agreement to rent a DVD in Sweden. And regardless of the possible influence of the German bureaucracy or not the period in Berlin was very important for me growing as an artist. I don’t think I made a single piece during my ten months living there, but immediately after I came home it suddenly exploded and haven’t stopped ever since. So, yes sure, I wouldn’t rule out that some German accuracy played its role. One of my greatest interests right now is when an overly accurate order results in that a system no longer is being able to use. I guess a lot of bureaucracy works like this.

You once stated that the whole idea about your installations/conceptual art was triggered by trying to find two identical objects at two different flea markets... Please try to explain the sensation of this process. And do I have to picture you roaming around flea markets every weekend?

I think I always have been a collector and for a long time I have been fascinated by Flea markets. Specifically a fascination by walking around to find doubles of seemingly unique, though often useless objects I have already purchased at another flea market. It is not only an inquisitive activity for me but it has also become part of my working process. Despite the fact that I did not have any use for most of these objects in the first place, the unlikelihood of discovering them twice in two different places makes the desire for their possession irresistible. The unique and the unknown origin of the object increased my wish to own its double. The same rules compelling me in selecting things at flea markets are also central to my art practice. I think there has to be a mix between something highly recognizable, and something very unique, to create an interesting encounter between the work and the viewer. And sure, maybe I am not visiting flea markets every

weekend, but every new work always leads to a large number of new visits. It is actually kind of a pity, since it used to be one of my favourite leisure pursuits, but doing it to often of course takes away some of the fun.

I love the idea that you present items of the everyday life as assembly sets... Is there a social commentary in there or is it simply all about aesthetics?

I would say it is more about social commentaries than it is about aesthetics. I don’t mean that the visual aspect isn’t important to me, it truly is, but I would never bother spending all that time putting a work together if I didn’t think my work added something to a contemporary dialogue. I rather see the aesthetics as a tool to increase the possibility for starting a dialogue with the viewer. It is for the same reason I use ordinary objects, things we recognize from daily life, since I believe that the recognition of these things can be used as a starting point for discussions within a wider context as well.

You also said that you’re quite intrigued by the irregularities in daily life... Would you agree that one has to practice on their own sensibilities to catch these?

Yes, I think we could all be better in spotting irregularities that might help us break our daily patterns. It is easy to get stuck in habits, both good and bad ones, which of course limits our lives in some ways. For me these accidental regularities, for example: when spotting two people passing each other dressed in the same outfits, a parking space packed by only red cars or discovering that an actor is playing two different roles at the same time when switching between TV channels, are a great source of inspiration.

What’s next for Mr. Johansson?

I am currently working on a new piece for an upcoming show at Haninge Konsthall right outside of Stockholm. After that I will spend most of the spring to realize two larger public installations, which is a new experience for me. There are a lot of new things to take into consideration, but the larger scale and budget also opens up a lot of new possibilities. I think it will be an interesting spring with lots of possibilities to continue creating new work.

WWW.MICHAELJOHANSSON.COM
WORDS: FORTY
PORTRAIT BY AMANDA NORDGREN



ABOVE
MONOCHROME ANACHRON, 2008
BROWN FURNITURES, BROWN OBJECTS, GLASS OBJECTS.
DIMENSIONS: 1 X 1,8 X 1,3 M.
CUBOIDS, TRONDLAG SENTER FOR SAMTIDSKUNST, TRONDHEIM (NO)



MIDDLE ABOVE
SHELF-MADE CHRISTMAS TREE, 2009
SEASON’S GREETINGS & A HAPPY NEW YEAR 2010



MIDDLE BELOW
STRÖVTÅG I TID OCH RUM, 2009
(STROLLS THROUGH TIME AND SPACE)
ARMCHAIR, BOOKS, BAGS, BOXES, RADIO, CLOCK, ETC.
DIMENSIONS: 0.55 X 0.85 X 0.6 M.



RIGHT
CAKE LIFT, 2009
OBJECTS FROM THE STORAGE ROOM AT ÅRHUS KUNSTBYGNING.
DIMENSIONS: 1.4 X 5 X 0.8 M.
INSTALLATION VIEW: TRUTH OR DARE, ÅRHUS KUNSTBYGNING, (DK)