

Critics' Guides /

A Guide to the Best Shows in Cologne



BY MORITZ SCHEPER

11 APR 2019

With Art Cologne opening its doors, a selection of exhibitions around town



Hanni Kamaly, *Arjemandi*, 2019, chrome plated steel, copper and steel, 2.3 x 1.4 x 0.9 m.

Courtesy: the artist and Ginerva Gambino

[Hanni Kamaly](#)

Ginerva Gambino

5 April – 25 May

In Hanni Kamaly's show 'Unbound the Gag' at Ginerva Gambino, four sculptures, graceful in spite of their large scale, stand in the space like distant relatives of Louise Bourgeois's spider sculptures. Focusing on formal aspects would, however, obscure the Norwegian artist's research-based approach, as the sculptures's hard, polished material recalls the architecture of prisons, gates and animal enclosures. In addition, the works are named after victims of colonial violence. These elements come together most strikingly in *AMAD AHMAD* (2019), a brute sculpture that looks like the three-fingered hand of a robotic Marvel villain and is named after the Syrian-born Amad Ahmad, who died in police custody under unexplained circumstances in Kleve, a small town near Cologne.

Izabella Scott: Luleå Biennial, Art Review, January/February 2019:102.

Luleå Biennial

Various venues, Norrbotten 17 November – 17 February

As I fly out of Norrbotten, Sweden's arctic region, I sit amid rows of soldiers. Luleå, the port city from which we departed, is located 900km north of Stockholm and provides access to a military site known as the Vidsel Test Range. Once iron and timber, this region's natural resource is now its emptiness: its nature reserve is rented out for bomb testing. I'm the odd one out, having been here for the Luleå Biennial, which was set up in 1991 by a local art collective, the Kilen Art Group, and has now been taken over by three young curators, Emily Fahlén, Asrin Haidari and Thomas Hämén. The set of exhibitions, showing work by 37 artists, begins in Luleå, occupying unlikely venues – from a Cold War bunker to a crane at the old harbour – and expands into the regional towns of Jokkmokk, Boden and Kiruna, the last a five-hour bus ride north into the Arctic Circle. Titled *Tidal Ground*, the biennale is themed around darkness. At the beginning of the winter season, when the days are less than six hours long, a golden sun streaks along the horizon, seeming continually to be setting.

At the Luleå Konsthall, a cultural centre on the seafloor, familiar works such as Francis Aljys's film *Paradox of Praxis 5* (2013), which documents a burning soccer ball as it is kicked through the streets of Ciudad Juárez by night, are placed alongside regional art. Sami artist Britta Marakatt-Labba has embroidered a flour sack left in the Arctic by German soldiers during the Second World War, which is displayed framed

beside a Sami wartime passport. Marakatt-Labba's father was a reindeer herder and Sami – one of the indigenous people of the northerly region of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia – who witnessed the Nazi occupation of Norway during the 1940s. The sack is embroidered with a reindeer, a postage stamp and a gun. As these artefacts attest, the militarisation of the northern borders prevented nomadic herders from travelling through their lands, a cultural region known as Sápmi. Punctuating the exhibition, meanwhile, are sculptures by Norwegian artist Hanni Kamaly, anthropomorphic assemblages of steel rods that droop and dangle like limbs. In *Freddie Gray* (2016), named after the African-American man who died in Baltimore police custody in 2015, five steel legs are held in a metal harness, a trapped figure that resembles both the architecture of confinement and the incarcerated body. Kamaly's sculptures illustrate degradation, turning humans into things – a 'thingification' that softens the ground for transgression, be it of indigenous or civil rights.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, a chain of fortresses and defence facilities were built across the Norrbotten borderland, preparations for a war that never came. One example is Mjölkuddsberget, a hill on the outskirts of Luleå tunnelled out during the Cold War. Decommissioned in 2000, Milk Point Mountain is now privately owned, its dank bunkers deployed as a mushroom farm and

bitcoin mine. Raqs Media Collective's *The Blood of Stars* (2017) takes over freezing shafts and caverns, which I roam with a handheld torch. Telephones ring in cold, empty rooms while spotlights range over the ghostly concrete chambers.

Across town, in a small group show at the artist-run Galleri Syster, most compelling are the pearly sculptures by Kuwaiti artist Monira Al Qadiri that make up *Spectrum I* (2016). Displayed along a wall and shellacked glossy, glittery pinks, the cone-shaped objects look like futuristic telephones, or perhaps sex toys. I soon learn they are 3D models of drill heads – tools of extreme destruction, used to bore holes into the earth's crust.

A two-hour bus ride north is the town of Jokkmokk, home to the Ájtte Museum, established in 1989 by the Sami community to tell the story of their people. Here, works by seven artists have been integrated among the exhibits of Sami furs and shamanic drums. In one room, Hiwa K's *Pre-Image (Blind as the Mother Tongue)* (2017) plays on a television set, following the artist as he retraces his 1996 journey from Kurdistan to Europe, balancing a dizzying sculpture made of mirrors on his nose; in another room, a mirror work by Swedish artist Lap-See Lam reflects back Sami artefacts. It's a subtle intervention – like the biennale itself – one that draws attention to what is here already, reminding viewers that this landscape is anything but empty. *Izabella Scott*



*Luleå Biennial, 2018 (installation view, Luleå Konsthall).
Courtesy Luleå Biennial*

Northern State of Mind

For the 16th Luleå Biennial, the darkness of the polar night is imbued with dreams of new forms of aesthetic and political resistance.

By Frans Josef Petersson 30.11.18 Article in Svenska

A quiet Sunday and I'm on a bus to Ájtte – Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum in Jokkmokk, one of the venues of the 16th Luleå biennial. Ground frost and gnarled birch trees testify to the region's subarctic climate. Jokkmokk is 170 kilometres from Luleå. Kiruna, where another part of the biennial is on display, is a further 200 kilometres from there. Lainio even further north. I don't know how far you need to go to see the entirety of the biennial, which includes an additional ten venues, but it's probably in excess of 1000 kilometres. Distances are far up here and it's difficult to see it all.

The Luleå Biennial 2018. Tidal Ground

 Comment

17 November 2018 — 17 November 2019

 Share

The Luleå Biennial is described as Scandinavia's "oldest biennial", but for many years it was of a more of a local concern. With this year's edition, the national member organization Konstfrämjandet (The People's Movement for Art Promotion) has taken over as organiser, and the regional dispersal is motivated by their commitment to spreading art throughout the country, including outside of the main urban hubs. The biennial is said to have been reinvigorated after "lying dormant" since its last instalment in 2013. This turns out to be quite an apt metaphor,

since the relatively untested trio of curators – Emily Fahlén, Asrin Haidiri and Thomas Hämén – has taken «darkness» as a “necessary and generative premise² for the exhibition.

“Generative” in the sense of a poetic or dreaming principle, allowing for “new contours slowly becoming visible”, rather than a theme.



Hanni Kamaly, *Ballok*, 2017.

“Necessary”, on the other hand, as a reference to the never ending darkness of the polar winter, but also to the ruthless exploitation of natural resources, and a largely forgotten history of fascist violence, endemic to the region’s “political darkness”. Yet, this darkness is both evoked and kept at bay by the curator’s. While visiting the main exhibition at Luleå Konsthall, the idea of a “safe space” comes to mind, a place where people can share their experiences without discomfort or fear of repression. A film by Beirut based Marwa Arsanios (born 1978) shows a meeting between a group of women of different ages in the autonomous Kurdish region of Rojava. The women speak about how humans can relate to nature without exploiting it, but equally important is that we are witnessing a quiet conversation between generations, rather than a debate or a political disagreement. The women are partisans, that is evident from their military greens, but their talk must be seen as political struggle in a different guise. And that is exactly how the biennial wants to function, I think.

This is the set-up: first an exhibition for gathering strength and sharing experiences. Then, towards the end of the exhibition period, an antifascist conference for this accumulated strength to be mobilized in the direction of an outside enemy. It’s a sympathetic model, not only for those who align themselves with the antifascist worldview, but for all who support the idea that art (as well as activism) is best served when allowed to emerge on its own terms. Yet, the biennial’s model is not about the conservative slogan “everything in its place”, as it doesn’t operate according to any predetermined criteria about how the parts should be combined. This is what constitutes the open, poetic element of the biennial – the “darkness” – with its specific “potential for thinking and dreaming”.

Konstnären Hanni Kamaly:

Vilken var din relation till Norrbotten innan du blev inbjuden att medverka i Luleåbiennalen?

– Det jag kände till om Norrbotten handlade om Kiruna och gruvdriften, och att det är en region som bebos av samer. Jag visste också att marken, i likhet med de norra delarna av Norge, används för militära övningar. Just nu lär sig 50 000 NATO-soldater föra krig på dessa övnings-slagfält. Men redan innan fanns en stark militär närvaro i Norrbotten. Placeringen av militära utposter i avlägsna områden bebodda av ursprungsfolk är enbart ett medel för att utöva makt och kontroll. För mig personligen är detta inget annat än kolonialisering av det land som tillhör samer.

Vill du berätta om dina verk?

– Utgångspunkten i mitt arbete är strukturellt våld och brutalitet. Förtrycket som vill göra monster av de förtryckta, som skapar skam och förnekar den sårbarhet alla människor bär på. Under arbetsprocessen läser, tänker och efterforskar jag så mycket jag kan, och försöker sedan omvandla mina känslor och reflektioner till en upplevelse av skörhet och skönhet.

– Dessa känslor tar sig form som skulpturer. Verken i Luleåbiennalen genererar en upplevelse av “den andre” – en kroppslig varelse som äntrar rummet. Trots att de är gjorda i stål ger de intrycket av mjukhet och känslighet. För mig är de monument, många gånger döpta efter de som lidit offer för förtryck.

Not Quite Human

Hanni Kamaly's work about racial violence invites debate about cultural appropriation, but ultimately opens onto more complex questions of collective remembrance.

By Matthew Rana 30.11.17



Hanni Kamaly, *Freddie Gray* (2016) & *Shabba* (2017).
Foto: Petter Dahlström Persson.

The large metal sculpture *SHABBA* (2017) is the fulcrum of Malmö-based Hanni Kamaly's exhibition, *ITS ALL REAL YEAH COME THROUGH* at Skånes konstförening. It's a spare exhibition comprising a video essay and six sculptural works that use structural integrity as a spatial metaphor for resistance to the structural violence directed toward ethnic minorities and people of color. Extending into the corners of the room *SHABBA* rises up adjacent to the ventilation system, its crudely welded limbs held together by a black hoodie of the type that, since the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin, has become a widespread symbol against racial violence. At once imposing and precarious, Kamaly's sculpture confronts the viewer with a sense of unease: one must pass through it in order to enter the secondary gallery.

None of the other works in the show assert themselves in quite the same way. Despite their monumental scale, metal sculptures like *FREDDIE GRAY* (2016) and *CRUTCHER* (2017) seem arrested or inert. Their skeletal forms recall junked animatronics – object

and not quite human (but not quite monstrous either). By contrast, *BAIDOO* (2017), a work bearing the last name of a Ghanaian woman assaulted by a police officer near Trondheim in 1999, is small and insect-like, barely registering as a figure.

Just so, Kamaly's newer sculptures, which are more materially impoverished and at the same time more formal, tend to verge on the tragic. This holds for

DURRAH and *JAMAL* (both 2017), which are named for a Palestinian father and son killed by Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip in 2000; a video taken of their deaths became the subject of a prolonged controversy in which doubt was cast on the veracity of the tape, claims that it was staged, and so on.



Hanni Kamaly, *BAIDOO*, 2017. Photo: Petter Dahlström Persson.

Media events such as this frame the sculptures, as the video *HEAD, HAND, EYE* (2017) makes clear. In this film-essay composed of found footage the artist narrates, Adam Curtis style, a museological history of decapitation, dismemberment and collection of human body parts. Recent clips of Confederate monuments being toppled in the American South are spliced together with the 2016 dashcam video in which Terrence Crutcher (aforementioned) is killed by Tulsa police; also among the plethora of materials are excerpts from Islamic State beheadings, a Virtual Tour of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Brussels, Disney's *Aladdin* (1992), and so on.

As a whole, *ITS ALL REAL YEAH COME THROUGH* is an attempt to reckon with present-day legacies of colonialism, particularly at the levels of ethnic conflict and institutional racism. However, in addressing the structural character of these legacies from a global/media perspective, the show tends to veer into abstraction, conflating specific histories and forms of struggle across a wide range of contexts. In this respect, it invites the kind of debate around cultural appropriation that in recent months has erupted around the work of artists such as Sam Durant, Jimmie Durham and Dana Schutz.

Just as debatable is the gesture of naming the sculptures after victims of violence. By withholding the individuals' full names



Hanni Kamaly, *Durrrah*, 2017. Photo: Petter Dahlström Persson.

Kamaly risks denying them their particularity, in effect reducing them to generic signifiers for ethnic identities and racialized subject-positions. The exhibition text provides no further information, undermining the solidarity that this gesture might have otherwise represented.

But to belabor such ethical and moral points would be to overlook what is most generative in the exhibition. Because it's precisely in these difficulties that Kamaly's work opens onto more complex questions. That is, how might

a collectively experienced trauma be figured and borne witness? Writing on the 'unspeakable' horrors of the Shoah, Giorgio Agamben reflects that language "in order to bear witness must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness." Kamaly's sculptures do not testify to what they have seen. But in their mute and twisted forms they begin to figure the challenges of such a task, and what might indeed "come through."



Hanni Kamaly, *Head Hand Eye*, 2017. Photo: Petter Dahlström Persson.