



# Lina Selander

Open System — Silphium and Other Works

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iniva 

## Lina Selander: Open System — Silphium and Other Works

Curated by Lisa Rosendahl

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**Lisa Rosendahl:** Your medium is the moving image, but quite often your videos are comprised of a succession of stills. What interests you in this way of working?

**Lina Selander:** First of all, there are no real still images — like photos on a wall — in a film as both the still and the moving image are subjected to the same overarching rhythm, the same flow of time. Having said that, I admit that lately I have felt that there is a greater concentration within the still image, a more immediate possibility for the viewer to stay in the image, to make it his or her own; it becomes a thought, an inner image. The still image also comes closer to a kind of sign, an ideogram or pictogram, without actually becoming one and this fits into my ambition that the gaze should be as free and calm as possible, exploring the image, sensing where it comes from and where it is going.

**Cover:**  
Lina Selander,  
*Anteroom of the Real*  
2011, HD-video,  
14 min, colour, silent.

**Right:**  
Lina Selander,  
*To the Vision Machine*  
2013, HD-video, 28 min,  
colour, sound.

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**LR:** For me, your use of single images creates a rhythm rather than a narrative, which allows for a tight composition that nevertheless remains open in terms of its interpretation. Looking back at the works you have made over the last few years it seems you have steadily moved further and further away from narrative, can you talk about that process?

**LS:** I think that rhythm has always been at the heart of my work, and that it has used narrative to further its own interests, so to speak. The rhythm needs something to work with. The more you think of it the more the two seem intertwined: a narrative without rhythm would perhaps only be a series of facts, and every rhythm is perhaps a beginning of a narrative. Regarding my moving away from narrative I think it has much to do with the previous question and the will to let the viewer think themselves into the image. The deliberate lack of narrative also creates a degree of unreadability, which is perhaps reminiscent of a state of fundamental untranslatability; the work leans toward something it can never fully grasp.

**LR:** There is a lot of cross-pollination going on between your works. Working together on this exhibition I began to see your practice as an open system where each new work is a way to further open up the reading of

certain images through their reapplication in different ways. Does the title of your work *Model of Continuation* refer to this process?

**LS:** Yes. When content-based narrative is not the main focus of the work, the emphasis shifts to the logic of montage. This is characteristic of my practice as a whole, which, as a consequence, dissolves the boundaries between individual works to a certain degree. I don't make a film in order to open up the reading of previous films or the images they contain, but I often think about the relationship between my films and certain images in them. In a way it is perhaps only a question of distance. It is the same problem or method really, the cross-pollination within a film or between the works, the only difference being the distance.

**LR:** Several of your works deal with the desires and failures of modernity. The surveillance by the Stasi and the nuclear disasters in Hiroshima and Chernobyl are some examples. In your videos we encounter these events through their official representation in museum displays and public archives. Your approach to these sites of meaning production seems to be to hone in on isolated images as a way of disassembling the overall picture. To me this suggests that the writing of history

is a process open to endless reinterpretation; could you relate to that?

**LS:** I like working with the official representations of events mainly because there has already been a process of editing, a disposition or montage that also defines its parts, which creates a resemblance to film. The official story can unfold together with the work I'm making, but as another story; neither fiction, nor fact. Rather than endless reinterpretation it is perhaps endless re-disposition. The open structure of a film of mine is the convergence with this endlessness, the coincidence of history. But just as the museum presents events as related parts of a story, my work also finds its final form while being conscious of the fact that it is just one of many possibilities. One might say this is a play between the archive and the museum, the possibility of connections and a specific actualisation of some of them. The fact that history in many respects is the history of recording devices and technologies, some of which I try to examine and disassemble in my films, could be another convergence point between my work and the writing or recording of history.

**LR:** *Anteroom of the Real* was originally commissioned for a library. Can you say something about this work?

**LS:** The work is about the editing process, and a play between the still and the moving image. But also about the act of selection, the choice of information, the editing of the events that will become, or is supposed to become, the official history. The hands show this in a concrete way; that it is actually somebody's decision how history is created. It was commissioned for the public library in Gävle, a city in the part of Sweden that was most affected by the radioactivity from the meltdown in Chernobyl. And it was actually from the Forsmark nuclear reactor, in the vicinity of Gävle, that the world was alerted about the Chernobyl disaster. They discovered unusually high radioactivity there and first thought something had happened to their own reactor. But soon they found that all evidence was pointing towards somewhere in the Soviet Union. They called them, but were told that everything was fine and under control.

**LR:** What role does the image of nature play in your work? It seems to be always there somehow, like a mute witness to the excesses of humanity.

**LS:** Nature is kind of the ultimate form, no content, all form. I think of my work as a form about form, a vortex that generates content: pieces of reference, knowledge, facts. In my films nature appears both as an opposite to

montage and as that which montage hopes to become: a non-constructed continuum, an absolute fact whose cuts, juxtapositions and rhythm form a complete and seductive whole. Apart from this, which you might describe as a kind of unachievable origin, images of nature also put whatever you place in relation to them into a certain perspective of deep, non-human time. A mute witness is a good description, only we can never be the beneficiaries of the testimony, only witness it...

**LR:** What interested you in the story of the plant Silphium?

**LS:** There are many interesting things about the plant: its contraceptive properties, that it became so valuable, that it turned out to be impossible to cultivate and became extinct. Then the story of the drought, the oracle, the exile... The fact that there is a historical/etymological link between the Swedish words for coin (mynt) and memory (minne) was also important. I was attracted to the phrase 'to coin', and to the image stamped on the coin. In the case of *Silphium* these images are the only trace left of the plant. This was the starting point, then other things and relations unfolded through a process of semblances; making the plant a witness, or a ghost, as if Silphium had lived on and was looking back at the world that eradicated it.

**Right:**

Lina Selander, *Silphium*  
2014 HD-video, 22 min,  
b/w, mute and sound.  
Made together with  
Oscar Mangione.

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until they feel – ahead of them – a barrier.

## Acknowledgements:

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