



Laila Svensgaard

## **INDEED, LIKE A SYSTEM.**

Visual artist **Laila Svensgaard** is currently showing her recent body of work in **Viborg Kunsthø**. In a stripped down mode of expression, through drawing and needlework, she explores the dialectics of language and the suspension of subjectivity in time and space.

The pieces on show range from large scale drawings to small scale poetic minimalism. The title of the show *Philomela* is taken from an ancient greek myth where the female protagonist resorts to the visual communication of embroidery when her tongue is cut out and she loses her voice to speak.

Laila Svensgaard (b. 1974) is based in Copenhagen and Malmö. She holds a BFA Fine Art from **Central Saint Martins**, London and is currently studying an MFA in Critical and Pedagogical Studies at **Malmö Art Academy**.

AF METTE LUCCA JENSEN

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*Philomela*

**Laila Svensgaard**

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**Your exhibition at Viborg Kunsthall is titled Philomela. In what way do the works in the exhibition relate to the myth of Philomela?**

Well.. For me it is not so much about the myth itself it is more about the horizon, that point from where someone is looking, and what is behind as well as what lies in front. Losing one's language in the sense of stepping outside of the cultural frame of understanding is something I experienced when I returned to Denmark after living in London the majority of my adult life. So my intention with the title of the show Philomela, is to set a mythical frame around the pieces to place the viewer in a contextual position from where to enter.

**Speaking of horizons, there is a piece in the exhibition with that title, could you say something about this piece?**

I guess it is about the voice and poetic imagination. The text in the piece is a written translation of the geographical coordinates of the mythical kingdom of Thrace where part of the myth takes place. But that may not be so important. What the piece does is activating in the viewer her imagination of a place. And the way we decode text is so different from the way we decode numbers, there's a sort of displacement happening when numbers are translated into text. This displacement in language I find compelling, it intrigues me.

**In general there are a lot of displacements, small scale shifts and glitches going on in your work. Sometimes so small they are barely noticeable, like the difference between seams and seems in one of the diptych pieces.**

Yes, you can say a word but how this word is perceived by someone else is interdependent on so many variable factors. Yet language is our primary way of communication, how we understand the world around us and each other is through language. It is also self-reflecting in the sense of being a system, and an order that you can never step outside of, or you have no control over, yet it determines everything future and past. I'm interested in this present that lies in between and how malleable this present is? The diptych word pieces address this (see/sea, seams/seems, seen/scene), there's this circular notion in the way they bounce off each other, back and forth but in this action they never get fixed to a specific point, or past or future. The same with language, it acts as a horizon you are looking at in the distance and at the same time it is this distant point that you are looking from. The subjective suspension between these two points in language is something I started working with in 2010 when I returned to Denmark.

**How do you see this investigation into language and the subjective suspension in relation to the large scale drawing Coasts, a key piece in the show?**

The dotted line drawing is part of an ongoing investigation where I am examining my own bodily position in relation to writing as movement. What it is to write, the performativity (literally), what is expressed, the relation to the body. The marks are recordings of my movement within a certain position, conditioned by the restrictions of the position of my torso in relation to how far my left arm can reach. There's also a temporality present too through the density of the layers building

up and rubbing out that indicates time and repetition. For me this is where the relation to the subjective suspension in the diptych word pieces is, coming from somewhere and going to something. The coordinates in the drawing are indicators of timed intervals, breaks where I paused before continuing. So you could say that the drawing is a kind of a map, or a mapping of a body in time and space. And about the materiality of text, an untold story, a recorded memory, a horizon... The drawing is made specifically for this show but it is also part of a larger investigation.

**To me as a viewer Philomela feels extremely present in this piece. I imagine her lying in a dark room, trying in vain to draw a map or stitch her story. The drawing is incredibly loaded and carries numerous readings, but I find it very touching when I read it this way, because... it could be her, but it could also be me or really any person, placed in a space in the world at any given time in a body with a limited reach to the world trying to understand and describe the world.**

Indeed, making sense of the world, like a system. The dotted line is a result of my investigation into writing and language. It is written language that is not preconditioned by the ties to a system such as the alphabet where the A is always an A and the B is always a B. The dotted line for me is an A and a B and a C at the same time. It is also a stuttering, a search for a language. So when I draw I am just as much looking for the language to write in as I am writing in language. There's a subjective suspension in this seeking to understand and trying to create. This duality I find very interesting.

**Thank you.**