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Systema Naturae

"Artemisia Absinthium (wormwood) is a conversational partner and the one plant I've had the best contact with. It's been very inviting towards me and has allowed me to use its leaves and stems to extract colour pigment for my painting", says Christine Ödlund about her new exhibition Systema Naturae. Revolving around a share in a community garden, the exhibition at CF HILL continues her longstanding interest in bridging communication between human and plant.

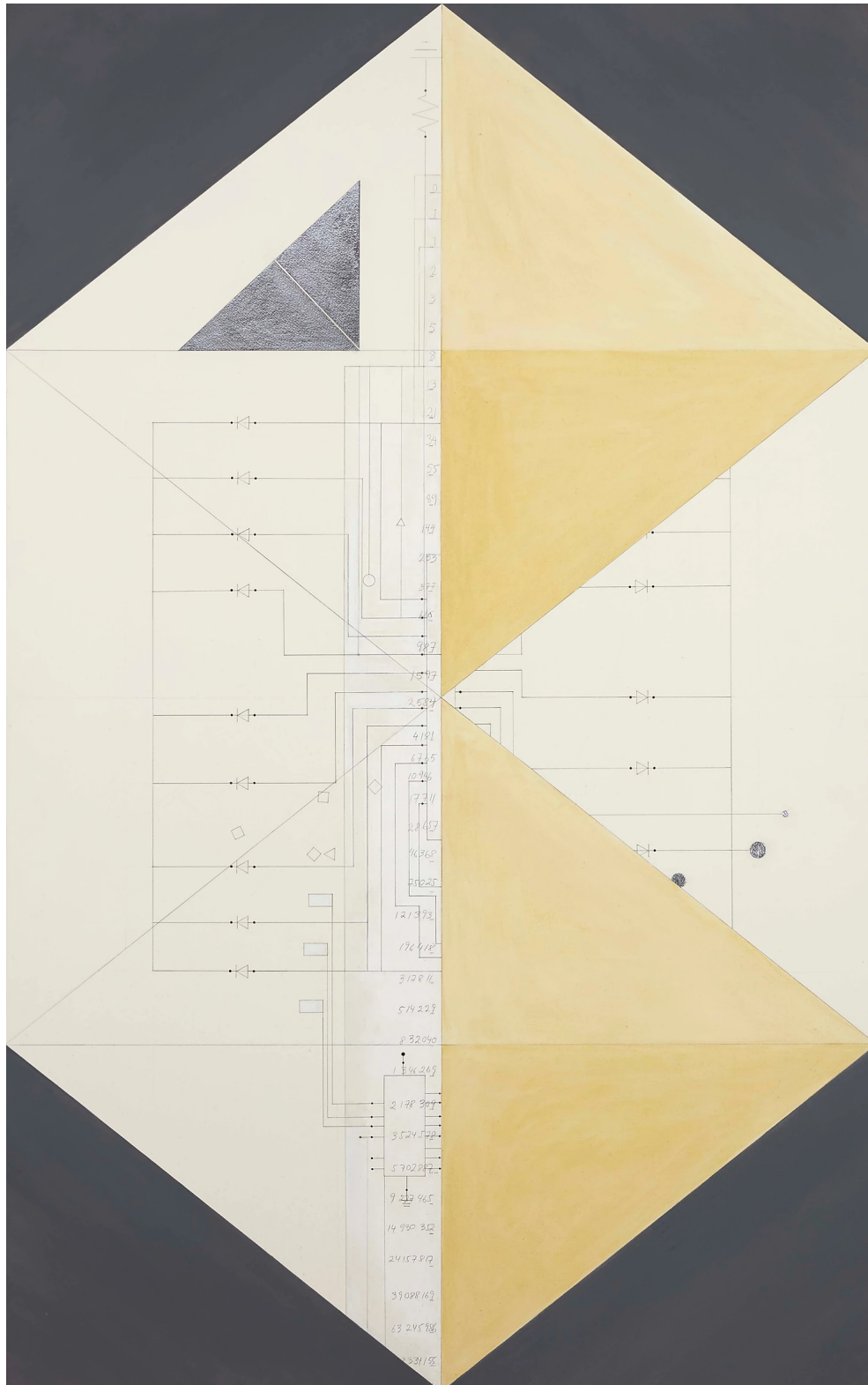


C-P: The narrative around your new exhibition informs your getting in possession of a lot in a community garden. Run me through this story and the sorts of epiphanies that might have been had as a result?

C.Ö: A friend of a friend; Elin Unnes who is a music journalist and an author on plants and gardening asked me if I would consider taking care of her lot since she lacked the time for it. Elin had through my art sensed a

kinship of sorts between us on the account of an obsession about plats. I agreed despite having a great deal of preconceived notions about the culture revolving community gardening. I hesitated since worrying whether this context would really apply to me as an artist. A “boxed” piece of land next to all the other boxes of land... However, there was a lot indicating a wide tolerance for odd expressions and differences between the lots so in the end I came to accept the offer.

Ultimately, my enabling a state where plants, pollinators, humans and other animals share this bit of land, further nurtured my thoughts about how the city and nature can co-exist in a constructive and crucial way. The lot has become a symbol and a haven for this sort of coexistence. It's become an integral part of my art and has allowed me means to be self-sufficient, especially in in terms of colour pigment for my painting.



C-P: The iconic botanical scientist Carl von Linné and the plant that is wormwood (*Artemisia Absinthium*) both find a way into your recent works on view; the latter through the extraction of colour pigment. What has the process been like regarding these notions?

C.Ö: I've since long taken a keen interest in the perception of plants and how they communicate chemically and acoustically both with each other and other living organisms. I've worked for many years trying to bridge the language barriers between human and plan. In my attempts for contact with the plants on the lot, I've been in dialogue with both living and dead botanical scientists. Some of them are: Agnes Arber, John Cage, Phytagoras och Epikuros, Henry David Thoreau och Carl von Linné. *Artemisia Absinthium* (wormwood) is a conversational partner and the one plant I've had the best contact with. It's been very inviting towards me and have allowed me to use its leaves and stems to extract colour pigment.

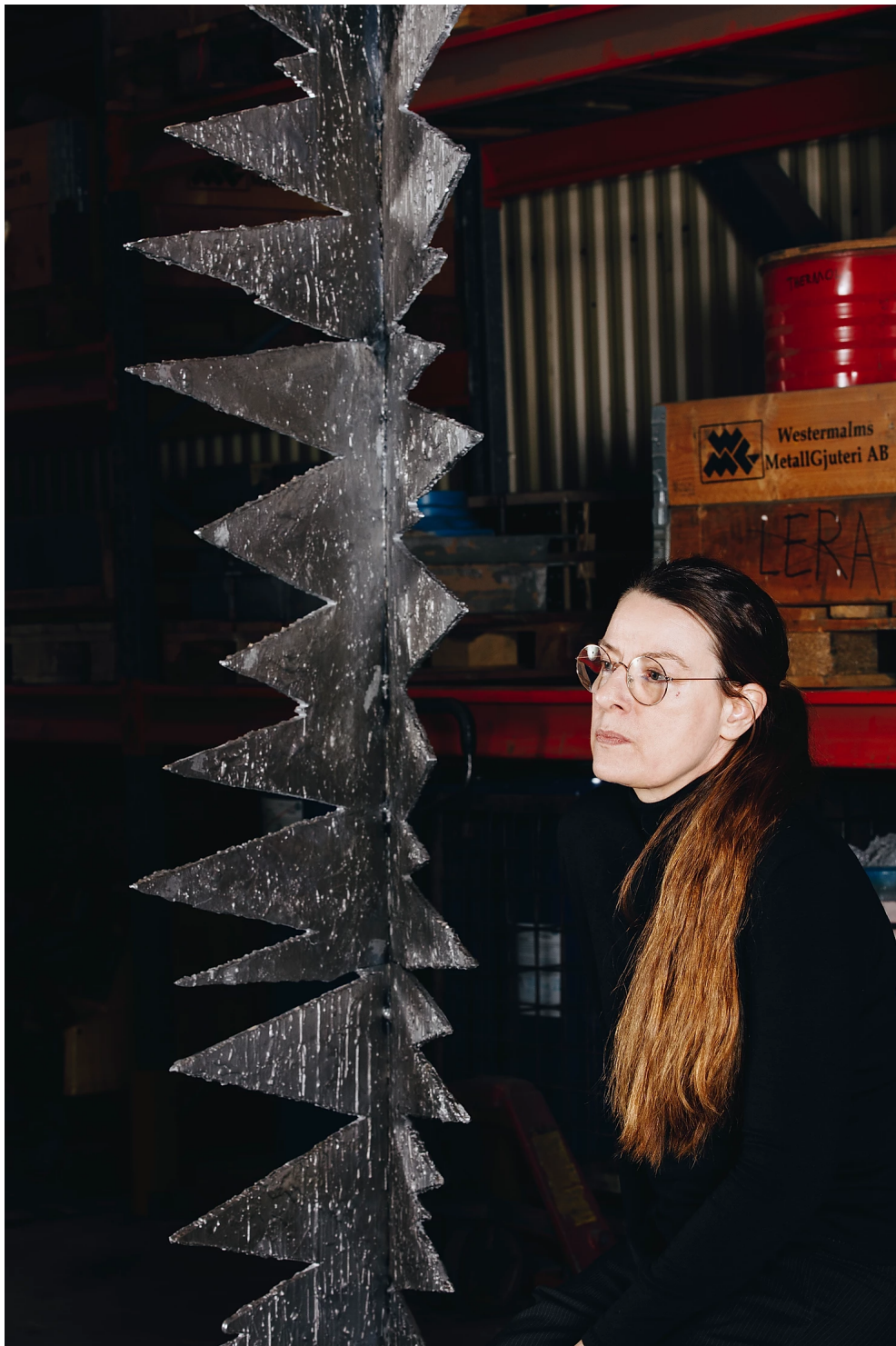
As far as Carl von Linné, I generally thought much about him during my own attempts to systemize and explore the garden lot, hence the title *Systema Naturae* which derives of his major works which was first published in 1735 in which he systemizes and names animals, plants and minerals. That work to me strongly brings to mind a magical book of formulas. Another of Linné's books; *Clavis Medicinae Duplex, The Two Keys of Medicine*, has always been significant for the exhibition. Through that work, Linné inspired thoughts about life consisting av bark, medulla and electricity.



C-P: Looking at the exhibition *Systema Naturae* as a whole, how do you feel it expands and sits in relation to your past trajectory to date?

C.Ö: I've consistently kept to a similar train of thought as in previous exhibitions. The difference now is that everything revolves around this bit of this community garden lot which I'm now in charge of. That's the context which has been transferred into the rectangular delimitation of the gallery room. In the gallery room I've attempted to recreate a garden where the plant pigments are at the forefront, as well as other elements that are needed in a garden. This exhibition is the result of a scientific, alchemist and practical method. Electrical experiments have also begun to take more room in my work, for example working trying out electrically conductive material like aluminum. For the exhibition I've made a couple of sculptures in recycled aluminum.

I also show a video; *Plant-Man Electro* where I, departing from a Tesla globe connect myself to living nettles in an electrical loop. The same video features a sequence where I've had assistance to Kirlian-photograph my philodendron plant.



C-P: The exhibition has been tied-in with a musical performance which begs the question of what sort of correlation exists between music and your work, and as to how music impacts what materializes in your studio?

C.Ö: I have a background in electro-acoustic music. The graphical score which makes part of this musical genre serves as inspiration and is found at the intersection between visual art and music. Plant communication and complex processes in nature on molecular or subatomic level are abstract matters which only become more tangible to me if I transpose them to sound. In a score the sounds can oscillate between science and metaphysics which in turn can crosslink and materialize in the shape of sculpture or moving image. Monica Gagliano is a researcher who have studied how corn plants produce a clicking sound from the root tips reacting to sound within certain frequencies. This acoustic plant communication is something I've devoted myself to, most recently in the group exhibition *Sensing Nature From Within* at Moderna Museet in Malmö. As far as plants and music go, there are a string of pseudoscientific experiments which continue to inspire me. At the opening of *Systema Naturae*, me and a couple of artist colleagues played on Schrutibox, autoharp and horse bells, in the honour of the wormwood.



C-P: What's next in line for you this first year of the new decade?

C.Ö: It's currently very difficult to plan anything at all, considering the consequences the Corona virus will bring and leave behind in the aftermath. It will be interesting to see if anything interesting will come out of all of this. For now, I intend to just keep working in my studio for a while. I will be working on a music album which will be released on iDEAL recordings next year. I also aim to work in Brussels a few months this fall, leading up to an exhibition at my gallery in Belgium; Galleria Marie-Laure Fleisch. I like Brussels.

Systema Naturae is open by appointment at CF HILL in Stockholm until April 11.

Christine Ödlund is represented by Galleri Riis in Oslo and Galleria Marie-Laure Fleisch in Brussels.
Images courtesy of: Part Projects, Stockholm