

Art Lab Gnesta

The Political Beekeeper's Library - Erik Sjödin

September 19th - October 25th 2015

In the exhibition The Political Beekeeper's Library artist and researcher Erik Sjödin presents his ongoing effort to collect, organize, and activate books where parallels are drawn between bees and humans.

During the summer the artist has facilitated a study circle around text about relationships between humans and bees. Next to the beehives at the cultivation cooperative Under tallarna in Järna the participants have met to discuss, among other things, alternative beekeeping, how bees are used for military purposes and how descriptions of bees are influenced by cultural conceptions.

Bees are said to be the most written about animal after the human. The books in The Political Beekeeper's Library illustrates how we historically have protected our cultural ideal onto the bee society: from having used the bee society as a proof for the usefulness of a strong leader, to today's more democratic ideas about collective decision making.

The visitors are invited to sit down and immerse themselves in the selected books and text, where the thoughts are allowed to fly high in the light and spacious old brewery space. During the exhibition period the library is further activated with study circle meetings and presentations at Art Lab Gnesta.

The exhibition is part of Utlöparna, a collaboration between Konstfrämjandet, Under tallarna and Art Lab Gnesta. The project is based on how self-organising initiatives use art to activate a discussion about how local communities should work, but also how they push art forward. Both locations relate to nature in questions about the small and the local, in contrast to the global and industrial. Forest edges, cliffs and swamps are both stages and metaphors in the different work that are carried out.

In the exhibition's small room documentation that has been gathered at Under tallarna in connection to the study circle is presented. Through photographs projected with a slide projector and atmospheric sounds recorded nearby an operation with idealistic ambitions based on the everyday work with the grounds. The slide projectors snapping and the photographs' warm tones are reminiscent of the seventies that nurtured similar dreams.

Our times fondness of self-sufficiency and the practical knowledge it requires is sometimes accused of being nostalgic. But instead of seeing nostalgia as a thread, perhaps we should approach it as a natural response to a crisis, something we have to go through to build a new and more inclusive society.

How we choose to organize the labor towards a better world is possible to mirror in how we historically have interpreted the bee society. In this way The Political Beekeepers Library also as questions about what is nature and what is culture, in a time when humans globally have changed nature to such degree that it no longer is possible to speak about it as something separate.

Caroline Malmström, Art Lab Gnesta

Exhibition group at Art Lab Gnesta: Signe Johannessen, Caroline Malmström, Peter Olsén och Erik Rören.

Thanks to the participants in the study circle Humans and Bees, Cornell University and The Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry's Library.