

English

3 September–17 October 2021

Comforting the machine

3:e Våningen

Curators

Tawanda Appiah and Simona Dumitriu

Artists

Charlotta Hammar, Dominika Kemilä, Kasra
Seyed Alikhani, Klara Andersson,
MC Coble, Mercè Torres Ràfols,
Nina Mangalanayagam, Nontokozo Tshabalala,
Shogo Hirata, Trinidad Carrillo

Introduction

Mia Christersdotter Norman,
Director of Röda Sten Konsthall, and Ioana Leca, Artistic Director
of the Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art

Welcome to the exhibition
Comforting the machine and GIBCA
Extended

Comforting the machine is an exhibition of ten artists who are all part of Västra Götaland's rich and interesting art scene. The show is the result of an open call for entries from artists throughout the region. Of the 165 submissions received, ten were selected. The exhibition is curated by two Malmö-based curators, Tawanda Appiah and Simona Dumitriu, who were also responsible for selecting the artists for the show. *Comforting the machine* is one of the offerings in the GIBCA Extended network of events.

When the Gothenburg Cultural Committee started the Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (GIBCA) in 2000, one of the reasons was to expand the contact between the local and international art scene. Röda Sten Konsthall has been arranging GIBCA since 2006, and launched GIBCA Extended in 2013 to take advantage of how much

interest and enthusiasm the Biennial has attracted.

GIBCA Extended is an open network for the entire regional contemporary art scene with the goal of offering a context that fosters inspiration and collegial meetings. Participation in the network also gives museums, galleries, and artists opportunities every other year to play off or react to the theme and context of the Biennial. Participants get an opportunity to follow along in the work of planning the next edition of the Biennial from an early stage, and the network provides possibilities for encounters between the regional contemporary art scene and the Biennial curators that can enrich both parts.

The aspiration of GIBCA Extended is to bring attention and visibility to Västra Götaland's contemporary art scene and the people who drive it. Our aim is to encourage meetings between the region's contemporary artists and the Biennial's national and international audiences.

The Biennial and Extended are disseminated through shared media channels. The ambition is that visitors will get a chance to encounter lots of exciting contemporary art while visiting Västra Götaland. Together GIBCA and GIBCA Extended make up what is probably Sweden's largest contemporary art event.

We want to hereby welcome you to a fall season full of contemporary art and, together with 3:e Våningen, present an exciting exhibition of artists who work in Västra Götaland.

Curators Tawanda Appiah and Simona Dumitriu

Comforting the machine, is GIBCA Extended's 2021 Regional Exhibition. It started with an open call based on the following questions:

“What are some of the deepest histories seeded in personal or public archives and records, in Västra Götaland's ports, towns, villages and coastal areas? What are some of the borders that restrict today's context? What are the disruptions going on? How do artists in the region take the power to make the discomfort or the pain visible, to project this discomfort into art and engagement, to interrogate the web of politeness? From isolation, exclusion, disconnection,

dissociation, partitioning, what do you see as places of arrival?”

These strong questions are neither empty nor rhetorical but work to provoke, reverberate, and call to action until they become part of the rhythm of collective consciousness. In a multiplicity of ways, they frame the exhibition and the work of the ten artists selected from a highly generous local response.

While researching and preparing for *Comforting the machine*, a few perspectives from the field of Subaltern Studies fuelled the process, most specifically the idea of writing and reading history from below – a history of those who have been forgotten, wrongly interpreted, and more often than not instrumentalized. Such history is always written as provocation and has the attribute of persistence. To quote Sarah Ahmed, “mere persistence can be an act of disobedience. Perhaps there is nothing ‘mere’ about persistence.”

The exhibition, as reflected in its title, makes a comment on the machine that is present day. Like in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, the decline of the body through interaction with the machine is inevitable. The artists show markings, sutures, reactions, and manifestations of these interactions. Surrounding them, Gothenburg presents itself as a contraption made of roads, bypasses, infinite

passages, noisy cranes, segregation, forming the maze of contemporary society. Its roads and blockages go nowhere – there is, in a sense, nowhere to arrive. Its paths, like arms, cross through incessant scaffolding into the barren unknown of colonial history. What then? Does it demand comfort, or do you feel comforted by it as it stands and looks at you, washing away the secrets of its trading history, anachronistic yet completely powerful and veiled in indifference? To note, whilst walking through the exhibition remember that the machine should not be befriended as it might bite.

As you step out of *Comforting the machine*, take these powerful images with you, let them persist and echo in the deepest beats of your heart:

the tides of history dripping slowly over bodies that are transformed with every breath;

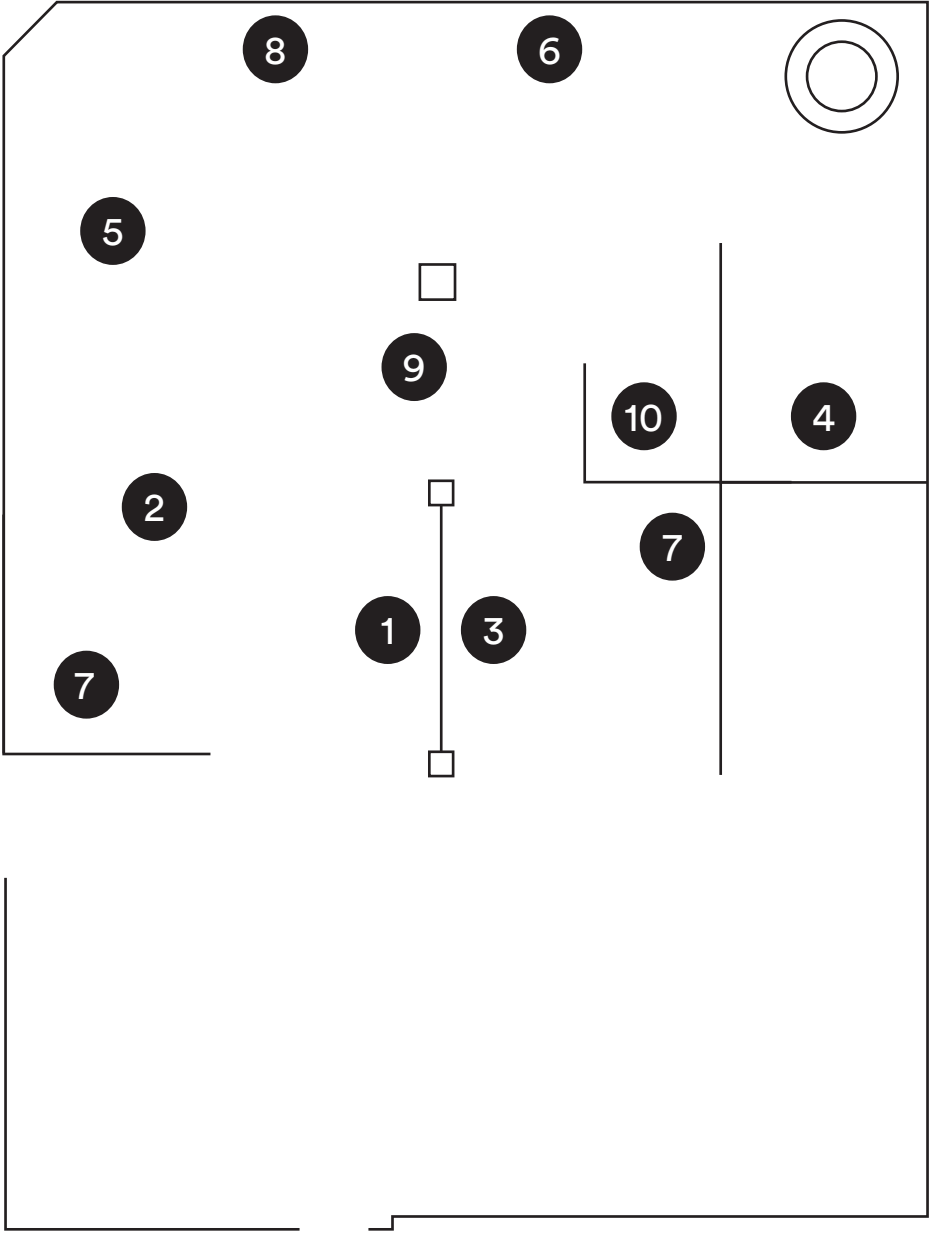
rain pouring over a lonely gaze in a deserted street, looking over its own body in a window;
the power and prejudice of time that lie in the weaving of each thread, narrating a history of in-betweenness;
the stench of what is never unearthed from collective memory glowing over the long forgotten trenches of wars kept at a distance, and in what is kept closed – in what the powerful see as their secrets and shame;

stones and cracks hidden in language, manifesting the unspoken to the extent that it becomes febrile research; a worried voice; a laugh and a cry to the buildings being added to the contraption, to the endless yoga mats padding it, to the force of “progress”; a stare, looking deep into the folds of hate and prejudice – alive and well, not consumed by their imperial clichés;

and finally, a body, fighting to un-carve its presence from the stone machine that is both entrapping and offering it to the public gaze.

3:e Våningen

1. Charlotta Hammar
2. Dominika Kemilä
3. Kasra Seyed Alikhani
4. Klara Andersson
5. MC Coble
6. Mercè Torres Ràfols
7. Nina Mangalanayagam
8. Nontokozo Tshabalala
9. Shogo Hirata
10. Trinidad Carrillo



Charlotta Hammar

Depicting the Untold / Stories from Käsö Island 2019

Text and photography installation, framed

archival jet prints

Variable dimensions

Käsö Island is marked by its history as a quarantine place for trade vessels to prevent them from spreading disease from Europe and Asia to Gothenburg and the rest of Sweden. Charlotta Hammar's series of images presents this hidden narrative while taking on new meaning in light of how the word quarantine resonates today, in combination with thoughts around access to safety. At present, Käsö is militarised and inaccessible, and the artistic process that preceded the photographs tested the limits of this inaccessibility. Hammar's practice is permeated with the ideas of threat, fear, preparedness, and anxiety. In *Depicting the Untold / Stories from Käsö Island* the blurred, ghost-like images bring forth these same ideas of threat and preparedness, which are part of the history of trade and militarisation in the region.

"How do you discover and tell a story from the past through the place where it all happened? This work is based on the finding of an archival image from Käsö Island, outside Gothenburg, a small island that functioned as a quarantine station during the 19th Century with the buildings still intact and preserved today. It can only be accessed by the military. Coincidences and a search for the hidden stories brought me to the island to create this work."

(Charlotta Hammar)

Dominika Kemilä

Inverto 1935–2020, II

2020

Sculpture 148 × 179 × 70 cm

Jackets, shirts, children's overalls, mud, glue, wood

Kemilä writes in an online conversation preparing for the exhibition, “the process behind *Inverto 1935–2020* is long.” The sculpture is part of a series that explores traces of trauma and absent history from various landscapes. Nation-states, most often than not, aim for denial and concealment when it comes to digging into their own past. They hide the remains of those murdered in their prisoner-of-war camps, in this instance, or make them disappear from the landscape and public memory. Coming from a personal, family history angle, the artist retraces these omissions and, in a sense, makes a mould of them that then becomes a memorial object.

*“At a former military training field in Gothenburg, I use violence and kick clothes in mud in order to get in touch with my family history. The sculpture *Inverto 1935–2020, II* is a box covered with these muddy jackets, shirts and outerwear. It spans from the mass executions in the former Soviet Union and the prisoner-of-war camps of the Second World War to present-day Gothenburg.”*

(Dominika Kemilä)

Kasra Seyed Alikhani

Ni måste Namasté

2020

Video, paintings, plastic chairs

Video, 14 min 30 sec

Variable dimensions

Ni måste Namasté presents a fictional neighbourhood in the process of noisy and disruptive construction. Influenced by noir aesthetics, the film follows a few characters living through this capitalist urban development project. Such ventures can be seen today, with their desirable designs in the pages of many magazines, as cities pride themselves in growing and adding the latest in sustainable architecture. The word sustainable is a cover for gentrification and the building of borders. It is an aspirational cliché that could be dubbed as the “Swedish dream” – a fit, healthy body in a newly constructed, sleek, clean, and “safe” neighbourhood, all mechanisms of class differentiation. Alikhani uses an anti-morose approach in his work and believes in the power of humour to engage the audience on multiple complex layers.

“Along with a yoga class, we follow several characters struggling to reach serenity in the midst of the thundering construction of some future vision. Sudden Hills is the stage on which fantasies of luxury and wellness are re-enacted in an omnipresent advertisement drawing from multiple city development projects in Sweden, and specifically Gothenburg.”

(Kasra Seyed Alikhani)

Klara Andersson

Vårgårda 2018

2019

Video and sound installation, 11 min 50 sec

Variable dimensions

Initially a sound artwork, *Vårgårda 2018* was put together from snippets of conversations, online chats, and other digital fragments from the daily interactions of young people living in the town of that name. Andersson describes Vårgårda as a place of desperation, creativity, and resilience, a rural place that is seldom if ever represented in Swedish artistic and cultural conversations. Mixing daily random observations with tense, triggering accounts of aggression and pain, the video and sound installation presented in *Comforting the machine* offers the viewer a glimpse into what existing and persevering can mean for local teenagers today.

“In young people’s conversation tradition, there is a straightforward and playful darkness that cuts through the banalities of everyday life, and the pedestrian tunnel becomes a meaning-laden public place where their stories can be heard in raw form. Life comes to a head and yet remains unreal as they are forced to grapple with life’s greatest existential questions despite having the least possible experience.”

(Klara Andersson)

MC Coble

We Are Waiting

2020 - ongoing

Digital prints after ink on paper drawings

Variable dimensions

MC Coble has amassed twenty years of experience as a performer and teacher. For *Comforting the machine* they chose to present drawings, a newer medium of expression for them. They return again and again to these drawings, which contain many layers of thought to accompany the lonely time of the pandemic as well as the intensely introverted time of transitioning at a later stage in life. Setting the scene is the Swedish medical system and the chemical language of daily life. Coble fragments and layers the process of thinking, writing, and relating to their surrounding world in these drawings. This new uncharted practice that the artist uses to outline the many nuances of transition is a fragile, open and generous mirror and journal.

“This work originated as sketches, documenting and reflecting on the process of coming out as a non-binary trans person at the age of 40. The constantly growing archive testifies to a time-consuming and emotional labour, which in turn reflects various temporalities – of queer time, of anti-capitalist progress, and of being put on hold.”*

(MC Coble)

Mercè Torres Ràfols

Jag är ny på denna ö (återigen)

2021

Tracing paper, beech wood, inkjet print,
Xerox print, 1947 photograph, clay mixed
with algae
Variable dimensions

Mercè Torres Ràfols's practice is deeply process-based. In *Jag är ny på denna ö (återigen)*, the artist makes efforts to communicate with people through learning their language and inventing new signifiers to connect herself, her identity and memories to the history of the island: through rocks, old language manuals made especially for the fishermen, through the skills and tools of fishing, through what lays in the depths of the sea. Learning a language, for Mercè, translates as physical effort, as abstraction, as looking back to a scenery from a broken photograph. It also translates into how belonging is both desperately needed and impossible, yet new languages can be charted from old ways.

*“In the installation *Jag är ny på denna ö (återigen)* I go through a guide used to teach English to fishermen in the 1930s. Some notes made by a fisherman named Lars are mixed with those I made while searching to be understood or to be able to understand. Sculptures of clay and algae invoke the undersea and those things that are lost.”*

(Mercè Torres Ràfols)

Nina Mangalanayagam

The Tangled Web of Belonging

2016

C-type prints and digital silver gelatin prints

Variable dimensions

Nina Mangalanayagam presents photographs from her series *The Tangled Web of Belonging*. Her practice is semi-autobiographical and research-based. Her work is about seeing and revealing. Her photographs depict multiple metaphors, locations, and elements of personal meaning: self-portraits and portraits of her mother, objects that refer directly to colonial history, and nature seen as a place for mapping out possibilities or as a symbol for both constraints and breaking away from them. As both an experienced artist and teacher worth a substantial practice, Mangalanayagam constructs each image as simultaneously emotional, pedagogical, discursive, and referential. Thus, each image needs space around it, almost as if to reflect the vastness of history and meanings from which it comes.

“What does it mean that my mother and I create a contradiction when sharing the same frame? For one thing, I am a reminder that nobody is unquestionably white. The images are from a body of work combining still lifes, portraits, and nature scenes into a metaphorical mix that illuminates the entanglement of narratives, myths, control, and hybridity.”

(Nina Mangalanayagam)

Nontokozo Tshabalala

Here I Stand

2021

Digital collage, 300 × 250 cm, and audio installation, 1 min 51 sek

Here I Stand is a life-sized print that directly confronts colonial history and how it hovers over us. The contemporary silhouette of the artist is staged to mirror the colonial relief still visible on the streets of central Gothenburg. Her use of collage merges geographies, namely Sweden and South Africa, and puts them into relationality. Her work focuses on the questions “Am I the only one seeing these images and wondering how they are still here? Why is this violence still echoing in my memory?” This interrogation rises in defiance of the process of national colonial pride upon which states are still being built. The artist’s practice is often combined with actions of engagement in the daily realities of a segregated city.

“Everyday visuals, often left unnoticed, even the most harmful of them all. A red thread linking the past, present and potential future experience of the brown identity (POC) in Gothenburg, highlights the existence of ongoing violent colonial power in everyday life. It’s painful to leave home, cross oceans and be confronted by it.”

(Nontokozo Tshabalala)

Shogo Hirata

Zure

2021

Paper textile weaving (paper, acrylic paint, potato starch)

Dimensions: 185 × 122 cm

Shogo Hirata affirms living between worlds. A skilled textile master who studied both traditional Japanese textile methods and ones local to Sweden, he uses his artistry to weave a vocabulary and a way of translating something from one culture to another. The search for familiarity is a classic exercise when finding belonging in a new context. By weaving paper threads, the process of making textiles is equated to that of writing, of creating signs of communication and leaving written traces of one's own history. Paper is a medium of narrativity and of safeguarding. What the artist finds impossible to express in words finds its way into the weave – a gesture of defiance and of resilience.

“The title Zure comes from the Japanese word for gap. Having been born and raised in Japan and later moving to Gothenburg, I noticed a difference in the perspective from which I view the city, its people, and its culture. I describe it as living in the gap between two cultures. What I see is different from what others see. The years I spent here haven't closed this gap. Sometimes I lose track of where I belong.”

(Shogo Hirata)

Trinidad Carrillo

MILK

2020-2021

Video installation

Title of each film: Rumina, 7 min 39 sec,
Lindu, 6 min 52 sec, and
Nwt, 3 min 16 sec

Trinidad Carrillo's three videos bear the names of goddesses: Rumina (an ancient Roman protector of breast-feeding mothers), Lindu (an Estonian queen deity that is at the origin of the Milky Way), and Nut/Nwt (Egyptian goddess of the sky). Well known for her photographic practice, Carrillo's contribution to *Comforting the machine* is the artist's first major foray into video work – and one that is epidermally personal. The production of breast milk, for many an essential act of the body during the first stages of raising a child, is seen by the artist as witchcraft, as painting, as poetry, as incantation – while she also examines how her motherhood is woven into her work as an artist.

By selecting goddesses who reference both the earth and parenthood,

Carrillo aims to establish her body as part of a telluric history.

“Ideas about what happens with the body during pregnancy started coming to me as soon as I became pregnant for the first time in 2002. The second time, in 2013, those ideas came back to me, but they had had a chance to ripen, to rise and ferment, in a chain of associations and experiences – idea chains that celebrated the body and that pulled me back into an exploration of goddesses and of the way women are viewed.”

(Trinidad Carrillo)

Biography

Charlotta Hammar was born in 1982 and holds a Master of Fine Arts in Photography from HDK-Valand, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. She earned a bachelor's degree from the same school in 2013. Her main discipline is photography, but she also works with film, writing, and installations. Hammar was selected as one of twelve artists for PhotoIreland's 2020 TLP Editions, and her work *Important Public Announcement* was a part of Cracow Art Week in 2021. She lives on a small island outside Gothenburg that often provides the stage for her photographic work.

Dominika Kemilä (b. 1985, Sweden) is a visual artist. In the media of sculpture, painting, and video, she investigates extinction and belonging through site-specific actions. Kemilä has been engaged in self-initiated artistic research on Second World War prisoners in the Nordic countries since 2014. Her own family roots are in several minority populations that existed in the Soviet Union. Kemilä has been selected as a guest artist in Trondheim, Vadsoe, and Lofoten in Norway. Her work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions in Sweden and Norway.

Kasra Seyed Alikhani is an artist and filmmaker who experiments with an expanded idea of set design and amateur filmmaking in the spirit of Maya Deren. Alikhani stages fictional worlds through painting, film, music, and installation in which sources ranging from personal experience, theory, and mass-culture merge and form the narrative. These become stages on which to re-perform the dissimulation of reality, and how ideas of sameness and Swedishness can haunt the everyday. Most recently he has explored how these ideas can relate to fantasies of illness and wellness.

Sound artist *Klara Andersson* examines previously unexplored digital materials and human stories as archeological artifacts of her generation – online chatting, web camera videos, and forgotten websites that convey stories of contemporary life. In Andersson's work, this volatile cultural refuse is given space in the contemporary writing of history, its unsorted meaninglessness providing a vessel for our most fundamental human questions.

MC Coble is a non-binary trans* artist who aims to manifest problems of bodily, societal, and symbolic navigation, focusing on issues of social injustice and normative boundaries. Often working with live art, photography, installation, and now drawing, their practice revolves around trans*/ queer/ feminist politics, play, and failure. Integral strategies involve intersectional activism, site-specificity, research-based and collective processes. For more information, please visit: www.mccoble.com

Mercè Torres Ràfols was born in Catalonia in 1995. She works and lives in Gothenburg. Ràfols works mainly with photography as it intersects with other materials such as text, ceramics, and found objects. She is interested in questions of inheritance, place, and tradition—how knowledge is passed on and how we come to understand something anew. Ràfols situates these questions in a specific territory, investigating how a place has been charged through time by the community.

Nina Mangalanayagam is an artist and a Senior Lecturer in Photography at the HDK-Valand Academy in Gothenburg, Sweden. Her research and visual practice explore themes of belonging, multiple heritages, and hybridity, often using a semi-autobiographical approach. She holds a PhD by practice from Westminster University and an MA in Photography from the Royal College of Art, UK. Mangalanayagam has been widely exhibited internationally, including the UK, Sri Lanka, Slovenia, Croatia, Slovakia, and Germany. She was commissioned alongside nine other artists to create new works that respond to the three Sri Lankan alphabets for the book *A-Z of Conflict*.

Nontokozi Tshabalala is a multidisciplinary artist, poet, Afrofuturist, and designer. Born and raised in South Africa, she uses her work as an avenue for posing deeper questions about her identity and the black experience wherever she goes. Inspired by her nephew, Siyamthanda a.k.a Ncufi, she writes and creates from a place of curiosity, naivety, and instinct and uses colour to express the happiness she wishes to share with the world.

Shogo Hirata is a textile artist and graphic designer. Born in 1986 and raised in Kyoto, Japan, he has been living and working in Gothenburg since 2014. In his artistic practice, the inspiration often comes from textile crafts and other analog (hand) techniques. During the process of learning these, he finds ways to use them in different contexts, with different materials, and in combination with other techniques and methods. In other words, he sees the process by which he expresses himself as just as important as the result.

Trinidad Carrillo is a Swedish-Peruvian artist educated at the School of Photography in Gothenburg, Sweden. In her visual world, magic is natural. Her photographs often depict the gap between dream and wakefulness, between the outer and the inner. Carrillo works with an indefinable eeriness that is at times difficult to dwell in. She has exhibited across Sweden, where she has also been commissioned to make permanent installations by the Public Art Agency Sweden, among others. She has also exhibited her work across Europe, the Americas, and Korea.

Programme & visit information

Göteborgs Internationella Konstbiennial

On the biennial's website ww.gibca.se you will find everything you need to know about the biennial, such as exhibition spaces, artists, programs and much more.

Opening hours 3:e Våningen

Wednesday – Sunday: 12 – 4 pm

Thanks to

Ellie Engelhem, Amila Puzić, exhibition coordinators, Röda Sten Konsthall

Andreas Engman, exhibition producer and exhibition's head technician, Röda Sten Konsthall

Elin Liljeblad, Josefin Jansson, communicators, Röda Sten Konsthall

Sofia Alfredsson, designer, Röda Sten Konsthall

Olof Persson, director, 3:e Våningen

Jenny Johansson, communicator, 3:e Våningen

Carl-Henrik Andersson, technician, Röda Sten Konsthall

Finn Pettersson, technician, 3:e Våningen

Fanny Dahlpil, Janna Ljunggren Stenbergh, Sally Söderberg, 3:e Våningen hosts

Kaj Granath, translator from English to Swedish

John Krause, translator from English to Swedish, English proofreader

The advisory jury of the open call, consisted of: Olof Persson (3:e Våningen), Mette Muhli (Skövde Konstmuseum), Sara Östebro (Boy Konsthall), Cia Runesson (Tiny Festival Producers)

And finally: Mia Christersdotter Norman, director, Röda Sten Konsthall, and Ioana Leca, artistic director, GIBCA, for their advice and care.

GIBCA

Göteborg International Biennial
for Contemporary Art

3VÄNINGEN

With support from:

