

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Foundation d'art Contemporain Daniel & Florence Guerlain
Mamma Andersson: Interview with Marie Maertens
Marie Maertens
January 2018

Mamma Andersson

Mamma Andersson was born in 1962 in Luleå, Sweden. She studied at the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, where she lives.

Her first exhibition was held in 1985 at the Norrbottens Museum, Luleå, and in 2017 she has had shows in galleries such as Magnus Karlsson (Stockholm), Victoria Miro (London) and Stephen Friedman (London). She is also represented by David Zwirner (New York) and features in several museum collections: the Centre Pompidou (Paris), the Broad Foundation (Santa Monica), the Dallas Museum of Art (Dallas), the Museum of Modern Art (Stockholm), the Museum of Contemporary Art and UCLA Hammer Museum (Los Angeles) and the MoMA (New York).



Photo: ©Patrick Miller

Interview with Marie Maertens

You start your pieces by taking pictures, mostly from books, and admit to be surrounded by art history. Could you go back to this practice of collecting images?

My interest in photographs has been around since I was a child. Some of these are still in my picture archive. At the beginning, it was probably because I found photographs beautiful, exciting or perhaps scary. Today, it is more about bringing new blood into my imagery – new inspiration. Other artists' paintings/drawings are another thing, they can inspire me in the actual work process, but I never borrow a motive.

How do you choose the image you like and after, how do you work with them?

Fully intuitively – it looks different from time to time.

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Does this process function in two different parts, like go and forward between the image and your drawing or painting?

Yes, a photograph, that may have served as the basis of an image, may stick around well into the process. However, I'm not looking to depict the photo so after a while the painting tends to go its own way.

How an image or a subject can motivate you?

I can search for interesting subjects for weeks, sometimes I find them in very unexpected books or magazines.

You have been also much influenced by theatre and film. How do the subjects enter in your drawings?

For a long time, I saw my paintings as still images from their own made-up film. As young, I dreamt of becoming a filmmaker, but I stayed in painting. About ten years ago, I began to search the Royal Theatre archives for scenography of all their theater sets. I borrowed some of the photographs and had them copied. Some of these I still use.

Is your work narrative? Do you have the impression or, do you want, to tell a story?

I think you often perceive them as narratives. Because I work figuratively this is inevitable. But I never have a story in mind that I want to convey. It's a lot more about the atmosphere, or a feeling.

In a previous interview, you made the parallel between your work and sport. How is each work a challenge?

Well, I don't know, you sometimes say so much unconsidered. But, sure, I used to be a hurdler when I was young – some things are not as far apart as you can imagine. In a purely mental sense, it is a matter of releasing control and entering a kind of special focus. But what I think I was talking about a few years ago was a series of images of a Czech female high jumper who, for each image, had taken a garment off, to end up wearing only a pair of small short pants and a minimal top. Totally focused, completely unaware of the huge Olympic audience who was expecting a world record. Now, painting is not results oriented like that, but it is often about stripping down to become credible and not squint at the audience's expectation.

You've started to draw when you were very young, and explain that you've embraced the reading later. Does it mean that the image is, for you, the strongest way of communication?

Yes, I painted and sketched thought my childhood and youth. It can certainly be because that was actually my strongest way of communicating. Reading was laborious, slow and sometimes incomprehensible. As left-handed, the hand always tended to erase the text of the pencil, so that all my note books looked terrible. If I

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have dyslexia, it cannot be very severe. Because today I write emails and answer questions in writing. I always read books. My only hobby outside my work is my book club.

You love the painting. Who are your favorite artists?

Yes, I love good painting, but bad can be very hard.

The painters I'm interested in slightly varies at the moment. Some only come for a short period of time, others stay with me year out and year in. Rightnow I'm watching Kasimir Malevitj a lot and Lukas Cranach is always with me. I could make a list of 50 amazing painters, but why should I?

In the contemporary art, you've mentioned Kara Walker, Eva Hesse or Louise Bourgeois, but your work makes me think also about Peter Doig. Is it a link that you could admit?

Eva Hesse is sometimes incredibly good. Peter Doig and I are almost of the same generation, he is born in 1959 and me in 1962, which means that we were growing up under similar influences. Perhaps listened to the same music, watched similar movies, read Tintin and went to art school at the same time. We have both been interested in the same artists during certain periods. I have not been inspired by him and I don't think he has been inspired by me but I have to admit that I found it interesting that there was another artist far away from me who sometimes "fetched water from the same well" as me.

What is the part of the colors in your work? You use a lot of "muted" colors... Do they have a specific meaning for you?

Colors are the best, there are no ugly colors, but there are color combinations that sometimes fail in some contexts. The times we live in today are often very insensitive, close to tone-deaf.

You represent a lot of characters, from behind, or wearing some masks. What does it mean? Gaston Bachelard has written that a mask allows people to be freer, behind it, with their expressions. Is it an assumption you could agree with?

To meet someone's eyes in a painting is not so far from getting eye contact with a living person. It can be stressful. Perhaps showing your back or putting on a mask is a way to get past it. But I have not done any masks, dolls on the other hand.