

“A Different Type of Anthropology”

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Photo by Johnny Misheff

**Hanna Liden, born in Sweden, 1976, has been living in New York since 2001 and was picked up by Rivington Arms shortly after graduating from Parsons School of Design in 2002. In addition to numerous group and solo exhibitions she was also a participant in the 2006 Whitney Biennial. Hanna’s narrative, post-apocalyptic images of barren landscapes are populated by masked figures whose body language is more like that of an animal than a human being. The figures of young female bodies are often naked and the masks, in black and white, are of a face, skeletal and deteriorating, which creates a jarring contrast between the two. The males tend to be wearing casual clothing, black t-shirts and jeans, and are often characterized by their depiction with fire, Esther carrying torches or photographed with a trail blazing in the foreground. Regardless of gender, all of these figures remain uninhibited in the face of the camera, staring blankly back at the viewer.**

The non-figurative images are more like an anthropological study. They include similar pastoral scenes documenting remnants of this “civilization”. Makeshift constructions of a cross, for instance, or a pagan star laid out with twigs in the snow. Liden has also developed another component of her study to further develop the group’s identity. She places sculptural forms like masks similar to the props she uses in her landscape images, on a painted ground and

photographs these as another sort of portrait. Defining the group, in this instance, by their possessions. Hanna's imagined civilization creates a haunting illustration of human beings relationship to the earth. Although her images are extreme, they are not heavy handed. In fact, it is the minimalist spirit and subtlety with which she adjusts reality in these pictures that makes them so believable. The non-intrusive approach she takes to placing her figures in found spaces and erection of ephemeral sculptures, reflect her distaste for consumer society, and concern for the impact it is having on our environment and population.





**When did you move to the United States from Sweden? Did that move change your ideas about how to make photographs?**

I moved to New York in 1998. Before that I lived in London for about a year and did absolutely nothing useful whatsoever. Before that I lived in Sweden, I did a TV show and worked as an assistant to a celebrity portrait photographer. In London I just watched movies and ate ecstasy and popcorn. I watched every 90's indie film ever made I think. I got bored and decided I needed to go to school so I moved to New York. I was culture shocked by the American optimism. Coming to New York made me realize that I could become an artist instead of some kind of commercial photographer, however, here I realize that I could become some kind of commercial photographer being an artist. This city is so great that I love, love, love it. Would have killed myself if I've not come here. I like the impossible struggle, the people and the motion.

**When you say that coming to NY made you realize you could be an artist and then some kind of commercial photographer as well, do you mean that the photographs that you show in galleries are commercial photography for you?**

No, I don't consider my work that I show in galleries and museums being commercial, even if the art world is definitely commercial. I was referring to the assignments.

**When did you begin to see yourself making a career out of taking images? Did you try any other forms of art making as well?**

I started taking photos when I was about ten years old I think. My grandmother gave me a camera for my birthday. Before that I wanted to be a bank robber. I changed my mind around eleven years old and decided that I wanted to be a photographer. I wanted to travel and being a bank robber in Sweden would have been easy but

not so easy in other places. If you make a perfect plan and then it goes wrong because your bank robber partner fucks it up, you go to jail for eternity. Being a photographer is more practical.

**What do you do in your free time when you are not taking pictures?**

I think of what pictures I should take. I hang out with my friends, I eat lunch, I have drinks, I watch reality TV and I sit on planes between New York and Europe. I just live, I sleep, I take baths, I make a phone calls, I take a cab, I have a crush, I have a fight, sometimes I cry, I do emails, I read the newspaper, I pay the bills, I get dressed, I go dancing, I get loaded, I get sober. I do regular stuff. Days have too many hours and sometimes it gets repetitive. Then, someday you die.

**I know many artists try to see as much art as they can and attend as many exhibitions as possible. In New York this can get to be a lot. How do you handle it? What other sources do you find as inspiration for your photographs?**

I go to my friend's shows. I go to the museums. I try not to stress out about it though. You need to have balance between your input and your output. Sometimes I have neither of those and I feel really lame just wasting my time waiting for a miracle to happen. Some seasons I go to every show and some seasons I see nothing. I watch lots of films.

**Are there group shows you have participated in that have changed your perspective about whom your peers are as an artist? Who do you consider to be your peers?** Agathe Snow, Dash Snow, Nate Lowman, Mika Rottenberg. There's probably more. Oh! My sister Klara Liden, she is my favorite entity in the entire world. She lives in Berlin. I miss her every moment of my life.

**Where do you shoot your photographs? How do you find these places?**

Lots of them are made in Sweden in places we used to drive by when I was a kid, Long Island, upstate New York, Queens, the Bronx, etc. I am always looking for places that remind me of the idea of a Nordic landscape and then I try to fake it.

**When you say that you look for places that remind you of the Nordic landscape and that you "fake it" when you find them. Do you prefer working this way? By faking it? Or would you rather be shooting the Nordic landscape? Do you consider shooting in completely fabricated sets or is the organic preexisting environment, kind of the lack of control that you get from that part of the equation for you?**

Recently I've been building small sets in my studio, like tabletops not landscapes. It doesn't matter if the landscape is in Sweden or in New York, it is about an imaginary place, a mood.