

"It Takes Two: A Studio Visit with Hanna Liden" By Alexandre
Stipanovich
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It Takes Two: A Studio Visit with Hanna Liden

by ALEXANDRE STIPANOVICH

Recently, PAULINE and I had the great pleasure of dropping into artist Hanna Liden's Union Square studio. Actually, it wasn't her real studio, but a temporary one lent to her while her place in Chinatown was being repainted. There, we discovered an austere room without any artifices. And we met Hanna, a really sweet person, whose blue eyes look right into your soul.

Alexandre Stipanovich: Didn't you start photography when you were 10 or 12?

Hanna Liden: I don't remember how old I was, but I was pretty young when I started taking pictures. I remember taking photos of flowers, friends... They were mostly focused on one subject. I think it just fascinated me – it's fun.

AS: Coming from Sweden and London, how did you manage to build your nest in New York when you arrived 13 years ago?

HL: When I came here, I was pretty young. I went to college here, so I don't think it was anymore difficult than coming from like, New Jersey or whatever. If you want to do it, you do it.

AS: When was it that you decided to stay?

HL: There wasn't a particular incident. I remember deciding that I really wanted to stay here right after 9-11, because my family and friends assumed I would go back to Europe. I felt really strongly about staying.

AS: What brought you to New York?

HL: I came to go to college at Parsons, which used to be really good for photography. At the time, I assumed it was what I was supposed to do – to go into the photography department. If I were to go to college now, I would probably just go to school for art. Parsons wasn't what I expected, but it gave me time.

AS: Your first series is all about the forests of Sweden. Did you start working on it before or after moving to New York?

HL: After. I don't think I ever would have done that if I hadn't moved to NY. I wouldn't have found it interesting.

AS: So, the distance made you interested in the forest?

HL: Yeah, or just the idea of where I was from. Or something like that.

AS: This series reminds me a bit of Peter Beste's black metal photographs – but these are more on the feminine side.

HL: It's a bit like that, but it's more connected to Nordic painting, like David Caspar Friedrich and people like that. People who make romantic landscape paintings that are very dark at times. I think that served more as inspiration than this sort of popular culture. Although it does have a lot of popular culture references.

AS: Is there something special about the woods or Nordic culture?

HL: Yeah, the woods, but also the mountains. I think so.

AS: Are they enchanted perhaps?

HL: Yeah a little bit, maybe. But I haven't done that kind of photography for some years now.

AS: You also did a series of city landscapes with candles. How did you come up with such a poetic vision of the city?

HL: I made a lot of props for my landscape photographs in the studio. I eventually started making sets with the props and only shooting the props – like still lifes. Then, I started the candle series. It has a similar mood to the landscapes, even though the photos are still lifes. They're in the studio, but they're actually cityscapes. It's just a different approach.

AS: The sight of the candles as skyscrapers feels as if the city is consuming itself, ultimately fading away.

HL: Yeah, it looks a lot like New York, but it's a generic city. It could be any city.

AS: *[Pointing to the canvases on the floor]* Are you working on a new series of paintings?

HL: They're not really paintings. They're more like collages on canvas. I'm doing this show at the end of the summer – It's going to be mostly sculpture but also these collages. There's something about the surface of a photograph

that you can never really enter – it's a very closed thing. It was starting to bore me a little bit, so that's why I'm doing these sculptural pieces now.

AS: I saw your show with Nate Lowman at Salon 94; it was really great. There were some collaborative pieces, right?

HL: It was more of a dialogue between his paintings and my photographs. There were only two collaborative pieces: the work with the receipts, and a drawing. But other than those, we made all of the other pieces simultaneously. That was really fun show to do. It was really natural because we always have that dialogue anyway. It was something we always wanted to do and the time was right.

AS: Do you believe in the supernatural?

HL: I don't at all. I wish I did. I wish I were religious too, but I'm just not. It's just not the way my mind works. For instance, I wouldn't say I'm 100% sure that ghosts don't exist, but I'm definitely not the kind of person who is like, "There's a ghost in this building!" I'm very rational most of the time. But it's fascinating to me. These ideas and how people believe in them. I'm interested in it, but I don't believe in it. I think it's very logical that people do believe in it. It's very difficult to not believe in anything.

AS: A friend of mine stayed in a supposedly haunted hotel that used to host Titanic survivors. He said he felt a breath at some point – and that somebody touched him!

HL: I've seen a ghost before, but it makes more sense to me that it was a hallucination. I guess it depends on what you call it. If you want to call it a ghost, you call it a ghost.

AS: Any upcoming projects?

HL: I'm in a [GROUP SHOW AT OHWOW](#) that just opened last Thursday. Then in September, I have a show at the Fireplace Project. Those are on the radar right now. And then in the fall, I'm not sure.

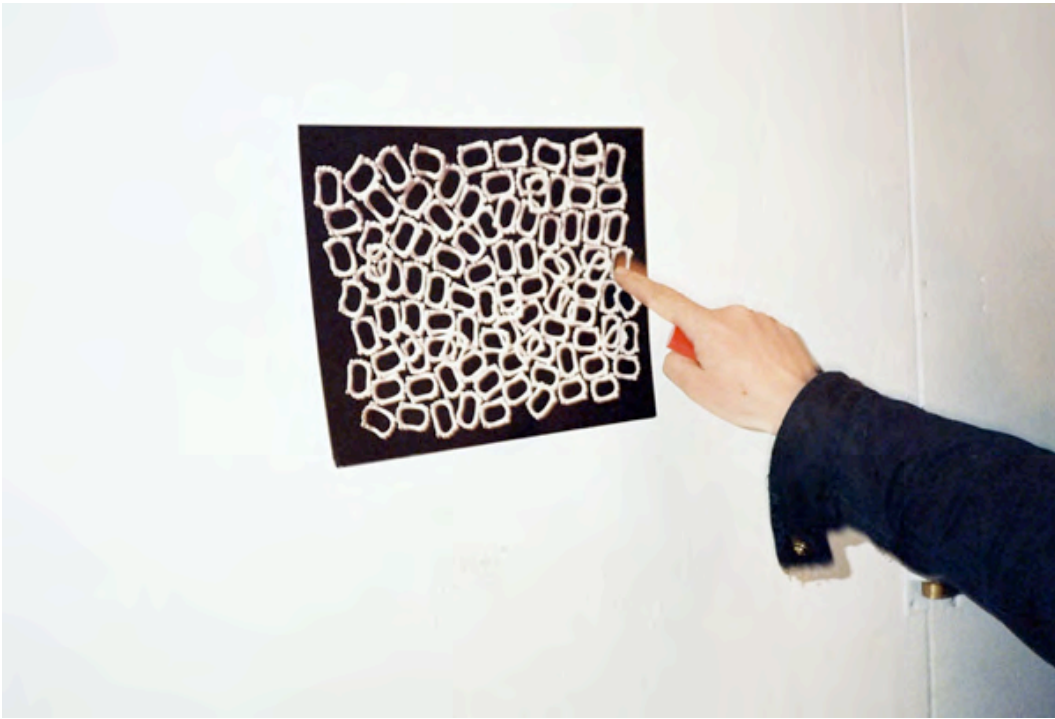




Hanna's new project in progress. She's making object collages on canvas.



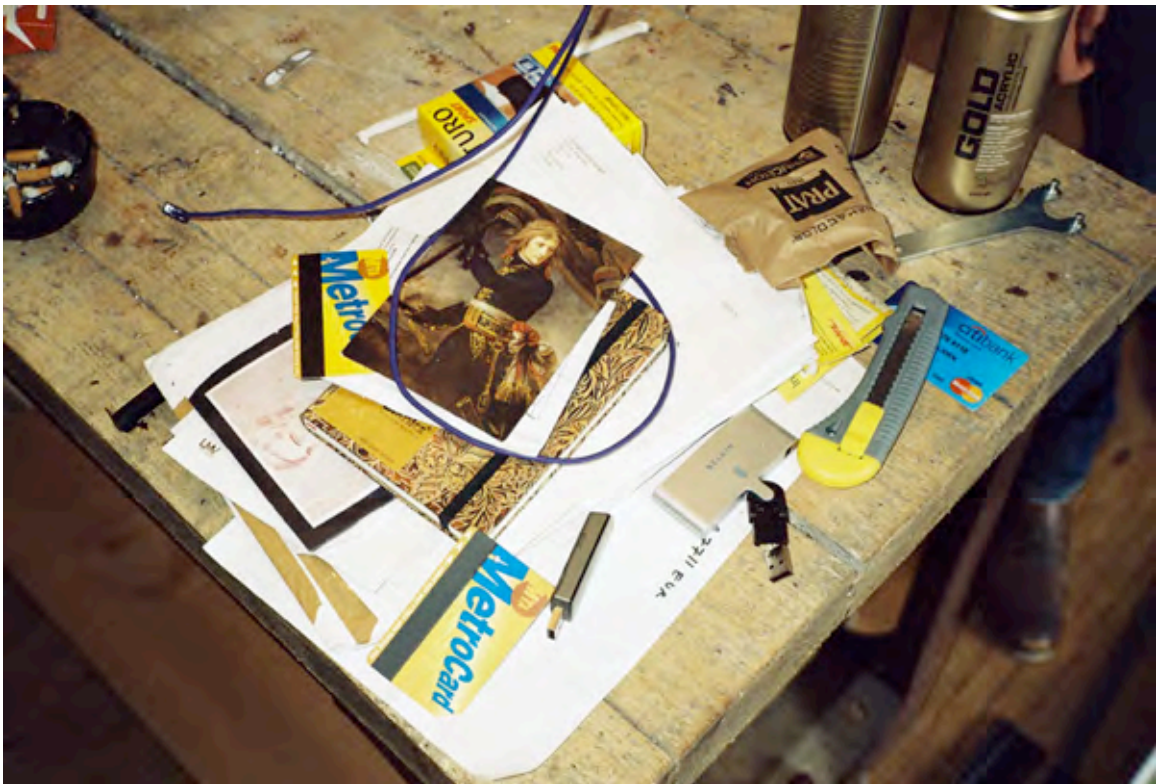
Hanna showed us part of her new project in the works: a monochrome canvas



Vampire teeth



An empty page of paper against the wall

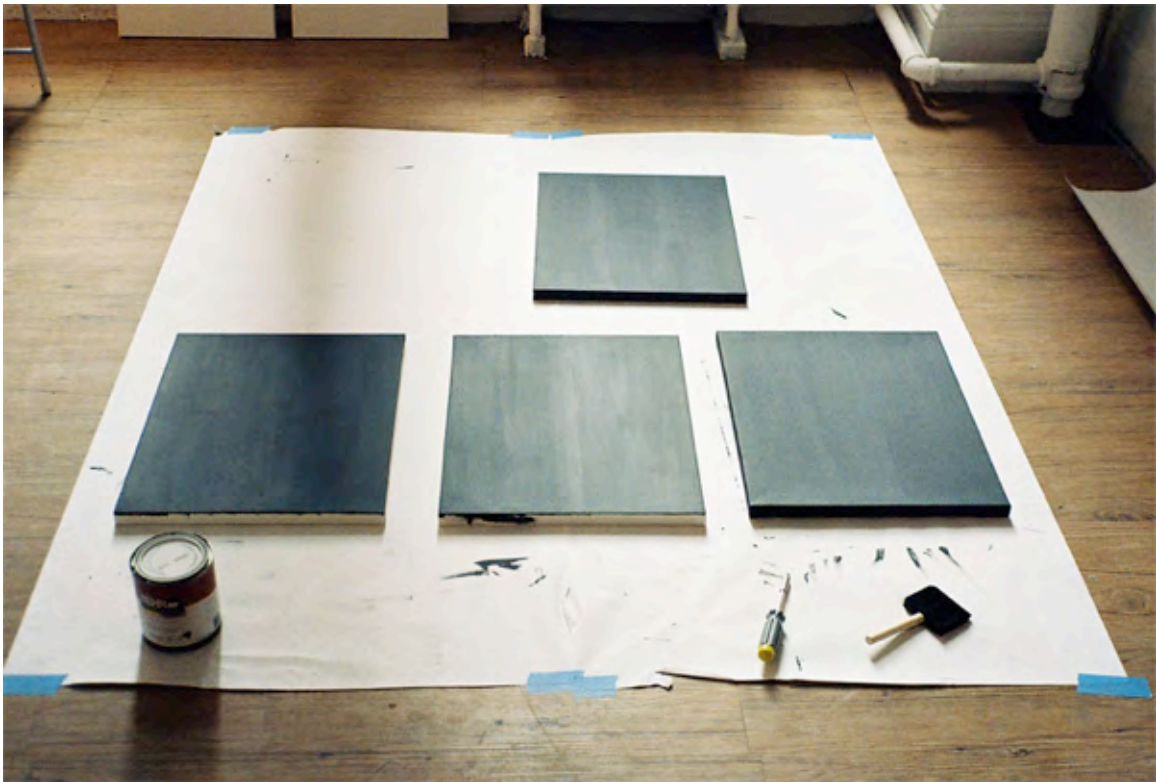


Details of the working table: Metrocard vs. Napoleon



Some chromatic ideas on a notepad





Black canvases on the floor, part of Hanna's new project



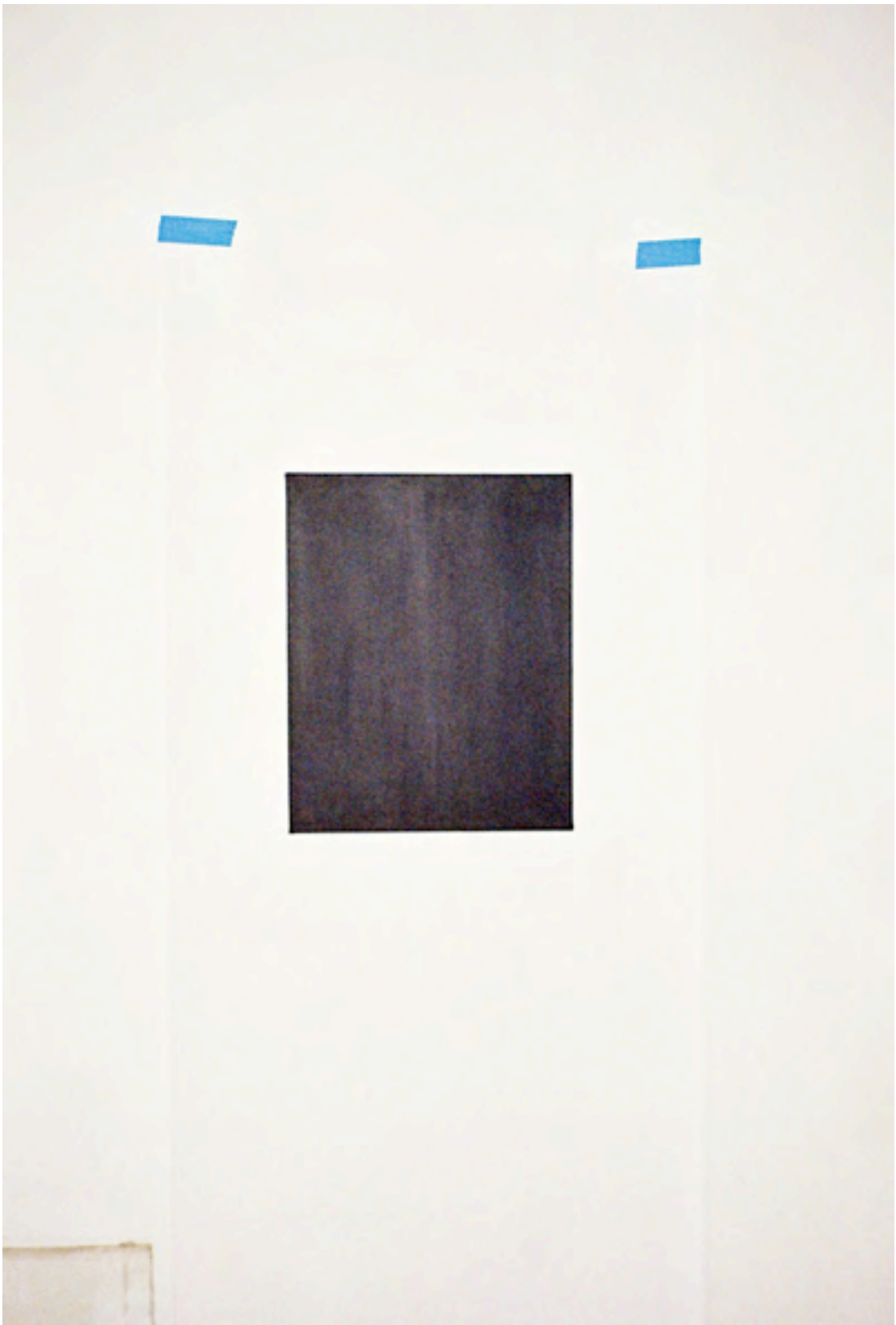
There are a few objects in the studio, drumsticks among them



The corner of the studio, very minimal



View from the window of Hanna's temporary Union Square studio



Black monochrome

