

THE MEETING OF PUPPETRY AND HANDCRAFTED MACHINERY

– a locally based puppetry project led by the members of the collective Not Quite

A small village somewhere in Dalsland. The sun sweeps the fields. I can smell the spring. I walk by the river to find the old paper factory that nowadays serves as a base for an active collective of artists. These artisans and artists have woken up the old factory back alive. They have seen the beauty and the necessity of the place for the region and the possibilities it has to offer for artists and for people living in the surroundings. Today I am walking towards the old factory because I have work to do with part of the artisans of the collective Not Quite.

Through a colleague, a friend and a former classmate from ESNAM, the Norwegian Yngvild Aspeli, I got to meet Torbjörn Alström. He suggested to me to participate in a project co-funded by Frölunda Kulturhuset. This project has led me to work with an interesting collective of handicraft artisans and artists of various kinds in Fengersfors.

We have worked together with their project “Det började med vatten” (working title). It all started when they inherited an old puppet theatre bus. Now they want to do their first show in the bus. Kalle, Cajsa, Jonas and Ulrika are new to puppetry, so we have together discovered some of the possibilities that the art of puppetry can offer. I am working with them as an advisor in puppetry. Jonas is doing the music and building some of the puppets. Kalle and Cajsa are manipulating the machinery and puppets on the small bus stage.

This group of artists is working on a project that tells about the use of natural energy resources, such as water and wood. They are talking about the industrial and societal changes such as the ones that happened in the region they are currently based. Like in any creative process they have done artistic research around the subject matter and they have decided to focus on visual storytelling and mechanical machinery that create images. This all is combined with puppetry scenes.

This weekend in March 2019 we are working with the puppetry scenes. There are wooden table top puppets that are manipulated by one or two puppeteers. While we are working

Kalle says: “Now we have to become puppeteers for real.” In one way, he is right. For people who mostly do handicraft work being on the stage is something totally different. On the stage, amazing esthetics is not enough, you need also play. Playing is not with what these artists are in their comfort zone, but we are here to find a common ground, something in between puppetry and craftsmanship. On the other hand, the project is not about creating puppet masters, but it is about the exploration of puppets and materials that these craftsmen use otherwise too. This project is about putting into play the amazing craft skills that these Not Quite people have. It is about researching how metal and wood and fabrics can play on the bus stage.

It is late in the evening in a big wooden house in the Swedish countryside. Through this project I have gotten a taste of the way these local artisans combine their everyday life with their artistic work. It is pitch black outside. The dogs’ paws scratch the wooden floors. The kitchen smells of tasty food. Fengersfors is a place where country life meets artisanal and artistic expression. Their newest artistic challenge is taming their wooden puppets to tour with their puppetry bus.

I fall asleep under the starry Dalsland sky and dream of little wooden people who work with big metallic machines.

Laura Sillanpää is a Finnish puppeteer who has graduated from the French ESNAM school of puppetry. After finishing her studies, she worked for nine years in France in the field of puppetry. Now she is back in Finland and working there as an actress and a puppeteer. She is also a hospital clown in Turku where she nowadays lives.