

Carl Eldh
Studio Museum

● Miss Brunnsviken ●



Ingela Ihrman
May 11–Oktober 1





Carl Eldh Studio Museum is pleased to present this year's summer exhibition with the artist Ingela Ihrman, internationally recognized for her large-scale sculptures and unconventional, humorous works. Here in Carl Eldh's studio, with mostly new and site-specific works, we see several suggestive scenes unfolding before our eyes. An exploration of creation and decay, beauty and its opposites.

Also this year Carl Eldh Studio Museum is celebrating its 60th year as a museum. As a tribute to Brita, daughter of Carl och Elise Eldh, who after her father's death transformed the studio into a museum in 1963, we are hosting cultural salons with music, poetry and performance. A way for us to reach out to a wider audience and open up the studio to different artistic expressions, just as Brita did during her time at the museum.

The Carl Eldh Studio Museum would like to thank the Swedish Arts Council and the City of Stockholm for their invaluable support to the arts, as well as Pontus Bonnier, The Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation and Anne-Marie Lembcke – The ad infinitum foundation for their generous donations to the museum and the exhibition.

Sara Bourke
Museum Director

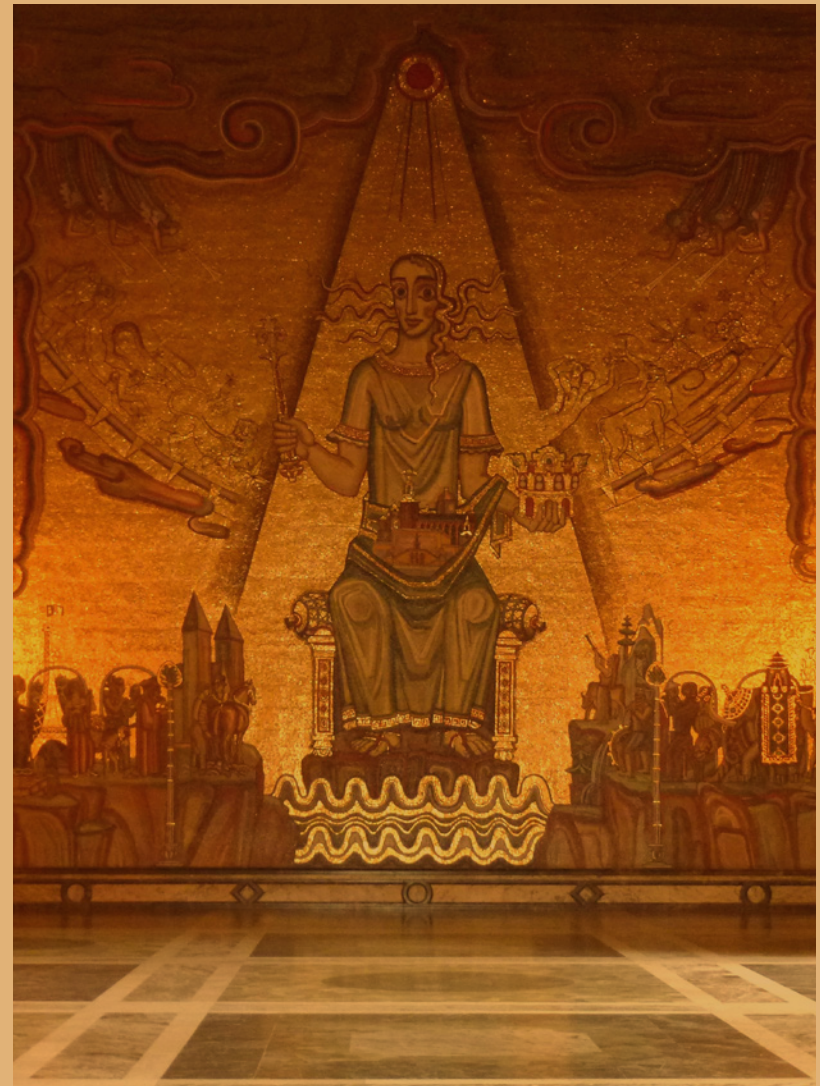
It was in a gymnasium in Hägerstensåsen in 2012 that I first encountered Ingela Ihrman's art. The audience had gathered at this emotionally charged site for a performance in the school's changing rooms, showers and gym. In front of us, a large toad moved slowly and strained across an obstacle course of classic gymnastic exercises. Its clumsy apparition, lovingly constructed from cardboard, plastic, fabric and a pair of spray-painted tights, elicited knowing giggles as it made its way across the plinths and jumping jacks.

The artist's ability to portray what it might feel like to be a living body, a biological creature that strives, longs, eats, gives birth, feeds and desires, has made me follow her work over the years. In Ingela's hands, everyday materials are transformed into sculptures, costumes and scenes that highlight the close relationship between humans and other animals and plants.

The *Miss Brunnsviken* exhibition was initiated by Joanna Nordin, former director of Carl Eldh Studio Museum. Together with Ingela Ihrman, we have spent the winter and spring working with the exhibition, exploring the history of the building and its metamorphosis from studio to museum. It is now a site where a collection of queens, or at least traces of them, meet in a play on ideas of beauty and the body. For in Ihrman's art, the supposedly beautiful is often set against something violent, disgusting or transformative. The gazes of the hundreds of plaster statues, portraits and bodies that Carl Eldh left behind cross in the room. In this exhibition, Ihrman encourages us to let the gaze continue beyond the beautiful surface.

Caroline Malmström
Curator

Remotly
Joanna Nordin
Curator









A Conversation About Miss Brunnsviken

Meet artist Ingela Ihrman in conversation with curator Caroline Malmström

CM: You have previously created performative and sculptural works that allow the audience to witness different forms of creation—a blossom, a birth or something that spreads uncontrollably. In this year's summer exhibition at Carl Eldh Studio Museum, we are greeted by aged queens, a ripe fig, dropped feathers and the remains of what appears to have been a serious party. Tell us about how these new and old works respond to your experience of the site?

II: In the past, I have looked for ways to render something vibrant and juicy—a freshly opened petal, mucus from the human body, or pink gums. To capture how I experience time in the rooms at the Carl Eldh Studio Museum, I have instead wanted to create a kind of aftermath. I have used materials and techniques that are first wet and then dry—paper towels, paper bags, silk, ink, watercolor, gelatin, starch paste and last year's reed. I wanted to work with my hands and participate in the process of creating something. The cactus flower *The Queen of the Night* is no longer soft and fragrant, as it was during the night of flowering, but withered and brittle. The question is—is she still beautiful?

You have chosen to title the exhibition *Miss Brunnsviken*. Why is that?

The title is a way of addressing the beauty that hits me in the face every time I visit Carl Eldh Studio Museum. I wanted to explore what it's like to stare at something beautiful—what happens to the viewer and the viewed?

I have populated my exhibition with various queens, who are *possibly* beautiful, and their dresses. Some of them take the opportunity to show off to museum visitors, others have left their mark and are somewhere else entirely. The costume of the hoopoe bird is scattered among the sculptures, but the warm body of the bird is gone.

Together, we have dug into the history of the site. We have talked about the visually dominant nude studies and portraits here and about Eldh's daughter Brita, whose hand arranged everything. But we mostly talked about the architecture.

What has struck you about the studio museum?

Carl Eldh had a real dream studio. Everything is very beautiful and nowadays a bit crazy with all the bodies in different scales, set up from floor to ceiling. I feel strongly about the space and materials in the actual studio that the architect Ragnar Östberg designed for his friend—wood, the smell of tar, the acoustics and, not least, the light streaming through muntin bar windows and thin white cotton curtains. It feels like time is standing still here.

Maybe it's because the bodies are made of plaster.

The building was completed in 1919 with inspiration from the neighboring property, one of Stockholm's oldest stables, but also from Greek temple columns, a Roman recreation room and an Old Norse banquet hall. The studio is now a listed building, but was initially criticized for its wild mix of disparate influences. How have Östberg's intentions influenced you?

The idea of the studio as a stable and a temple has followed me during the work on the exhibition. I think it captures exactly what it is like to be an artist—a mix between mopping dirt or standing in a dusty stall eating oats day after day, while being in touch with something spiritual, transcendent and the search for meaning. The work encompasses both the earthly and the sacred.

Brita Eldh (1907–2000), lived with her mother Elise Eldh in the United States until the death of Carl Eldh in 1954. Brita inherited her father and established the foundation shortly thereafter (1963) to preserve the site and its inventory in perpetuity. During her time at the museum, Brita also hosted salons of music and poetry, a practice we continue through *Brita's Salon*. What has it been like to approach the site under these conditions?

In a studio, art is in progress and is experienced from within. In a museum, the processes stop and things are viewed from a distance. Surely, the studio and the museum are the opposite of each other? Is this a studio or a museum? Mostly a museum, I think. I wanted to tickle



the rigid beauty in the nose a little and test the limits of the museum's look-but-don't-touch principle.

The exhibition relates to the Golden Hall in Stockholm City Hall, another of Ragnar Östberg's projects. The four walls of the hall are covered in artist Einar Forseth's shimmering gold mosaic. The Queen of Lake Mälaren is the largest of the room's characters, sitting on a golden throne wrapped in a cloth with her hair flowing in waves. She is reminiscent of queens and goddesses from both Greek mythology and the Swedish Empire era of the 17th century, but seems to have been invented as late as the 1860s. Who is the Queen of Lake Mälaren to you?

The Queen of Lake Mälaren is a kind of Miss Stockholm. She has been given the task of embodying the city and generating positive fantasies about Stockholm, in the same way as a municipal slogan or the advertising practice of using pretty girls to sell things. She is magnificent, but there is a harshness in her eyes. Maybe due to the weight of carrying the whole city in her womb. In my exhibition, she has forgotten her crown and her strappy sandals, and left a vomit of golden mosaic in the garden. This year, both the Queen of Lake Mälaren and the City Hall turn 100 years old. I hope she has risen from her throne and has been celebrated with a grand party.

Your performative work *A fig* will be shown as a sculpture in the exhibition, but will also be activated in a performance during the summer. What do we get to experience?

A fig is a silent performance in one act, both an act of becoming and a disintegration. I, dressed as a fig, enter and laboriously divide myself into two halves as if a knife had cut the fruit body in half. The cut exposes the interior of the fruit, but my own body is still hidden in one half of the costume. The fig wants to manifest its pain. A kind of drama queen, with the hope of perhaps also receiving praise for its beautiful flesh.

In the catalog, we can read your text *Aphrodite*, previously published in *Seaweedsbladet #1*, a local newspaper you published when you lived in the Seved area of Malmö. Tell us about your relationship with Aphrodite, the goddess of love.

Aphrodite came to me during a residency in the Andaman Islands in the Indian Ocean. I remember imagining the

text during my snorkeling trips and once having to pause because I was giggling so much that water was leaking into the cyclops. The text is about a person, perhaps the girl in Botticelli's painting, who is in the shallow water at the edge of the beach. There she practices being washed out of the foam and radiating beauty and harmony. Over time, she begins to question this task assigned to her and heads out into murkier waters. In the sea, Aphrodite notices how the skin on her fingertips wrinkles, leading her to wonder if she herself, like the beach, the sand and the foam, embodies a liminal state.

The exhibition also features part of an earlier work, *The Giant Water Lily Victoria amazonica*, whose flower now rests unfurled in the museum's rotunda. Since 2021, the giant water lily is also on display as a public artwork by the subway in Hökarängen's southern entrance.

In Hökarängen, *The Giant Water Lily Victoria amazonica* is a two-meter tall sculpture in patinated bronze. The naked female body—a dominant motif in outdoor sculptures by artists such as Carl Eldh and Per Hasselberg—uses her floral costume as protective armor. Only the toes protrude from under the stem and a hand pushes one of the petals aside. The flower is half open, phallically erect, and has thorns for defense if needed—eye-catching, but not necessarily pleasing.

The Victoria family of water lilies occurs naturally in the Amazon River delta. European botanists brought them from there in the early 19th century and named the genus after the young British queen. Large coal-fired glass and iron greenhouses were designed to allow the plants to survive in Europe, and the event of blooming was considered a sensation. That's still the case today, and Victorialhuset at the Bergius Botanic Garden on the eastern shore of Brunnsviken is open on those summer evenings when one of their buds is about to burst.

The pink petals that lie wide open on the circular floor of Carl Eldh Studio Museum are part of my performance costume. I feel beautiful in it—prettier in petals than in a dress.

Afrodite – Ingela Ihrman

Det är precis i början. Afrodite är ny i havet. Havet är nytt för Afrodite. Hon måste vara försiktig så hon inte drunknar eller blir bortförd av en tidvattenström.

*

Afrodite håller sig vid strandkanten och övar sig på att bli uppsköldj. Att stiga ur skummet. Hon måste överlämna sig åt vågkraften men samtidigt se till att inte bli alltför hårt uppkastad. Afrodite får kramp i vaden och skrapar ena sidan av ryggen mot en död korall. Hon har stora mängder snäckskalsand i baddräkten, i könshåret och under bröstet.

*

När Afrodite reser sig ur skummet vitnar det för ögonen. Blodomloppet har glömt gravitationen. Afrodite får inte glömma att andas. Hon blundar och fokuserar på höfterna och axlarnas lutning. Att de ska vara motsatta. Läger hela tyngden på stödbenet och låter det andra benets fotsula vila lätt mot planet som hon står på.

*

Planet Afrodite står på är en strand.

*

Den som upprepade gånger låter sig kastas mot sanden kommer med tiden att anta en rundad form. Kanter, krafs, utbuktningar och överhäng slipas bort och fram träder det sköna, runda. Afrodite slappnar av, gör sig mjuk i kroppen och låter sig bäras av vågen, hela vågen upp. Det plaskar och fräser när hon landar.

*

Inte sällan får Afrodite höra att hon har så mjuka händer. Inte sällan tar någon dem i sina och klämmer till eller stryker dem mot något inte lika mjukt. Men ingenting är lenare än anemon och levande korall. Varken hästmular, blötkyssar, sjövattnet eller Afrodites händer.

*

Rytmen är regelbunden. Intervallerna kan skifta, men inte hur mycket som helst. Det kommer alltid en ny våg. Afrodite sitter på huk i det djupa och låter sig gång på gång dunkas mot sandvallen. Hon tycker om att vara hårdhänt och ta i. Det är upplösning och förening om vartannat.

*

Afrodite spänner på sig sitt cyklop. Hon är på jakt efter en skalhalva nu. Något att posera på när hon blivit uppsköldj ur skummet. Hon sveper med blicken över kalciumkarbonaten. Visst finns där musslor. Men ingen är stor nog att rymma ens den ena av Afrodites båda fötter. Är det verkligen helt nödvändigt att hon står i ett musselskal?

*

Afrodite stannar upp och blåser luftbubblor med näsan under vattenytan. Hon har tröttnat på sina övningar vid strandkanten.

Tycker det känns meningslöst och förutsägbart att hon ska stå där i solgasset och posera. "Utstråla skönhet och harmoni". Hon spänner låren och ger simfenorna fart. Hon vill inte ha översikt och hon vill inte se klart.

*

Afrodite rör sig mot grumligare vatten. Hon håller händerna framför sig och skärskådar sin hud samtidigt som hon simmar. Den har blivit större och måste rynka sig i vågor för att få plats på hennes fingrar.

*

Afrodite sträcker ut sig i hela sin längd under vattenytan. Allt som är hon, alla vävnader och vätskor är inkapslade i detta blöta skinn. Afrodite ser ut i havet. Där finns inget som omsluter. Måste hon ha hud?

*

Stranden är ett gränstillstånd. Både hav och land. Skummet är ett gränstillstånd. Både vatten och luft. Sanden är ett gränstillstånd. Både fast och flytande. Är Afrodite också ett gränstillstånd?

*

Nu ser hon dem. Blomsterkorallen och rövanemonen! Afrodite bromsar sin snorkelfärd. Hon har upptäckt en hel äng av bulliga koralldjur under sig på havsbotten. Hon sårar på benen, vilar lungryggen mot ytan och svävar så ett par andetag. Sedan fyller Afrodite sig med luft och dyker ner.

*

Afrodite stryker hänfört med handflatorna över vajande smutsrosa tentakler. Häpnar över hur lena anemonhinnornas smekningar känns mot underarmens skinn. Hon gör det mesta av sitt andetag.

*

Afrodite kikar ner i anemondjurens plutande rövöppningar. Hon vill pressa in sitt finger i vartenda ett av de där hålen. Trycka sig in i det purpurfärgade skrynklet. Men det gör hon inte. Det får hon bara inte. Inte än. Och nu måste Afrodite upp för att andas. Nu!

*

Afrodite, kärleks gudinnan. Ja! Vattnet Afrodite omsluts av är 27 grader varmt men havet inuti henne är varmare ändå. Och nu stiger det i Afrodite. Hon håller inte tillbaka. Afrodite är överallt och allt är i Afrodite.

*

Afrodite sitter på sin handduk i sanden. Hon har badat färdigt för den här gången. Det hav som sugits upp av Afrodites hud dunstar och snart är fingerskinnet lika stramt och slätt som vanligt. Är det mer eller mindre kvar av henne nu? Eftersom mängden vatten i Afrodite minskat måste väl koncentrationen av henne själv ha ökat? Hon tycker inte alls att det känns så. Afrodite är törstig men av havsvattnet kan hon inte dricka.

Aphrodite – Ingela Ihrman

In the very beginning, Aphrodite is new in the Ocean. The Ocean is new to Aphrodite. She must be careful not to drown or to get carried away by the tidal current.

*

Aphrodite is learning how to let herself be washed up near the shore. To rise from the foam. She must surrender to the power of the wave but also make sure not to be completely overcome by it. One of Aphrodite's two calves cramps and her back chafes against a dead coral. Large quantities of shell sand get stuck in her swimsuit, in her pubic hair and under her breasts.

*

When Aphrodite stands up, she can see stars shooting. Her heart and her bloodstream have abandoned gravity. Aphrodite must not forget to breathe. She closes her eyes and focuses on the tilt of her hips and shoulders. They must be opposed. She puts her full weight on the supporting leg, and allows her other foot to rest very lightly on the surface on which she is standing.

*

The surface on which Aphrodite is standing is a beach.

*

Someone who is repeatedly thrown against the sand will eventually assume a rounded shape. Edges, bulges and folds will soon wear off, and a beautiful form will emerge. Aphrodite tries to relax. She makes her body soft, and allows herself to be entirely carried by the wave. It splashes and sizzles when she lands.

*

Quite often, Aphrodite is told that she has such soft hands. Quite often, someone grabs hold of them and squeezes them or wipes them against something not as smooth as them. But nothing is smoother than tentacles and anemones. Neither horse mules, wet kisses or freshwater, nor Aphrodite's hands.

*

The rhythm is regular. The intervals may vary, but only to a certain degree. There will always be a new wave. Aphrodite squats in the deep water next to the shore and allows herself to be smashed against the sand wall. She likes to be rough and physical when the sea dissolves and sets.

*

Aphrodite straps her diving mask on. She is now on the lookout for a shell. Something to pose on, since she is born of the sea. Aphrodite scans the calcium carbonate. Sure, there are clams and mussels around. But none are anywhere near large enough to fit one of Aphrodite's feet. Must she really stand in a clamshell?

*

Aphrodite makes a stop whilst blowing bubbles from her nose. She is fed up with her exercises near the shore and considers it

pointless and predictable to stand in the sun and pose. To "radiate beauty and harmony." She kicks her fins to gain speed. She couldn't care less about the crystalline.

*

Aphrodite is moving towards murkier waters. She holds her hands in front of her face and surveys her skin as she swims. The skin has become larger and must fold in undulations to fit on her fingers.

*

Aphrodite stretches out in her full length underneath the water's surface. All she refers to as herself, all these tissues and fluids are encapsulated by this wet skin. When Aphrodite gazes out in the void of the ocean, she sees nothing encapsulating the sea. Aphrodite asks herself: why must I have a skin?

*

The beach is something in-between. Both sea and land. The foam is something in-between. Both water and air. The sand is something in-between. Both liquid and solid. Is Aphrodite also an in-between?

*

There they are! The Flower Coral and the Anus Anemone! Aphrodite interrupts her snorkeling tour. She has just spotted a meadow of chubby coral colonies underneath her on the seabed. She spreads her legs and floats at the surface for a couple of breaths. Then she fills her lungs with air and dives deep towards the bottom.

*

Aphrodite fondles the swaying tentacles with her hands. She didn't expect them to be so silky. She makes the most of her breath and touches them again and again.

*

Aphrodite peeks down into the pouting openings of the anemone animal. She wants to squeeze her finger into every single one of them and gently push herself through the beautiful purple folds. But she won't do that. She can't, not yet. And now Aphrodite must ascend to breathe. Yet again!

*

Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Yes! The seawater that surrounds Aphrodite is 27 degrees Celsius, but her inner ocean is even warmer. And so it rises in Aphrodite. She's not holding back. Aphrodite is everywhere and everything is in Aphrodite.

*

Aphrodite is sitting on her towel in the sand. She is done with swimming for now. The seawater absorbed by her skin evaporates into the air and soon her fingers are just as tight and smooth as before. Is there more left of her now, or less? If the level of water in Aphrodite has subsided, is the concentration of her higher? Aphrodite is not so sure. She is thirsty but cannot drink the water of the sea.

Miss Brunnsviken
May 11 – October 1, 2023

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Rotunda exterior, 1920s. Photo from Carl Eldh Studio Museum's collections.

Elise Eldh's leaf cactus on the loggia, 1920s. Photo: Carl Eldh,
from Carl Eldh Studio Museum's collections.

The plumage of the hoopoe bird - Ingela Ihrman, 2023. Photo: Valdemar Asp.

The Queen of Lake Mälaren in the Golden Hall of Stockholm City Hall. Photo: Holger Ellgaard.

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Interior of the rotunda, 1920s. Photo from Carl Eldh Studio Museum's collections.

Hoopoe bird. Photo: Syed F Abbas.

Brita Eldh in front of Carl Eldh's Studio Museum, 1970s.
Photo from Carl Eldh Studio Museum's collections.

