



Press conference:

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Press documents:

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Sofia Hultén
Here's the Answer, What's the Question?
24 January – 1 May 2018

As its first exhibition of 2018, Museum Tinguely is showing sculptures, installations and videos by the Berlin-based artist Sofia Hultén (born 1972 in Stockholm). Hultén's works start with found objects – unremarkable everyday items or materials from the world of DIY stores and workshops. Via a series of manipulations that sometimes verge on the absurd, she examines these things that are marked by their previous lives, intervening in their processes of decay or reworking them into new arrangements. The striking titles of her works allude to concepts from philosophy and quantum physics, and to motifs from science fiction and pop culture. As a result, they stand in surprising and often humorous contrast to the prosaic appearance of her materials and filmed situations. With their feel for the magnificence of the easily overlooked, Hultén's works heighten our awareness of the degree to which our experience of time and reality is tied to the objects that surround us. *Here's the Answer, What's the Question?* is the largest solo show of the artist's work to date.

Poetry and enigma of the found object

Hultén's works centre on found objects in the true sense – objects she comes across during online searches or in the street. In most cases, they are industrially mass-produced items, rendered individual by traces of usage. With her feeling for their magnificence and poetry, Hultén devotes meticulous attention to these easily overlooked things, as in the 72-minute video piece *Past Particles* (2010) featuring a found toolbox and the more than one thousand components and spare parts it contains. Filmed individually, each of these items is shown on a huge screen for precisely four seconds. But although these small objects can be seen to have been produced for a specific purpose and according to exact specifications, they remain somewhat mysterious. This disparity between present matter and forgotten function is alluded to in the work's title that blends the "past participle" (used to form various grammatical tenses) and the "particles" that make up our world.

Time loops, repairs and decay

A recurring theme in Hultén's works involves structures of time and how they manifest themselves in the materials she uses. This always begins with the questions: "What if things happened differently? What if the laws of physics didn't apply in the ways that we

normally assume?" The installation *Mutual Annihilation* (2008), consisting of an object and a four-channel video, starts with a weather-beaten chest of drawers, which the artist carefully restores before using wax, paint and kicks to immediately return it to the battered state in which she originally found it. In a similar gesture, for *Particle Boredom* (since 2016) she takes sections of particle board, makes a latex cast, then pulps the boards before pouring them back into their original forms. With this absurd, self-negating labour, Hultén playfully resists the impossibility of turning back time and shows that however meticulously she works, most of the factors determining the state of the objects she works with escape her control. "I am often trying to find that moment," Hultén says, "where the things I am working with do something I don't expect, where things are not going according to plan."

Non-sequences, mixtures and variables

Hultén also uses the topic of time, effect and cause in her work in another way, as in her video series *Nonsequences* (2013–2014). Here, she breaks banal everyday moments down into their individual phases – for example wiping an apple on one's trouser leg, eating the apple, dropping it into the dirt by accident, and putting the core in a bag to throw away – and then plays through the sequence in various more or less meaningful orders. A similar play on disorder and mixing occurs in sculptural form, as in her series *Scramble* (since 2016) for which she dismantles graffiti-covered pull-down shutters and reassembles their slats in different combinations. Taking a more narrative approach, *History in Imaginary Time* (2012) combines a detail of a situation from Hultén's youth – a free-standing fence element, a hooded top, a tennis ball, four torn-off woodboard corners – into different versions of causal events. The unsettling and absurd quality of the mixed-up, chaotic situations is due in part to the way they are blithely presented alongside more logical orders and arrangements. Here, the artist names the narrative strategies of sit-coms as a shaping influence: "I am just changing one element at a time, out of a normal sequence of events. If it's a complete nonsense then you lose the appearance of believability. That's why I often choose to change just one thing. It's the same with situation comedy, which informs a lot of what I'm doing in my work. Usually it's a completely conventional set-up in which we are very familiar with what's around, with only one salient thing changed. If everything is changed the situation becomes wacky, which is not so much fun."

Here's the Answer, What's the Question?

Both the puzzles set in motion by Hultén's works, such as the search for the objects' functions or the "correct order" of her "non-sequences", and the artist's object-testing approach, as documented in videos like *Altered Fates* (2013), were what suggested the exhibition title *Here's the Answer, What's the Question?* At the same time, the title also refers to her new series *Pattern Recognition* (since 2016) in which she engages with the 1967 publication of that name by the Russian computer scientist Mikhail Bongard. On perforated sheet metal used to hang tools in workshops, Hultén uses found tools to create diagrams developed by Bongard as benchmarks for intelligent machines. According to Bongard, a future system capable of autonomously identifying the opposites represented by these diagrams (empty/full, symmetrical/non-symmetrical, etc.) would have displayed a human capacity for pattern recognition and method development. Presented with an answer, we as viewers are called upon to search for the question on which each arrangement is based.

Biography

Sofia Hultén was born in Stockholm in 1972 and grew up in Birmingham, England. In 1998, having studied sculpture at Sheffield Hallam University, she came to Berlin on a scholarship at the Hochschule der Künste. She still lives and works in the city.

Catalogue/cooperation

The exhibition was created in cooperation with IKON Gallery, Birmingham. The two institutions have joint-published a catalogue with a foreword by Jonathan Watkins and Roland Wetzels and texts by Lisa Anette Ahlers, Chris Sharp, James Langdon and Sofia Hultén. *Sofia Hultén. Here's the Answer, What's the Question?*, Birmingham/Basel 2017, 128 pages, English/German. ISBN: 978-1-911155-12-6.

Curator: Lisa Anette Ahlers

General information

Title: Here's the Answer, What's the Question?

Address: Museum Tinguely | Paul Sacher-Anlage 1 | 4002 Basel

Duration: 24 January–1 May 2018

Opening: Tuesday, 23 January 2018, 6:30 pm

Press conference: Tuesday, 23 January 2018, 10:30 am

Guided tour with the artist: Sunday, 29 April 2018, 1 pm

Opening hours: Tuesday– Sunday, 11 am–6 pm daily

Websites: www.sofiahulten.de | www.tinguely.ch

Social Media: @museumtinguely | #museumtinguely | #sofiahulten

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Photo credits: Sofia Hultén, *Nonsequences I*, 2013, Single-channel video 5'41"
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