

Interview with Mariangela Mendez
Curator of 43 Salón (inter) Nacional de Artistas, Medellin, Columbia 6.9. -
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MM: In your work for the Salón, you pursue a historical journey and examination that concerns topics both personal and universal. How do you address the challenge of blending the autobiographical with issues of collective or cross-cultural relevance?

AD/ML: We believe that personal is political. Sámi people taking part to human zoo's was quite unknown part of history in Finland and the the more we found out about Markku's family history, the more interesting the whole topic became. It was also very difficult to dig out actual facts about these human zoo tours. We wanted to know how the everyday life was like, what was it like to camp in a zoo or how the viewers reacted. This proved to be quite impossible wish. The historical facts are interesting but much more fascinating is the part we cannot find any information about, which we can only imagine. And we believe this is genuine collective amazement we share with many others.

MM: Popular culture is often present in your work, simultaneously celebrated and parodied, playing with various genres of popular or mass culture. Tell us about this fascination of yours?

AD/ML: One of the keywords in our collaboration is to have fun aswell. But we always treat our topics with utmost dignity and respect. Our themes can be displayed in a carnivalised way but the essence is always there. Folklore in its many forms fascinates us, and for us familylore is part of it. We are always serious and sincere with everything we make, sometimes the outcome just looks funny. But we are not afraid of it.

MM: Would you be able to indicate how your art work has been an instrument in addressing your Sámi heritage or identity?

AD/ML: Sámi heritage is a part of Markku's heritage. Defining the Sámi identity has been a long process and a journey to his own history and persona. Thus it is also an inevitable part of his art work. Annika is not Sámi, but belongs to the Swedish speaking minority in Finland. Two minorities share same kind of identity issues. At the moment Sámi identity is very political question in Finland. We take part to this discussion with our art work.

MM: Much of your projects involve notions of staging, revisiting, enacting or reenacting, simulating, performing... Could you tell us something about this aspect of your work?

AD/ML: We started to work together doing performances. Documenting these performances lead into photography work and videos. We still see our photographs as some kind of documentary of an action we are doing. We don't write a script to our photos, but we plan the shooting location, the dresses and the props, think about the light and camera angles, but from there on we just act out. Sometimes the best photos include a surprise element, sudden fog or people passing by. Performing the act has as important role to us than the outcome, the photography, the two dimesional object.