

Sharp Projects  
No Wiggle Room  
Albin Bergström  
Text by Francesca Gavin

What happens when you touch something? Albin Bergström plays with the properties of material in his work. His installations, tapestries and freestanding sculptures are made with varied found objects from crystal glass to cutlery, straw, tufted textile, papier-mâché, burnt canvas, and even cigarettes. As he notes, "I think it always starts with the hands for me, not the mind."

He knowingly combines the elements with uncanny results, specifically fire and earth. Candelabras are made of flammable straw or embedded with cigarettes; It echoes the combinations and strategies of surrealism, notably Meret Oppenheim's *Le Déjeuner en fourrure* (lunch in fur). The artist is interested in creating a sense of tension of function and material. "I'm always drawn to materials or forms that have a kind of bodily quality to them," he explains. "It's also important to me to remove any function. My interest in these objects are the image or fantasy of them - the desire they produce." Bergström's combinations are strange, ambiguous, uncomfortable and playful.

His sense of humour is equally balanced by tragedy and the melancholic. The humour seduces you and draws you into domestic scenes that have a sense of suburban emptiness. He gives a nod to the grief of the bourgeoisie or the drama of the everyday. The artist incorporated cups, glasses and cutlery alongside his anthropomorphic figures that seem to form a kind of tea party of the monstrous. "I've been interested in the idea of domestic objects as witnesses. That they carry information but the information that cannot be mediated", he points out. All the objects in the works were sourced in flea markets and charity shops. Items embedded with unknown histories and information. Items that reflect the existential narratives of life and death.

Although there are moments when the work brings to mind Nicole Eisenman or Sarah Lucas — Dorothea Tanning's soft sculptures feel like a strong touch point for Bergström. Her strange interior installations with stuffed, odd shaped forms are echoed in his burnt canvas figures. Bergström, like Tanning, is also drawn to textiles and chairs though these domestic materials and objects emerge in different ways. He would start with a chair, then, sewing and stuffing fabric by hand to create parasitic sculptures that change the found objects. The aim was to fuse the handmade with the mass produced. "The work is very much for me about how modernist design in its utopian ideals and standardisation of furniture and interiors also creates a distinction between that which is normal and that which isn't. Or rather the standardisation defines normalcy." His sewn bodies refuse to conform.

These anthropomorphic objects touch on the human but the implied figure is notably absent. Somehow this feels like an echo of an internal experience. His titles such as *If These Cups Could Speak* or *The Table is Set* (A duo show with Julia Goodman) jokingly reference ideas of psychological or social dysfunction. "I often talk about feelings of discomfort in my works, of being uncomfortable in one's own skin," Bergström considers. "I am inspired by the ill-fitting, or deviations from normalcy." There is something gothic here but with a strong nod to queerness. "Most of my works are monstrous but not really threatening. They all have bad posture, doing their best to stand with a straight back. Like puddles pretending to be oceans. To me they're dark and sweet at the same time," the artist notes.

Textile is also an ongoing medium. Originally working with small scaled weavings, and now consisting of large scale tufted rug pieces or tapestries. These works are based on the artist's own childhood drawings, created around the age of 5. He added 'off' elements – eyes, a skeleton, while playing with scale and perspective. The pieces are textured and graphic at the same time. The process allows for a more sketch like approach than weaving, leaving room for chance, mistake and impulse. This exhibition is named after the tapestry work, *No Wiggle Room*.

Bergström's approach to aesthetics blends narratives around pleasure, display, interiors, feminism and domestic labour. For the artist, the work also draws on a history of interior space. "I think there's queer references in a lot of the works, and how appropriations of certain aesthetics have been a kind of life line for queers throughout history. There is an interest in the ideology behind aesthetics and objects in my practice overall, but it's something I tend to keep unsaid, or more like a whisper rather than a shout."

Albin Bergström (b. 1992, Gothenburg, Sweden), is an artist and writer living and working in Vienna. Recent exhibitions include Haus Wien, Vienna 2021 & 2020, The Table is Set, AAAA Gallery, Vienna 2021, Hypercloth, Fonda, Leipzig 2021. He is also the co-curator of Roundup, an exhibition project that's been running since 2017, that turns his parents garden in Gothenburg into a sculpture park for one day and night in August every year.