

A PARODY OF CORRESPONDENCE

by Bluestockings (BS)



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One late afternoon we met up with the Swedish artist Maja Li Hårdelin and the caricature *Finkel* for a bemusing chat about life, art, trolls, telltales, and tattletales.

We climbed the rickety stairs to Fuxia 2 on Industrigatan 17B, an old industrial area in east Malmö, to view the exhibition *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, presenting works by Maja Li Hårdelin and Dagmar Moldovanu.

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BLUESTOCKINGS (BS):

Thanks for having us, Maja Li! Should we move a little closer to this humongous caricature on the wall so you can introduce us?

MAJA LI HÄRDELIN (MLH):

The title of this caricature is *Finkel*, or fusel, which is the kind of oily, impure, alcohol fumes given off when you distill alcohol. So it's very prominent in moonshine. But it's also what kind of makes the taste flavoring for whiskey or slivovitz. OK. And so it's drawn by a caricaturist, Johannes Nygren from JNArt, who I found online.

FINKEL (F):

Also finkel is a derivative of 'finkeljokum', a most beguiling ruse of a name. I believe it refers to some sort of alcohol substance that I'm not terribly interested in. As to how I came to be, the first operation in a project like

this is choosing a subject to imitate. The next step in the operation is the 'completion' of chosen fragments, which are then given their final artistic intervention and ultimate form.

BS:

That's an interesting way to think about one's conception. What prompts were given to the caricaturist?

MLH:

No comment.

F:

Well, clearly, the prototype for my larger-than-life display as a drawing on this movable wall is the artist herself.

MLH:

Well, yes, that's correct. That's relevant — but perhaps not super relevant. I don't think that this caricature and what the image does is necessarily about me. My face is simply something I have complete access to. I don't have to ask anybody for permission to use it. Which makes sense in relation to making an artwork, especially if you want to make work related to psychology or something. I'm the artist, so I'm the one that does the thinking and the making. So for me, it's easier to use myself and my own experience in relation to that.

BS:

How have you worked with drawing and caricature in this exhibition?

MLH:

I'm interested in caricature because it hints at some notions that are significant for the works I'm presenting in this exhibition. Which is when a dream or an idea is off from what it actually is – or that something's wanting, or trying, to be something... but in its diluted state, it doesn't have the capability to see what it actually is.

F:

Everything needs to be planned, executed, academici-
zed and marketed by an interning workforce for optimal
operational success.

MLH:

No, for me, at the moment at least, what's more
important in my work is the element of chance and
coincidence. And perhaps instigation.

BS:

Just across from you, *Finkel* (2025), on one of the pillars,
hangs another drawing, *Copyright* (2025). It's an image
of the copy of a drawing that the German Renaissance
painter and printmaker Albrecht Dürer made of himself
in a letter to his friend Willibald Pirckheimer in 1506.
You've formed a humorously exaggerated correspon-
dence between the two images. Where did you come
across this drawing by Dürer?

MLH:

I saw it in a documentary about the Northern
Renaissance, like in one of those BBC documentaries



Albrecht Dürer: *Selbstbildnis mit 26 Jahren* (Self-portrait at 26), 1498. Prado Museum, Madrid

from the early 2000s. Then I googled it. It's famous, as Dürer is considered the first self-portrait artist, and the drawing itself is considered the first caricature or emoticon. Talking about it in those terms is kind of stupid. But then again, it also says a lot about art history. Or, more precisely, how the idea and role of the artist are perceived. I think that's maybe why I was interested in it. But also, because it reminds me of a troll I once saw driving a car.

BS:

A troll that was driving a car?

MLH:

Yeah. It really reminds me of a troll – like a real troll that I once saw. There were four people in the car when it happened, and we were all convinced that we saw a troll driving a car in northern Sweden. I would say that's how these kinds of ghosts or these spirits exist. They exist, like the troll exists, inside of people. To me, that's very visible in Dürer's emoticon. And I also think that his actions in his life indicate a very troll-like behavior.

BS:

OK, could you elaborate? Albrecht Dürer was a troll – in what way?

MLH:

I don't know. He cared a lot about his riches and stuff, and in that personal letter to his friend where the emoticon is from, he's bragging about how well it's going for himself in Venice and so on. What I'm hinting at is – here's a man who enjoyed depicting himself, or liked

putting himself in the role of Jesus Christ in several of his portraits.

BS:

We had a laugh about that too. Like [imitating Dürer] "Don't call me pretty – but also here's my skin and my man cleavage." It's both funny and pompous at the same time. We also saw in another letter he wrote to the same friend, using coded pictograms for each of his friend's love interests, so as not to reveal or spill any secrets to the wrong pair of retinas. But his friend Mr. Pirckheimer would be in the know as to what woman the weird hay broom thing, or the dog or a flower referred to.

Could you say that the sardonic technique of juxtaposing the self portrait of Dürer with your own caricature at least tries to counteract something?

MLH:

Well, maybe. Or maybe I'm the pompous asshole in this situation, because it's not at all different from Dürer depicting himself as Jesus, another masochistic figure that takes on the whole suffering of the world. In regards to using the image of Dürer, it was just something that I stumbled upon as I was working with this exhibition, and I was drawn to it.

BS:

That spoke to the troll inside that had already kind of awoken?

F:

Yes, exactly.

MLH:

Yeah. Or I can't really say. The humorous aspect lies in the connection between humility and humiliation. Like when somebody shares something that's been super embarrassing, I find that both funny and relieving, for everyone. I mean, I did a huge self-portrait, and even if it's a caricature it's still a two-meter-tall image of myself. It really makes me cringe inside to think about that decision. I guess it ties into that masochistic approach of what to show and what not to show.

What interests me is this idea of something perceiving itself as one thing, but it appearing – or showing up as something else. Or, in hindsight when a frequency shifts, and you suddenly see a person differently. Whether it's in a historical or fictional context or just looking back at someone's actions, you notice that the aura, or the energy around them, has changed.

It's quite an abstract notion. But I think it exists in different ways or shapes. Maybe it's similar to being intoxicated. It's really hard to pinpoint what exactly happens when that shift takes place, when something changes. It's like a transformational notion that exists in language, or in everything, basically.

BS:

Looking at your practice at large, you work with a variety of media such as film, sculpture and performance. What questions or themes do you work with?

MLH:

Regardless of what you make, I think making art is engaging with consciousness and what it means to be a conscious being. And that interests me a lot.

BS:

So your work is about exploring these liminal states?

MLH:

I'm really interested in the kind of communication between the inner and the outer, and in those breaches. Or how faulty the cognitive system is. Or at least how faulty mine can be. Sometimes, really faulty. You know how they say that when you look at an image, you actually only see the focal point, and your brain fills in the rest based on assumptions of what it should be? Yeah, that kind of thing really gets me going. That's what I try to incorporate into the work somehow.

BS:

We look forward to transcribing this.

F:

Good luck with that.

MLH:

Yeah, good luck!

This text is based upon deliciously obscure conversations and interviews conducted with Härdelin throughout the months of February and April 2025. The conversations touched upon her practice, and the beautiful parody of correspondence between two paper-based works *Finkel* (2025) and *Copyright* (2025), orchestrated by Härdelin in the exhibition *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, Fuxia 2.





File:Durer letter emoticon 1506.jpg

File Discussion

File File history File usage



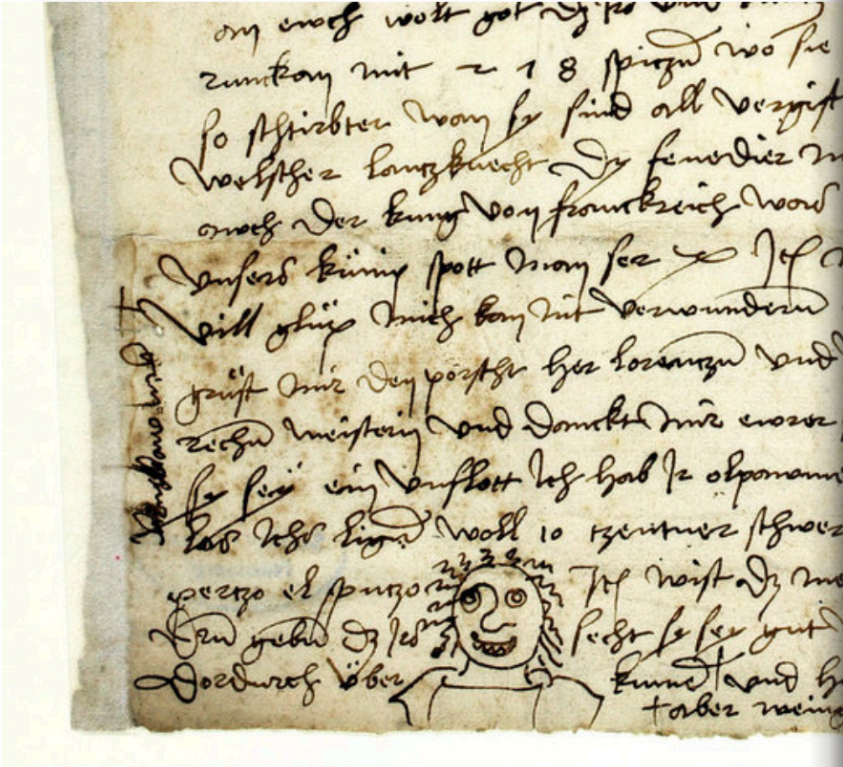
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MAJA LI HÄRDELIN (SE)

dives into intricate constructions of analogy. In her work the line between fiction and documentation is very blurry. Härdelin explorations make use of a variety of media, such as film, sculpture and performance. Within the exhibition space, they often extend to installations that juxtapose the familiar comfort of ordinary stuff, through highlighting slightly peculiar elements. The installations often reference everyday scenes subtly altered—like an out-of-place object or an unexpected sound—prompting contemplations of the hidden layers and histories that can be found within ordinary spaces, objects, and relationships.

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