

Swedenborg Epic.

A Short Reprise For Emanuel Swedenborg,
Who Went Insane, But For Very Good Reasons

Swedenborg Epic. is an exhibitionary reprise offering a domestic space to artists to create a work around three accounts upholding the charge of insanity brought against Emanuel Swedenborg (Stockholm 1688 - Wapping, London 1772). These accounts, largely based on rumor and hearsay, have been propagated by Swedish pastor Mathesius, Methodist leader Wesley, and questionably by the Moravian Brockmer as based on events taking place during Swedenborg's stay at Brockmer's house in London during 1744.

Arguably, the possible fictionalisation and extravagance of these accounts have led to a certain degree of degeneration in regard of Swedenborg's reputation, both during his late days and posthumously. Taking these peculiar and rather ambiguous accounts as its leitmotiv, the project opens a space for speculation and image-correction of Swedenborg's stature and meaning in the present.

The exhibition, curated by Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk, Rianne Groen and Nina Swaep, features works and new commissions by Dave Charlesworth, Kitty Clark, Leif Elggren, Bentley Farrington and Marenka Gabeler.

Account I

“[...] When Mr. Brockmer retired to his room, which was about nine o'clock, he [Swedenborg] ran after him, looked very frightful: his hair stood upright, and he foamed a little at his mouth. He wanted to talk with Mr. Brockmer, but as he had an impediment in his speech, it was long before he could bring forth a single word. At last he said, he had something very particular to communicate: namely, that he was the Messiah: that he was come to be crucified for the Jews; and that as he had a great impediment in his speech, Mr. Brockmer was chosen to be his mouth, to go with him the next day to the synagogue, and there to preach his words. [...]” - Mathesius, *Arminian Magazine*, 1781

Account II

“Many years ago the Baron [Swedenborg] came over to England, and lodged at one Mr. Brockmer's: who informed me that while he was in his house had a violent fever; in the height of which, being totally delirious, he broke from Mr. Brockmer, ran into the street stark naked, proclaimed himself the Messiah, and rolled himself in the mire. I suppose he dates from this time his admission into the Society of Angels. From this time we are undoubtedly to date that peculiar species of insanity which attended him, with scarce any intermission, to the day of his death.” - John Wesley, *Arminian Magazine*, 1783

Account III

“[...] The following question was then put to Mr. Brockmer: “Supposing it to be true, that Baron Swedenborg did actually see and converse with angels and spirits, did you ever observe anything in his behaviour, that might not naturally be expected on such an extraordinary occasion?” He replied in words to the following effect: “If I believed that to be true, I should not wonder at anything he said or did; but should rather wonder that the surprise and astonishment which he must have felt on such an occasion, did not betray him into more unguarded expressions than were ever known to escape him; for he did and said nothing but what I could easily account for in my own mind, if I really believed what he declares in his writings to be true.”” - Robert Beatson and Robert Hindmarsh visiting John Paul Brockmer in London, *Magazine of Knowledge*, Vol. II, 1791

Dave Charlesworth (1982, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, UK)

Dave Charlesworth is an artist and curator. Often working with a mix of film and performance, he exposes fragmented personal histories and generic social phenomena as avenues to explore a range of experiences of the contemporary British landscape. Using a series of scaling devices from big to small and specific to vague, and through a constant reworking of narrative and imagery the work depicts landscape and architecture as solid features in an emotive space, often focusing upon a utilitarian manipulation of land whilst avoiding open and straightforward statement about the politics of that utilisation.

I have endured all these troubles for thy sake (2012) is a mixed media work that collages together a series of found images along with additional sculptural props. The work uses motifs such as classical ecclesiastic architecture and images from a study of Iron Age worship stones. The work calls into examination the idea of an authentic spiritual experience, it forces parallels between structures which are designed to heighten a sense of the supreme and divine with objects of worship which are born out of a more rudimentary process of inquiry.

The title recalls the inscription beneath a painting of a young boy lain to rest in a shallow pit of earth. The painting is hung in the porch of a church in London. The church is not our nearest neighbour though it shares the same lineage. The inscription is possibly entirely fictional. The inscription offers hope, an occurrence of martyrdom, yet is has as a suggestion of a vainglorious orator. One who takes on an unknown and unknowing burden.

Kitty Clark (1988, Brighton, UK)

Despite the unfortunately generic nature of celestial imagery it is an undeniably visceral experience to encounter a particularly brilliant view of the skies.

The default digital wallpaper of Windows personal computers circa 2001 was the the instantly recognisable image of an overly saturated cyan sky and rolling green hills, a photograph Microsoft entitled *Bliss*. The corporate adoption of such imagery however, has not been successful in imbuing us with true feelings of bliss, 'a state of spiritual blessedness, typically that reached after death', according to dictionary definition. On the contrary, the digital overuse of idealised natural imagery has worn away any genuine emotional or spiritual response, gradually reducing the sublime to the synthetic.

Once denatured to the natural, encountering in reality a perfect blue sky with clouds as fluffy as the titles from *The Simpsons* is an uncanny experience, and so life imitates cartoon.

The first sightings of the earth seen from space were said to inspire in those who saw them a new-found recognition of a the world as a united collective entity, a euphoric experience that enlightened and informed their perceptions completely. Perhaps inversely, a genuine encounter of the skies from the soil of the earth could invoke a truly blissful solitary spiritual awakening?

Leif Elggren (1950, Linköping, Sweden)

Leif Elggren is a writer, visual artist, book publisher, stage performer and composer based in Stockholm. His practice investigates dreams, subtle absurdities and social hierarchies turned upside-down. His audio work, often created as the soundtrack to an installation or performance, has been released on several experimental labels.

For *Swedenborg Epic*. Elggren will present the record *Emanuel Swedenborg: Angel Modulations*. The recordings date from a session in Swedenborg's summerhouse in Stockholm on the 27th of July 2007, where Elggren was using his voice as a carrier of Swedenborg's voice. The results presented here were captured after several days of attempts to get in contact with, to bridge the gap between this world and the other, this existence and the other. The recordings are a first simple experiment trying to follow Swedenborg's own way of establishing a contact or a communication. What is interesting here is what is happening between the words, what is happening under or over, over or under - the voice as an irregular sound generator.

Bentley Farrington (1988, London, UK)

I was born in London, where I live and work most of the time when not in Auckland, New Zealand. I was thinking to start writing this by laying down a truth and then slipping in a lie or two. People don't expect it that way. If you hit them with something too fantastical right off the bat then they don't go for it, and if you suddenly start writing about something completely different after the first paragraph then people will begin to suspect you're loosing your mind. At least thats what I've recognised.

After I graduated from the Slade last summer I spent some time in the forests and mountains of the Lake District talking with others about making art, using a collective voice and what that meant. I spent long summer afternoons cycling alone along the hills with no maps just a sandwich in my pocket and the sun and a gentle breeze across my back. I think I'll try and show through some kind of epistemological dialogue that we learnt through transmission of experiential mindsets to become holons. Oh actually I probably won't. I might start writing about avoiding the 'mainstream' cultural ostracism by making a conscious effort to make less individualistic work... The whole is the sum of its parts. Not more or less. Aesthetically networked artworks which acknowledge their own use of plain dumb stupidity vying with physicality as intellectual tools in the pursuit of anti-craft, where transmission of ephemera can unlock totemic apparitions of flint axe heads camouflaged against the backdrop of ludic categorisation. The words "real tools for real people" might echo in the heads of those chewing gum, bodily processing the acerbic humour of the visual content-currency. Its also just nice to change environments environment in the hope of regaining access to a different mental state. Just don't expect everyone's versions of events to be the same.

Actually, once when I was driving up to Liverpool I noticed a crow stealing crumbs out of a bin at a service station. It wouldn't jump in. Instead it slowly circled the top pulling the bin bag up a bit at a time until it was able to access the contents and get what it wanted. I always thought truly finding the core 'nugget' of meaning or value from a piece of text or a work was a bit like that.

Marenka Gabeler (1975, Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

For *Swedenborg Epic.*, Marenka Gabeler engaged in a thorough research on the writings of Swedenborg in relation to the area surrounding Brockmer House. Relating to Swedenborg's divine revelations towards the end of his life, her photographs of the route she set out in the area are strongly saturated. Thus they evoke the sense of what Swedenborg described as the first stage of the afterlife. Engaging in particular with the book *Heaven and Hell*, published by Swedenborg in 1758, Gabeler created three traditionally bound notebooks, which symbolize Heaven, Hell and the World of Spirits. Her installation of drawings, paintings and photographs aims to grasp the depths of Swedenborg's mystical legacy.

Exhibition

05.02.12 - 05.03.12

Private View

Saturday 4 February 2012, from 19.00 - 21.00

Featured Artists

Dave Charlesworth, Kitty Clark, Leif Elggren, Bentley Farrington
Marenka Gabeler

Curated by

Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk, Rianne Groen, Nina Swaep

Practical Information

After the private view the exhibition can be viewed by appointment only.

To book an appointment, please send an email to swedenborg.epic@gmail.com

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For press requests, please send us an email via swedenborg.epic@gmail.com.

Further information and documentation will be available on

www.niekolaasjohanneslekkerkerk.com/page6.php

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