

FIA BACKSTRÖM

Woe men – keep going

2 March to 29 April 2017

On 2 March 2017, Mary Boone Gallery will open at its Fifth Avenue location *Woe men – keep going*, a configuration of photographic works conceived of by Fia Backström and curated by Piper Marshall.

A conceptual artist who has worked on arrangements of the collective since 2003, Fia Backström brings a historical lens to the complex, politically tangled present. *Woe men – keep going* takes as its point of departure the question of what it means to be a female-identified artist working under oppressive conditions. To answer this question, artist Backström has devised an architecture that brings together photograph-based work by artists Laura Aguilar, Simryn Gill, Katherine Hubbard, Corita Kent, Barbara Kruger, Deana Lawson, Emila Medková, Lee Miller, and Backström herself. Backström's aim in exhibiting these artists' images alongside her own is both instructional and conceptual; collectively they serve as examples of artists enduring complex political regimes. The images also offer formal and conceptual strategies of how to negotiate shifting ground.

Backström has arranged the images into what she calls clusters, through which she sets up morphological connections: a napalm bomb cloud becomes a plastic bag, which turns into a toxic waste release, and then shifts into a heart-shaped stain. The idea of hiding in plain sight is evoked by Laura Aguilar's *Grounded #106*, an image where a spine-like pattern dots the sandy foreground. It leads the eye upward before being interrupted by desert boulders. One boulder here is the artist's body, compressed in a manner akin to a rock molded into the landscape. The round, undulating horizon in this image resonates with the adjacent *Four Shoulders (disposition)* by Katherine Hubbard. Here the artist, semi-nude, appears as doubled in front of a barren terrain that echoes the structures in *Funerary Towers, Palmyra, Syria* by Lee Miller. The proximity of the three images results in a formal syntax where skin transforms into turf, leaving a trace upon the territory itself.

The arrangement of these images is made possible by Backström's hanging device: the *Flexible Image Arrangement System*. This new modular architecture liberates the work from its dependency on walls. It also reflects Backström's interest in interconnection, allowing her, as an artist, to network the contemporary images with their historical forebears. The stands facilitate an intimate choreography which ushers the viewer's body into a personal relationship with the exhibited works.

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Woe men – keep going offers up an associative and poetic connective tissue between works which are informed by differing subject positions, geographic locations, and historical periods. Using material specificity, Backström weaves meaning through ecological scale shifts from the intimate and mental to the global and cosmic, baring awareness to the biophysical present.

Fia Backström has exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and MoMA PS1, Long Island City. Venues such as the Serpentine Gallery, London; Museum of Modern Art, New York; White Columns, New York; The Kitchen, New York; and Tranzit Gallery, Prague, have hosted her projects and performances. In 2011, she represented Sweden at the Venice Biennial, and she was the subject for the Fall season at The Artist's Institute in 2015. In 2016, Primary Information published a monograph of her writing; her texts appear regularly in *Artforum*, *Art on Paper*, and *Pacemaker*.

The exhibition, at 745 Fifth Avenue, is on view through 29 April 2017. For further information, please contact Ron Warren at the Gallery, or visit our website www.maryboonegallery.com.

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