

Wetterling Gallery

Liva Isakson Lundin Hold Sway

Text by Magdalena Dziurlikowska
Artist and critic

A metal force swings across the room, hither, thither, round itself and out again. It dances through the air like a butterfly knife, a silver snake, a thundercloud on a lead. Strip steel hovers in the room thanks to the rope that supports its flamboyant gestures and fastens those on the wall. The ropes make it possible for the steel to fly but, in the same movement it fastens and fetters it. When Liva installs the work, the metal will begin to shred the rope and it appears that the steel could slash through them at any moment. The work is entitled *To Hold Sway* expressing the fact of having power or great influence. Literally, holding sway involves keeping something hovering. Isn't this contradictory? Yet at the same time totally appropriate because this may be the way that life is. We have to try to grasp something that is free and wild. We need to understand it and control it, because it is all that we have, the only thing that is real. Perhaps we succeed in this for brief moments. The wind when one is sailing. Emotions that we can build on.

Liva has produced numerous drawings and models for the large-scale installation. But there is a great deal that distinguishes drawings from the full-scale end result. Other forces are set in motion and no one can guess the result with any certainty. The artist works with loads and weights that she cannot control herself and she feels challenged by this, by the need to find solutions step by step. Liva also sees herself as one of her materials and she plans for a tug of war that will be visible in the sculptures. A tension between her, the objects and the room; between three willpowers that create a work. All the constituent parts of the work are to be active. The material will not just be, but it will work, carry, pull and shape and thus be encountered.

Springy strip steel is one of Liva's favourite materials because she can use it to produce shapes that are not permanent. Strip steel is strong in itself and has so much life that it feels like some of organic material. An industrial material that has been tempered so that it won't break. Ordinary steel fastens in a specific form when bent but is deformed if one changes the curve. Liva and I talk strip steel it seems as though we share personal experiences of life such as choices, adaptations and survival. The metal is also interesting to Liva since it is full of contradictions, cold and hard, sharp and soft. Heat and cold, electricity and sound can be transmitted through it. Masses of movements in a piece of unmoving metal, she summarizes and I am reminded once again about how symbolic a material can be. There is no actual narrative underlying the sculptures but Liva defines physical and mental states with her works, concerned with bodies, movements and struggles. To stand before one of her works and to recognize something of what one sees with one's sinews and muscles, that is how one understands them.

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Past Bearing is the other sculpture at the exhibition. A thick, heavy black rubber band sprawls lazily across a sheet of glass while also supporting it. And the glass supports the snake. This seems like a circular argument but it works. Slackness and weight, strength and fragility rub up against each other. The sheet of glass is 8 mm thick, stable yet fragile. The rubber has a strong odour, massive and bodily. Looking at the work is like hanging over the sharp edge and feeling a sense of vertigo at this being possible. *Past Bearing* is the name of the riddle, a past attitude, a past approach, almost a departed being, a past being. Something has happened and now there is a time past. Can a person or a snake relax to the extent that we can hang over a perilous sheet of glass? Do such arts belong to a past world or do we need to adapt them to another domain in order to carry them out?

The drawings create a bridge between the two sculptures with their very different natures. They do not depict any specific objects but are aspects of materials that reflect a variety of different themes. The drawings use oil pastels which are buffed to produce a sort of layered painting. Some of the drawings are pale green and have visible joints, just like the sheets of glass. The forms that ultimately appeared are material, monumental and, at the same time, delicate. They look like impossible sculptures. A sculptural world of ideas in which qualities are examined.

Simultaneously with the exhibition at the Wetterling Gallery, Liva is also working on an artistic treatment for the new centre for sports and the arts in the Swedish town of Knivsta. The model can be seen in her studio and it will grow into a work measuring about sixteen by eleven by eight metres. This, too, is a suspended sculpture using strip steel, though in this case the metal has been shaped into points. A whirlwind of whiplashes or octopus tentacles. The shapes seem poisonously sharp, full of emotion and anger as though they were enjoying their anger. Liva had in mind a record player with its pick-up needle for playing vinyl records. These needle points are looking for something to read in the atmosphere. The title is *Moves* which can be interpreted both as movements and as moving. A move can be a tactical chess move, for example. To make a move on someone is to flirt with them, to will someone in a variety of ways at many levels.

Movements are a recurring theme in Liva's art. In several of her works she has crashed materials and has created emotional landscapes. In her MA exhibition at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm she presented *Stimuli* in which glossy metal tongues penetrate yellow cubes of gelatine. It feels like having them on one's tongue without being able to mention them, a crazy but apposite surrealist encounter that I cannot cease to be fascinated by. The items in no way belong with each other, yet they become totally inseparable from the very first time I see them. As though I had seen them many times before. The gelatine is heavy and it sticks to the floor. It halts the movement of the tongues while, at the same time, supporting their form. The gelatine acts as fetters that have been pierced. In her sculpture *Vibrissae* the metal tongues are completed with feathers that rest against a wall. The title is loaned from the Latin word for whiskers which position themselves round rough parts of the wall. Perhaps they can read tiny movements there? *Harmonic Absorber* is an installation in which Liva painted the floor of a room with latex and included a rope in it. When she ultimately lifted and tightened it the white membrane was stretched, creating an effect that looked like shells or follicles, a muscle or an infection in the building. The

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title *Harmonic Absorber* she borrowed from her study of structural regulation in high-rise buildings. Tall skyscrapers are designed to sway within certain parameters so that they are not damaged by high winds, and inside the structure there is a tuned mass damper forming a counterweight to the movement. As Liva explains all this I can also hear the story of a human person.

Abstract sculpture is the term used to cover what Liva is working with but it does not adequately indicate what she is trying to communicate. I try to be very precise, she claims, and to distil what one cannot explain in words. During her progress she has been inspired by other sculptors with a strict but charged expression, for example Eva Hesse, Eva Löfdahl, Roni Horn and Richard Serra with his verb list of how one can deal with a material in order to twist, pull, push and so on. The question as to how a form or a material relate to others arise. Relations are one of the keys to Liva's sculptures. Steel, rope, glass, rubber control, ignore or concern. They risk pushing each other over the edge. The very same movement can be read as a fall or as a rescue. Rescue or capture? The business of holding, is it holding up, holding in place, or holding fast? Her sculptures challenge each other. Living is about exposing one another to states or things, she claims, not with the intention of being unkind but in order to be able to live. It is in relationships that we are tested, I answer and can push each other into masses of conditions. On the way home from Liva's studio I reflect that human relationships are ambivalent while language is binary. Our experiences are woven from contradictory emotions that language cannot embrace. A word cannot communicate that something is both glorious and terrifying or beautiful and demanding. But there may be a sculpture that expresses this.