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**Body to Body**  
**at Tensta konsthall**  
**The Little Gallery**  
**13.6 2020–1.11 2020**

**Norra Sidan**

**Tensta konsthall**

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This summer and fall 2020 Tensta konsthall's visitors will get the opportunity to experience a whole new transformation of the Little Gallery and the café by the artist duo Åsa Norberg and Jennie Sundén. A number of textile wall works turn up here and there in the room, and two quatrefoil-shaped objects are placed in the foyer. Body to Body could be described as a playful and hands-on voyage of discovery in the history of learning. It is a bit like a private detective quest for those philosophers, teachers, and other thinkers who spent their lives developing models and opportunities in teaching. Such pedagogues reconsidered the idea of pupils being empty vessels to fill with knowledge and instead chose to shift perspectives and question hierarchies to "learning by doing", a quote that has been attributed to the pedagogue John Dewey (1859-1952) and also functions as a description of the way Norberg & Sundén execute their works: together in collaboration and with the use of multiple kinds of fabrics and sewing techniques.

The title Body to Body has a deliberately charged meaning in a year like 2020, when social distancing, previously an unknown expression, has become a common word all around the world. Standing

physically close to each other has become associated with danger and carelessness, and our accustomed ways to socialize, work, and learn have been challenged by new demands, often in front of a screen. To meet 'body to body' automatically activates senses and connects all the bodily synapses in an unbeatable way.

With the help of images, textiles, and different techniques, the audience gets to know some of the most fascinating pedagogues. In this way Norberg & Sundén shed light on how learning as a scientific field unites theory with the wisdom of the hand.

The various works also bring to the fore an orientation and consciousness about the role of the individual within a collective, in the tightest group as well as in society at large, and also how everyone's capacities can contribute knowledge to the group. Pedagogy not only deals with how to learn, but how different pedagogical methods reflect an idea of a society.

Against a sky-blue background, a figure built out of white cotton stripes emerges, his legs spread and with open arms. The title is The Flax, referring to the story 'The Flax' by H. C. Andersen, in which a group of children follow the flax from flower to fabric. Their image is inspired by a certain modernist edition of the story from 1941 by the artist Bart van der Leek. The entire book, even the text, is built by blocks in the primary colours blue, yellow, and red, in a pure

De Stijl spirit closely related to van der Leek's artist friend Piet Mondrian's art.

Building images and new shapes with geometrical figures such as circles, triangles, and squares is a pedagogical exercise many of us recognize from Kindergarten or from activity books from our childhood. A person who methodically began to invent instructive toys was the teacher and mathematician Friedrich Fröbel (1782 – 1852). His starting point was the construction of a crystal, and out of this he created a selection of 'toys' which he named 'gifts and occupations' to encourage children to use their senses with their hands and fingertips to get an idea of abstract forms such as pyramids, spheres, and cubes. From this point of view, it's easy to imagine that these toys might have given the impulse for the birth of abstract art.

Through Body to Body Tensta konsthall's Classroom is expanded into the Little Gallery, the café, and the porch. The Classroom was born out of the ongoing project Tensta Museum and has turned up in many shapes since it was initiated in 2014. It is used daily by different groups for meetings or activities such as homework support, public lectures, film screenings, the Language Café within the framework of the artist Ahmet Ögüt's independent university platform The Silent University, and more. This summer, the expanded classroom will become the backdrop to Tensta konsthall's Women's Café and the Art Porch, where grown-ups and children

can meet and try out different crafts together with pedagogues from the Hemslöjden i Stockholm.



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**A conversation between Åsa Norberg & Jennie Sundén and Paulina Sokolow**

**Paulina Sokolow (PS):** What can the public expect at a visit to your exhibition?

**Åsa Norberg & Jennie Sundén (ÅN&JS):** The exhibition includes a series of textile works, concentrated in the Little Gallery at Tensta konsthall, but the work also expands to the café and the foyer. The works present personalities from the history of pedagogy and art. They all have different aesthetical expressions and are executed in a variety of textile techniques. Together they form a group or a community that surround and populate the rooms at Tensta konsthall.

There are two sculptural works, which have borrowed their form from the American pedagogue John Dewey's model for an ideal school. The form is similar to a four-leaf clover, in which every leaf is represented by a classroom designed to fit different practical occupations and exercises. The centre area of the school, which consists of 'The Library' and 'The Museum', Dewey imagined as a room in which the practical skills that the student had gained would filter through a more theoretical and reflective moment. The sculptures might also be seen as two tables, at which visitors can sit and gather around. Maybe the installation can be perceived as a meadow where the textile personalities have gathered

around, ready to learn more about themselves and the world from each other.

**PS:** For some time now, you have dug into the history of pedagogy. Why and why now?

**ÅN&JS:** The pedagogical currents that we have taken a closer look at often stress the strings and context of how the world is tightly entwined together into a complex weave. For us today, these are perspectives that we feel are much more urgent in times that are also extremely abstract. There's also an ethical aspect in the fact that knowledge and understanding can generate a sense of responsibility, from the tiniest thing to the largest.

The early reformist pedagogues suggested methods which show great similarities with the way art sees and reacts in its investigating and experimental creative processes, and towards themes and materials. It's all about learning by doing, seeing and feeling, and in exchange with each other. These were and still are important processes that involve all the senses and thus, in this way, produces knowledge on many levels.

One of the works in the exhibition shows a figure taken from Bart van der Leek's illustration of H. C. Andersen's tale 'The Flax', which is about a linen flower's life cycle from flower to thread to fabric, clothes, paper, and finally ash. The figure that we have depicted is a school principal,

whom the children in the story believe they see when the linen evaporates into smoke at the end of the story. We think that the story sheds light on the holistic view found within many of the pedagogical movements that have caught our interest.

**PS:** You have worked in a number of materials, but textile is something that one connects with you particularly. What qualities are you after in the fabrics you work with, everything from denim to galon and Wettex cloth?

**ÅN&JS:** All materials are automatically and indirectly bearers of meaning, which is something we take advantage of in almost all our works. In this project, among other things, we want to refer to those tactile textile boxes known from Montessori pedagogy; boxes with patches of textile material which with their various textures and colours are used by children to compare or pair colours or textures. A way of learning by touching. Also, the textile is an interesting material as it connects people to each other and the world in so many ways, both metaphorically speaking and literally. At the same time, textile is both history and culture, economy, politics, language, and craft. We all have both a physical and visual relation to the textile material as well as to its expressions as we constantly experience and wear it on our bodies and in our memory. With textiles, we create our identity and signal class, affiliation, and power. Also, it is a material with never-ending shapability

and potential with which you can create almost anything. Through cutting, sewing, weaving, and folding we can warm, protect, build, and tell just about anything.

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**1. Embroidery on wool felt (pink)**

Figure inspired by the score/ notation by Friedrich Albert Zorn. Zorn (1816-1895) was a German dancer, choreographer, and dance theoretician who wrote an extensive publication on the art of dance in which he described a system for notation. There is a historical connection between modern notation for dance and the birth of geometric abstraction in the beginning of the 20th century. The schematic representations of the body occurring in the notation have several similarities with how modernist artists depicted a body.

**2. Appliqué of lining fabric on fleece (orange, entrance)**

Figure inspired by Gunnar Faith Ell's collection of pedagogical books in Växjö. Gunnar Faith Ell (1876-1950) was a decor painter and drawing teacher at the public school for girls in Växjö. He got his inspiration in his teaching from Waldorf, Montessori, and the learning-by-doing movements. His extensive collections are systematically arranged and present overall solutions for teaching concerning method, material, as well as techniques.

**3. Appliqué of woven cotton bands on functional textile (blue)**

The figure, a school principal, is inspired by the artist Bart van der Leck's illustration from 1941 of H. C. Andersen's story 'The Flax' (Het Vlas). See above.

**4. Pom-poms on corduroy (violet)**

Figure inspired by the publication Orbis Pictus by John Comenius (1592-1670), a Czech pedagogue, bishop, and writer known for having written what is considered as the first picture book, Orbis Pictus. He is also the author behind Didactica Magna, containing an organization plan for the school. The latter would later influence some of the 'fathers' of modern pedagogy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi.

**5. Embroidery, faux fur on jeans (outdoors)**

Figure inspired by the children's book The Crying Baby by the writer and psychiatrist Heinrich Hoffmann (1809 – 1894), who also illustrated his own books. In 1845 Der Struwwelpeter (Shaggy Peter) was published, a book he wrote for his son. The book reflects the idea of a proper upbringing in the 19th century. Tough methods and fear would curb cocky and lazy children.

**6. Posca pen on furniture fabric (green, beside the sofa)**

The frog is inspired by Paper Toy Making, 1937 by Margaret Campbell, which contains different examples of paper foldings / origami. Throughout history, paper folding has been a way to understand and visualize mathematical problems.

**7. Embroidery on furniture wool (lime green, café)**

Figure inspired by a design

exercise at the Bauhaus school by the artist Hilde Reindl. In Norman Brosterman's *Inventing Kindergarten*, the writer sees connections between the early Kindergarten/Friedrich Fröbel and the modernist abstract forms that emerged in the Bauhaus school. Many of the artists at the school, such as Johannes Itten, Vassily Kandinsky, and Paul Klee, had themselves been pupils or teachers at a Kindergarten.

**8. Appliqué on mattress cover on faux suede (turquoise, cloak room)**

Figure inspired by the Waldorf movement pedagogy called eurythmy. Among other things, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) was a philosopher, artist, architect, and pedagogue as well as the founder of anthroposophy and the Waldorf pedagogy. Waldorf pedagogy puts as much importance on the theoretical, the emotional, and the incentive in children's mental development. Eurythmy is an artistic way to move your body which is performed and taught within the anthroposophical movement and takes its starting point from the feeling of sound and harmony to encourage children to make their own interpretation.

**9. Embroidery on terry cloth (yellow/orange on blue, book shop)**

Donald Woods Winnicott (1896-1971) was an English pediatrician and psychoanalyst, who stressed the importance of playing, culturally as well as in therapy. A method he used

in his work with children was 'the squiggle game'. By drawing a form that he gave to a child to improvise with, he could in a natural way take part in the child's drawing and have a conversation about it. In this way, rather it is the child teaching the therapist. With the help of fantasy, a scribble could be interpreted as a hat or an animal. For Winnicott, this was a form of communication that could be both meaningful or nonsense, enlightening or hidden. For him, the strain between these statuses was of interest.

**10. Embroidery on fleece (red and green on white)**

Big Bird is a recurring figure in the children's TV program *Sesame Street*, the American series created by Jim Henson in 1969. The series, shown all over the world including Sweden, featured hand dolls known as muppets as leading stars. With the short and funny sketches, the idea with the show was to inspire children to learn reading and maths. The show pioneered many similar programs with countless followers and copies all over the world. In Sweden, the show inspired by *Sesame Street*, was named *Fem myror är fler än fyra elefanter* (Five Ants is More Than Five Elephants). The concept of "edutainment" is about entertainment made with an educational purpose.

**11. Eyelets, nylon thread, and velvet on galon (yellow)**

Rudolf Laban (1879-1958) was a

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Hungarian-British dancer, dance theoretician, and choreographer who developed his own notation system. The system is built based on boxes distributed on a time axis. Depending on how you position the box, you note if it's about weight or movements. Also, it's possible to show energy, strong or gentle movements. The notation system is named Labanotation.

John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American philosopher, psychologist, and pedagogue who promoted an activity-based pedagogy in which theory, practice, reflection, and action would be combined. Dewey claimed that individual and social development go hand in hand, and he viewed the school as the most important unit concerning the quest for a democratic society. In 1886 Dewey founded an experimental pre-school in which collectivity and cooperation to build power to reach a common goal was emphasized. Dewey said that the school must take charge of the experiences that the children already have when they start school. Through strengthening the relation between what's taught and real life in the outside world, he claimed that all the various connections and extended contexts would emerge and be made more visible. Dewey has been credited with the motto "learning by doing".

Maria Montessori (1870-1951) was an Italian pedagogue, researcher,

medic, feminist, philosopher, and philanthropist. She was the first Italian female medic. Montessori worked out a physical material for children with impairments and stressed the importance of stimulation and training of the senses for these children. She then also used the material on children in socially vulnerable areas and discovered that this sensorial training that the children got through testing and controlled tasks promotes a significant developmental advantage. As the Montessori pedagogy teaching material is concrete and physical, it helps children understand the outside world and becomes a path to reach new knowledge. In the learning process it helps children to move from the concrete to the abstract. According to Montessori, the work that they perform in the classroom should be zestful and self-driven. Then, the teacher's role is the observer who intervenes only when the child is stuck in a task. Maria Montessori put much hope into the child's ability to change society.

Friedrich Fröbel (1782-1852) was a German pedagogue who founded the Kindergarten. He also worked out the first pedagogical material aimed at the youngest children, so called playing 'gifts'. These were abstract models of crystals in the form of geometrical figures in various materials. The idea was that the young child, through interaction with and observation of



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forms and materials, would obtain knowledge about themselves and their surroundings. It was also about a way of teaching abstraction. In a time when this wasn't a common way of thinking, Fröbel presented a new way to see and perceive the world. Artists such as Buckminster Fuller, Josef Albers, Vasily Kandinsky, Johannes Itten, and Piet Mondrian, all with connections to the Bauhaus school (1919-1933), either had participated or had been teachers in the pedagogy of Fröbel's Kindergarten. Fröbel has also influenced reformist pedagogues such as Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, and the Reggio Emilia movement. Fröbel's ideas about the child as a growing plant, who should be given the opportunity to grow freely and bloom, are echoed in many of the later environments and materials specifically produced in pre- and post-war social initiatives to strengthen children's status and development in the struggle for a democratic society.

John Comenius (1592-1670) was a Czech pedagogue, bishop, and writer. Among other things, he is famous for having written *Orbis Pictus* (1658), which counts as the first illustrated children's encyclopedia in the world. *Orbis Pictus* was quickly spread throughout Europe and had a great influence on children's education. Comenius also wrote one of the central pieces of pedagogy: *Didactica magna*. In this book, Comenius presented a teaching and

organization plan for the school and the book would become influential to modern reformist pedagogy. Comenius is said to be the first to describe children's development chronologically from birth to adulthood as well as the first to present a democratic pedagogy.

Åsa Norberg and Jennie Sundén have been collaborating since 2005. Their installations and projects are often site specific and/or context based. With an interest in how aesthetics and design reflect the social reality in which they are produced, their work reconstructs and highlights different social phenomena, political ideas, and other artists' practices. By combining physical material, aesthetic form, and theoretical references, their aim is to create new perspectives and views on already existing discourses or narratives. Selected solo shows: *A Table of Content* at Kalmar Konstmuseum (ongoing), *The Royal Academy of Art* (2018). Group shows: *Moderna Museet* and *Marabouparken*. Also, Norberg & Sundén run the artist space *Hit* in Gothenburg.

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## **PROGRAM**

Due to the current situation, introductions to the exhibition will be given individually and spontaneously. The staff will be happy to help. And please contact us in advance if you want to visit as a group!

### **Art Porch - open textile workshop on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays 13:00-16:00**

As usual, the Art Porch is open for children and adults. This year's theme is 'Patterns and monogram'. There are sewing machines free to use as well as material to experiment with. Participants can continue ongoing projects or start new ones. This year, the Art Porch is led by Maria Holmerin and Carmen Blomstrand from Hemsjön i Stockholm in collaboration with Makda Embaie and Muna Al Yaqoobi from Tensta konsthall.

### **Art Friday - for children and young adults every Friday 11:00-17:00**

Fridays starting June 26 you will have the chance to meet a real artist at Tensta konsthall, Makda Embaie. Together we try different materials such as clay, colour, textile, prints, and photography! We provide inspirational materials as well as refreshments. No registration needed!

**8-11 years: 11:00-13:00**

**12-16 years: 15:00-17:00**

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**Tensta konsthall**  
**Cecilia Widenheim**  
**Director**  
**Didem Yildirim**  
**Producer**  
**Fahyma Alnablsi**  
**Reception and Language Café**  
**Fredda Berg**  
**Host**  
**Hanna Nordell**  
**Curator**  
**Makda Embaie**  
**Mediator**  
**Muna Al Yaqoobi**  
**Assistant Women's Café**  
**Paulina Sokolow**  
**Head of Communication**

**Installation**  
**Johan Wahlgren**  
**Karl Norin**

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