

Lerchenfeld

53.007



03 What do you
actually do? *Chloe*
Stead

What do you actually do?

HFBK graduate Chloe Stead (together with the photographer and also HFBK graduate Jens Franke) met former students to talk about work, life and art. It is the prelude to a series of interviews for the website of HFBK Hamburg



Astrid Kajsa Nylander, 2020; all photos: Jens Franke

Ding Moments: Astrid Kajsa Nylander on painting as a space, mini jobs as a metaphor and hairspray taking over

Astrid Kajsa Nylander may share her crowded Neukölln studio with two other artists, but it's not difficult to spot which works belong to her. United by their vivid, almost

garish colour combinations, Nylander's paintings stand out even in a room teeming with objects. "I was always very drawn to the idea of colour as a physical phenomenon," she explains. "I want my paintings to be a space that the body reacts to."

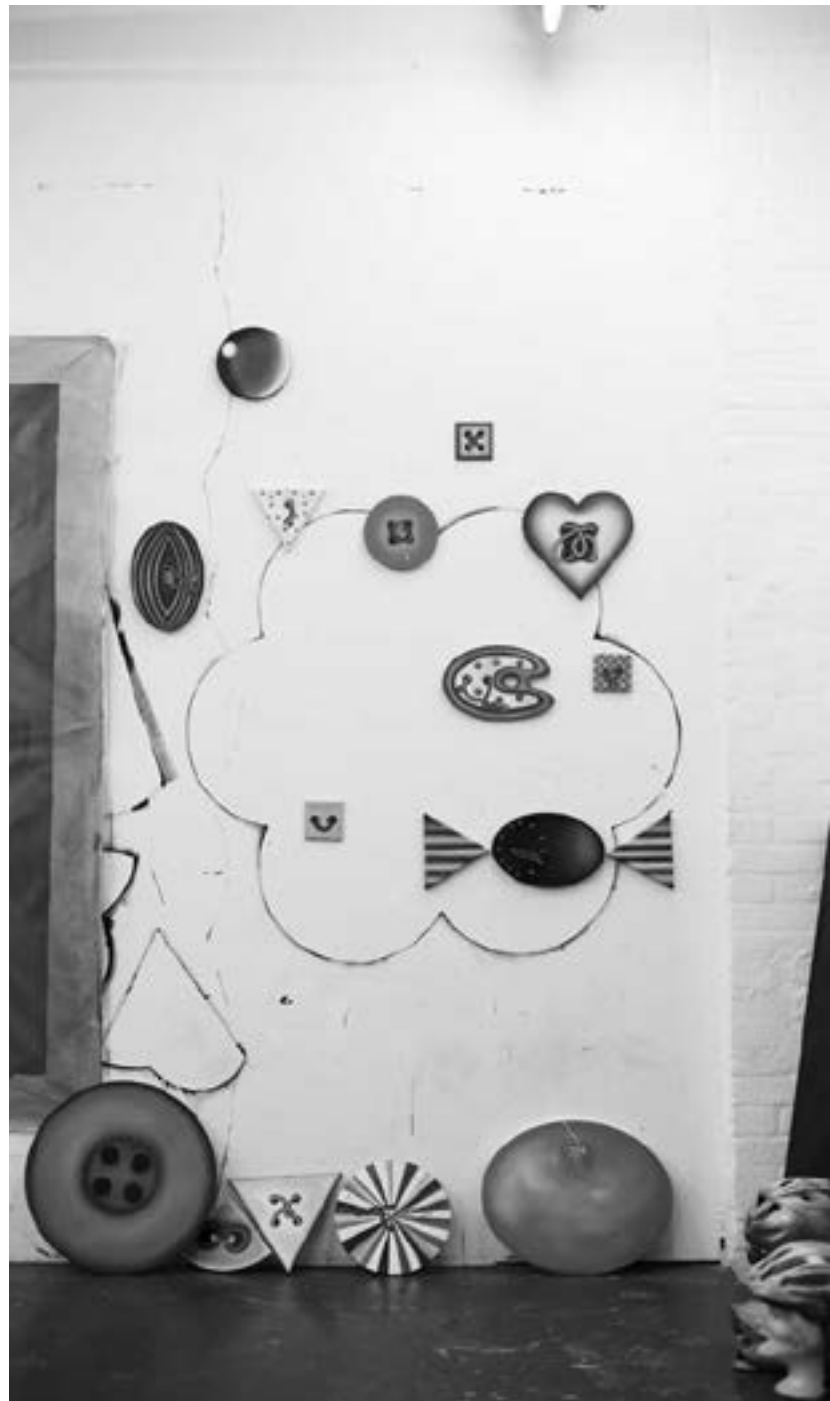
Born in Gothenburg, Sweden in 1989, Nylander cites the Gothenburg Colourists and the Skagen painters—two Scandinavian collectives active at the turn of the 20th century—as early influences on her colour palette. It's easy to see why; known for their vibrant, light-filled canvases, both groups utilized colour as a tool to evoke emotion in their respective audiences. A less likely inspiration, Nylander tells me over tea and slices of cake, comes in the form of traffic signs. "When I was a teenager my hobby was to go out at night and steal them to put in my room," she says with a laugh. "I thought they were the most amazing, beautiful things." Nylander hasn't always considered herself a painter. Starting her studies at the HFBK in the sculpture department, it was only during an exchange in the context of the Art School Alliance Program (ASA) at the San Francisco Art Institute that she began working on canvas. Based on a set of drawings Nylander made while she was still in Hamburg, her first painting series, *minijobs*, dates from this time. The series comprises images of buttons rendered in oil paint on shaped, sometimes pre-stretched canvases, an idea that suddenly came to Nylander during a trip to an art supplies shop. "I immediately had this *ding* moment of, yes, that's how they should be," she says.

The title of the series comes from both their diminutive size and the German concept of the "mini job," a type of employment in which employees can only earn up to 450 euros, exempting them from paying income tax. Although the title came after she'd already started the paintings, Nylander's buttons, which have looping painted "strings" that seemingly connect them to the canvas, could be seen as a metaphor for the lack of financial freedom that comes from these restricted roles. "You can't make more money because then you get in trouble," she says. "It's a job that makes you dependent—you're either relying on your family, your partner, or undeclared income."

There is also a gendered aspect to this. As critic Francesca Lacatena pointed out in her 2019 essay on the *minijobs* series, last year two thirds of "mini-jobbers" were women. "This special status," she wrote, "was originally justified by the supposed limited labor market attachment of the country's married women whose role in the traditional family model was at best that of supplementary income earner."

It bears repeating that women, alongside the myriad of other challenges they face, are still paid 80 cents for every dollar a man earns (for women of colour this statistic is even worse). As a female artist, Nylander has tried to combat the current system—"which is basically working against you"—by collectivizing. While still a student she was a member of the Hamburg-based feminist collective CALL. After graduation she moved to Berlin to take part in Goldrausch, a program for female artists offering 15 women per year workshops in professional development in an attempt to combat the most frequent challenges faced by female artists. "I think it's important to be with other female artists in a group to share questions, dreams, and insecurities," explains Nylander. "It's pointless to try and solve these problems alone."

For her latest series, these interests found their way onto her canvases. Based on protest signs from the 2017 Women's March, the series began out of an interest in the allure of the analogue in our digital age. "We do everything on a computer now," Nylander ex-



Studio of Astrid Kajsa Nylander, Berlin, 2020



Hagen Schümann in his gallery, Berlin, 2020

plains, “but it occurred to me during the protests that when we go out in the streets we’re still taking paint and making these often quite personalized posters.” As with the *minijobs* series, many of these pieces exist somewhere between objects and paintings—they function as, and are representations of, signs of protest. “In the beginning,” Nylander continues, “I was wondering how I could actually transform these signs into paintings. Then I came to the idea that it would actually be interesting to just paint them as they are—like a study.”

At her recent solo exhibition at the Kunstverein Siegen, Nylander showed these “studies” alongside a large-scale painting featuring further images of posters from the protest with flowers that are growing in and around fences. “I see this as a symbol for the patriarchy,” she explains of this inclusion. “It’s not us versus the patriarchy because we’re actually intertwined,” she says. “The question is, how can you protest against something that you grew up within?” Taken from the blurb on the back of a hairspray bottle, the exhibition title, *Mega Widerstandskraft* (mega resistance), further underlines this point. The absurdity of the language of political resistance being repackaged and used to sell beauty products is not lost on Nylander. As she puts it, “I mean, what has the firmness of your hair got to do with it?”

Astrid Kajsa Nylander studied at the HFBK Hamburg from 2012-18 with Jutta Koether and Hanne Loreck. In 2019, she had a solo show at Kunstverein Siegen and took part in group shows at Crum Heaven, Stockholm; MiART, Milan; Gallery NTK, Prague; Strizzi Space, Cologne; and Haus am Kleistpark, Berlin. She is currently based between Stockholm and Berlin. More information: <http://astridkajsanylander.net/>

“I don’t usually like the cool guys”: Hagen Schümann created a thriving gallery in Berlin

“The first time I had to make an invoice to Hong Kong I had no idea what I was doing,” admits Hagen Schümann. It’s a remarkably candid statement to hear from a gallerist, but Schümann, who initially trained as an artist, wears his inexperience as a badge of honour. “I talked to some older friends and they told me that some of the nicest galleries are founded by artists,” the thirty-five-year-old director says with pride.

We’re sitting in the backroom of Å+, the Berlin-based gallery that Schümann has been running for the past five years. Originally a driving school—complete with an ugly green carpet—he spent six months renovating the space with a friend after signing the lease in 2015. “I rented it first as a studio, but after I finished fixing up the room I decided I didn’t want to work here anymore,” explains Schümann. Instead, he decided to open an exhibition space, which quickly became a full time job. “I thought I would run Å+ and make work in my spare time,” he says, “but it’s just crazy how much work it is.”

Still, he’s not complaining. After a few years of self-funding the project, Schümann says that the gallery is now sustaining itself through sales alone. It’s an impressive feat considering the lack of collectors in Berlin and the recent spate of closures of small and medium-sized galleries in the city. He modestly attributes his success to the unexpected commercial success he had with some of his artists, as well as the ample help and advice he has received from friends who work at other galleries. “If those people weren’t there it would be much harder,” he admits.

One unexpected factor in the gallery’s favour is its location. Situated in Moabit, Å+ is one of a number of galleries that have either started in or moved to the Central Berlin district in the last few years. “There’s no better place in the city,” says Schümann, who cites the transport and autobahn connections as major plus points. There is also

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