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Schwein: A Work Process

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In the spring of 2019, I met free-range pigs on an organic farm outside Malmö. I felt a buzzing in my chest. That summer I couldn't stop thinking about pigs. I began a photographic and artistic work that spanned four years.

At the farm, Ängavallen, I was welcome to photograph as I wanted. There, the animals are allowed to go outside all year round, to root, dig, play, and bathe in mud puddles during their short time on earth. In the beginning I was afraid of the pigs and they were afraid of me. Gradually I dared to approach them and gained their trust. I felt like Jane Goodall when I sat in dusty fields summer mornings and evenings trying to understand what kind of animal the pig is. When my exhibition was finished, I missed them. Being able to lie in the straw in the sun and hear their content snores around me was a respite from human life.

Part of my work was to understand the pig's place in society. I stood with the animal rights activists Kristianstad Pig Save outside Scan's factory to greet the pigs going in for slaughter. I also visited one of the largest pig factories in Germany.

With me I had my analog medium format camera and a small video camera, a GoPro, and a notebook.

Here are excerpts from my process diary:

20/8 2019, Ängavallen.

I wonder if the pigs smell the gelatin when I change the film?

11/11 2019

All species disappear. Pigs exist in hundreds of millions.

6/3 2020

The radical thing is to make the pigs look beautiful. Beauty and humor. The violence as a hidden message. Everyone should want the pictures on the wall.

19/5 2020, demonstration with Kristianstad Pig Save outside Scan.

The adrenaline rush when the slaughter truck arrives. The pigs are so real. Pink with human eyes. Body. Then the rapid heartbeats and the silence afterwards. One pig has scratch marks and wounds. Blue eyes, scared eyes. One is lying on the floor unable to get up. My instinct is to comfort them "Little pig, we're trying, we're trying". The smell of smoked ham mixes with that of pig poo and live animals at the slaughterhouse entrance.

Thoughts:

- We live in a society that makes it extremely difficult to do good. Those who try must exert themselves to the utmost.

- Life after this - heaven - is it animal-free? Imagine getting there and all the pigs are there too.



17/8 2020, Ängavallen.

I could start working faster today, they were calmer. Maybe it was the heat, maybe they recognized me. Like a relationship. I have been interested in them and scouted for almost a year. And now I have been granted access. Now I love them. I could control a little more today. Went to the mud puddle by the sows, and then everyone came there. Got a feeling that two of the sows, especially one of them, liked that I photographed her. I know this can go well now. Proud that I was so persistent. Maybe I will only use the pictures I take from now on, discard the others. Getting really close now. Totally covered in mud.

1/10 2020, scanning pictures in the office.

I was at Ängavallen 3 hours straight last week. Only with the sows with litters in the meadow. Want that to be the universe now. The universe of pigs. Always summer, closeness, calm, pleasure. I feel like I'm close to a breakthrough. But time is running out. Soon the light and heat will disappear. Soon the sows are moved and the piglets are slaughtered.

– Motherhood. Friendship. Existence.



14/10 2020, pig factory, Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany

My skin smells like pig. The cameras smell like pigs. I did breathing exercises on the way in. Panic was close.



Fixated sows. Dead piglets. Felt like I could barely make it. Had to take pictures constantly. Without the camera it was unbearable. Started telling all the sows “I love you”. Felt it. Seeing them and giving them my love was my only means. The system is merciless. The powerlessness is total. The roof and beams completely covered in spiderwebs. The pigs have such cute, beautiful faces. The young are curious like children. The big ones suffered the most. They fixated the sows while waiting for them to give birth. Lying in their own shit. Filling their cages, genitals pushed through the cracks, teats red and tense. Panting, biting the beams, but most of them completely apathetic. Only women who worked with them. Everyone in the staff was kind to the animals from what I saw.

10/5 2022, Ängavallen.

I made a friend today! Went out at 06.15. The year-old sows were sleeping in the straw outside. She (Carmen? Stina?) lay down right next to me wanting to be scratched. Wonder if she had a calming effect on the other pigs. It went so well today. I got to join. It is wonderful to film and include the sounds. The dust that swirls around the snout as they breathe in their shed. I could co-exist with them. She made me feel safe.

They are slaughtered one by one when they reach a slaughter weight of 100 - 110 kg. She was big. Going back on Thursday. Hope she lives then.

27/5 2022, Ängavallen.

Damn crappy day. She is gone. Sold in pieces in the shop now. She didn't come up to me and lay on her side to be scratched. I was so sad. Just crying. The others care as little about me as people do about pigs. But she wanted to be with me. Sensed when I needed support. Then she came and laid down next to me. With full confidence. I looked for her everywhere. Scanned the area. Checked in all the sheds. Looked for her spots and the yellow round tag in her ear. My friend.

They are getting disgusting now. Puberty. Riding each other. Smelling each other's asses.

All technology malfunctioned. I forgot the microphone. Accidentally turned on continuous shooting instead of video on the GoPro. Then the GoPro died completely. Fucking shit.

5/6 2022, Ängavallen.

It is being in existence. No goodbye, beginning or end. Except for the imminent absolute end. It's addictive to me. An original, higher state.



23/6 2022, Ängavallen, with the sows.

Animals that feel good are in absolute zen. The enviable state of the present. In life.

A shrill call and all five or six sows gathered with their heads towards the middle and the piglets came running. Some kind of conference. Then everyone went back to their own.

8/8 2022, Ängavallen.

Why am I doing this when I'm so afraid of death?

17/10 2022 Exhibition text:

What is a life? A soul in a body? What is the purpose of that body? It's longing?

I only know mine. My body wants to feel the warmth of another body. The smell of earth and rain. The look at the horizon and the anticipation of what is there.

For four years I have been photographing pigs. A pig's life is short. They say pigs are like us. They can definitely teach us how to enjoy ourselves – you have to look hard to find more sensual creatures than pigs.

But the vast majority of pigs are losers. Industrialization's biggest loser.

