

FRIEZE

Lea Porsager's Desire for Destruction

At her first institutional solo exhibition in Sweden at Moderna Museet, the artist's sculptures reference Marcel Duchamp and evocations of pleasure and knowledge

BY [MATTHEW RANA](#) IN [REVIEWS](#) | 12 APR 21



'STRIPPED', the title of Danish artist Lea Porsager's first institutional solo exhibition in Sweden at Moderna Museet, is a reference to Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23) – a citation the artist further appropriates in her aluminium sculpture *Bare Excitation* (all works 2020). In Porsager's version – a meeting of the sacred and profane – the bride's upper half is replaced by yellow and magenta light projected onto the wall. Standing in for the bachelors in the sculpture's lower half are ten magnetised prayer wheels in phallic shapes, which look every bit like sex toys. Here, the artist cheekily invites us to speculate whether it was masturbation rather than group sex that Duchamp had in mind when composing what he once described to Jasper Johns as a 'hilarious picture'. Whatever the case, the erotic encounter between the ethereal bride and her bevy of mechanical bachelors sets the stage for Porsager's relatively bare presentation, which gestures towards the cosmos in its evocations of pleasure, knowledge and desire.



Lea Porsager, 'STRIPPED', 2020, exhibition view, Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Courtesy: the artist and Moderna Museet, Stockholm; photograph: Åsa Lundén

As the intertitles suggest in *Mighty Rushed Wind Experiment* – a 3D animation of undulating surfaces referencing dark matter wind – the erotic can be a deterritorializing force. Punning on physicist and theorist Karen Barad's notion of agential realism, elaborated in her 2007 book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Porsager pitches this as a force capable of turning 'a-genital realism into a stripped bare unbroken fall.' Similar ideas animate the show's grand gesture, *G.O.D. [Generator. Organizer. Destroyer]*, a monumental sculpture comprising blades from a disassembled wind turbine cut into genital-shaped pieces and scattered the length of the gallery. Here, too, we glimpse an erotic capacity to change not only how we experience space, but also our bodies and those with whom we share that space. We are both within and outside of the realm of sculpture. For Porsager – one of a younger generation of Nordic artists whose interest in spirituality and the occult has folded into the new materialism of thinkers like Barad, who foreground the immanent vitality of matter – this includes outside elements such as breath, wind and spirit.



Lea Porsager, *Bare Excitation*, 2020, installation view, Moderna Museet, Stockholm.
Courtesy: the artist and Moderna Museet, Stockholm; photograph: Åsa Lundén

More than the version of spirituality it offers – an esoteric mix of Buddhism, Pentecostalism and astrophysics – it is the show's ethical propositions that intrigue. However, 'STRIPPED' is far too ambivalent to be a morality play. In part, this is due to the non-binary materialist philosophy on which it is based. Over the last decade new materialist thought has lent cachet to even the most blatant formalism, which is typically recast as research into materialist ontologies, a critique of Western epistemology: As if anthropocentrism, mind/body dualism and representational thinking could be undone by the non-human agency of paint spills or the intelligence of brushed aluminium.



Lea Porsager, 'STRIPPED', 2020, exhibition view, Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Courtesy: the artist and Moderna Museet, Stockholm; photograph: Åsa Lundén

To an extent, a similar dynamic plays out in 'STRIPPED': at their most basic level, these are slick post-minimal sculptures on which questions surrounding the nature of being and knowing are brought to bear. But what sets Porsager's work apart from that of like-minded peers and makes it convincing, is both its strangeness and its grounding in social experimentation – as in her *Anatta Experiment* (2012), presented at documenta 13, which revolved around the spiritual communities formed during the early 1900s at Monte Verità in Switzerland. Although strange, the part-whole relationships that typically coalesce in Porsager's work feel aloof here, stripped of utopian promise. Perhaps this is simply the logical outcome of the artist's realist approach or the consequence of a protracted pandemic during which neither she nor the curator could be physically present for the installation. For all its eroticism, this is an intensely lonely albeit thought-provoking presentation.

*Lea Porsager, **'STRIPPED'** is on view at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, through 16 May 2021.*

Main image: Lea Porsager, Full of Beans, 2020, installation view, Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Courtesy: the artist and Moderna Museet, Stockholm; photograph: Åsa Lundén

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