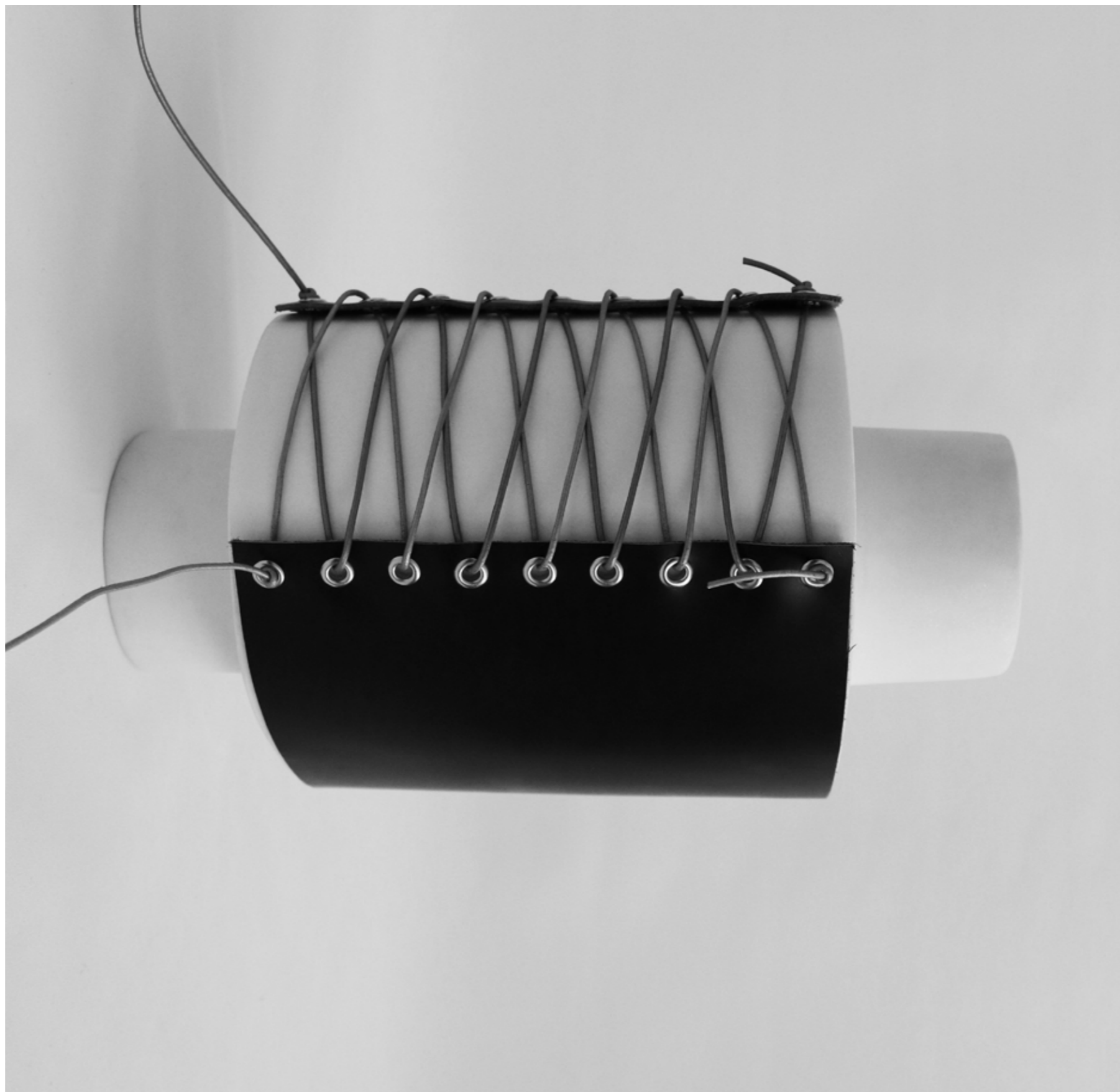


Lea Guldditte Hestelund
Consumed Future Spewed Up as Present

07.04 – 27.05 2018



CV

Lea Guldditte Hestelund (b. 1983) studied at Düsseldorf Art Academy in 2012-13, and graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 2015. Her work has been shown in Denmark and abroad in exhibitions at Værelset, ARoS, Kunsthal Aarhus, SAK Kunstbygning, Ystad Art Museum, Treignac Projet, Künstlerhaus Dortmund, Parallel Vienna, and CompleteBody in New York.

EVENTS

Friday 6 April 5-6pm

DEMONSTRATION: *CARRIERS*

On the opening night the series of works entitled *Carriers*, which is part of the exhibition, will be demonstrated. The *Carriers* are a kind of uniform designed for both human and non-human bodies.

Thursday 19 April 6-7.30pm

CONVERSATION: *THINKING THROUGH FICTION*

What potential does fiction possess as an approach to understand reality? On the occasion of the exhibition, Hestelund will in the company of author Olga Ravn as well as Dea Thune Antonsen and Ida Bencke from the Laboratory of Art and Ecology talk about how to think through fiction and the importance of communities and collaboration. The event will be in Danish.

Thursday 10 May 7-8.30pm

SOUND PERFORMANCE: *XENIA XAMANEK (EQUIS)*

For one evening, the exhibition provides the framework for a performative sound universe created by the musician Xenia Xamanek (Equis), who like Hestelund is interested in a fluid concept of the body and bodies in transition.

Friday 25 May 6-9pm

BOOK LAUNCH: *DE ANSATTE*

For the exhibition the author Olga Ravn has written a work of fiction, which is presented as one of the works in the installation. This evening, Overgaden invites you to the launch of the novel that will be published at Gyldendal.

THANK YOU

Lea Guldditte Hestelund would like to thank Olga Ravn, Lisbeth Jacobsen/Dufteriet, Tony Winkel Vasquez, Birk Bjørlo, Christine Overvad Hansen, Flemming Brian Nielsen/FBN Stenhuggeri A/S, Kasper Holm Jensen, and Esben Gyldenløve. Also a thank you to all the carriers of *Carriers* on the opening night: Pia Eikaas, Nina Hestelund, Marianne S. Hestelund, Christian H. Pedersen, Nanna Stjernholm Jepsen, Mette Woller, Birk Bjørlo, Christine Overvad Hansen, Merete Jankowski, Zaratea Gaarden Hurtig, Marit Tingleff, and Olga Ravn.

Image: Lea Guldditte Hestelund, *Marga TS_01A1*, 2017.

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Witnesses under the Influence – The Subtly Posthuman in the Sculptures of Hestelund

By Jacob Wamberg

Has our longing for the future switched to apathy? Not that long ago the future lay like an enticing horizon, tempting us with the promise of infinite progress, ideal societies, and technological wonderlands – and we could not wait to get there. “Because the future has long since begun” as the eighties slogan for Commodore home computers announced with an image of a woman running across a vast, sun-glistening desert. But as we have gradually become engulfed by a world of artificial intelligence and biotechnology, it is as if we have lost any sense of the kind of desire or utopian expectations these accelerating new developments were meant to fulfil. Like the rainbow, the horizon tends to disappear as soon as you approach the place where you thought it was.

Consumed Future Spewed Up as Present, the title of Lea Guldditte Hestelund’s exhibition at Overgaden, can be seen as referring to a variant of this perplexity. The title plays on the myth of Cronos, the Greek god of time, who devoured his own offspring and then disgorged them at the command of Zeus. The time we live in has practically devoured the future we so strongly desired, but in our gluttony we have retched it up as an all too familiar present. And of what use is a present full of future promises if we can only devour them with our ingrown habits? A subtlety in Hestelund’s installation is thus that even though it has a science fiction framing via Olga Ravn’s novel accompanying the exhibition, it is highly restrained in terms of explicit indicators of “traditional” future universes: the spacey nursery repertoire of rockets, robots, celestial bodies, laser beams, monsters with mechanical components, etc. To be sure, with its orange floor the pyramidal corridor connecting the lounge-like entrance to the inner room of the installation might be reminiscent of a corridor on a spaceship like those in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, just as the flat, black stone circle in the inner room recalls a telescope or porthole looking out onto the universe. Nonetheless, science fiction is just one of many possible frameworks of interpretation.

What we immediately encounter in the exhibition’s tripartite interior suite is an unfathomably unsettling installation of amorphous, body-like marble sculptures tied together or hung from leather harnesses or straps, the so-called *Carriers*. The combination of recollected, fragmented body parts – torsos, tumours, polypuses, undeveloped organs – and restrictive harnesses evokes a surrealistic atmosphere, and one intuitively grasps Hestelund’s interrogation of what bodies are – where their boundaries are, how they are disciplined and reshaped, and how they relate to objects at large: tools, machines, fetishes, toys, biological organisms, inorganic

natural forms, space matter. Despite their smoothly shining classical imperturbability, some of the sculptures even appear to have been shaped by the binds that tie them. A white, cylindrical sculpture (*Marga TS_01A1*) is laced like a Victorian corset, whereas others are reminiscent of parcels (*Tentare NR_02A2*), strung joints of meat (*Ai CM_03B3*), or generic enslavement (*Terra CA_01A1*). They remind us of the corporal punishment and torture that have shaped the human and animal body throughout history, and also of the inversion of these forms of pain in the sadomasochistic desire of subcultural fetish rituals.

If through her surrealistic approach Hestelund points back to modernism, and even further back to classicism, this in no way minimises the science fiction perspective. On the contrary, by insisting on elements that obviously belong to the established inventory of art, she identifies something alien-like if not post-human at the very roots of modernism, something our biotechnological age might finally have matured us sufficiently to uncover. The thoroughly digested present we spew up as the future is perhaps especially present in the art we thought we knew so well, but in which we have overlooked an inherent undermining of the human subject. Freud claimed the uncanny to be the familiar in unfamiliar places: ultimately the womb penetrating the armour of civilisation – the individual consciousness the adult subject believes itself securely ensconced within.¹ The unsettling effect of Hestelund’s installation may thus be due to the fact that the future has always been concealed within what we until now have domesticated as ‘modern art’, and that the future leakage of art objects, the futuristic seepage into the present, recalls the fluid boundaries between the subject and the rest of the world, between body and object, and between the ego and non-ego last experienced in infancy – and which are also stored in prehistoric layers, from tribal cultures down through biological and geological evolution. The posthuman also marks the return of the prehuman.

It might be fitting to accompany this archaeological re-exposure of the posthuman in modernism with the re-excavation of a half-forgotten genealogy of art history from the 1960s: the American art theorist Jack Burnham’s *Beyond Modern Sculpture*. In this pioneering work, Burnham declares that art since 1900 can be seen as a symptom of a new era in which technology will reshape and maybe outpace organic life entirely. He specifically addresses “the part being played by sculpture in shaping our destination as a post-human species”.² More recently such thinking has been pursued by feminist posthumanist Rosi Braidotti, who calls

avant-garde art non-human due to its connections with animal, vegetable, earth and planetary forces, and post-human in its interrogation of the limits of what the embodied self can do and endure.³

So again, the unfamiliar revealed in the familiar does not only come from the future and outer space, but at least as much from the inside, the inherent yet repressed. The uncertainty of where to locate the unfamiliar permeates the novel Ravn has written to accompany the exhibition. Leather-bound with a seal on a table in the lounge-like entrance it forms a parallel narrative of sorts. Experiences of mysterious, foreign objects on “ship no. six thousand” – which Hestelund’s exhibition is presumably a version of after the completion of “a biological termination” – are related through a series of numbered witness statements. The witnesses are clearly infected by the alienness they have to relate to. The objects are referred to as difficult to define, as one becoming many, as indeterminately shifting between gender, body, nature and artefact: “As if they came from our dreams or from a distant past that we carry within us as a memory without language. Like the memory of being an amoeba or a unicellular organism, of being a weightless foetus in warm water.” (018) But the same prehuman and posthuman lack of boundaries and emancipation from our habitual categories and dualisms affect the witnesses, who say of themselves: “Half human, of flesh and technology. *Too alive.*” (014) Or: “I live like numbers live, and the stars, like the tanned hide cut from the stomach of an animal lives, and nylon ropes, as all objects live connected to each other. I am like one of these objects.” (019)

It is all these posthuman as well as prehuman transgressions of boundaries that Hestelund strives to re-expose with her curious objects – and their relationship to the context and viewer. Most of the objects draw on the traditional relationship of marble sculptures with a perfect, complete and polished human form, but Hestelund’s body, as underlined by the recurrent flesh tone of the stone, turns towards vulnerability, fragmentation, and opening up to its surroundings. The normal development of its classical stem cells is arrested and twisted towards the organic, crystalline or even tool-like, recalling the cyborg – that post-human synthesis of the organic and mechanical.⁴ Sporadic spray paint – in psychedelic blues or yellows – underlines this sabotage of classical ideals. In this anti-classical departure, belts, straps and cords are given commensurately more scope, becoming what the German philosopher Martin Heidegger called *Zeug*: clothing as technology in the broadest sense of the term.⁵ Yet it is clear that this technology is no longer

a compliant tool for humans. Instead it is they who, for better or worse, are transformed. To underline that this technology and the objects it manipulates is not locked within its own metaphorical space, and can like Ravn’s novel reach out and interact with the space of the viewer, the exhibition opens with a performance by a group of people dressed in the same *Carriers* that enclose the objects.

Hestelund’s posthuman deconstruction of the coherent human body is particularly striking in the context of her previous work. At one juncture she was manically obsessed with the classical marble body and its flesh and blood reappearance in fitness culture. For her art academy graduation project she used bodybuilding to transform her own body into that of the figure of *Discobolus* (2014-15), as well as reconstructing fitness equipment in white marble. Just as the first round of deforming the classical human form in surrealism was simultaneous with the vitalist body culture cultivated by fascist and communist regimes in the 1920s and 1930s, Hestelund now enters the second round of deformation during totalitarianism’s late successor: the fitness culture of neoliberalism. And who could be better equipped to detonate the body perfected by force than someone who has inhabited it herself?

Jacob Wamberg is Professor of Art History at Aarhus University.

1. Sigmund Freud, ‘Das Unheimliche’, in: *Gesammelte Werke, chronologisch geordnet*, Vol. 12: *Werke aus den Jahren 1917-1920* (London: Imago, 1947), pp. 227-68.
2. Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of this Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1987 [1968]), p. 371.
3. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge and Malden (MA): Polity, 2013), p. 107.
4. Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, in: *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), pp. 149-81.
5. Martin Heidegger, ‘Die Ursprung des Kunstwerkes’ (1935-36), in: *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), pp. 1-74, particularly pp. 13-14.