

SVILOVA | GUNILLA HANSSON

# ***REFINE***

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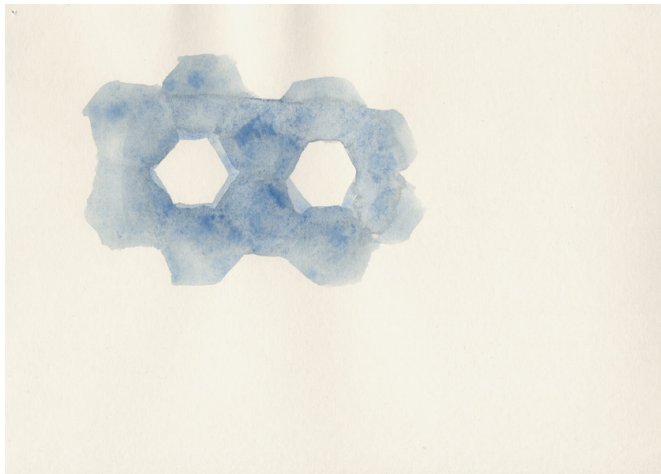
# ***THE SWARM GROWS FAINT***

By Laura Mott

See the white: look at the space around the hexagonal shapes that promise to continue, but do not; the space outside the frame that can never truly confine the sea; the space we call “nothing” after the color ceases to bleed. It is the possibility of this space where this text resides (refines) and where the work of Gunilla Hansson becomes a speculative detour towards an uncertain future.

The view from Hansson’s studio in Kungshamn, Sweden, overlooks the Preem oil refinery and its smokestacks. She gets her closest viewpoint by boat, on the familiar

journey to the island of Stora Kornö where her family keeps bees, which guides her most recent investigation between the structures of the refinery and the beehive. Her findings and examinations are placed before us, careful comparisons of image, watercolor, text, and line. They are primarily separate forms with a hesitated connectiveness, compositions that recognize the seriousness and restrained hand this kind of inquiry requires. Nonetheless, the space that surrounds them functions like air, giving individual sustenance to each yet remaining invisible.



Ett arbetarbi kan meddela andra nektarsamlande bin var en nektarkälla befinner sig. Det utför då den så kallade bidansen. Det rör sig då i form av en åtta, vanligen på en lodrät växkaka. Åtten är hoptryckt så att biet rör sig längs en rak linje mellan de båda ringarna i åtten. När biet rör sig längs denna raka linje vippar det med bakkroppen. Lodlinjen längs med växkakan motsvarar riktningen mot solen i horisontalplanet. Den rätta linje längs med vilken det dansande biet vippar med bakkroppen svarar mot riktningen till nektarkällan. Vinkeln mellan lodlinjen och vickningslinjen motsvarar alltså vinkeln mellan solen och nektarkällan i terrängen. Om biet dansar med huvudet uppåt ligger nektarkällan inom den halvcirkel av horisonten, ovanför vilken solen befinner sig på himlen. Om biet dansar med huvudet nedåt ligger källan inom den motsatta halvcirkeln. Om nektarkällan ligger nära genomförs dansen snabbt. Ju längre bort nektarkällan är belägen, desto långsammare genomförs dansen. Om nektarkällan ligger mycket nära dansar biet inte i en åtta, utan i en cirkel med varannan cirkel medurs, varannan moturs. Då genomsöker de andra bina området närmast kupan i alla riktningar.

Gunilla Hansson, *REFINE*, 2013

In my mind, a film flickers on to this space like an empty screen; honey and oil seep across the page we see (sea). They move closer from opposite ends. The liquids slowly come towards each other in glorious, shining viscosity, each delicious and menacing.

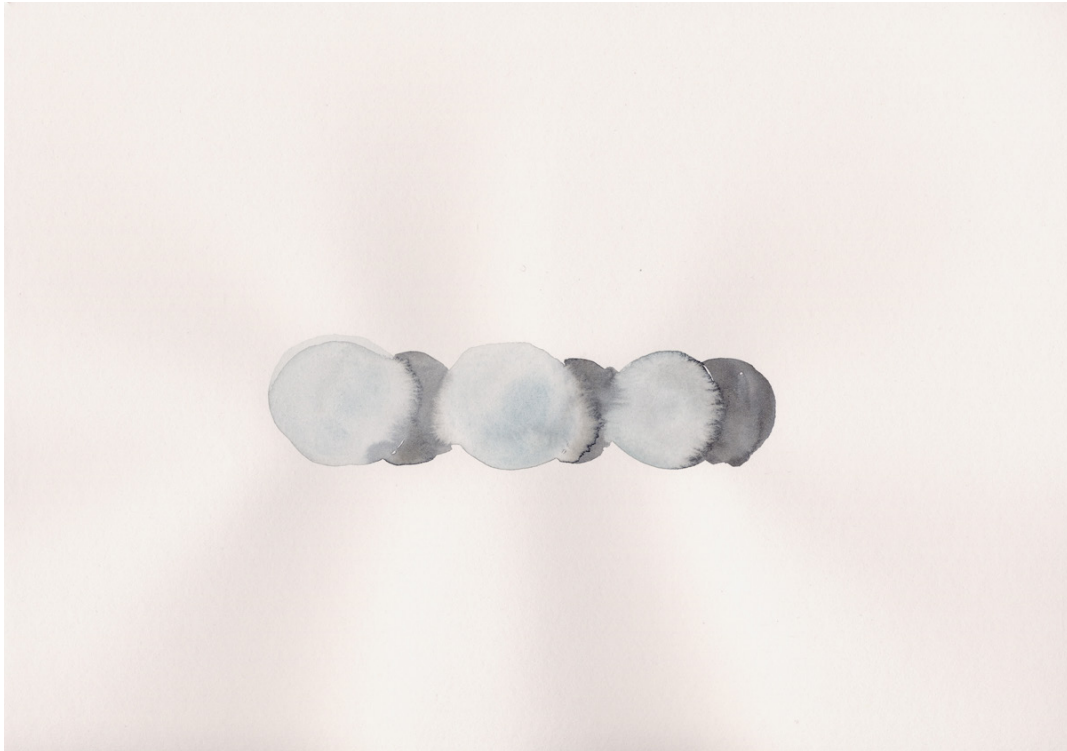
Oil is hydrophobic, meaning “water fearing”, immiscible with water. In the above scenario, the oil becomes the obvious brute (crude), a villain restrained by its evil doings by the valiant water. However, oil, in and of itself, is rather innocent; without our extraction it is benign. This is not to diminish the thrilling drama of its creation—organic compounds, molecules and rock in an infinite wrestling match, under intense heat and pressure, beneath the earth’s surface. However, it is only within a narrative that is not its own—the story of human innovation and destruction—that this naturally occurring yellow-to-black liquid becomes a villain.

A single strike of G Minor, the chord of suspense (consequence).

The bees have long been humans’ uncertain allies sustained by a history of nervous respect (prospect): their society and sweet crop we celebrate; their sting and swarm, we fear. A saccharine example of our loyalty (soliloquy) is the English custom of *telling the bees*, an intimate conversation in which hives are told of important events in their keeper’s lives, such as births, marriages, travels or deaths. Yet in the collective mind’s eye, they remain dutiful warriors—diligent to their mission, protective of their territory. Poets and philosophers have long exalted bees and their hive structures as a model for human society, transforming the hexagon into metaphorical architecture that encapsulates class systems, work ethic, co-operation, industry and societal harmony. So now as we watch the collapse of their colonies, it is not only an ecological travesty, but also



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a worrisome foreshadowing. In recent years, the topic of bees is likened to the biblical plague of the locust. However, the sound of danger is its opposite, not an increasing roar, but rather we hear the swarm growing faint. The catastrophic depletion of bees is injuring the environment and crippling our food resources. In parts of Northern China, where the threatened disappearance of bees has already come to pass, the workers out of desperation now have to pollinate fruit trees by hand.

The film flickers, honeycombs (catacombs) fill with oil. It happens fast, ceasing all production (suffocation). We have failed all attempts at containment (contaminant).

Perhaps there will be another outcome; the honey and oil seep together, and instead of a war, they conspire. Interests aligned, they undergo convergent evolution; no longer will they curtail to our desire for industry and speed, or tastes for onion and cherries. The

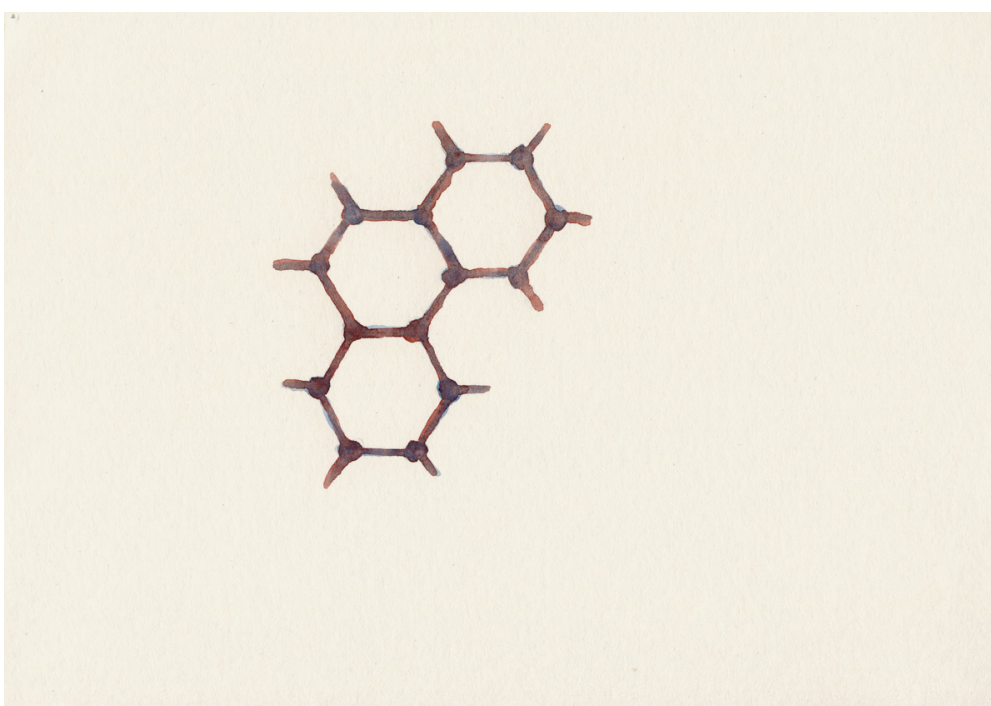
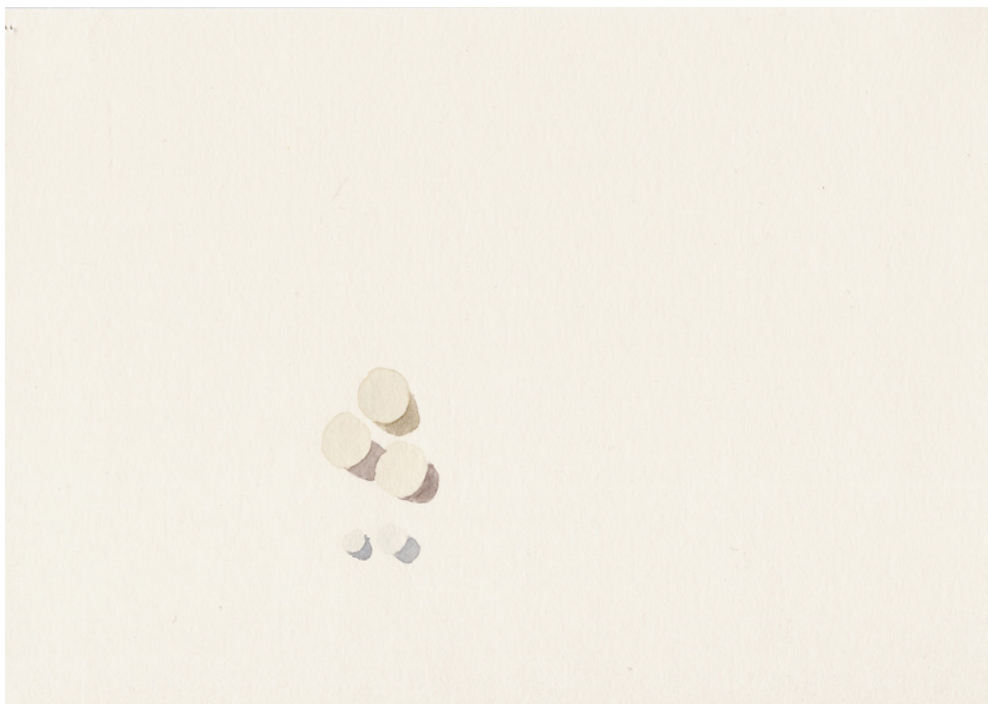
air that was once invisible (invincible) joins the plot.

In the aftermath, the smoke has a calming effect; the bees enjoy the respite and the oil is placid. Without us, the film is completely silent (salient).

Laura Mott

-LAURA MOTT-

Laura Mott is the Curator of Contemporary Art and Design at the Cranbrook Art Museum, located outside Detroit, Michigan, USA. Previously, she held positions at Valand Academy (Gothenburg), Iaspis (Stockholm), Gothenburg Konsthall, Mission 17 (San Francisco), Peter Freeman Gallery (New York City), and the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York City). She received her M.A. in Curatorial Studies from Bard College and BFA/BA dual degree in Art History and Fine Art from the University of Texas. She writes about contemporary art and culture, and has been the co-editor of several publications.



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## **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Gunilla Hansson (b. in Kungshamn, Sweden, 1961) graduated from Valand School of Fine Arts in Gothenburg. She is the head teacher at Gerlesborgsskolan in Bohuslän and a member of the art collective TOMBOLA.

Hansson has exhibited her work at Gallery 54 (Gothenburg), Gothenburg Museum of Art, The Nordic Watercolour Museum (Sweden), Taigh Chearsabagh (Scotland), RMIT School of Art Gallery (Melbourne) and P-House Gallery (Tokyo).

She currently lives in Kungshamn, Sweden.

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