

## Do Not Touch the Floor

I once called up Helén Svensson from the middle of a gym routine, seemingly out of the blue. We had met per her participation in the 20th anniversary exhibition of ID:I Galleri where her first solo is now being presented, and ultimately marks a year-long collaboration between us. Approaching her with the idea, there was a hunch that leaps forward and a new phase of her artistry could be moved towards in a close dialogue. The exhibiton "Inte nudda golv" is a seasoned artist at the top of her game, showing inspiring craftsmanship and material command.



Helén Svensson. Photo: Anna Drvnik

**C-P:** You were exhibiting for many years with the now defunct Peter Bergman Gallery in Stockholm, following your graduation from the city's Royal Institute of Art. What can be said about your earlier trajectory as an artist?

**H.S:** I was with the gallery from the beginning until the gallery closed its doors. The mutual trust over a ten-year period became a starting point for my artistic practice and of course meant a lot. I felt very privileged.

**C-P:** When I first started properly surveying your work it was evident that your work often has been seated in minimalism, abstraction, repetition and what appeared in essence like "slow art-making". You once told me in the studio, while describing your work, that from a certain view your making informs elements that are such that even a child should be able to do. Elaborate!

**H.S:** I relate to a simplicity, the small movements, the seemingly meaningless and the everyday. I usually stick to simple materials

that are easy to get hold of and the repetitive method can be applied to most things. I want to make the process easy to everyone; a kind of accessibility.

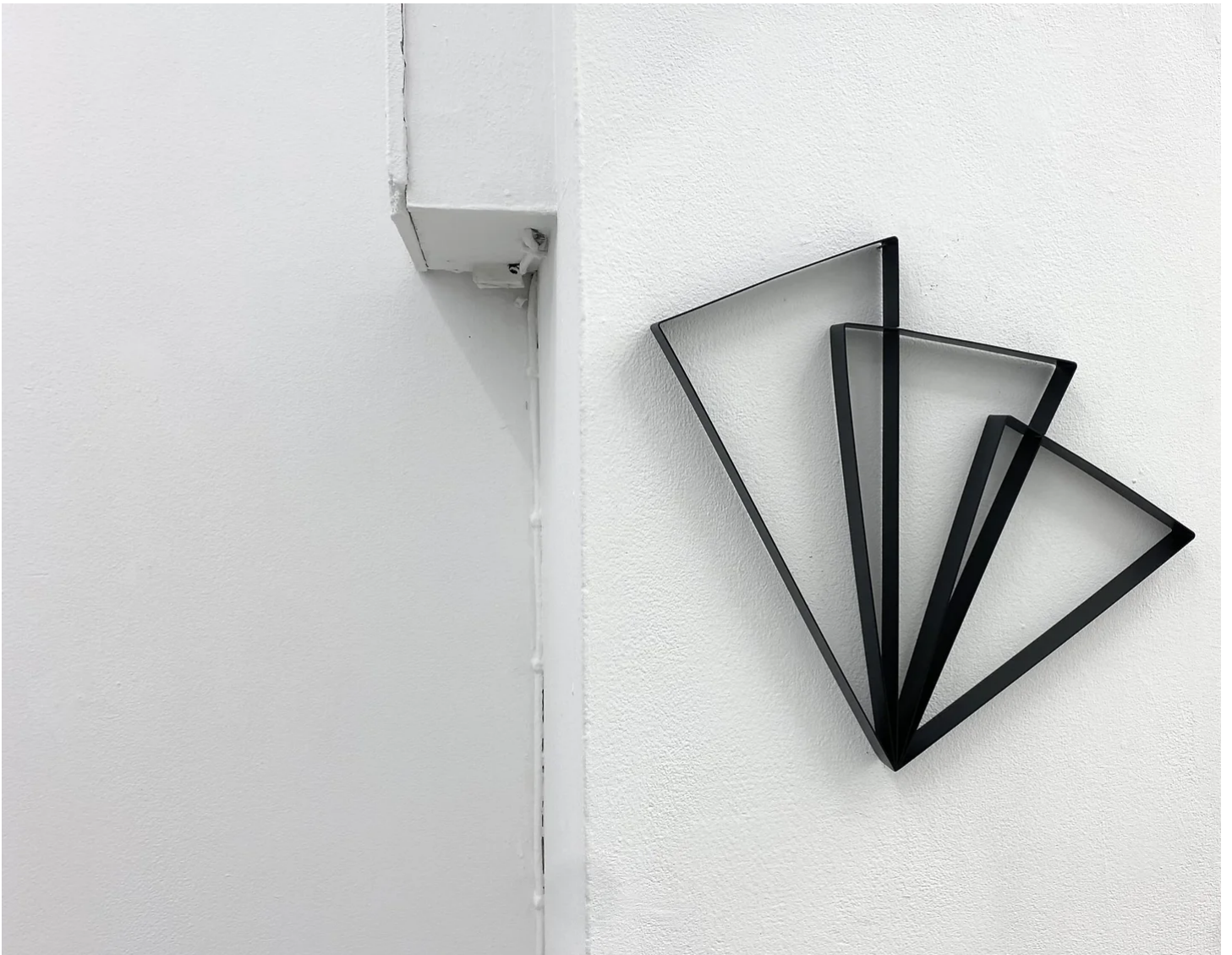


Installation view, Helén Svensson "Inte nudda golv", curated by Ashik Zaman, ID:I Galleri, 2023

**C-P:** When we started our collaboration that is now seeing a second phase with this exhibition, it was intriguing to me how much time you've been spending in the recent year in collective and collaborative projects with other artists. It made perfect sense for that to reflect in that work we would be doing together. A project that materially connects to the exhibition we are presenting at ID:I is the one you've been developing with Lisa Jevbratt that stems from invasive plants on Santa Cruz Island outside of California. What brought your attention to such plants?

**H.S:** Lisa and I had done some projects with wool as material when the idea came up and Lisa started the project "Invasive Species/Endemic Breeds: A sensorial Mapping of Channel Islands" 2017 which I am part of. On Santa Cruz Island, an idea to reintroduce the island's original ecosystem is being implemented. Plants and animals that came to the island from the middle of the 19th century and forward are not considered original and must therefore be removed. Santa Cruz Islands sheep were included in the group of animals to be removed and eradicated from the island. However, some of the sheep were transported to the mainland and remain today. We became interested in the complex and intertwined influence humans have on our ecosystems and the aesthetic, emotional, magical and medicinal relationship between humans, plants and color. In our process-oriented project, we brought wool from Santa Cruz Islands sheep to the island and combined the unwanted sheep's wool with the non-native plants, by dyeing the wool with the colour from the plants.





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**C-P:** Wool stands - or actually - hangs at the forefront of our exhibition. Wool is such an “earthy” and elementary material to me. I’ve been enjoying that we are “playing” with wool and emphasizing it a bit differently than certain art audiences might be used to. I usually would relate wool closer to textil-based art more so than sculpture. Wool is both a material and the “object” of display here. What can you share about the act and work behind processing the wool?

**H.S:** I show an installation with five rings covered with felted wool strips, two of the rings have the natural color of the wool and the other three are dyed with lichens. Wool is so interesting as material as it is so complex. It is both heavy and light, it can be both soft and prickly and of course there is also the smell. In this work, the rings interact with the complexity of the wool material, and the immaterial voids and the placement of the wool rings in the exhibition room bring the visitor into a slow movement.

The slow working process with all the individual elements has been a way of approaching and devoting myself to the material.  
*Clean-wash-card-needle felt-cut strips-collect lichen-dye-wash-bind-sewing-needle felt.*



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**C-P:** Anyone who knows your work intimately from having followed over the years will clearly be able to see significant leaps that have happened also only since your last gallery solo exhibition. Colour definitely is a signifier in the exhibition, a bit in contrast to the visual disposition of much of your earlier work. How might your view on colour have shifted?

**H.S:** Choosing a colour has always been complicated for me, which one should I use and why. In the latest projects together with others, colour has been present. In this exhibition I have used the colour of the lichen and in a Donald Judd interpretation/hommage the blue color is our mutual choice in a close dialogue, so in that way it has been easier. But it is clear that with colour included in the exhibition, my reduced system expands, which I find very inspiring.

**C-P:** Yes, Donald Judd, who is clearly and deliberately referenced in the exhibition. I love that, this nod back to a history of contemporary art. In my head takes so much artistic confidence and conviction to venture towards that particular work that is being presented as one of three works.

**H.S:** Yes, but the prerequisite has been our close dialogue about it. It feels fun! In my interpretation, I have compressed the boxes and then drawn out them to rectangles. The labour of the hand and the material are made visible, which is in line with my artistry.







Helén Svensson. Photo: Anna Drvnik

**C-P:** Lastly, our title is “Inte nudda golv”. We were choosing between two titles; both of which resonated very well but ultimately arrived at this being the one to settle for. What would be a short elevator pitch of the exhibition based on the title?

**H:S:** I'm curious blue... (In Swedish; Jag är nyfiken blå).

### **Ashik Zaman**

*Helén Svensson's solo exhibition "Inte nudda golv", curated by Ashik Zaman, at ID:I Galleri in Stockholm is on view through October 22.*