

Overview



Mamma Andersson and Jockum Nordström, *Surfers*, 2010. Color spit bite and sugar lift aquatints with aquatint and soft ground etching. Paper size: 28½ x 21½ inches; image size: 22 x 15½ inches. Edition 30. All images printed by Emily York, assisted by Ianne Kjorlie and Asa Muir-Harmony.

Mamma Andersson and Jockum Nordström

In April, 2010, Swedish artists Mamma (Karin) Andersson and Jockum Nordström worked for two weeks jointly creating etchings in the Crown Point studio in San Francisco. Crown Point's director, Valerie Wade, interviewed them on April 23, their last day at the Press.

Valerie Wade: We're here today at the end of the third time we've seen you both at Crown Point Press. Jockum was here in December of 2007 and Karin visited with your two sons. Then in December 2008 Karin was in the studio. At that time Jockum was visiting, and the three of us had a conversation about the idea of the two of you working collaboratively on prints, both working on the same plates. But I didn't take you seriously. I didn't know, really, if you meant it or not. It was the first time I had heard about the idea.

Now you have been working together here for the past two weeks, and I would like you to speak a little bit about what sparked the idea.

Jockum Nordström: I think that when we first discussed it with you we had already done something together.

Mamma Andersson: We had done a small thing for an auction in New York, in Brooklyn for a school.

JN: We made something together. Karin came to my studio with some drawings and paintings and we just worked together on them. It worked out well.

MA: We also made something together for friends, for a birthday. We



Mamma Andersson and Jockum Nordström, *Lou*, 2010. Color spit bite and sugar lift aquatints with aquatint and soft ground etching. Paper size: 21½ x 28½ inches; image size: 15½ x 22 inches. Edition 30.



Mamma Andersson and Jockum Nordström, *Readers*, 2010. Color spit bite and sugar lift aquatints with aquatint and soft ground etching. Paper size: 21½ x 28½ inches; image size: 15½ x 22 inches. Edition 30.



Mamma Andersson and Jockum Nordström, *Hunter*, 2010. Color spit bite and sugar lift aquatints with aquatint and soft ground etching. Paper size: 21½ x 28½ inches; image size: 15½ x 22 inches. Edition 30.

were making work together just for fun.

VW: Your work is quite separate and individual so it is a surprise to see both of you placing images together on the same piece of paper.

MA: I think it has been quite important for us to have our work separate because we have everything else together.

JN: The studio is private, you know.

MA: Very private.

JN: It's about your own memories and your own dreams and it's not about anybody else.

MA: I think we developed self-confidence by not mixing each other's work together. To find your own way, it was important to look for your own voice and not mix your partner's voice with yourself.

VW: In the earlier years?

JN: Yes, in the earlier years.

MA: But today, it's so clear what we want to do now. We have strong ideas by ourselves so it doesn't matter. We can work together. We are a good team working together. We have two boys and we have a life together, so it's not a big deal. It's just fun.

JN: It's fun but also challenging when you work with printers. Even if they're really good and you have a good time in the work, it is hard to understand what you should be doing. And this was even more complicated: me and she and the printers.

VW: I watched you working and I know it was complicated, working together and working with the printers. Before you came, did you strategize your approach?

MA: I took some drawings and some backgrounds from my studio to Jockum's studio and I think I was not worried. I think Jockum was a little more worried. He said, "I need two more days to make new things for this collaboration thing." But I saw that the floor was full of cutouts so I said to him, "You don't have to be worried. Let me pick up the things on the floor and make a choice of different stuff."

JN: She had to sweep it up. She swept up a lot of cutouts and put them in a bag and she said, "We'll do something with this." And for me, it was a good idea because it was open, everything was more open. We just came here to the Crown Point studio and we didn't know exactly what we were going to do. I think there's a point in that.

MA: It's better to be open

JN: It's really boring if everything is set out clearly from the beginning.

MA: On the airplane, we started talking, "Should we have a theme for the work? Should we have something to follow?" And then we said, "Okay, we can work out of the Bible." There are the Ten... I don't remember the English word for them.

VW: Commandments.

MA: We were sure we should work with this, but after one day here . . .

JN: No Bibles, this time.

MA: It was like we were in a cage. We couldn't just play around with the cutouts . . .

JN: It wasn't fun. For example, some of the cutouts are close to narrative things already. If you have a story, we thought, if we work with a story thing, maybe it would be more open.

VW: Your friend Paolo Colombo has a really good quote. He says,



Mamma Andersson and Jockum Nordström, *Faces*, 2010. Color spit bite and sugar lift aquatints with aquatint and soft ground etching. Paper size: 28½ x 21½ inches; image size: 22 x 15½ inches. Edition 30.

“Mamma builds houses, Jockum inhabits them. She gathers, he hunts.”

JN: Karin had made a lot of backgrounds, which is like building the house.

MA: But I will say that Jockum builds houses too.

JN: And she paints a lot of figures and people too.

MA: But I know what Paolo means. I think it’s a good opinion.

JN: Since I was two years old, I’ve been obsessed by people and the spaces between people.

VW: And Karin brought landscapes that, as you said, are like houses—the spaces holding the people. Karin, I noticed that sometimes you worked from the back of the watercolor landscapes that you brought. Is that true or no?

JN: It’s beautiful on the other side.

MA: In the last years when I work on paper I mostly use a sort of rice paper. It’s very thin. When you work with watercolor, the paper eats the color, but it is actually difficult to let the color go through the paper, even with rice paper. I have been using a special lacquer so the color can go through the paper. I think, when I’m working with

this lacquer it has something to do with spit bite and sugar lift. These are very close to my process on paper, so when I’m standing by the downdraft table drawing with spit bite acid, it’s very familiar. It’s the same feeling as using the lacquer. I move the brush the same way.

JN: I like to do the spit bite a lot because . . .

MA: It’s so beautiful.

JN: Yes, it’s beautiful and it’s little bit like being Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Something’s coming up, but you don’t know the colors. It’s a good feeling to know you can try different colors in the same marks. When I’m in my studio I have just one chance. So I try to make it in one way.

MA: But it’s not the same with printing.

JN: When the color comes out and the print is good, you’ve got something you don’t get in another way. And I love it. I love it.

MA: Another thing. What’s very, very nice is that you have to lean on the people who are working for you, the printers.

VW: The technical work?

MA: Yes. You have to lean on them, and you have also to be surprised.



Mamma Andersson and Jockum Nordström, *Pieces*, 2010. Color spit bite and sugar lift aquatints with aquatint and soft ground etching. Paper size: 28½ x 21½ inches; image size: 22 x 15½ inches. Edition 30.

You cannot know exactly what's coming out, even if you're planning very strictly. But I like this thing. I like to surprise myself and I like it that we are surprised together, too.

VW: How did you make the choices about which figures to use, about the compositions?

MA: We had some discussions sometimes.

JN: We had discussions all the time: approve, disapprove, print, the best print.

MA: In some of them, you were the chief and in some others I have been the chief. The prints in which each of us was 50 percent chief have been more of a problem. I can have an idea going very far in one direction and you can have an idea going in the other direction, so we have to make small compromises all the time, but finally we find a solution.

VW: The whole is stronger than the parts.

JN: But I think you can't do this too many times. We are having a really good time now. And if we do it one more time, maybe . . .

MA: We can do it in twenty years again, I think.

JN: Yes. Yes.

MA: If we are together.

JN: Maybe if we're not together, we will work better, but the pictures are going to be totally different.

MA: We can do it together in twenty years, even if we're not together.

JN: Okay.

VW: Do you find that color is really a big challenge?

MA: I think the main thing with printmaking is the color and the graphic character—how black meets light.

JN: I really like working with color in this process. But the main problem for me is the time. I want to be here one year and just play with the process.

MA: I'm sure Valerie wants to have you here that long!

JN: But you know what I mean. It's the playful thing here, and look at the colors! It's so beautiful and good.

VW: Do you work with color differently or similarly?

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MA: We were really surprised from the beginning. When he put his cutouts on my backgrounds...

JN: It was a surprise for me.

MA: I thought we would be far away from each other, but we are not. I think this work is going to show that we are very close to each other.

JN: But you are always more beautiful in your color. You have more skill in that.

MA: I'm more brave with the strong colors, I think.

JN: I'm always more dirty. I hate it when I am too nice.

MA: This is one of the things we have to fight a little bit about. I say, "We can have a bright yellow." And he says to the printer, "I think the yellow is a little bit too bright. Can you make it a little bit more dirty?"

JN: Can you put some black and amber in this?

VW: Are titles important to you?

JN: For me, they are really important.

MA: I would say it's the same for both of us. It depends. For my next show at David Zwirner, I do have some paintings with the title "Untitled" but this is very, very unusual. I made them a year ago and shipped them directly from my studio without having titles for them. And to make a title one year after making the painting is too crazy. But in general the title is important for both of us. I think so.

JN: And sometimes the title is the beginning of something. Maybe there was a year in my life when it was not so, but it always seems to come back to the words.

VW: So in this series, how are you working with titles?



Mamma Andersson and Jockum Nordström in the Crown Point studio, 2010.

MA: Right now we have working titles for all of them.

JN: One word for each one. Already we have all six.

MA: We will see.

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