

TURN RIGHT UP

VÄND RÄTT UPP

A young girl holds a long rein. She is not issuing commands to a horse but to another girl. With her whip and her vocal orders she drives her at a controlled pace round and round the ring.

The scene comes from Pernilla Zetterman's (b. 1970) video *Vänd rätt upp* [Turn Right Up] from 2002. It is a simple, charged picture that presents the borderland between play and discipline that riding horses embodies. Just like several of her works, this one finds its point of departure in the personal and private sphere. Early childhood experiences are made to serve as springboards for more comprehensive formulations.

The first time I saw Pernilla Zetterman's work was on a visit to Konstfack (University College of Arts, Crafts and Design) in 2001. She showed a suite of photographs with details of horses and the equipment used for breaking and controlling the animal: saddles, bridles, blinkers. The pictures of details are an effective medium, conjuring up both a sense of recognition and of distance, a sort of alienating effect. The artist skilfully deconstructed the stereotype of horse-loving girls and allowed a succession of complex and contradictory states to rise to the surface.

Several of Pernilla Zetterman's works have been concerned with control and self-control, with how we are formed as people. The young girl's relationship to the horse is not just a matter of gaining control. It is also a relationship characterized by a sense of closeness and physical contact, by the need to care for something. Her works are, thus, not just about discipline in a simple sense but in equal measure they emphasize delight and the mechanisms that provide the motive power.

This is an aspect that is also fundamental to *Ground Rules*, the photo-based artistic treatment that Pernilla Zetterman has produced for, Sweden's Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm [KTH]. The work consists of a series of photographs that are hung in a long corridor leading to the entrance of the building. At first sight they are striking; right inside the door there are two large photographic diptychs portraying the lines of a running track. Each diptych consists of two mirror images in which the

white lines converge, forming strictly elegant patterns that are almost abstract.

Just to the left there is a photograph of a body dressed in blue. The image is cut off just below the head and the torso is clad in a weighted jacket of the sort that people use for increasing physical resistance when training. The movement is hard and compressed as though the body wanted to take off. In a picture at the end of the wall, on the far side of the two large diptychs with their red running tracks, the body seems to have stopped and to have turned to the beholder with a concentrated movement.

Project manager Joa Ljungberg has described it astutely in a folder dedicated to the work: "She stretches out her arms towards the beholder in something that can be read as a defensive gesture—thus far but no further—but also as an attempt to recover the body's softness and flexibility. Integrity and calm pervade the picture. The perspective is directed inwards. There is time for perception, consideration and reflection."

The close-ups of the lines on the running track are formally important in binding the images together but are also vital to the "narrative" that is played out. The atmosphere of the engineering college has been important, "a place in which visions and knowledge meet competition and sacrifice", as Pernilla Zetterman put it. The pictures remind one of physical training but also of predetermined courses and systems of rules.

The work is also specific to a context in that it links up with the site in a formal sense too; matching the architecture of the room which, with its large windows, invites dialogue with its immediate surroundings. The brick-red of the running track—the images were photographed at the former Olympic stadium just down the road—reflects the surrounding architecture and the dimensions of the photographs harmonize discretely with the low building.

I am reminded of some of the American artist Ed Ruscha's paintings from the late 1990s in which he portrayed—with the greatest precision—something that looks like the surface of a street with a grid of road-markings. Beside each line there is a well-known geographical name from Los Angeles' network of urban districts: Hollywood, Sunset, Santa Monica, Vine.

Ruscha places the illusion of the image and the geographical reference onto the same level in the surface of the painting. These are fantastic works in all their simplicity. At one and the same time they are an image of some-

thing physically concrete and an abstracted map in which the question as to what one is actually seeing is shaken in an intricate manner.

But there is a difference between Ed Ruscha's road marks and Pernilla Zetterman's running tracks. While Ruscha is patently interested in the picture as a language—like the notions that a name of a form can give rise to—in Pernilla Zetterman's work I rather see an attempt to give expression to a state, a psychological room.

In the two smaller photographs that frame the entity the perspective of the running tracks taken with a "subjective camera" is that of the beholder. As though one were looking down at the ground while waiting for the starter's gun. There is an identification with what is happening in the work. The beholder is invited into the action. At the same time the lines coincide in an almost hallucinatory manner. The presentation moves between dream and literal realism.

In reality, the "lines" that direct our lives are invisible. But just as in the pictures, one imagines they form patterns that converge and that change depending on the point of view. *Ground rules* is a potent expression of themes that have recurred in Pernilla Zetterman's work: performance, control, motivation, discipline, both on a physical and mental level. But also of the struggle to be seen, to find happiness. To extend the body's limits. Here I can wonder whether the picture showing someone wearing a weighted jacket perhaps makes the whole rather too explicit. Would the work have gained something by being further abstracted?

But the jacket is not just a weight. It can also be seen as a protective shield. This is important to remember. A fundamental element is also the fact that the photographs of the running track are so beautiful that one sinks into their elegance. One can read the works as an artistic treatment of an entire social climate, of meritocracy, competition and agitation. But if the seductive and arresting perspective of the running track had not been part of the work it would have fallen flat. I want to be there, is my reflection as I gaze into the picture.

In his essay entitled "Postscript on the Societies of Control", the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze writes: "Many young people strangely boast of being 'motivated'; they re-request apprenticeships and permanent training. It's up to them to discover what they're being made to serve, just as their elders discovered, not without difficulty, the *telos* of the disciplines."*

This hair-fine distinction between being motivated and being formed to serve the purposes of other people appears as the most powerful part of *Ground Rules*. As I see it, the work deals with how we, as individuals, internalize a way of thinking that is inherent in our entire social system. We direct the whip towards ourselves. And we enjoy doing so.

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NOTE:

* Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control", October 59, Winter 1992, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, pp. 3-7. This essay first appeared in French in *L'autre journal*, no. 1 (May 1990).

National Public Art Council of Sweden Catalogue #36/2007