

Q&A with Sisters of Jam. Questionnaire

by Hannah Macfarlane

How did you start working collaboratively, is it important to work in the same studio/ country, or is there a possibility for projects to evolve over a distance?

-Since we are sisters and both artists we have always used each other to juggle ideas but it was in 2008 that we started to collaborate as a duo. It started with Moa inviting Mikaela to join forces in doing a public art commission. From that point it was like it all fell into place...Moa actually dreamt that she was doing public art with a group of women and in that dream they were called Sisters of Jam, so we took on that name for our collaboration and we still love it cause its funny and so playful. We were always jealous growing up at gys that played in bands, they occupied the studio at high school with their "jammin", networking, hanging out...Now we have our own band and jam art☺

We shared studio at Iaspis during 4 months in 2010 but otherwise we have been living and working in different cities (Stockholm and Umeå) – meaning many phone calls and traveling. It's worked surprisingly well even though the ultimate way would have been having longer periods together.

How has the increased interest in collaboration and collaborative projects changed the stereotype of an artist, moving from the idea of the individual to a collective?

-We believe that the focus moves from the person-the artist- to the art itself. In a way you "depersonalize" the art a bit and maybe that makes it easier to actually raise questions about the subject you are working with. It's also important for us not to say who did what, moving away from the obsessive of the individual.

With project ideas coming from two separate minds and possibly directions, is there a chance that ideas can become lost which could limit the potential of the individual artist?

-If that happens it's evidently a bad collaboration. Every idea that one of us might have, big or small, we listen to, ad to it, discuss it, and we "try it" even if we just try it in or minds. Collaboration is not the same thing as taking different work by artists and putting them together as one work. For us a collaboration is $1 + 1 = 3$.

How do you choose what content to work with? What aesthetics, etc?

-Whatever feels important and interesting for the moment to poke into, that's where we start. We share an interest in "portrait", historiography and creating a feminist dialogue over generations. We have over the years developed a work method and certain aesthetics, we try to develop and take it a bit further every time. We like working with a project for many years and ad material: doing a book, next time it's a film, and then it's a drawing and then we love the process when we can do an exhibition trying to put all the pieces together and also inviting other people to ad to our material. Collaboration is in a way about loosing control (but in a good way) and trusting that other person. It creates a thrill.

Is it possible to discern a collective "signature" in your artworks? A style that is grounded in your collaboration and different from your singular "signatures"?

-It's that $1 + 1 = 3$ again, like a "third artist" that absolutely has its own "form/sign". A project of ours often take ground in archive material and research and explores sisterhood as an artistic strategy.

How do others look on your collaborative work? Reactions? (do they comment more on the collaboration itself rather than the works produced)

It depends. Often there is a curiosity about how we collaborate in relation to that we are also sisters. We think that the key for us is the fact that we *are* sisters, we know each other in and out and there is a unshakable ground between us, no matter what the circumstances is. Our work is process oriented so how we came about the idea and how we treated it is actually very relevant when discussing our work, therefor also discussing our collaboration is relevant.

How do you know when a work is finished?

When we no longer feel curious. Our process is based on our dialogue and when that dialogue slow down the work is usually finished. That's when we stop adding material to a project. But having different exhibitions in various forms is a way of keeping the material alive, seeing it in new installations, combining pieces together is great fun..

Advantages / Disadvantages of collaboration?

Advantages: Being more than one person means you can do more. Being an artist comes with a lot of pressure and a lot of that lies in that it's up to you. In a collaboration it means it's not just up to you. If one of us is on maternity leave, has to take on a "money job" or whatever the other person will keep on doing what needs to be done. It's also more fun, you can share the experience when something is good or bad.

Disadvantages... sometimes you are not in the same place in life, you don't strive in the same direction just then, that's how it is and that can be frustrating. It's just like in every relationship sometimes you have to give the other one space.