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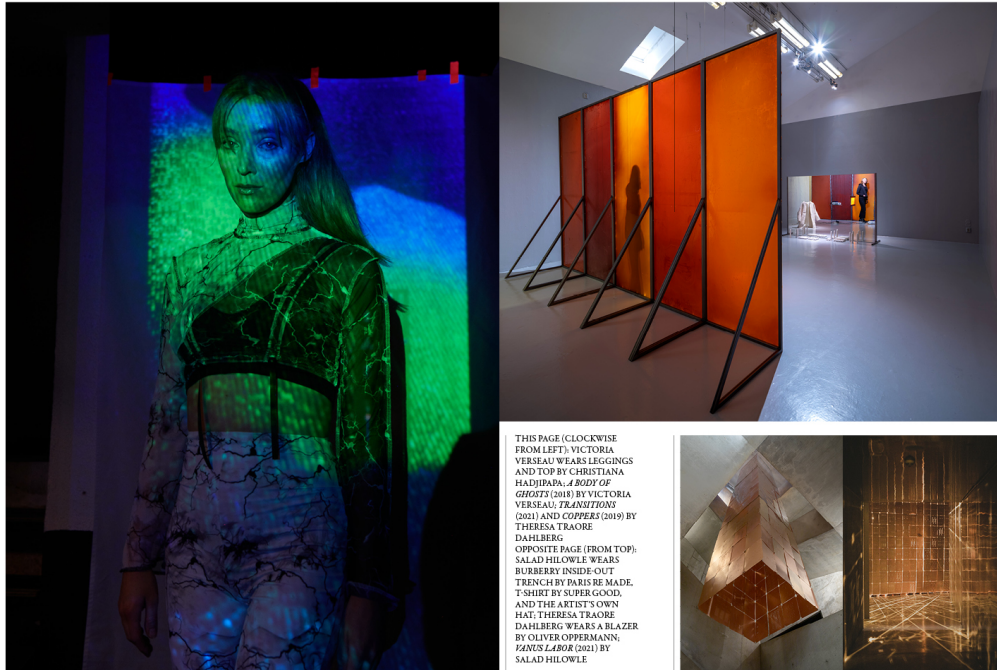
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Revitalize

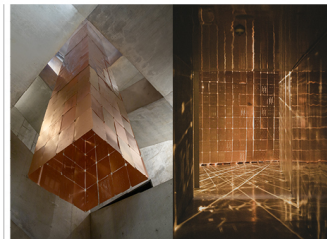
# Possible Futures

In a time of revitalization, three artists - Victoria Verseau, Salad Hilowle and Theresa Traore Dahlberg - talk about what the future promises as they emerge from a time of reflection and seclusion

Words by SASIKA NUMAN Photography by NILS LÖFHOLM



THIS PAGE (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) VICTORIA VERSEAU WEARS LEGGINGS AND TOP BY CHRISTIANA HADJIPAPA, *A BODY OF GHOSTS* (2018) BY VICTORIA VERSEAU, *TRAXITION* (2021) AND *COPPERS* (2019) BY THERESA TRAORE DAHLBERG. OPPOSITE PAGE (FROM TOP): SALAD HILOWLE WEARS BUBBLEY INSIDE-OUT TRENCH BY PARIS RE MADE, T-SHIRT BY SUPER GOOD, AND THE ARTIST'S OWN HAT; THERESA TRAORE DAHLBERG WEARS A BLAZER BY OLIVER COPPEMANN; JAMES LABOR (2021) BY SALAD HILOWLE



To revitalize: to revive, to resurrect, to rejuvenate, renew, even invigorate. The term can be applied to everything from the natural sciences and technology to fashion, beauty, culture (most definitely) and, for the purposes of this article, the visual arts. I had the opportunity to ask three inspiring artists about their views on the concept of revitalization and their insights into the future, both personally and artistically.

We also spoke about the time spent during the past two years or so creating and upholding their artistic practices during a global pandemic. What struck me was their optimism and excitement for a life altered by this stretch of time. The three artists - Victoria Verseau, Salad Hilowle and Theresa Traore Dahlberg - each have very different and distinct approaches to their artistic practices and to art making in general. What brings them together for this interview series is my genuine fascination with how, through sculpture, installation and filmmaking, they create narratives in which they tell stories with great depth and agency. Wanting to gaze into the future, but perhaps at times to throw off the shackles of conformity for the freedom of adventure, is very appealing after what has felt like an incredibly long hiatus in the course of normal human interaction. Despite the world being paused, so much has happened, so much has been created. The constant stream of artistic output continued... and it bears fruit. Here the artists share their view of what is to come, while giving us a glimpse of what they've accomplished during these extraordinary times.

Understanding the intricacies of Victoria's practice are in tandem with understanding who she is as a person. She writes and directs film as part of her artistic practice, which is very much engaged with

themes such as identity and otherness. There is clearly a deep-seated quest for this artist to explore constructs of gender, and the importance of memory, along with the concept of the private voice via the collective public experience.

Interested in understanding what the concept or idea of revitalization means to these artists, I first pressed conceptual sculptor and filmmaker Victoria on what she immediately thinks of when hearing the word. Speaking candidly, she tells me, "I think of many different phenomena in my life when thinking about revitalization. However, what I come to think of the most is the transition I went through from boy to woman, from one life to another. This took a toll on me but at the same time I realised a dream and achieved what I'd always wanted. A rebirth or revival of my old 'boy-self' has taken place during the years after the transition, a self that had long been dormant. It isn't one significant event, but a process that has been going on for a long time, a slow movement. It made me live. From trying to live stealthily, where many aspects of one's personality need to be suppressed or hidden away, to now letting these different ways of experiencing converge and become one."

Fascinated by how Victoria finds inspiration in the very layered concept she is engaged in, as well as what truly influences the artist on a more personal level, she answers me empathetically: "Many things. My life, memories and experiences inspire me to make works that deal with (my) history. The journey of memory between the mind and the world of objects and places; how stories about life come to be; and what is left out and forgotten are recurring themes that I work with. Ideas and inspiration come to me when I am in motion."

Victoria identifies with a restlessness, abated by travel, which she describes as freeing. Excited, she explains, "Since I was little, when I first became aware of reality and the world I lived in, I have been interested in what lies beneath the surface of that reality, right next to everyday life." Have certain events shaped the artist? Are there memories she revisits?

"What I now understand that I discovered as a lonely six-year-old in the woods was probably exactly what we do not have words or language for, the atmospheric and photosensitive," she says. "This was such a strong experience that I think it became a trauma that has been with me ever since. There are oceans of psychological and unknown worlds that can

sometimes be felt as a presence in everyday life. I believe, hope, but also doubt that they exist." In her own words, she wants to create a dissolved boundary between life and death, when she is able, through her artistic practice, to approach a sharp and at times dazzling and perhaps otherworldly reality. Through her art she aims to capture, preserve and reconstruct the transient memories from the crucial times that shaped her.

When asked if she is excited about the prospect of new beginnings, Victoria is optimistic, or, as she puts it, "ambivalently excited." She misses, "I am a person who is drawn to the unknown, and I find meaning in what we cannot predict, explain, or have not yet discovered, that which we can only imagine."

Investigating the relationship between fact and fiction, and the rewriting of history, artist Salad Hilowle has previously researched and made work focused on the depiction of the Afro-Swedish persona in Swedish art history. His latest project, *Janus Labor*, is an exploration in the art historical context from which the African diaspora often finds itself omitted. Fascinated by Sala's detail-oriented practice, I want to understand the artist's approach to the concept of revitalization. "As an artist who works with the theme memory, it means going back into history and presenting another alternative," he says. "I am going back and trying to present the unremembered history in a new context." Enthusiated by the possibility of new beginnings, Salad explains, "I think the art world needs a new beginning. Looking at how it's been going, it really needed a new beginning."

The past two years have allowed Salad more time to reflect. "It meant I had more time to focus. I hope this process of slowing down has been good for my practice. I want to be an artist who can make work for a long time, I'm in it for the long haul. That means some of this process allows me to take time for myself, personally," he says. The artist firmly believes in the possibilities of revitalization, especially regarding how Western, in this case Swedish, society tackles its own relationship with art history. Salad explains further, "I believe we're in need of revitalization. *Janus Labor* is proof of that. We need to revitalize Swedish art history." Salad is inspired by artists from earlier generations. Recently he has been gaining inspiration from "forgotten artists from the 1960s and 70s

in Sweden," with a distinct focus on Afro-Swedish artists such as Fatima Ekman, Ibrahim Abdulkadir (to name just two), as well as the American artist Martin Puryear, who studied at the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm.

Theresa Traore Dahlberg works with the medium of film, exploring complex narratives including memory, identity and interpretation. Not dissimilar to Victoria and Salad, Theresa's work features film quizzically expanding the notion of documentary filmmaking, which she pairs with sculptures and installations where the material is a focal point. Depicting the fate of the people she documents, Theresa is conscious of the socio-economic and political environments she finds herself in, translating this awareness to the work she produces, as well as throughout her work.

When asked about what she associates with the concept of revitalization, the artist answers, "I think of rain and reconsideration. I think of a process that I am in now, researching and discovering part of my history and redefining it in a new time and context." Excited by the prospect of starting up again, Theresa defines the feeling as one of "new beginnings". The artist is currently working on a project that was initiated with recordings of her grandmother's stories and a bronze hare she found in the archives of Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm.

Eager to explore new frontiers within her art, Theresa explains, "I am now exploring the world of scents and its possibilities to recreate specific memories. I'm trying new materials and techniques, and spending time developing ideas always gives me a feeling of going into the unknown, which sparks my curiosity." The artist is inspired and moved by anything that raises questions, even in everyday situations. With constant attention to "changes and choices", as Theresa puts it when describing her belief that our society is in need of change and revitalization, she tells me assertively, "We need to reconsider, and find ways to imagine possible futures."

@victoriaverseau; @dicksalar; @theresatraoredahlberg

