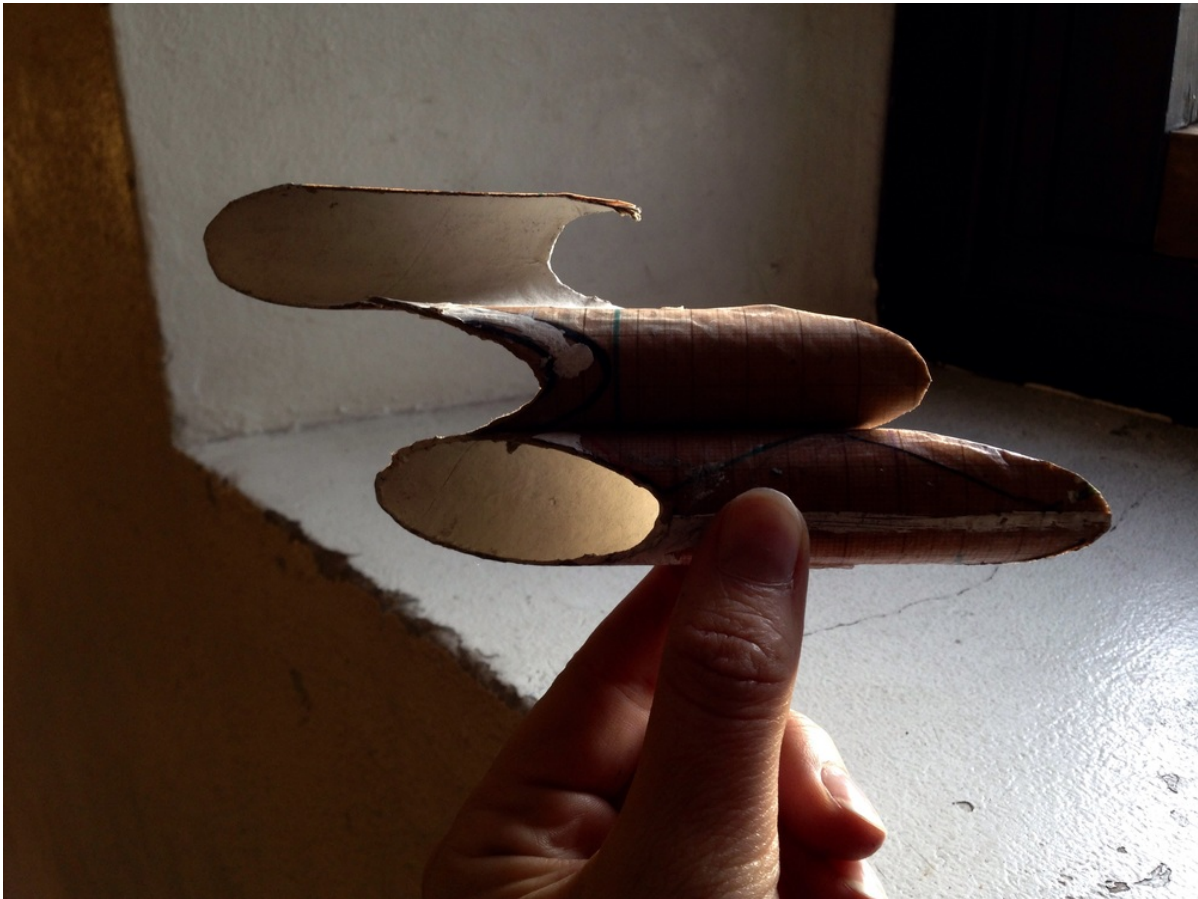


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Eline Mugaas, Scale Model #30, 2015

SIRI AURDAL BY ELINE MUGAAS

March 1, 2016

An overlooked artist is brought to light at Kunstnernes Hus this March.

Interview by Lisa Andrine Bernhoft-Sjødin

This Friday Kunstnernes Hus presents the exhibition *AURDAL / MUGAAS*, a collaboration between Siri Aurdal (b. 1937) and Eline Mugaas (b. 1969). The exhibition is based on Mugaas' longstanding research and documentation of Aurdal's much undervalued work, which has resulted in the comprehensive publication *Siri Aurdal by Eline Mugaas*, released by Primary Information to coincide with the exhibition. Mugaas has also made a series of new photographs that enter into dialogue with Aurdal's sculptures.

Lisa Andrine Bernhoft-Sjødin: The survey of Norwegian art and women's liberation in the exhibition *Hold stenhårdt på greia di* at Kunsthall Oslo in 2013 included Siri Aurdal's piece *Interview*, a multicoloured, multipiece Plexiglas sculpture suspended from the ceiling. Was your upcoming exhibition *AURDAL / MUGAAS* at Kunstnernes Hus initiated by the research you did for this show?



Siri Aurdal, *Interview*, 1968-2013, Courtesy of Kunsthall Oslo

Eline Mugaas: Absolutely. The exhibition is based on the forthcoming artist book *Siri Aurdal by Eline Mugaas*, in which I've gathered, archived and documented her work and research material. I've been through tons of boxes and bags, copies, sketches, scale models, all beautiful stuff. These are fragments of an artist's oeuvre but the pieces fit loosely together and gave a sense of continuity in her installations. For instance, I found copies of copies, etched over, adding complexity to her work and emphasising the way she was snubbed as a relevant artist.

LBS: This is an ambitious exhibition. Aurdal's sculpture *Surroundings* (1969) is being rebuilt in the main hall of Kunstnernes Hus, and when the show finishes it will be reassembled in the Vigeland Sculpture Park for a project by Oslo Pilot. Is a new perspective on her art added by showing this sculpture in two such different contexts?

EM: Yes, and that's just it: she pushed the envelope with her sculptures by taking responsibility for how they were addressed. She created these monumental, organic sculptures and took them out of the gallery context, into schoolyards and the learning environment. People were invited to incorporate them into their daily lives. This was one of her main concerns. These three perspectives – the book, exhibition and installation at Vigeland – stress both my involvement and the social and political foundation of her works

LBS: Included in the book is the image of *Surroundings* (1969) that first caught your eye back in 2012. A guy sits in a curved piece, high up near the ceiling at Kunstnernes Hus in 1969. What was it that sparked your interest?

EM: I've included the full image in the book, and in it you see the sheer size of the installation, which fills up the main hall at Kunstnernes Hus, all the way up to the ceiling. The piece incorporates the main traits of her work, both social and political, as mentioned before. The material she used was prefabricated, often oil pipes. Aurdal was interested in geometrics and mathematics, and she figured out a way of cutting these pipes, creating two curvy pieces that mirrored each other. She discovered that they could form the basis for her sculptural work, curving them into engaging structures for the viewer to climb or sit in. The political part was the environmental context, but also, especially in *Surroundings*, it worked as a speaker's corner, by inviting the viewer to write whatever they have in mind on the surface. What struck me was that a piece this momentous and timely had been forgotten. With this exhibition and the book, I want to make her invisibility visible, so to speak.



From the opening of *Surroundings*, Kunstnernes Hus 1969, unknown photographer

LBS: The modules are all cut out using the same method, which makes them interchangeable, but also, the material, the oil pipes have changed in dimension and colouring over the last 40 years.

EM: The oil pipes were fairly new in Norway in the 1960s, and when she started working on them we were still looking for oil. Amazingly, we struck oil just a few months after the show ended. The dimensions of the pipes have changed as the industry has changed. The pipes that made up *Surroundings* in 1969 were 14 cm wider, the material was thicker, the surface

dirtier. In addition to being smaller, today's pipes are thinner, the surface is smooth and clean, sporting a light colouring of pink and green. These changes demonstrate the passage of time, and ultimately the agility of timescapes, the fragility of forever.

LBS: The issue of who's looking is a substantial part of your work as it has been to Aurdal. Aurdal was an activist artist in the 60s and 70s, and worked from the notion that every viewer was important, and that art was just as valuable in the schoolyard as in the gallery. I'm wondering if your different contexts for the works in your latest book *I Make Another Room*, 2014, derives from that idea as well?

EM: I guess you could say that, though Aurdal work specifically derives from the deeply, but not obviously, political, while mine is more about the contextual issues of displaying works. The works you refer to were shown at Galleri Riis in 2014, and selected works shown on the facade at Oslo Central station and in Bredtveit women's prison. The recipients of these three



spaces are very different. What is considered melancholy and beautiful in a white cube, might be too dark in a prison context, where people are dealing with depression and confinement issues.

LBS: This exhibition isn't just about showing the world an overlooked artist's oeuvre, is it? The new work you've done for the exhibition are 25 photographs of different parts of her scale models, displayed by your very visible hand.



Eline Mugaas, Scale Model #11, 2015

EM: It became clear early in the process that it was also about me wanting to show her work, and not a retrospective or revival of Aurdal's work. The hand in these images underscores the level of responsibility I have in this project. For me, this image elaborates on the role of the artist as documentarist, and how delicate a narrative is. The bigger issue is who gets to decide who's canonised and who's not. I think a canon is just a guide, and that we need to be more critical of the basis on which the choices are made. We need the knowledge of hindsight. My proposition is that through my female, postmodern gaze and critical hindsight, I lend enough weight to make visible someone else.

