

Kind of a Collective..... *Stafett* and the uncertainties of collaboration.

By Stephen Zepke

What is the difference between influence and collaboration? What is the difference between the flows of ideas and images that circulate the world and come to land here, or there, in a brain or in a work, and the deliberate co-operation of two or more artists on the same object? The question already assumes oppositions between the general and the specific, between flows and a thing, between "everyone" and a small group of people. These oppositions that are too fast and take too much for granted. The artist's collective *Stafett* – comprising of Minda Andrén, Jennifer Gelardo, Flavio Palasciano and Alexander Jackson Wyatt – deliberately evades such presumptive distinctions, because they utilise various modes of influence and collaboration in the fluid medium of their process. Their work, or works (depending on how you look at it) emerge from a group dynamic that begins from direct influence, produces individual works, and ends in a collaborative curating of the exhibition. But where *precisely* influence ends and collaboration begins in this process is difficult to pin down, and quite charmingly evades effective definition. This, I think, is its most interesting aspect.

The four artists are close friends, and make up two couples. So the setting is already close and intimate. Perhaps for this reason the "works" produced by *Stafett* occupy an ambiguous place between individual and group production. The works in the exhibition *Glass Jaws* have been separately produced but under the rubric of the group's name – *Stafett* is the Swedish word for "relay" – production emerges from a dynamic process where each individual's work is actively influenced by, and often borrows directly from the work of the others. Andrén, for example, started using metal plates for her paintings and gave them a sculptural quality, while in response Palasciano produced a cut metal plate that functions somewhere between a wall-mounted sculpture and a painting, pieces of which interact directly with Andrén's work. Or Gelardo makes a table-like sculpture (*Standing Ovation #2*) that has a place reserved for one of Jackson Wyatt's cut-outs, and Jackson Wyatt constructs a clock that is draped with offcuts from Andrén's paintings (*Machina (office clock concept)*). And so on. In these cases the works move towards direct collaboration, but without abandoning their individual authorship. It is as if the group wishes to exemplify the way we are never just one, or the way our "oneness" or identity is always already made up of relationships to others, to people and things, and to and through the machines that channel our experience. It is as if all these other things that surround us make us an "I", and our world "ours". Every I and every world a multiverse. In *Stafett's* work the individual's are present, but their identity is diffused, moving and merging into and out of each others; contagious. Furthermore, if we were to examine the practice of each group member the meaning of influence and collaboration would shift in turn, turning the terms kaleidoscopic, their shimmering forms changing with each rotation.

Stafett's work becomes more properly collaborative in the final installation of their show. Here a certain spontaneous group energy grasps the works and caresses them into their final configuration, playing them off against each other, and in some cases merging them together. But, we might say, this is not collaboration but rather curation. So what is the difference between curation and collaboration? Once again, with curation the works remain individually produced, but they get mixed up in a process that emphasises their similarities, or even supports aspects of one work with parts of another (as is the case with Andrén's *Machina* and part of Palasciano's

Soft. Harmless. Ingenuous. Edible. Lovable. Desperate. But as each work was already produced according to the vagaries of this group's *almost* collaborative creative process, perhaps this distinction between individual works and a group exhibition is not really relevant. Or maybe this concept of curating in fact sublates the distinction, absorbing both individual and collaborative production, especially as the former is already a "curation" of influences operating within the group. In fact Minda Andrén suggests as much, describing the group's dynamic as an "organic series of references", one both natural but also fragmented, that can be direct or equally, diffuse. For example, Palasciano may say something and Andrén picks up on one word, which then appears in another form in a painting. A collaborative polymorphism.

The others also have their own versions of what exactly is happening within *Stafett*. Jackson Wyatt sees the group like a band, each member contributing their own thang to an overall "vibe", or alternatively, as a corporate identity (he has produced a fake office for the show – *Tip of the Tongue (office desk concept)*). Gelardo uses a striking metaphor, describing the group as four individuals who are all inside a tower. *Stafett* is in this sense a container, but perhaps also a protective structure. Palasciano gives almost the opposite account, claiming *Stafett* is like the meeting of four portals or potentials, and the exhibition *Glass Jaws* is the collateral damage that results from their collision. It seems typical that each member should have a decidedly different account of what their group means, even to the point where one might think there is more than one *Stafett*. Indeed, perhaps the best way to think of the group collaboration at play in *Glass Jaws* is that it is a process in which not knowing exactly what that process is, is its most important, and most active element. It is precisely because the *Stafett* collaborative process – a process operating in art and in life – is so mysterious and obscure that it refuses rules and systems, and makes the process continually orient itself around experiment. *To be unsure – as method*. What emerges as a result is a group subjectivity expressed in an exhibition, one that has not in any way solidified around an identity, but one whose various identities confront each other in a process that continues to search for its own logic.

If there is one similarity in all of this it is summed up by the exhibition's title: *Glass Jaws*. It implies the extreme sensitivity required by each member of the collective, and the fragility of egos when things get personal. Reflecting this the work in the show shares an interest in found materials and in their fragile possibilities of composition and decline. There is a certain violence to the process, but also complex forms of care, a delicate sensibility that aims to place the trashy and fucked-up somewhere between refuse and redemption, or perhaps at both places at once. As a result, there is a lot of humour in the work when things turn up in unlikely places, but also moments of melancholy as other objects seem irretrievably faded and abandoned. There is often a feeling of residue about the work, as if the actual event already happened and we are left with its rather deflated remains, its meaning and force now faded and confused, lost on an old wind that only blows echoes.

And maybe work that is produced in this way, via an experimental and emergent group process, can only act as the remains of a day now past, the day the show left town.