

WE ARE ALL ACANTHUS

Alt Går Bra's interest in the acanthus leaf warrants an explanation that demonstrates the leaf's historical significance in the architectural and artistic fields, as well as its contemporary interpretation. Before being a motif, the acanthus is, fundamentally, a plant with a rich mythological background that might appear a bit brief and irrelevant today. The story goes that Akantha was the name of a nymph whom the Greek god Apollo attempted to abduct. As she resisted, she scratched the god of arts and poetry. Furious, Apollo transformed her into a thorny plant as a reminder of the scratch on his face—a plant that loves the sun, symbolizing Apollo and placing her in a position of veneration, even dependence. It appears that nymphs were destined to be pursued and to provide explanations for every natural occurrence; botanists would probably approach this origin story with more precision, considering the plant's diverse varieties: *acanthus arboreus*, *acanthus sennii*, *acanthus hungaricus*, *acanthus montus*, *acanthus spinosus*, and *acanthus mollis*. Latin erudition would not serve any purpose unless it highlighted the multiplicity of ways that the acanthus has spread across and adapted to diverse latitudes. Popular imagination has frequently associated the acanthus with the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and certain African countries, mythically linked to Apollo as a solar, southern plant, despite its remarkable adaptability and capability of establishing itself in numerous regions, including northern countries, thereby evolving into a particularly popular motif. Its adaptability, which some might describe as "resilience", is perhaps one reason why this motif has transcended time since its origins in 5th century BC Greece, becoming a contemporary symbol. The acanthus holds a pivotal place in art history, encompassing both architecture and ornamentation. Its origin is often debated; what is certain is that the first documented traces of the acanthus can be attributed to the painter, sculptor, and goldsmith Callimachus, active in Athens between 432 and 408 BC. Vitruvius relates the following legend: while wandering in the countryside, Callimachus happened upon a child's stone grave, around which grew an acanthus plant, coiled, as tradition recalls, "around a small offering basket." Its thorny leaves protected the meager yet precious obols, meant to accompany the child's soul to the afterlife, from thieves. There also exists a Roman version of the story: a young slave had placed a basket containing some of her deceased young mistress's favorite jewelry on her grave, and upon returning some time later to mourn, found that an acanthus plant had sprouted, gracefully twining around the basket. This legend inspired artists and architects to such an extent that some believe that the baskets atop Caryatids are interpretations derived from acanthus capitals, a nymph reclaiming her human form, freed from Apollo's curse.

Its resilience makes it a favorite choice for adorning parks, gardens, and urban floral displays. The acanthus boasts numerous advantages: in botanical terms, it is an invasive species - what would have, up until recent times, been labeled as a weed. Yet, this herb also has the capacity to defend itself; its nearly invisible spines line the leaf edge and are present on the leaf itself, making the plant resistant to insects, the tiny predators of parks and gardens. Not even the slug, a seemingly feeble yet fearsome predator of plants, would dare approach its lustrous deep green foliage, which conceals hundreds of small urticating follicles. It blooms for extended periods, with a base that remains verdant all year round, and shafts that dry so as to never fully fade. All these properties have not escaped the notice of botanists in search of species which are both capable of self-defense and are low-maintenance. Beyond the plant's inherent beauty with its abundant leaves, it is its ability to adapt and refusal to be subdued that is arguably what intrigues

artists beyond its ornamental design. It is also a plant that refuses the domination of man, both in a human and masculine sense. While feminist theory has not yet fully embraced the acanthus plant, the scratches on Apollo's face remind us that the plant conveys an essential element: that of consent, of permission. Its resilience and adaptability do not imply submission or acceptance, especially not to the Anthropocene—in equal terms to that of mankind—a term fiercely contested by philosopher Donna Haraway. By choosing the acanthus, Alt Går Bra's artists, consciously or otherwise, have identified with a plant that serves as a motif rallying a community of Earthly beings. It is unfortunate that the philosopher's work, *Manifesto of Companion Species* (2003), which addresses the importance of taking our relationships with dogs seriously, doesn't have an equivalent in the realm of natural species. Few terms align so well with natural history of the acanthus as that of a "companion species," a self-sustaining, armored plant; setting aside, of course, its fierce independence. It is true that Donna Haraway does not restrict companion species to just pets; she encompasses "rice, bees, tulips, intestinal flora, and every organic being on which human existence relies." Her perspective profoundly modifies current human relations with species, especially those which are often ignored as mere decor, challenging the dominance, relevance, and legitimacy of those stances. Although Haraway hasn't commented on the acanthus, her ideas have influenced Alt Går Bra's two artists, specifically the second chapter, "Tentacular thinking", of her essay *Staying with the Trouble* (2016). This "tentacular thinking" notion in Donna Haraway's work intersects directly and profoundly with the acanthus motif. The straightforward connection arises through direct representations in Alt Går Bra paintings, where tentacle-like forms akin to lianas are cloaked in foliage reminiscent of acanthus shafts rather than leaves. These symbols correspond to what Haraway describes as "string figures and stories" (Donna Haraway, *Récits pour notre temps*, 2024), echoing the Navajo Indians of the American Southwest's winter custom of utilizing string figures to narrate the cosmos and the afterlife—a tradition transforming cosmology into narrative. Isabelle Stengers links this string play to the rhizome concept theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, further enriched with celestial dimensions echoing space exploration. The formal kinship, colors, and even the intrusion of sci-fi elements undeniably forge a connection between the acanthus and its proliferation modes to stress the necessity of rhizomatic thinking. As explained by Donna Haraway ("Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene," in *Staying with the Trouble – Making Kin in the Chthulucene*), this approach resists oversimplification and draws attention to chain reactions. According to Haraway, humanity and companion species don't just traverse from point A to point B; myriad solutions and bifurcations form a labyrinth now made not of walls and mazes but of Ariadne's thread itself; a labyrinthine concept that becomes a metaphor for acknowledging the world's complexity due to relational intricacies

Yet the acanthus has its own limitations and contradictions. It is so engrossed in its self-defense that it fails to significantly protect other species; because of its invasive nature and its foliage and sap, it does not promote the growth of other species. Conversely, like many thorny plants, the acanthus shelters small mammals and urban wildlife, providing a haven beneath its leaves. It is fascinating to tie the plant's natural environment with its iconographic interpretation or usage that overturns the iconographic proposition and reverts to its generally accepted Greek etymology. The acanthus grows close to the ground, sometimes thriving in near-arid, heavily mineralized soil, whereas its iconographic representation often embellishes the upper sections of architecture or column tops, referring back to its Greek etymology, perhaps designating the spiny heads of certain plants. While representations of the acanthus can exist in a wall or

buildings lower areas, popular imagination tends to consistently place it in elevated areas, especially, along iconographic traditions, the regions at the junctions of the wall and roof. The acanthus remains the decorative motif of choice for columns, particularly Corinthian ones. It offers, for some, a synthesis and, for others, an alternative between the Doric (masculine) and Ionic (feminine) columns. Iconologists have demonstrated that the Ionic column's coils are simplified forms representing Greek women's hair; thus, the Corinthian column, merging both orders, encompasses both genders simultaneously. This renders it, from a gender perspective, a union of the sexes, expressing masculine and feminine characteristics in one of the most perfect or graceful motifs. In the art language of Antiquity, the acanthus symbolized inseparability, at least within the distant realm of science fiction.

The acanthus stems appear to have almost scale-like elements, such that it links the plant's origins to the mythical and indistinct world of metamorphoses. It is hard not to associate this transformation with the ability of certain species—notably insects and reptiles—to camouflage by adopting their surroundings' hues for better concealment. Artists have often admired this biomimicry, describing a precise phenomenon which in reality embodies a survival process, a metamorphosis born of foresight in response to impending danger. Biomimicry, akin to wartime camouflage, is nature's cunning tactic to evade foes. The close-up on stems shifting into tentacles denotes the most straightforward and apparent link. However, beyond an unexplored analysis of the acanthus leaf Donna Haraway proposes a method to identify within nature those species serving, akin to string figures, to manifest dependent and interdependent ties, taking into consideration society's progress: ecology, decolonization, feminism, and gender studies. Each subject could undergo transformation or '-ization': ecological, decolonial, feminization, or queering. The tentacles therefore symbolize the connections between these embryonic thought processes evolving into paradigms—a novel science of relationships that a critical consciousness may or must relate to its examination and interpretation methodologies. Philosopher Donna Haraway scrutinizes the interplay, metabolisms, and co-productions that each species, flora included, engages with in nature's specific language. The “tentacular thinking” chapter in *Staying with the Trouble* is too intricate for a brief summary; the author revisits ecological theories and principally exposes the vanity of human-centric views. In a striking passage, Haraway posits that humans aren't solitary in experiencing grief and mourning—a notion that has been demonstrated as existing within the animal world, but is novel when applied to flora. Plants can also manifest mourning, joining in loss. This seemingly strange concept was largely accepted in Antiquity; Persephone's Greek abduction story explained the changing of the seasons: spring symbolized Demeter's hopeful anticipation for her daughter's return, nature's inherent empathy led to greening, rebirth with their summer reunion, while autumn marked her departure for the Underworld. Consequently, nature, still generous, gradually languished due to the impending separation. Humans aren't the sole sufferers of separation; nature suffers as well, albeit differently, since its signs of such loss are symbolic—perhaps ecological shuffles hide deeper sorrows. Reading these manifestations of mourning first requires decoding; Nature is not aloof, and species often demonstrate solidarity, the basis of permaculture principles. Haraway's ideas paired with David Holmgren's analyses offer another significant insight into the iconographic and ecoresponsible interest given to the acanthus, grotesques, and faux marbles. The common theme of these three subjects and motifs is their positioning at the margins, which Holmgren discusses as "using edges and valuing margins" in his essay "Permaculture: Principles and Pathways beyond Sustainability" (2002).

Nothing More True than *Faux* Marble

Faux marble, or *marmi finti*, stands as anything but a flattering artistic composition. If the name of this pictorial technique inherently suggests its ephemeral nature, the coupling of the qualifier “fake” (or even “feigned”) with a noble material such as marble seems to solely underscore the derogatory connotation of such a composition. The choice of material (or its dissimilar imitation) can only reflect how an artist interprets it what unfolds is the further extension of the meaning of “bad weed,” which the Alt Går Bra collective delves into through the use of another Classical decorative art, revived during the Renaissance. Ostensibly, their aim is to reassess the significance of the *marmorino* technique within art history, transitioning from it being relegated to a purely ornamental dimension of realistic imitation, to an autonomous work asserting a primary role within the artistic composition.

As a formal exercise, the representation of marble appears to be the quintessential act of mimetic reproduction—a simulacrum. It entails repeating on walls what already exists in nature, with the ornamental use of the genuine, natural material proves quite costly in practice. However, its utilization extends beyond mere economic considerations, emerging as an aesthetic and philosophical strategy. Revisiting the Renaissance taste for antique art, Alt Går Bra revitalizes a decorative architectural and interior design technique to impart a luxurious aspect independent of the material’s inherent nobility. Nothing else so nourishes the gulf between superficial semblance of affluence and material reality, according to Didi-Huberman: since the 17th century, artists often utilized *faux* marble to decorate churches and palaces, striving to achieve the appearance of opulence without the cost of the genuine material. A notable shift emerges within this series. Whereas *faux* marble formerly enhanced empty spaces, here, decoration claims the central role in the arrangement of works—assuming the status of protagonist in the room, in accordance with the creative and spatial flow of the entire exhibition. This is an issue of valuation that is here implemented, elevating modest material through reproduction and placement: going beyond its initial status as a mere spatial filler within a composition, it now fills entire museum rooms.

If the imitation of marble’s texture and appearance, which involves the use of pigments to reproduce nuances, veining, and gloss, witnessed great success from the Roman to the Baroque eras, this same feature makes it a rare occurrence in contemporary art. Alt Går Bra’s attention towards the *faux* marble series within this exhibition arises from thorough examination of diverse marble types: displaying replicas such as *greco scritto*, *portasanta*, and granite trending toward abstract naturalism. This choice enhances the chromatic diversity of the marble-like canvases; it is this polychromic nature which has drawn the interest of artists over the centuries. Furthermore, it also highlights the in-depth research that underlies the collective’s artistic elaboration, their creative source grounded equally in visual observation as well as critical study of historical (textual) sources in the development of citation-based conceptual art.

To understand the meaning and essence of these paintings, one must return to the ancient use of *marmi finti*—situated in the in the ancient Italian context—drawing inspiration from Alt Går Bra’s 2017 residency at the Scandinavian Circle in Rome. Its pictorial origins can be found in Roman art, where it played a substantial decorative role in ancient iconic structures such as Pompeiian villas and Nero’s Domus Aurea in Rome. *Faux* marble prominently appears in Pompeii’s Second Style (2nd century BC to the 1st century AD), typified by its use in walls

adorned with faux architectures and panels mimicking various luxurious materials, including marble. Domus Aurea painters (64-68 AD) also extensively employed *faux* marble to embellish rooms, ceilings, and columns, blending it with elaborate paintings to simulate opulence. As seen in Pompeii, the inclusion of marble-like surfaces in the Domus Aurea fostered the illusion of space and luxuriousness through painted columns, decorative panels, and feigned frames. All is appearance—imperfect resemblance, “dissimilar simulation.”

Mimesis is central in *faux* marble’s artistic use, to the extent that its application is more clearly revealed through the *trompe-l’œil* principle. Similar to *trompe-l’œil*, this pictorial technique seeks to manipulate perspective and shading to craft the illusion of three-dimensional volume or objects within observable space. If it is true, as Louis Marin suggests, that “*trompe-l’œil* is the pinnacle of painting,” the technique itself displays a more meta-pictorial than autotelic function. In Alt Går Bra’s interpretative key, *trompe-l’œil* is not purposeless; rather, it serves as a citation of the illusionistic frescoes of the Italian Baroque period. Ostensibly creating seemingly three-dimensional spaces and volumes that are, in reality, two-dimensional representations, Alt Går Bra aims not to deceive but to transform flat surfaces into worlds rich with depth (bestowing a different volume type). Employing this technique, which aspires to liberate alternative worlds, encourages reflection upon the nature of representation, transcending *trompe-l’œil*’s humorous and ironic nature as a style of exercise. As Jean Baudrillard explains in “The Enchanted Simulation of Trompe-l’œil” (*De la séduction*, 1981), *trompe-l’œil* involves not confusing reality, but consciously producing a simulacrum infused with full recognition of it as artifice—casting reality’s third-dimension into doubt—transcending reality’s effect, invoking profound skepticism towards reality’s principle. In this way, *trompe-l’œil* eventually disillusion the eye: faux marble’s artifice isn’t mere deception, instead stimulating critical engagement in viewers, reexamining our trust in appearances and inciting reflection on imitation’s limits and potentialities—as Georges Didi-Huberman’s suggests in his essay on Fra Angelico.

Thus, nothing is more authentic than *faux* marble: for although it may initially appear as a *trompe-l’œil*, it surpasses the status of simple technical stratagem. It notably facilitates dialogue between visible and invisible, ephemeral and eternal, showcasing an ability to employ tangible elements conveying acute meanings. Within Fra Angelico’s work—a recurring visual reference of the exhibition—this approach is evident. Often overlooked, Fra Angelico’s compositions integrate panels of *faux* marble, adding depth and intricacy to his pieces. Take, for example, the *Madonna of the Shadow*. Studied (but only partly) by scholars for centuries, it remains fragmented in the collective imagination, suffering from a general lack of knowledge symptomatic of *faux* marble’s marginality in interpreting artworks. Yet, beneath the scene where the Virgin enthrones her son surrounded by saints, four faux marble panels in vermilion and ochre tones are aligned in parallel to the main painting. In the absence of traditional iconography, *faux* marble appears as an empty entity, seemingly lacking narrative, failing to attract observer attention. It says nothing, yet Alt Går Bra cites it: the use of *faux* marble in Fra Angelico’s work echoes the methods developed by the collective, albeit for a different function. In Angelico’s work, *faux* marble, despite its visual prominence (located at eye-level), goes unnoticed, nonetheless elevating the intent of the piece. Conversely, Alt Går Bra *physically* elevates *faux* marble, to the detriment of the entire work. Elevation here is interpreted literally, as the material is physically located at a higher spot. During the Renaissance, *marmi finti* occupied peripheral positions, always below or at the sides of main paintings (as seen in Giotto

and Fra Angelico). Alt Går Bra disrupts this paradigm: in lieu of canvases placed only at the *base* of other paintings, additional *faux* marbles are placed *above* main paintings. By encircling the principal works, these *marmi finti* undergo a double status change: firstly, their omnipresence ensures visibility; yet secondly, they accompany unfinished large-format works, thus becoming finishing elements that guarantee that the pieces will be exhibited in a museum setting.

Thereby, the thread uniting the exhibition reveals itself: the marble-like series offers Alt Går Bra an opportunity to reframe (by placing it at the center of the exposition) traditionally overlooked or secondary pictorial elements. Mirroring the rest of the exhibit's components—acanthus, grotesques, decommissioned machines—*faux* marble, though emerging as a supportive element, asserts itself in the composition to the extent that an entire museum space is devoted to it. Classical and Renaissance art primarily tied *faux* marble to architectural decoration and the emulation of luxury; in contemporary art, however, *faux* marble assumes fresh conceptual and aesthetic meanings. For Alt Går Bra, it primarily serves to surpass the theme of real-vs-illusory perception, previously explored in the exhibition's other series. *Faux* marble becomes a lens filtering and amplifying the tensions between reality and appearance, authenticity and artifice. As the boundary between what is true and what is false increasingly blurs, *faux* marble comes to symbolize these cultural and aesthetic tensions. Didi-Huberman suggests not relegating it to a mere material substitute of the original, emphasizing its capacity to destabilize traditional perceptual categories. The illusion crafted by this technique prompts considerations on perception's reliability and art's manipulation of the senses. In this sense, it challenges the conventional conceptions of authenticity and material value: *faux* marble is no mere imitation—it is commentary on simulation, a kind of palimpsest, in Gérard Genette's sense—a secondary narrative initiating reflection upon painting itself. Through this, it ceases to be a secondary element, inviting attention where eyes ordinarily do not pause, as “the eye closes to categories of vision: it arms itself in advance with categories deciding what to see and what not to see, where to look and where not to want to look” (Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissimilarity and Figuration*, 2009).

This secondary pictorial discourse unveils a reversal of Horace's *Ars Poetica* maxim, “*Ut pictura poesis*,” meaning “As in painting, so in poetry,” implying shared goals and methods between painting and poetry in representing reality and evoking emotions. Though the expression emphasizes how both arts strive to capture vivid images and engage observer/reader imagination, one cannot overlook an inherent hierarchy between poetry and painting – if only to underline that the former imitates the latter. However, Alt Går Bra attributes an inverted meaning, where poetry ceases to be mere imitation of painting; rather, painting employs poetry to reclaim a discursive unity. If the entire exhibition celebrates the fragmentation of unity and new, formerly marginal perspectives to reconstruct an untold, unseen history, it is only achievable through narration (poetry).

Paradoxically, this pictorial discourse lacks traditional iconic elements and is led merely by colors, prompting reflection on how details of texture and veins are represented on marble, becoming the actors of the canvas. The imperfect and approximative drawings that emerge from the canvas's details demands consideration from within the grotesque series' intertextuality—or *interpictoriality*—of this exhibition. A diffracted interpictoriality, as this palimpsest-like exhibit remains incomplete and fragmented: a visual citation-dominated discourse stitches together torn margins. Like a palimpsest, the exhibition accumulates layers

of understanding attributed to margin-related depictions (antiquity to Renaissance, baroque to contemporary art, South to North, West to East) and reveals surface traces of prior citations. In this sense, each canvas becomes an individual text to be questioned through the interlayering of significations, inviting viewers to attentively (re)read the margins, highlighting previously secondary details which, through the search for intertextuality/interpictoriality, now reveal new connections. Within this pictorial landscape, borrowings and references transcend quotation—a reinvention that compels the visitor to navigate between classic referents and contemporary ruptures. Thus, Alt Går Bra's palimpsest breaks traditional linear reading modes akin to images—tentacular grotesques, machine oscillations—inviting a transversal exploration where each detail, no matter how trivial, references entangled discourses.

“Formless Forms of the Ineffable,” as Georges Didi-Huberman terms them, figures that project outward of themselves. On several paintings, marbled veins appear to represent indecipherable ancestral beings, haunting and elusive anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and phytomorphic beings trapped in the canvas, only fleetingly distinguishable through the nuances of color gradients. Nothing is more illusory than the pictorial reproduction of marble: thus, these subtle cues conceptually align with other works in the exhibition wherein tentacles, limbs, mushrooms, and other living forms erupt from grotesque gilded scales. These monstrous and linear figures, un-figurables sketched within figures, must be interpreted through the detailed value that Daniel Arasse attributes to them in *Le Détail : Pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture* (2009), to their undervalued status, despite the potent meaning and fresh perspectives they offer. If details help to narrate alternative discourses within the overall work, they also provide an interpretive key in discerning not just its aesthetic but also its cultural and historical posture. Arasse recalls that artists like Marcel Duchamp and Jackson Pollock transformed the significance of details in contemporary art through two essential elements found in Alt Går Bra's marble series: liberated color and playful (citation-based) irony. From Duchamp's perspective, detail embodies an ironic critique of traditional artistic canons, as in *L.H.O.O.Q.*, where a minor pictorial intervention defies the entrenched conventions regarding art and femininity. Conversely, Pollock's details arise through a complex interplay of color and form, altering the observer's perspective on depth and motion. Through the faux marble series, Alt Går Bra demonstrates that attention to marginal details can transform aesthetic experience, shifting from mere observation to active and critical artwork engagement.

From Roman-era luxury to Renaissance spirituality, what is *faux* marble's true meaning? What traces shape Alt Går Bra's palimpsest? Marble-like surfaces, with their precious and durable aspect, were used by Giotto in Padua's Scrovegni Chapel to emphasize the veracity and universality of sacred themes. Fra Angelico, meanwhile, employed *faux* marble as an intermediary between what is divine and what is earthly, shimmer and abstraction directing towards sacredness and transcendence, as in Florence's San Marco Convent's *Annunciation*. Critiquing faux marble, Didi-Huberman interprets these depictions as tools allowing artists to explore the links between matter and spirit, visible and invisible. These marbled panels bestow the pictorial discourse with structures that rhythm and exalt concepts of eternity and divinity. Thus, *faux* marble is an attempt to connect the human to divine, painted stone representing both spiritual stability and eternity, fulfilling the transformation of the visible into a portal to the invisible. One must not forget that the context that Alt Går Bra cites is that of two painters producing religious iconography; Christian art, as Didi-Huberman notes in *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (1992), “produced countless images of fantastically empty tombs,” of

which these marble representations are iterations. In the work of Fran Angelico, the placing of faux marble beneath paintings symbolically elevates them, as they represent Christ's tomb, that most sacred Christian site - a witness of mortal transcendence and resurrection. Embodying both death and rebirth. Much like images, tombs lack autonomous meaning, which they acquire in reference to the observer by establishing a connection with that viewer. Thus, tombs and related images live only via *and* for viewers—acting as mirrors reflecting and unveiling fragments of humanity and history. Could *faux* marble therefore be the representation of a symbolic tomb within Alt Går Bra's work? If Alt Går Bra elevates *faux* marble's prominence to the point of replacing the subject, it is because artistic research is paramount within their reflections: *faux* marble panels mark the wall's centrality, indicating another tomb, celebrating another disappearance. This displaced tomb—akin to Christ's open and empty sepulcher—metaphorizes the death of the unitary subject the effects of which provokes the exploration of the marginal motifs that characterize this exposition, underlining the necessity of examining them through interpictoriality to grasp their full sense.

Alt Går Bra or The Art of the Citation

Everything begins (and therefore ends) with a leaf. Or rather, leaves. The acanthus leaf, of course, and the sheet of paper one writes, draws, or paints on. This new exhibition from Alt Går Bra is thus a tale of leaves. But what kind of leaves are they? When discussing this exhibition, the Alt Går Bra collective explicitly references several works that served as their inspiration. These include works on grotesques (Maria Fabricius Hansen's *The Art of Transformation: Grotesques in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (2018) and Alessandra Zamperini's *Ornament and the Grotesque: Fantastical Decoration from Antiquity to Art Nouveau* (2008), works on *faux* marble (Georges Didi-Huberman's essay on Fra Angelico, Jacques Dubarry de Lassale's *Identification des marbres* (2000), and Yannick Guegan's *Imitation des Marbres*), as well as philosophical and artistic references (Georges Didi-Huberman, Gilles Deleuze, Donna Haraway, Jacques Derrida). What does this (multi-) citational practice, combined with the acanthus motif, reveal about the exhibition's stakes? What role do these scholarly, historical, encyclopedic references play, and what do they disclose about Alt Går Bra's artistic practice? Are these merely details, akin to footnotes, or does this citational, textual, and pictorial use challenge the blindness of obviousness—that is, the belief that everything is already said, already seen, and that one arrives too late?

“To quote is to cut,” Antoine Compagnon asserts in his well-known work, *La Seconde main ou le travail de la citation* (1979). This cutting, inherent to the acanthus and to the leaf, is materialized and mechanized through the presence of lawnmowers within an exhibition dedicated to the leaves that we cut. These are old, obsolete, semi-industrial lawnmowers once used on Norwegian farms. Their unexpected presence is both imposing and peculiar. Placed, significantly, at the exhibit's center—a natural focal point—they draw our attention, asserting themselves within Alt Går Bra's thoughtfully constructed kinetic installation. The origin of the word “citation”, stemming from the Latin *citare*, equates to setting in motion, transitioning from rest to action. These lawnmowers are connected to an oscilloscope and therefore oscillate, producing winding, sinuous lines that contort, like the tentacles sprawled across the walls. Despite visibly and overtly symbolizing the intrinsic menace of cutting due to their sharp sawtooth blades, they are nevertheless useful (for instance, by removing weeds). Thus, they

ought to be contemplated in relation to what surrounds them. By introducing these mowers in a space devoted to contemporary art, Alt Går Bra alters their status: from “social and technical machines” to “desiring-machines,” echoing Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology in *L’Anti-Edipe. Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (1972). The power of the machine lies within its fluxes and desires; *desire* here reminds us that each production process is linked to nature. Desiring-machines “operate through cuts and fluxes, associative waves and particles, associative fluxes and partial objects, inclusive disjunctions, polyvocal conjunctions, thus creating samples, detachments, and left-overs.” The articulation between imagistic tentacles, *faux* marble panels, colorful canvases, grotesque details on the walls, and these ground-bound mowers could not be better illuminated. Desiring-machines manifest in powerful ways: “unending connectivity,” “continuous strength,” and “directional rupture,” “absolute severance from what it replaces.” A desiring-machine is a “cut-flow; the cut stays adjacent to the continuity of a flux it separates from others, granting it a code.” Proud of its powers, “the machine establishes connections and executes cuts.” The semantic field (connection-cut) references the citation principle itself, enacting the antagonism between production and (visual) representation. Desiring-machines oppose projection since they escape representational domains. Deleuze and Guattari insist that production and desiring machines are indeed the same machines but in two different states, the former being production whereas “desiring-machines, on the contrary, represent nothing, signify nothing, want to mean nothing, and are precisely what you make of, from and with them as well as what they make themselves.”

Transformed into “desiring-machines,” these mowers symbolically respond to Antoine Compagnon’s question: “How does one navigate the brambles of what’s already been said?” More precisely concerning this exhibition, how does one navigate through the brambles of what has already been seen? “Excessively yet cautiously”, the Alt Går Bra collective says. “Don’t succumb to the alienating proliferation of acanthuses”—such an injunction takes on a metaphorical resonance: it conveys the latent danger of citation, its endemic power—the temptation to replicate everything. Borges pushes this temptation to its extreme in the short story *Pierre Ménard, Author of the Quixote* (in which Pierre Ménard, rewriting word for word the *Quixote*, reinvents it). The artist must maintain their grip (even if this grip may be “secondary”, along Compagnon’s *The Second Hand*) on the reproduction of the tentacular images, the *faux* marbles and the grotesques. Though perhaps yielding to the allure of reproducing old, antique images, the artist must remain vigilant, and these mowers serve as warning signals. They underscore the necessity of cutting in every citational artistic context. The acanthus is an invasive, perhaps even viral, plant; one might say that it duplicates with ease, suggesting that, while these pictorial acanthuses may be observed and even admired within this exhibition, one must remain vigilant in monitoring, in containing them, much like the tentacle-images. Indeed, close observation of these reproductions of the acanthus plant reveals them to be simultaneously enlarged and metonymized versions of grotesques, as if Alt Går Bra opted to set aside the temptation of naturalistic depiction by magnifying details, giving them a spectacular aspect (through scale and vivid color usage) and tentacular shape (an animalized and vegetated pandemic-like interlace) while *disfiguring* and rendering them *unrecognizable*. Every citation is intrinsically dual, thus prone to “metonymic confusion.” The colors derealize and devegetalize these acanthus-images, elevating them to another level of reality—beyond mere surface or depth to include elevation. This is why columns and thyrsi, inspired (or even reproduced), from the walls of Pompeian villas appear. It is no coincidence that grotesques strive to defy gravity; again, these grotesque representations run counter to the

lawnmowers' function—to cut ground-level elements: grass, hay, fields, all symbols of vegetation, foliage and their crucial role in life's potential. Thereby, they inhabit the crossroads of art and nature.

“When I cite, I excise, I mutilate, I select,” Antoine Compagnon declares, never seeking to euphemize or diminish the inherent violence of the citation. This procedure is never trivial, beginning it with a removal, a tear. Such violence requires recognition, awaits reparations, consolation. Alt Går Bra *foresees emerging danger*. These images are channeled, juxtaposed yet distinct, each isolated within canvases functioning as compartments, allowing visitors to contemplate the overall installation in total tranquility, appreciating these images without feeling threatened (or entangled) by them. Grotesques, like *faux* marbles, function as framing devices. The canvas respects its contents precisely through its edges, through its margins. It allows one to preserve the measure, the measure made of the canvas to be cut, just as the use of the citation preserves the work it is drawn from. Of course, if one is not careful, a citation can become wholesale copying. Yet, citation is never only about repetition, or rather repetition-citation is less concerned with hiding than it is with revealing what is different. Citation is based on memorized recollection to accentuate what is forgotten. Contrary to what might be assumed, repetition is not mere doubling or mimetic calque, solely dedicated (devoted) to simple reproduction. It does not belong to the art of mimesis but rather to its pretense, much like the *marmi finti* (“feigned marbles” or *faux* marbles), invoked by Alt Går Bra, as many simulacra giving themselves away, feints showing their flaws. As Antoine Compagnon explains, a citation is a serial repetition which possesses an “emblematic value within an indefinite movement”; citation is therefore an “engaged symptom” choosing the format of its repetition to better display the power of difference. Or rather a difference as Georges Didi-Huberman calls the “troubled resemblance” in *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (1992)—an essay whose very title embodies the exhibition’s exegesis, given its focus on separating what we observe from “what gazes back,” i.e., “what is thought through my eyes.” Didi-Huberman revisits (*cites*) the line from Joyce’s *Ulysses* (“thought through my eyes”) along with the Irish writer’s beautiful expression: “shut your eyes and see.” For Didi-Huberman, this is the “visual work that is ours alone” should we observe an artwork. “*Let us open our eyes to experience what we cannot see.*” Thus, this exhibition challenges us to see what is imperceptible *at first glance*, asking us to *look twice*, in essence exploiting the effect of a type of visual citation; much like a game of “spot the difference”. The initial, troubling, resemblance introduces an infinitesimal nuance, unnoticed at first, which then subtly emerges through re-vision (such as when one looks anew at a painting’s details). Revisiting these colorful canvases and *faux* marbles often reveals peculiar hybrid figures, anamorphoses, phytomorphic, zoomorphic, teratomorphic, and anthropomorphic shapes—all evoking the language of the grotesques discussed by Philippe Morel. These forms are not merely haptic projections; they endow the verb “to see” with the full power of transitivity: simply *looking* is not enough to *see*. Rather, one must still *see something*, regardless of the nature of what is seen. Once a nuance, shape, or differing detail is identified, one is able to *resee*, fulfilling the greatest of wishes inherent to the image: conversion. Certainly, it is a peculiar sort of conversion, an “imaginary crystallization” which Philippe Morel notes “decomposes the mesmerizing image, yet promptly recomposes it; frames it, condenses into painting or simulacrum; accommodating from the scene a singular detail, pinpoints that detail then seizes it.”

The citing of these grotesques and marginalia forms so many *mises en abyme* of the “*pan* effect” and “detail effect” discussed by Georges Didi-Huberman in *La peinture incarnée* (1985). Tellingly, the art historian initially connects the *pan* effect to Roland Barthes’ “punctum”, notably to its “punctum expansion force.” *Pan* is the intense (*poignant*) effect exerted by a detail, a margin, an extreme element (understood as closure and border). Its potency is evident yet paradoxical: hypertrophied, both *pan* and detail act as a punch (for Lacan, the punch functions as a “working edge”) disturbing, even fragmenting the foundations of figurative paintings, wielding the power of “delegitimizing the obvious”, a power that comes across as “violence, [a] hasty disjunction.” The detail/*pan* violence reminds us that any disjunction must be seriously considered, firstly due to its proximity to the *pan* effect, and then because it seeks to render unidentifiable the figures that it recreates, obfuscating the work of pictorial mimesis. Thus, the *pan* remains a *trompe-l’œil*, with the magnification of the *pan* akin to “obstructing vision,” where hypertrophy of the real details and close vision paradoxically impart a representational imprecision: though appearing to be precise and detailed, the figure remains unidentifiable. Georges Didi-Huberman calls this process the “panic effect,” whereby detail dominates over the entirety: “the *pan* effect” thereby acts like the *panicked* shift of the local over the global, the detail over the whole, whereby the detail, as *spatium*, overshadows the whole as an *extensum*, invoking something haunting, obsessive—“the punctual and poignant invading of the senseless detail in the whole.”

In Alt Går Bra’s exhibition, citation manifests both pictorially *and* textually: within the *faux* marble room, their acanthus research article is projected onto the walls (showing their own words, their references), while speakers installed in pianos play a reading of the article, allowing us to hear the words that are both visible and audible, the simultaneous citation of one by the other. How can one not see a visible passion for reading and writing? Citation “invites reading, solicits, provokes, flirts like the wink of an eye: it is always to an eye that one returns, the eye that is expected to feel from perspective. There is surely much to say on the citation as an eye, as Quintilian and St. Jerome among others call it.” That Antoine Compagnon resorts to ocular taxonomies echoes how we should approach this exhibit. Alt Går Bra dramatizes, renders spectacular citation’s role within their artistic practice. The time of closing our eyes to see has passed, is now the time of accepting visual duplicity—hence the fundamental idea of the image-simulacrum’s evidently at play within the *faux* marbles, grotesques, acanthus-tentacles. All these visual citations actively engage the visitor, leading them, towards double vision: for once, this is not a sign of a visual dystopia, but rather a quality of the exhibition. Seeing, reading, hearing the same image. Citation enjoins us to consider painting in discursive and auditory terms, turning painting into a speech act. Such is this exhibition’s wager. The eye is distinct from the pictorial vision (each eye sees things in their own way). When Antoine Compagnon highlights citation’s iconic value, he references two icon types: image (which mimics properties) and diagram (which mimics relationships). Present and responsive, these two iconic forms link together two semiotic systems. Pictorial citation repeats what has already been said and seen. Every citation is simulacrum, underlines Antoine Compagnon, and every simulacrum is a lure. These various pictorial citations reference both simulacrum and icon. The textual and visual citations that underpin this exhibition dovetail two artistic avenues: the art of the copy-icon and the art of the simulacrum-fantasy.

Within *Les Grottesques: Les figures de l'imaginaire dans la peinture italienne de la fin de la Renaissance* (1997)—which Alt Går Bra cites among their working and inspirational sources—Philippe Morel discusses the acanthus leaf, which he associates with color spots and *faux* marbles. There exists a strong relationship between ornament (as image) and text (as script): “seemingly mundane motifs like acanthus leaves sometimes carry political or religious semantic values resulting from an ancient metaphorical tradition of the exploitation of their vegetal nature or of a formal treatment of their arrangement.” How can one not “see” in this citation the textual and visual origin of Alt Går Bra’s exhibition, of the words and images that sparked their creative imagination? An interweaving (found within the colorful tentacle forms) showing how “an abstract figure if there ever was one, comes to symbolize divine order.” When Philippe Morel evokes Fra Angelico’s color spots and *faux* marbles, he cites Georges Didi-Huberman’s *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance et figuration*. Citation within citation thus, this citation is truly *second-hand*. Moreover, this doubled path of the reading and vision of grotesque is particularly meaningful. Philippe Morel underlines the commonalities of marginalia and grotesques, the “plastic relation of marginalia to text,” attentively exploring “grotesques’ kinship with gothic manuscript margin decor,” lamenting its perpetual sidelining, which he aptly labels a “sort of myopia.” On one hand, grotesques *summon* manuscripts, which are decorated texts “framed” by margins, small drawings, or drawn letters. The text is thus bordered by images, which are presented as being purely decorative (ornamental). Conversely, there exists a “grotesque language” characterized by a distinct vocabulary and syntax. Alt Går Bra’s exhibition inverts this perspective, placing at the center of our focus the detailed and colored panels (ultimately on walls), *framing* them with literary references (found and mirrored within this brochure you are currently reading). Such framing is not without reason; Morel insists these margins, much like grotesques, are traversed by “the theme of the struggle.” He emphasizes what he terms “rinseau aggressiveness,” a type of “animal-vegetal combat” spurring deliberately unsettling “polymorphism, entwinement, or interweaving phenomena.” Importantly, the forms emerging from various exhibit paintings are miniaturized, hybrid, vegetative, monstrous, stemming from an “ambiguity of dissemblance,” isomorphic and polymorphic alike. Like the margins of drawn text, they tell of the inventive power of polymorphism and interweaving, borrowing from “columns and zoomorphic capitals, which favor vegetal forms.” Gothic manuscripts are characterized by “line ends morphing into rinceaux before metamorphosing into animal tails,” linking them “to a grotesque vernacular teeming with hybrid phytomorphic figures.” Marginalia is near to grotesques through conjured values: symbolic values, iconographic sequences, narrative systems, “the semantic relation to the margins of texts or miniatures.” These text-border drawings are by no means subordinate, bearing a haptic and optical function, tasked with intensifying reading of the text, literally exciting the eye.

Citation is at once both “solicitation and ex-citation,” Compagnon reminds us; it seeks “the instant moment of sollicitational brilliance.” It merely mimics one of childhood’s simplest, most nostalgic games: “cut and paste.” Importantly, citation never merely *extracts*; its movement is always dual, requiring refuge, integration, acclimation within the hosting system. Extracting, removing from its original *context* (or rather contexts: temporal, geographic, semiotic, aesthetic), citation mandates an immediate reintegration into another whole to compose a new ensemble. Citation being a graft, it is first and foremost a *foreign entity*, “a mutilated organ” not belonging to yet appropriated by the one citing, bearing certain conditions. It necessitates transplantation; a far from neutral or self-evident action which carries the risk of rejection

which one must “guard against” and “of which the evasion is a jubilation.” Citation is collaborative labor, that of the transplanted object and the host organism. The graft must take root for the operation to succeed; the graft is simultaneously organic, surgical, and aesthetic. One of its meanings is of a vegetal nature.; the natural graft most represents the “original” *par excellence*—the first cutting, imitated by all our mechanical, organic grafts. Take the acanthus, a Western ornament (from Greece, ancient Rome), opposed to the palmetto, an Eastern ornament (from Asia, Egypt); Beyond this ornamental struggle lies the success of a vegetal graft, that of the Mediterranean acanthus braving harsh Northern climates. The acanthus experienced transplantation, its cuttings spreading – the operation was successful. If proof is needed, look no further than the Kristiansand Museum: the acanthus is ubiquitous on its walls, tessellating space. Grafting’s immense potency persists; even when completely accepted by host. The trace of a graft never entirely vanishes—almost as if to remind us from *whence it came*. Assimilation or absorption will never be absolute (this would be synonymous with oblivion). In a text, citation *signals* its presence through quotes or italics, flagging an ongoing process of transplantation. Similarly, Alt Går Bra cites its sources and references—what precisely do they accomplish? What does citing painting entail—is it akin to citing painting? Are these modalities mimetically aligned? For whom? Why? What effects do they produce? Where, within this exhibition, can traces of extraction be discerned, what significance do they entail? Answers lie within substance (abstracted naturalization, mimetic metonymy), form (compartmentalized surfaces, like canvases), and arrangement: juxtaposed canvases, pianos and lawnmowers, interplay of color, videos. One must read (and hear) to see accurately. Citation, by summoning another’s words, unveils its dialogical power, which Antoine Compagnon frames as “a symbolic partner” no less concrete and real, for all the absence it entails. Thus, citation is triply “supportive”: of phenomenon, fact, practice. This recalls, to our mind, Compagnon’s assertion that makes citation a rallying point: *la citation donne rendez-vous*, “citation signals a meeting”. In this exhibition, we are invited, in both a literal and figurative sense, to heed this summons to the letter.

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