



# GUNILLA JOSEPHSON

## The Blood-Red Heart of Johanna Darke

### December 13, 2005 - January 29, 2006

MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

Québec





GUNILLA JOSEPHSON

**The Blood-Red Heart of Johanna Darke**  
2004-2005, colour video with soundtrack, 67 min

PRESENTED THREE TIMES DAILY  
AT 11 A.M., 2 P.M. AND 4 P.M.,  
WITH ADDITIONAL SCREENINGS  
ON WEDNESDAY EVENINGS AT 7 P.M.

*The Blood-Red Heart of Johanna Darke* is one of Gunilla Josephson's major works. Filmed over a period of four months while the artist was in residence at Paris's Cité Internationale des Arts in 2003, the piece developed in three phases. A first version was presented at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris in the fall of 2004. A second was shown at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery and then at the Swedish Cultural Centre in Paris. And now there is this "final" version. "It is rare ... that a work surpasses the actual (ideal) idea," says the artist. "I end up with a film that is not a film, and that's what I want ... an ambiguous physical and emotional atmosphere."<sup>1</sup>



The Swedish-born Gunilla Josephson, who divides her time between Canada and Europe, has been exhibiting her work since 1985. Through her practice, which fuses aesthetics, painting, sculpture, installation and video, she explores the myths and symbols of our culture and history. Among her best-known pieces are the installation *Flying Carpet*, 1994, the video *Loco(motive)*, 1998-2000, and *Hello Ingmar*, for which she was awarded the Oberhausen Short Film Festival Prize in 2001. Discussing her controversial quotes from the films of Ingmar Bergman, Gunilla Josephson refers to her "real and brief contact with him." She likes to play on the distance between the real and the imaginary, and to talk enigmatically about where truth ends and fiction begins. She also speaks of "the real story, where truth is falsehood," and quotes Shakespeare: "Life's ... a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."<sup>2</sup>



*The Blood-Red Heart of Johanna Darke* is Josephson's first "feature-length" video. A fictional "documentary," it was inspired by her walks through the streets of Paris, a city whose many monuments and unique architecture give it a powerful symbolic resonance. "I imagined myself walking in the footsteps of a woman from the past. Sometimes, when I turned around, I'd see her walking in my footsteps. I followed her, she followed me ..."<sup>3</sup> Gunilla Josephson has invented a woman who could have existed, a young novice who leaves her Quebec convent to study architecture in Paris. The artist sets her story during the



Occupation, but allows her character to move freely through the Paris of today. Exploiting the anachronistic, she mixes styles and periods. The name she has given the young woman, Johanna Darke, is a pun on Jeanne d'Arc — Joan of Arc. Yet Gunilla Josephson sees her character as an anti-heroine, the female equivalent of Meursault in Camus's *L'Étranger*,<sup>4</sup> someone out of step with the world and other people. < < <

The heart, blood and red of the title foreshadow a drama. The narrative thread unreels in a series of scenes where the artist interweaves reality, history and mythology. Using a shot of a miniature Gothic cathedral — a recurring motif in her work<sup>5</sup> — Gunilla Josephson reduces the gap between fiction and reality, shifting the imaginary closer to the actual. < < <

Gunilla Josephson admits that she is not interested in acting: the roles are taken by amateurs — friends and acquaintances. She likes to play with clichés and to manipulate traditional female poses. "When someone changes posture, they change character, they're no longer themselves." In one of the early scenes — the scene with the piano, where two young women dressed identically in the same short red dress play the instrument together, not side by side but one behind the other — Gunilla Josephson places her character in an unusual position, throwing light on her own creative process but also on the duality of identity that operates throughout the whole "film." <

LOUISE ISMERT

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1 Remarks made in a private communication with the author and during a lecture given at UQAM on April 7, 2005.

2 One of the most famous lines from *Macbeth* (1605-1606), Act 5, Scene 5.

3 Quoted in the essay by Andrea Carson in the catalogue of the exhibition presented at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery in fall 2005.

4 In this work, the artist quotes the entire last paragraph of *L'Étranger*.

5 The 1994 installation *Flying Carpet* included a painted reproduction of the carpet in Chartres cathedral and a pile of miniature cathedrals made of wax.

## Artist's Statement

Who is Johanna Darke? She exists, she doesn't exist. I walked in her footsteps. She walked in mine. I found her, she found me. Or perhaps we invented each other. My lies are her truths, her desires are my imaginings.

The facts are these: in 1939 the little shining voices compel Johanna to leave the convent in Quebec and travel to France. In Paris, she will study the architecture of Notre-Dame with the aim of designing her own cathedral. Soon after the Nazi occupation of Paris, Johanna becomes involved in the Resistance as a messenger. She is betrayed, arrested by the Gestapo and subsequently vanishes. It is presumed that she was executed.

Johanna is a woman lost in the city of History, an impostor of female heroism. Her phantom existence is an engagement with an imagined Paris and with a mythology of patriotic courage.

The veracity of art demands that we accept Johanna on her own terms. Her drama of isolation and tragedy, her pathetic poignancy and her simplified heroism are an unconditional reality of mystery, absurdity and beauty. These are the contradictions that provoke art, and make it necessary.

I make free associations and improvisations. My method for the acting, filming and editing challenges the accepted conventions. I substantiate my argument by a resistance to the tyranny of orthodoxy, in art and in life.

It will be understood, after all these explanations, that I speak without any intention of blasphemy or martyrdom, but simply with the somewhat ironic affection that an artist has a right to feel towards the characters she has created.

GUNILLA JOSEPHSON

**Script** Lewis DeSoto, Gunilla Josephson **Sound** Eve Egoyan, Gunilla Josephson **Camera** Lewis DeSoto

**Music** Eve Egoyan, *Compositions for Piano and Harpsichord*; Tchaikovsky, "June: Barcarolle" from *The Seasons*, Op. 37b; Éric Satie, *Troisième Gymnopédie*; 20th-century cello suites; Miles Davis, *Bitches Brew*

The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal is a provincially owned corporation funded by the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec and receives financial support from the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Canada Council for the Arts.

Born in Stockholm Sweden, December 16, 1947.  
Lives and works in Toronto, Ontario, and in Montmartin-sur-Mer, France.

### Principal Solo Exhibitions (since 1990)

- 2005 *The Images Festival*, Toronto, Ontario — Also in 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000.
- 2004 *The Blood-Red Heart of Johanna Darke*, Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris, France; Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto, Ontario (under the title *Resistance*); Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta.\*
- 2001 *The Apple Videos*, A\_Level Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.  
*Happy House: The Id, the Kid and the Little Red Fireman*, Art System, Toronto, Ontario.  
*Hedda's House*, The Art Gallery of Mississauga, Mississauga, Ontario.\*
- 1999 *Chorus of None*, Galleri Leena Kuumola, Helsinki, Finland.  
*(Loco)motive*, Archive Inc., Toronto, Ontario — As part of *Narratives in Motion*, a joint exhibition with John Dickson.
- 1997 *Horse Latitudes*, The Red Head Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.\*
- 1996 *Memento Vitae*, The Museum for Textile (now the Textile Museum of Canada), Toronto, Ontario.\*  
*Once Upon a Time: Contemporary Tales*, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta — With Michelle Gay and Max Streicher.\*
- 1995 *Ceremonial Waxes — Untextiles*, Gallery Haga, Frösunda Centre, Stockholm, Sweden.  
*Fjällbjörk (What do You Think of It, Moon?)*, The Red Head Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.
- 1994 *Ceremonial Waxes — Untextiles*, The Red Head Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.  
*Flying Carpet*, Access Art Now, The Eaton Centre, Toronto, Ontario.
- 1992 *Of the First Mould*, Kingston Artists Association (now the Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre), Kingston, Ontario.
- 1990 *New Paintings*, Opéra Galerie de l'Espace Monsigny, Paris, France.

### Residencies

- 2003 Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France.
- 2000 Charles Street Video, Toronto, Ontario.
- 1998 Gushul Studio, Blairmore, Alberta — In collaboration with the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta.
- 1997 Circolo Scandinavo per Artisti e Scienziati, Rome, Italy.
- 1995 Nordiskt Konstcentrum, Bergen, Norway.

### Principal Festivals (since 1998) and Group Exhibitions (since 1991)

- 2005 *Rendezvous With Madness Film Festival*, Toronto, Ontario.
- 2004 *51st Sydney Film Festival*, Sydney, Australia.



- Invasions (Part Two)*, Gladstone Hotel ART Bar, Toronto, Ontario — Event organized by Elements Collective.\*  
*New Toronto Works*, Pleasure Dome, Toronto, Ontario.
- 2003 *GLO 2003 (palpate)*, Archive Inc., Toronto, Ontario.  
*UK/Canada Video Exchange*, South London Art Gallery, London, England — Also in 2000 (The Lux Cinema, London, England; Vidéographe, Montreal, Quebec; The Hull Centre for Time-Based Art, Hull, England).
- 2002 *15. Stuttgarter Filmwinter*, Stuttgart, Germany.\* *Changing Times, Time Changes: Canadian Experimental Films & Videos of the 1990s*, MSVU Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia.\*  
*Home Show*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba.\*  
*Signal & Noise, Festival of Video and Sound*, Video In, Vancouver, British Columbia.
- 2001 *18. Kasseler Dokumentarfilm- und Videofest*, Kassel, Germany.  
*Head Frame*, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy.  
*Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen/Oberhausen International Short Film Festival*, Oberhausen, Germany — *Hello Ingmar* awarded Festival Prize.  
*Moving Pictures, Festival of Dance on Film and Video*, Toronto Ontario.
- 2000 *Poetic Narratives, Thoughts on Canadian Film and Video Art*, Art Gallery of Sudbury, Sudbury, Ontario.
- 1999 *Canadian Currents*, The Goethe Institute, Toronto, Ontario.  
*Taste of Landscapes, Videomedjia*, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia.  
*Tranz ↔ Tech Toronto International Video Art Biennial*, Toronto, Ontario.  
*Video Archaeology Festival*, Sofia, Bulgaria.
- 1998 *Femmedia, Film and Video Festival*, Stockholm, Sweden.  
*Topographies de la peau : Tracer l'interface/Topographies of the Skin: Charting the Interface*, Langage Plus, Alma, Quebec; L'Œil de Poisson, Quebec City, Quebec; Glendon Gallery, Glendon College, York University, Toronto, Ontario — As part of the *Paysages Inter Sites* project.\*
- 1997 *Ashkenaz: A Festival of New Yiddish Culture*, Lonsdale Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.  
*Cut*, Archive Inc., Toronto, Ontario.  
*Northern Encounters*, Wynick/Tuck Gallery; Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.
- 1994 *Six Contemporary Swedish Artists*, Granite Club, Toronto, Ontario.
- 1992 *Cold City Invitational*, Cold City Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.
- 1991 *Place/Practice*, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario.\*

\* An asterisk indicates a publication.