

HELSINKI

Jan Lütjohann

Galleria Myymälä2

Jan Lütjohann works wood. Using hand tools and pre-industrial techniques, he creates elements that seem rudimentary, reductive, even downright plain, from which he then forms sculptural installations that reveal constellations of ideas and references. In 2019, for instance, he mounted “as precisely as necessary,” which addressed our current preoccupation with mass-produced perfection by presenting a self-produced toolkit for making straight lines, right angles, and flat surfaces. Over the

years, he has also created several portable workshops, including one that packs into a small cube. These compact constructions accentuate adaptability and doing more with less. Though we experience such works as static entities in galleries and museums, they nevertheless embody functionality and imply forms of activity; in short, they are usable. Many of these qualities were evident in Lütjohann’s recent exhibition “Centers of Gravity,” where he used adjacent spaces to juxtapose two distinct, yet interdependent groups

of objects focused on the task of carrying.

The first gallery contained several non-identical pairs of carrying implements, the majority of which share titles. For example, though Lütjohann used through-mortise and tenon joints to affix rungs to rails in the two versions of *carrying frame* (2022), the size, shape, and number of members that make up each work are different. Moreover, the addition of rope, which serves as shoulder straps and parcel ties, distinguishes one of them. This erratic play of inconsisten-

cy and agreement permeated all of the works in the show. Ranging from subtle differences between the variants of *head ring* to the much more obvious ones distinguishing *carrying pole* and *carrying pole with load* (all works 2022), such features provoked ongoing speculation regarding the design and particularities associated with the use of these structures.

In the second gallery, which featured things to be carried, viewers were confronted by a substantial number of boxes in which the erratic play of inconsistency

and agreement continued. Made with laminated pine boards, birch plywood, and several traditional joining methods, these boxes varied in color, grain, size, shape, and means of fabrication. Moreover, Lütjohann had segregated them to create two well-balanced stacks, both titled *load* (2020–22). In addition to conveying weight and stability, the arrangements demonstrated that the axes of symmetry in both stacks were nearly aligned—this despite the fact that one stack was made up of oblong boxes, the other of square ones.

But what about the organic, bubble-like forms hand-carved from discarded sections of tree trunk and placed on top of each mass? Lütjohann says that they represent those things that cannot be stacked or packed in the boxes and, therefore, require special handling. Intriguingly, the shape and orientation of these forms echoed the general configuration of the boxes on which they were set, their placement adding visual contrast and asymmetry, as well as a degree of precariousness.

“Centers of Gravity” triggered multiple associations. Thoughts drifted to specific traits—the backpack’s versatility, for instance—as well as the needs and desires that influence people’s daily routines, at home and abroad. Lütjohann’s selection of archetypes not only called attention to the laboriousness, multifariousness, and multicultural aspects of carrying, but also to modes of carriage across the ages. Such implements have been

used in times past and continue to be used today, in rural and urban areas, in all geographic regions.

The exhibition statement, which noted that “Whoever carries something becomes one with the thing being carried,” furthered the idea that these carrying implements operate as bodily extensions that help us perform. But it also spoke of struggle, imbalance, and inequality, warning of the toll they can take: “The load is never evenly distributed; many have to wear out their bodies.” “Centers of Gravity” offered a discerning and understatedly evocative portrayal linking the utility of carrying implements and the nature of work with people’s inherent resolve and creativity.

—JOHN GAYER

Jan Lütjohann’s work is currently on view in “Shared Space,” a group show at the Helsinki Art Museum through August 13, 2023.

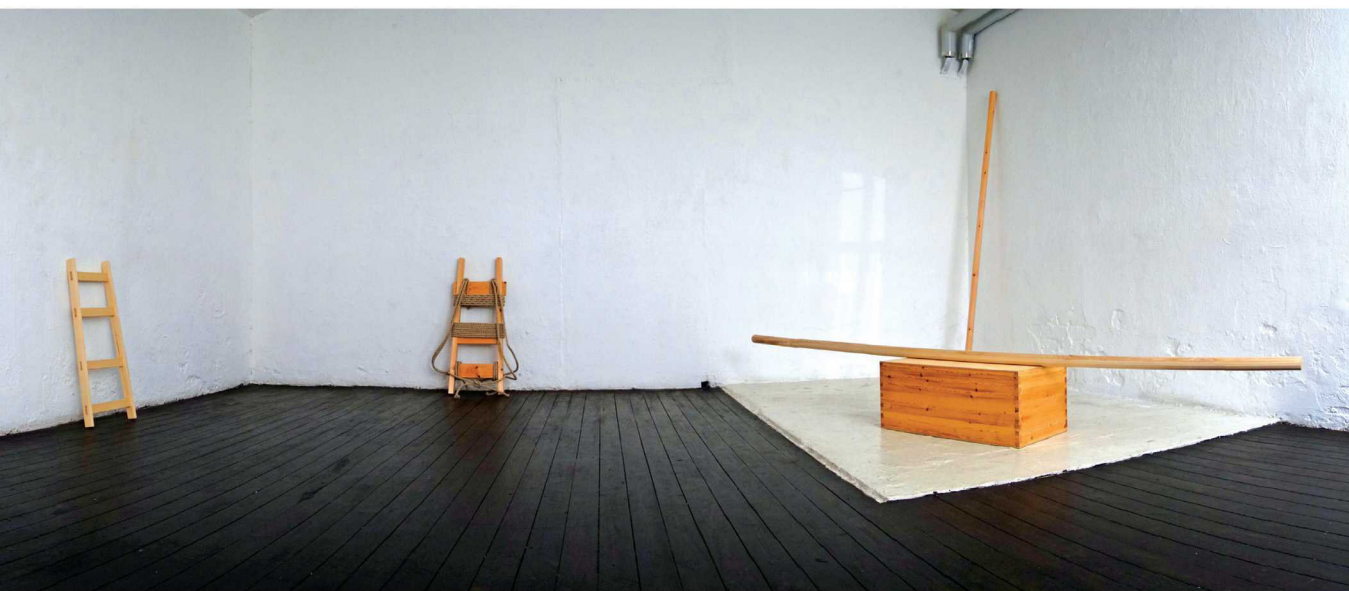


JAN LÜTJOHANN

OPPOSITE:
Installation view
of “Centers of Gravity,”
2022.

THIS PAGE, TOP:
Installation view with (back-
ground) *load*, 2020–22,
spruce, laminated pine
boards, and birch plywood,
155 x 105 x 140 cm.;
and *load*, 2020–22,
birch, laminated
pine boards, and birch
plywood,
90 x 90 x 160 cm.

THIS PAGE, BOTTOM:
carrying frame,
2022.
Pine and plant fiber,
40 x 5 x 80 cm.



THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: COURTESY THE ARTIST

