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BA thesis: "Unitism – Man's Nature, Society's Culture, the Deeper Meaning of Symbols"

In the late 70's Umeå Universitet became the second institution in Sweden to offer a Bildlärarexam, combining a prep year in art at a folkhögskola with three years of study at the university level. Though there was no formal exit thesis required for graduation, I continued my work on a project that started prior my enrolment as an undergraduate student.

During the early 70's, I became interested in symbolism and what the inception of symbols might have in relationship to the physical world. Based on the fundamental design of the tetrahedron, I created a tent, symbolizing the place of shelter where man could cultivate his thought and define culture through his interaction with the environment.

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Man's Nature, Society's Culture - The Deeper Meaning of Symbols  
1979, Ulvön, Sweden – Hans Westman

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Working with this theme, from 1976 on my explorations as an artist evolved into a number of installations documented through photographs. "Unitism, Man's Nature, Society's Culture – the Deeper Meaning of Symbols" is summarized in the following artist's statement, both in the original Swedish and in the English translation.

"Vår visuella perception växer fram i tiden och våra estetiska upplevelser bestäms delvis av vår fysiska position till bilden. När vår position ändras, sker ändringar i bildens komposition, som när vi rör oss genom rummet och iakttar formerna i våra egna omgivningar utifrån olika synvinklar. Om vi föreställer oss att formerna är symboler, och att de berättar en historia som ligger dold i de mönster som uppstår ur bilden, känner vi den stillhet som genomsyrar formerna och som är Livets (historiens) ursprung."

"Our visual perception grows from time and our aesthetic experience is decided, in part, by the physical position from which we view the image. When our position changes, the composition of the image changes, like when we move through space and observe forms in our own environment from different points of view. If we imagine the forms as symbols, we can see the story that emerges from the image, hidden within the patterns, and we feel the silence, the source from which the story came."

This exercise in perceptual evolution strove to explain how to read the patterns derived from viewing the tent at different stages while in construction and how these symbolic interpretations could be used as a vehicle to unfold an ongoing story and enable the viewer to encounter the visual aesthetic in every perceived moment.

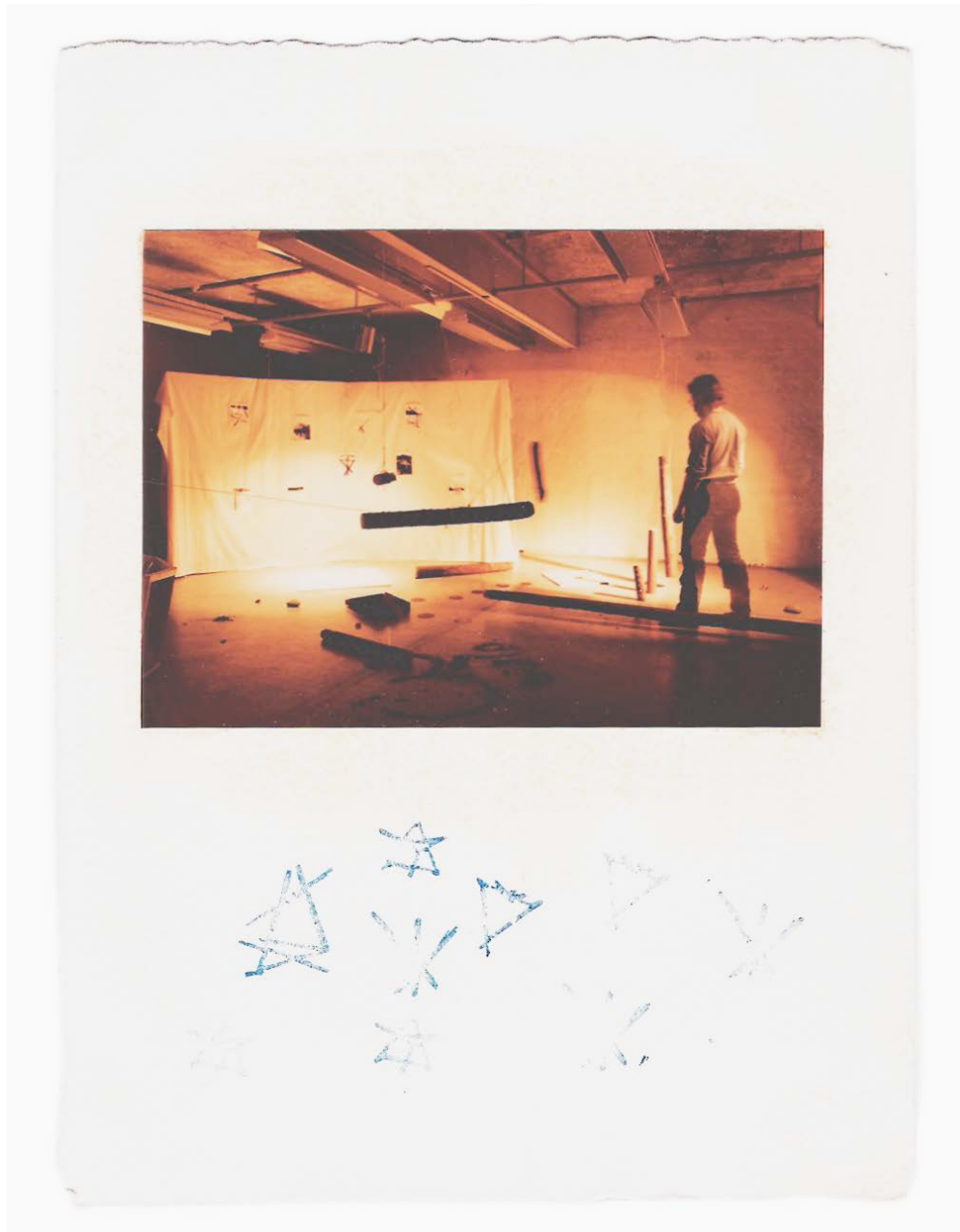


“Man’s nature, Society’s Culture, the Deeper Meaning of Symbols”

Playing cards, 1980 – Hans Westman

Nine primary symbols were “identified” and a set of nine playing cards was created. In the game, dubbed "Vilse i Verklighet", players freely interpreted a cards meaning, associating a place and an event, shared with the other players. The next player would draw a new card and expand on the environment where the players were now in and build on the sequence of events. This became an exercise in creativity, enabling the players to improve their ability to visualize through free interpretation and to create a bridge between the world of reality and the made up world of the players.

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“Man’s Nature, Society’s Culture – the Deeper Meaning of Symbols”  
Installation, 1980 Tullhuset, Umeå – Hans Westman

This carried over to the exhibition with the same working title, the installation becoming the bridge for the visitors, which was documented in a series of photographs in nine separate “chapters”.

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The installation was summarized as nine chapters of sequential images documenting the events, which when transposed to film lead to my first introduction to the art of animation. I made a proposal to get funding for my film project and submitted it to “Filmverkstan” in Stockholm, Sweden. It was accepted and I was able to produce “Unitism” (16mm), which was started in 1981 was completed in 1984.



“Unitism”, 1984 Filmverstan – Hans Westman

<http://www.westmandesigngroup.com/film/unitism/>

Before returning to the United States in 1995, the film was transferred to VHS (PAL). The link provided is a digitized copy that can be viewed on line. The sound track was created by my mentor at Filmverkstan, Mihail Livada, who was a pioneer in experimental film making in Sweden between the years 1950 and 2001.



# UNITISM

MAN'S NATURE  
SOCIETY'S CULTURE  
THE DEEPER MEANING OF SYMBOLS

UNITISM, *written in 9 chapters, tells an artist's story of what he sees — uniting concrete with abstract — through the intellect's perception of what is real and what is unreal.* Hans Westman