

Kris Lemsalu Malone & Kyp Malone Lemsalu at KW

Article by Léna Szirmay-Kalos // Mar. 09, 2020

At the opening performance of Kris Lemsalu Malone and Kyp Malone Lemsalu's exhibition 'Love Song Sing-Along' at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, I find myself singing along with the artists and the audience. We sit together, immersed in a fantasy world of birch trees, floating water and a swan paddle boat carrying two human-sized animal sculptures of a blue hare and a yellow jaguar. The multidisciplinary Estonian artist Kris Lemsalu Malone accompanies us on the floor in an outlandish outfit—representing the jaguar—while her collaborator, artist and New York avant-garde musician Kyp Malone Lemsalu, dressed in a blue suit—representing the hare—leads the ceremony. He welcomes us with a soft "hello friends" and starts the session that, from the outset, feels like an intimate celebration of love and togetherness. We sing and Kyp Malone Lemsalu harmonizes, adding collectively-generated sound layers with a loop station.



Front: Kris Lemsalu Malone: 'Love Song Sing-Along,' 2019/2020; middle: Michèle Pagel: 'Birch Trunks,' 2020; back: Kyp Malone Lemsalu: 'Love Song Sing-Along series 1–14 (Detail: 7–14),' 2019/2020; installation view of the exhibition 'Love Song Sing-Along' at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2020 // Courtesy the artists, photo by Frank Sperling

The duo's artistic practice places emphasis on communal work and collaborative methods. The now-married Kris Lemsalu Malone and Kyp Malone Lemsalu presented their first collaboration 'Going, going' at Performa 17 and have since worked extensively with their friends. For 'Love Song Sing-Along' they transformed the third floor of KW into a large-scale installation: a colorful, fairytale-like *gesamtkunstwerk* that encompasses ceramic and textile sculptural works, watercolor paintings and music.

At the beginning of the narrative exhibition, we meet the protagonists. A blue hare and a yellow jaguar with a stuck-out tongue—presumably the alter egos of the artists—sit in

the front seat of a romantic swan paddle boat. In its back seat, the characters' features are multiplied, with miniature jaguar and hare heads erupting from colorfully glazed ceramic hands. In the mythological world of the Maya people, the jaguar represents the underworld, whereas the hare symbolizes creative power in other cultures.



Kris Lemsalu Malone at the opening performance of the exhibition 'Love Song Sing-Along' at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2020 // Courtesy the artists, photo by Frank Sperling

In her practice, Kris Lemsalu Malone often refers to different cultures. Crossing multiple disciplines, her works are a mixture of fiction and reality that go beyond an expression of an inner journey. Having studied ceramics, she experiments with traditional techniques using a broad spectrum of materials to subvert traditional craftsmanship. In her installations, she mixes sculptures with found, natural

materials, positing the importance of the symbiosis between substances. In her work, nature exists between object and subject and the natural and the unnatural: it is posed as an ungraspable concept.

Kyp Malone Lemsalu composed the sound for the installation and painted the watercolors that hang on the walls as light curtains. These paintings guide us through a story of genesis, simultaneously marking different phases of the artist-couple's relationship while presenting various mythologies on the creation of the world. At the center of the paintings, often accompanied by the swan, the jaguar, the hare and the bodies of the artists, is a tree. The tree is a sign of physical and spiritual nourishment. It embodies transformation and liberation, growth and resurrection throughout the narrative. The swan, symbolizing fertility and commitment, invites the protagonists on a journey that seeks alternatives for the origins of the world and brings together the animal kingdom with that of humankind. Some of the paintings share intimate moments in the artists' relationship, while others depict the naked bodies of Kris Lemsalu Malone and Kyp Malone Lemsalu as Adam and Eve.

Another recurring symbol is the third eye. Borrowing from spiritual traditions, it refers to the gate that leads to inner realms and spaces of higher consciousness. Fusing together secularity and religion, mythology and history, the symbology of the exhibition proposes a shared space in which life and death are simultaneously perceived and

experienced.



Left: Kyp Malone Lemsalu: 'Love Song Sing-Along' series 1–14 (detail: 7–14), 2019/2020; right: Kris Lemsalu Malone: 'Love Song Sing-Along' (detail), 2019/2020; installation view of the exhibition 'Love Song Sing-Along' at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2020 // Courtesy the artists, photo by Frank Sperling

A floating river, made out of textile, divides the installation space. Birch trees, made by sculptor Michèle Pagel, line the river, their trunks carrying dozens of padlocks. On the one hand, they refer to the romantic act of leaving padlocks on bridges across cities in various parts of the world as a testament to commitment. On the other hand, the act of puncturing a trunk with a padlock can be understood as a colonizing gesture of humankind over nature. The trees in this scenario are not a symbol of liberation, but rather a manifestation of the power relations between humankind and its environment.

'Love Song Sing-Along' thematizes the endless possibility of evolving and reinventing oneself as an individual, a couple or a community. Through the combination of seemingly real events and fiction, Kris Lemsalu Malone and Kyp Malone Lemsalu conjure up something fantastical and vulnerable: a celebration of love, relationships and togetherness. It is light and heartfelt. A cynic would not last five-minutes in this exhibition, most likely dismissing it as naive and cheesy.

In the past couple of years the fields of art and popular culture have seen a resurgence of interest in magic and in the mystical. The longing to embody the moment in which magic holds the promise of connection and empowerment is both an existential, ethical and tactical gesture, during times of environmental collapse, right-wing political gains and an ever-accelerating capitalist system.



Kyp Malone Lemsalu at the opening performance of the exhibition 'Love Song Sing-Along' at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2020 // Courtesy the artists, photo by Frank Sperling

While the opening performance is endearing, it leaves me slightly disappointed in its almost childish approach to togetherness. Kyp Malone Lemsalu kindly encourages us to sit and sing with him, and to experience the moment without capturing it on social media. His tone brings me back to memories of sing-alongs in kindergarten. Yet, the assertion of collective presence in real-time gathers new force in the current context of technological mediation. Beyond the notion of participation, the very act of gathering bodies, the act of assembling, feels like a political gesture due to its raw potential to incite further action.

Exhibition Info

KW INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Kris Lemsalu Malone & Kyp Malone Lemsalu: 'Love Song Sing-Along'

Exhibition: Feb. 29–May 03, 2020

Auguststraße 69, 10117 Berlin, [click here for map](#)