

## Louise Liliefeldt



Louise Liliefeldt (untitled) 7a\*11d 2018 PHOTO Henry Chan

Species. The term species is loaded, especially because of its interconnectedness with capitalist and present social orders. Spray painted in orange on a potted tree and later on the back of her black t- shirt, **Louise Liliefeldt** uses the word to tackle the tension between feelings of superiority and guilt, more specifically when thinking about the established relationship between humans and non-humans post Western Enlightenment. Although a great deal of the artist's critique is focused on the Victorian values of humans versus nature, it also points a finger at how one's humanity can easily be stripped for capital gain, and so one of the questions that Liliefeldt asks with this performance is: what do we do to what we think is lesser than us?<sup>[24]</sup> The choreographed movements highlight this thought, more precisely with the focal point being the excessive pruning of a tree. A tree that has been created for the purpose of a controlled environment, manicured for an indoor space. The artist goes up and down a tall ladder, initially only cutting off dry leaves. Then she moves to the ones that are simply imperfect. At the end, it is as if it has become an ingrained behavior, an impulse that she can't stop; even the good ones are discarded. To add to the uneasiness of this piece, she also utilizes stasis midway into an action, forcing the audience to pay attention, to be fully present, to witness each movement. Furthermore, a visually strong Christian symbol of discipline, guilt and penitence is added to reinforce the idea of

redemption after the fact. In a darker corner of the room, an orange light glows; it is the same colour as the painted word "species" on her back and on the pot of the plant. Kneeling down, she flogs herself with a whip with leather fringes. Each time the artist passes another pruning stage, a sort of point of no return, she flogs herself out of guilt. The self-inflicted violence echoes the one permitted on the tree. Tiredness and ache are immanent in the piece, as the muscles are memorizing a demanding movement sequence, pinning down the tremendous length that goes into maintaining and sustaining a distanced rapport with nature. Who is physically maintaining this order with sweat and blood and who is it benefitting? Whose bodies are compromised when thinking about imminent climate change? At the other end of the visual spectrum, an ostrich egg, that was hung on the tree and later carried on her back, is finally entrusted to the care of the audience. We pass around the egg carefully, attentive to the desire to extend a tender gesture that was nonexistent in the space.