



Cecilia Edefalk MATRIX 261 JUNE 29–OCTOBER 16, 2016  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM & PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE

Stockholm-based artist Cecilia Edefalk (b. 1954) probes the uncertain nature of historical memory, the mutability of time, and the visionary role of light in her paintings, photographs, watercolors, and sculptures. Her attentive and reflective approach is evident in her considered revisitation of familiar subjects and motifs, such as classical statuary, plants, animals, portraits, and natural cycles of growth and decay. Although Edefalk’s practice is intuitive and deeply personal, and often guided by particular experiences in her own life, she expands concepts of originality through her consistent exploration of repetition and seriality. The critic and curator Daniel Birnbaum observed that Edefalk’s works “multiply and divide themselves, creating a complicated play of shadows, mirror-images, and phantoms.”<sup>1</sup> The repetition she deploys is both analytical and an agent of amplification and reverie—it is a method of generating a thoughtful space in which to examine the myriad dimensions of a given form, phenomenon, or concern. For Edefalk, the production of images and objects is a way to turn a subject around in her mind, exploring it in its many potential shapes, colors, formats, and sizes. The work included in *MATRIX 261* focuses on Edefalk’s decades-long engagement with her natural environment, whether it be the daddy longlegs that she discovers climbing a window in her kitchen, or a transfixing Roman sculpture she encounters in a museum.

Over the last couple of years Edefalk has been visiting a dandelion-filled meadow near her house, recording it with her camera in various states of bloom, and at changing sunlit moments of the day. One large-scale photograph on view in the exhibition pictures a section of the field illuminated by resplendent, filtered light that turns the heads of the translucent flowers into glowing orbs. She arrests this fleeting experience with her camera, infusing it with poignancy rooted in the distinctiveness of the moment. Edefalk also renders the meadow in paint, in three small canvases with thin washes of black-and-white tempera. In these little paintings she records changing states of the meadow, much as an Impressionist painter might have done in the late nineteenth century. In another photograph, Edefalk zooms in on the hand of a friend who tenderly holds a perfect, spherical seed head before the wind carries the seeds away. She enlarges the picture to a monumental scale as if to underscore the fragility and singularity of the moment. Her use of a black-and-white palette in both the paintings and photographs suggests that she is intent on isolating transitory moments of perception rather than accurately documenting a vibrant setting. The single dandelion head appears again in a diminutive green tondo (four inches in diameter) and in a series of red canvases that visualize the flower in its various expressive states. She uses color to punctuate form in these tiny canvases, as if to proffer the flower as a mutable symbol of time’s delicacy.

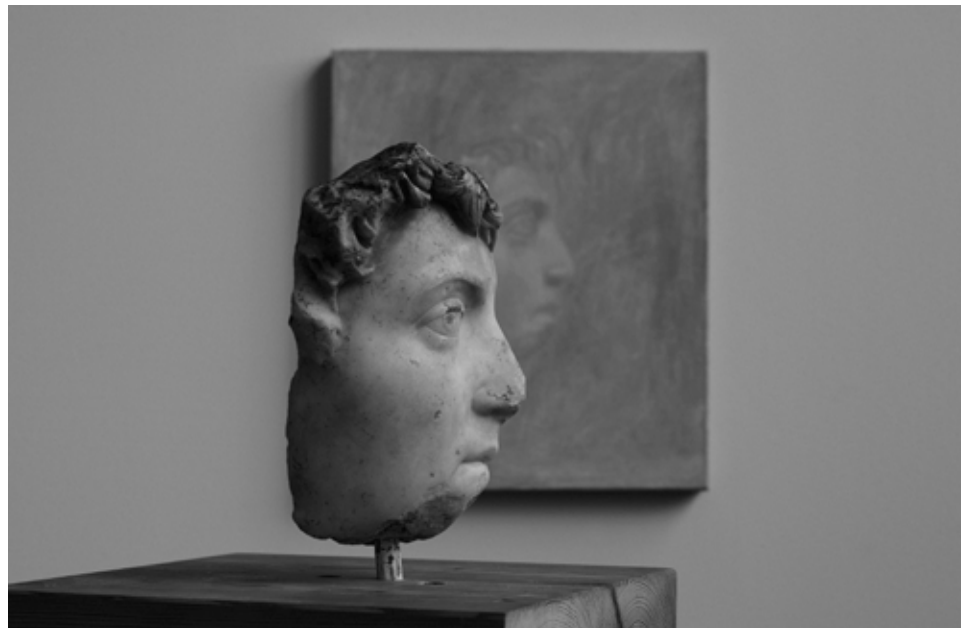
Edefalk has been chronicling flowers and various plant life in her artwork since the late 1970s. In 1978, accompanied by a botanist friend, Edefalk set out on a three-year sojourn across Europe with the intention of executing a series of watercolors of coastal wildflowers in areas of historical significance in England, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and Portugal. The flowers and plants she renders in these exquisitely detailed watercolors act as her lens onto the ancient landscapes she visits—such as Taormina, Palermo, and the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa. In these works Edefalk meticulously records indigenous species of grass and flora—ranging from the familiar to the rare—sometimes from various perspectives, and she notes the location and date of the drawing on the sheet of paper. These

detailed drawings, originally made to comprise a botanical book on Mediterranean plant life, highlight the analytical nature of Edefalk’s observation. She made 160 of these drawings over the course of this trip, but they have rarely been exhibited, and the book was never published; twenty appear in this exhibition, on view for the first time in the United States.

Another natural subject that has inspired the artist are birch trees, a type common in Sweden. One morning, upon rising, she discovered that a beloved Weeping Birch on a property across the street from her home was being felled for no apparent reason. She found this event to be quite traumatic, and so she set about collecting the remains of the graceful tree—its bark, branches, and leaves. She later transformed these fragments into dozens of cast-bronze sculptures to memorialize the birch in a wide range of shapes and sizes, creating a forest of sculptures from the single tree. In the largest painting in the exhibition, Edefalk draws a faint outline of the branches of the tree, rendering them in a barely-perceptible shadow—a ghostly presence of a once living form. Edefalk transposed her feeling of devastation into a creative process, producing dozens of works that each serve to honor the memory of this sacred form.

Another group of paintings, sculptures, and photographs displayed in *MATRIX 261* points to Edefalk’s interest in historical sculpture, in particular a Roman marble portrait of Marcus Aurelius from the second century. She encountered the sculpture when preparing an exhibition at the Malmö Konstmuseum in 1999, and it became the foundation for a large, growing body of work. “The sculptures I choose for my work have been around for a long time in human hands,” Edefalk remarks. “A lot of people have seen them and maybe this also creates a layer, an invisible material that attracts me.”<sup>2</sup> The series of paintings, entitled *To view the painting from within* (2002), shows the Roman sculpture against a pale blue background that recalls the color of the Swedish midsummer night sky. Each painting in the series was executed quickly, in a matter of a couple hours, over the course of a month. The perspective from which she presents the sculpture on each canvas approximates the corresponding phase of the moon on the day on which it was painted. On the process of making paintings of sculpture, she reflects, “I recognize something in the sculptures and by painting them I integrate it with myself. In a way they are all self-portraits, or becoming.”<sup>3</sup> These paintings further relate to a series of photographs, *To view the painting from outside*, which again shows the artist’s eye traveling around the original sculpture, capturing its shifting perspectives. In the photographs Edefalk shows the marble with the painting she made of it in the background. The position of the camera mirrors the perspective of the painting in the photo, creating a doubling effect, so that each painting becomes an imagistic echo of the sculpture—a relationship the roving camera is uniquely able to visualize.

Edefalk continues her exploration of the Aurelius portrait in another series of bronze sculptures, which marks her first time working in a foundry. In these works, we see extraneous structural elements of the casting process added to the final form, including the wooden plates, flash, and sprues used to make the cast. In *Portrait of a Sculpture* (2007), she turns the portrait upside-down, and in some instances she adds branches that seem to grow out of young Aurelius’s head; in others the face’s surface becomes a brilliant gold patina, a soft milky white, or an opaque black. In each case, the



artist explores different formal attributes in her attempt to expand the many possibilities for shape and structure. As the diverse works in this exhibition suggest, Edefalk envisions the timeless, yet evanescent quality of her various subjects, which together seem to open up an amorphous vista onto another dimension of time and space while remaining firmly rooted in the creative present.

#### Apsara DiQuinzio

CURATOR OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART AND PHYLLIS C. WATTIS MATRIX CURATOR

1. Daniel Birnbaum, "Angelic, Demonic: On Cecilia Edefalk," in *Cecilia Edefalk* (Bern and Stockholm: Kunsthalle Bern and Moderna Museet Stockholm, 1999), 52. Exhibition catalog.

2. "Cecilia Edefalk in Conversation with James Rondeau," in *Cecilia Edefalk in der Antikensammlung der Kunsthalle zu Kiel* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König GmbH & Co, 2009), 10. Exhibition catalog.

3. *ibid.*

CECILIA EDEFALK / MATRIX 261 IS ORGANIZED BY APSARA DIQUINZIO, CURATOR OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART AND PHYLLIS C. WATTIS MATRIX CURATOR. THE MATRIX PROGRAM IS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GENEROUS ENDOWMENT GIFT FROM PHYLLIS C. WATTIS AND THE CONTINUED SUPPORT OF THE BAMPFA TRUSTEES.

#### Biography

Born in 1954 in Norrköping, Sweden, Edefalk studied at the Royal Academy of Art, Stockholm, from 1981 to 1986; and Konstfack, University College of Arts, Craft, and Design, Stockholm, from 1973 to 1977. One of Sweden's most celebrated artists, Edefalk has had numerous one-person museum exhibitions at Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland; Moderna Muséet, Stockholm; Malmö Konstmuseum, Malmö; Lunds Konsthall, Lund; Kunsthalle Kiel, Germany; Nationalmuseum, Stockholm; Art Unlimited, Basel; The Art Institute of Chicago; Nordic Watercolor Museum, Skärhamn, Sweden; Parasol unit, London; and Museum für Kunst, Bremerhaven, Germany. A major retrospective will open in the fall 2016 at Prins Eugens Waldmarsudde in Stockholm. Her work has appeared in many group shows at various international venues including the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; *Documenta 11*, Kassel, Germany; Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the *22nd São Paulo Biennial*. She has received many awards and grants including the Barbro & Holger Bäckströms stipendium, Sweden; Edstrandska stiftelsen, Malmö, Sweden; and the Hans-Viksten-stipendium, Sweden. Edefalk lives and works in Stockholm. She is represented by Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, and Stene Projects, Stockholm.

FRONT *Silver Roots*, 2010; polished bronze; 21 ½ x 12 x 7 ¼ in. © Cecilia Edefalk, courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

ABOVE *Weeping Birch*, 2010; bronze and tempera; 2 pieces: 33 ½ x 6 ¼ x 4 ¾ in. and 33 x 8 x 6 in. © Cecilia Edefalk, courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

OPPOSITE *Dandelion*, 2014; silver gelatin print; 33 ¾ x 50 ¾ in. © Cecilia Edefalk, courtesy Stene Projects, Stockholm.

BACK *To view the painting from within*, 2002; oil and acrylic on linen; 17 x 14 ⅝ in. © Cecilia Edefalk, courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

*To view the painting from outside*, 2008; silver gelatin prints; 11 ⅜ x 14 ½ in. © Cecilia Edefalk, courtesy Stene Projects, Stockholm.

