

# KUNSTforum

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DET OFFENTLIGE ROM | JAN CHRISTENSEN | JOHN GIORNO | ANDREA LANGE | WANÅS KONST

DARK ECOLOGY | DIGITALE ROM | BIRMINGHAM | ENGLISH TEXTS



## JAN CHRISTENSEN:

– Kunstnere forholder seg alltid til et sett regler, i den hvite kuben så vel som det offentlige rom.

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Foto: Martin Rustad Johansen

## KUNSTforum 1-2015

www.kunstforum.as

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Kunstforum drives på idealistisk grunnlag, og er støttet av Norsk Kulturråd og Fritt Ord.

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**F**or visuell kunst er den «naturlige» distribusjonskanalen utstillingen, et medium som ofte finner sted i museer og gallerier, og som omfatter en sammenstilling av kunstverk strukturert etter en fellesnevner. Utstillingen som distribusjonskanal er knyttet til modernitet, ideologi og en måte å kategorisere verden på som vi i dag opplever som nettopp naturlig. I følge denne logikken blir museene og galleriene kunstens naturlige habitat, der den hvite kuben har etablert seg som et «rent» rom for kunsten, fritt for føringer og begrensninger.

Kunstinstitusjonen er et rom som gir kunst mening som kunst. Men det er også et rom der kunsten risikerer å reduseres til «bare» å være kunst. Når kunsten er fri for føringer som økonomi og politikk, kan den konsumeres på kantiansk vis, med et desinteressert blikk, der verket oppleves som hensiktsmessig uten å tjene noe praktisk formål. Som betraktere har vi vent oss til denne måten å forholde oss til kunst på, og kritikere og kunstnere ser på dette som et kvalitetstegn. Kunst som styres av utenforliggende mål, som et middel til å oppnå noe annet enn en kunstnerisk opplevelse og kritisk refleksjon, vurderes fort som urent og problematisk. Eller verre, som dekorasjon og ren estetisk nytelse.

Kunst kan selvsagt distribueres i andre kanaler enn utstillinger, og det mest nærliggende er kanskje kunst i offentlig rom. Offentlige rom regnes gjerne som det vi omgir oss med til daglig: urbane rom og landskap. Juridisk sett er et offentlig rom et fysisk sted der ingen ekskluderes, et større og på mange måter mektigere område som (paradoksalt nok) stadig holder innflytelse over kunst som skapes, der den stadig står i brytning mot andre interesser, som «folkets» smak og «krenkelsestyranniet».

Den statlige etaten KORO (Kunst i offentlig rom), tidligere Utsmykkingsfondet, er den største oppdragsgiveren for kunst i offentlig rom i Norge. Opprettelsen av Utsmykkingsfondet (1976) skjedde på bakgrunn av et behov for å distribuere kvalitetskunst til folket, samtidig som kunstnere kunne få ordentlig betalt for jobben. Begrepet utsmykking har gitt denne typen kunst lav status, noe Jan Christensen nevner i portrettintervjuet. Han er i takt med KOROs ambisjoner om å være en aktør for produksjon av en kritisk kunst i det offentlige rom, bevisst konteksten det jobbes innenfor. Mens kunstnere tidligere leverte ferdige arbeider til mer eller mindre ferdigstilte offentlige bygg, er kunstneren i dag tilstede gjennom hele prosessen. Når kunstneren trekkes inn i prosessen på denne måten, blir det mulig å tilpasse verket til konteksten og dra inn stedsspesifikke elementer.

I det offentlige rom er det ikke sikkert kunsten umiddelbart gir seg til kjenne som kunst. Kunst i «andre rom» enn utstillingsrommet blir til på andre premisser, med andre krav til kunstneren. Christensen beskriver for eksempel hvor mye byråkrati det innebærer å skape kunst i tilknytning til nye bygninger. Utstillingsrommet gir også en type kontroll over lesningen av verket, som det offentlige rom ikke nødvendigvis gir, og et kunstverk i offentlig rom kan trigge utilsiktede lesninger hos publikum, noe som kan skape stort engasjement rundt kunsten, dens vesen og rett til å vises i det offentlige rommet.

De siste årene har vi sett mange eksempler på at kunst utenfor museene skaper engasjement; Jonas Dahlbergs forslag til 22. juli-monument på Utøya har forarget naboene som stadig prøver å få det stoppet; Christian Frederik-monumentet i Oslo ble kuppet av politikere og kunstkonsulentene trakk seg; Vanessa Bairds veggmaleri til Helse- og omsorgsdepartementet har fått sterkt kritikk fra ansatte som ser 22. juli-elementer i bildet; Kongolandsbyen til Lars Cuzner og Mohammed Ali Fadlabi i Frognerparken i anledning grunnlovsjubileet skapte et mediesirkus som få kunstnere får oppleve. Ofte deler diskusjonene offentligheten opp i to motpoler der «folket» står på den ene siden mot en «kulturelite» på den andre.

Mot dette bakteppet er denne utgaven av KUNSTforum et forsøk på å tegne opp noen perspektiver rundt et tema som er stort, komplekst og langt fra entydig.

## BIDRAGSYTERE NR. 1 – 2015

ANDRÉ GALI (f. 1976) er ansvarlig redaktør i KUNSTforum.

MONICA HOLMEN (f. 1982) er redaktør i KUNSTforum.

NICOLAI STRØM-OLSEN (f. 1982) er daglig leder i KUNSTforum.

MARI RUSTAN (f. 1985) er nylig engasjert som nettre-daktør i KUNSTforum.

MAGNUS BONS (f. 1964) er skribent og kritiker, og fast bidragsyter i KUNSTforum og kunstschriftet Konstperspektiv.

TONJE GJEVJON er performancekunstner, filmskaper, komponist og skribent.

ERLING BUGGE (f. 1971) er kunsthistoriker, kritiker og skribent.

HÅKON LARSEN (f. 1980) er postdoktor i sosiologi ved Universitetet i Oslo.

JEANETTE ULRIKKE LUND (f. 1987) virker som frilansskribent og –kritiker.

ANDREAS MASVIE (f. 1992) er skribent og bachelorgradsstudent ved Norges Handelshøyskole (NHH).

ARE BLYTT (f. 1981) er billedkunstner.

KETIL NERGAARD (f. 1964) er billedkunstner og skribent.

JULIE LILLELIEN PORTER (f. 1975) er billedkunstner, frilansskribent og del av kunstnergruppen Ytter siden oppstarten i 2008.

JARLE STRØMODDEN (f. 1965) er museumsleder ved Vigelands-museet i Oslo.

MARTIN RUSTAD JOHANSEN (f. 1984) er fotograf.



Andrea Lange, *Pay Attention Motherfuckers*, 2010, Oslo sentrum. Foto: Hilde Honerud.



Marius Dahl og Jan Christensen, *Sehnsucht*, 2013. Lakkert bronse, betongfundament.  
Courtesy: Ankerskogen svømmehall og idrettspark, Hamar kommune.  
Foto: Dahl-Christensen



# Kunst for alles skyld

Den berlinbaserte kunstneren Jan Christensen (f. 1977) arbeider for tiden med tre forskjellige kunstprosjekter i offentlig rom simultant. I utviklingsprosessen av verkene disponerer han anslagsvis åtti prosent av tiden til byråkrati og formidling.

Kun de siste tjue prosentene går til kreativt arbeid.

AV JEANETTE ULRIKKE LUND

Det er en av vinterens hittil verste snødager når Christensen kommer sykklende bortover bryggeveien på Tjuvholmen. Det er mørkt, men iført en lysende neongul arbeidsjakke er han ikke vanskelig å se. Han forklarer at dette er antrekket som kreves på byggeplassen til et nytt Østfold-sykehus, hvor han i samarbeid med Marius Dahl jobber med et omfattende kunstprosjekt. Med tre offentlige kunstprosjekter gående samtidig, er det ikke overraskende at han verken har tid til å skifte eller spasere.

De siste årene har Christensen gjort seg bemerket med offentlige kunstverk, særlig *Sehnsucht* (2013) på Hamar og *En melankoli* (2011) på Oslo S. Sistnevnte kom i etterkant av 22. juli og var et av de første kunstverkene som tok utgangspunkt i temaet. Førstnevnte var et oppdrag knyttet til et svømmebasseng, der Christensen samarbeidet med Dahl og laget en stor skulptur av en ku med badering rundt livet. På symbolsk vis peker de to verkene på spennet i Christensens kunstnerskap, fra poetisk sorgbearbeidelse til finurlig humor, og en konseptuell og materiell bredde. Han er for rastløs til å holde fast ved ett medium, og rører seg mellom forskjellige former og materier avhengig av ideene som skal realiseres.

Foruten kunstverk som har sin plass utenfor kunstsystemets vante arenaer, har Christensen hatt en aktiv karriere med galleri- og museumsutstillinger. Hans siste utstilling var *Time as Matter* med Dahl på Viborg Kunsthall. Før dette har han en imponerende liste soloutstillinger på

blant annet Gerhardsen Gerner både i Oslo og Berlin, Sørlandets Kunstmuseum i Kristiansand, Kubus Lenbachhaus i München, Stenersenmuseet i Oslo og Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.) i Gent. Med utstillinger verden over og studieopphold i Frankrike, Irland og Sør-Korea, fremstår Christensen som en av de mest internasjonalt aktive norske kunstnere i sin generasjon.

Han har også vært innom kuratoryrket, og en av de mest omfattende utstillingene hans var *Rykk tilbake til start* i 2008. Der inviterte han 92 kunstnere, skribenter og designere til å stille ut på Galleri 0047 i Oslo i en serie på seks utstillinger over seks uker. Ved siden av har han vært en aktiv stemme i debatter i kunstfeltet. På mange måter er Christensen prototypen på den postdisiplinære kunstner som behersker en rekke ulike uttrykksformer og praksiser, der grensene mellom verksproduksjon, diskurs og kontekst stadig overskrides og re-evalueres.

Christensens vei fra studier til aktiv deltakelse i kunstfeltet var relativt kort. Fra 1997 til 2000 studerte han på Statens Håndverks- og kunstindustriskole i Oslo, men hoppet av da han fikk sjansen til å dra til Berlin med galleristen Atle Gerhardsen. Der jobbet han som gallerimedarbeider før han kom i gang med egne utstillinger. I dag er han tilknyttet galleriet Gerhardsen Gerner både i Berlin og Oslo.

Før de offentlige prosjektene tok overhånd, lagde Christensen «konvensjonelle» verk i den hvite kuben. De har en annen karakter enn de

offentlige prosjektene; de er ofte tyngre og mer ironiske ovenfor kunstnerrollen og kunsten i seg selv.

Å rette et kritisk søkelys mot diskusjoner i kunstfeltet, som påstander om maleriets død eller selvkritiske refleksjoner over det å være kunstner, preget Christensens tidlige karriere og kom til uttrykk i verk som *Painting Myself into a Corner* (2003–2005) og *I Will Never Make it* (2000).

I 2007 nådde Christensen et nullpunkt da han lagde verket *Relativ verdi* som en utfordring til medias kommersialiserte fokus på samtidskunsten. Verket representerer en side av Christensens kunstnerskap som er grunnleggende kritisk til kunstsystemet, som oftest til kunstpolitikk og en meningsløshet i samtidens kunstscene. Verket var en kollasj av 1000 hundrelapper, der opplaget av verket kom i forskjellig valuta: dollar, euro og kroner. Men før verket ble solgt for kroneverdien, ble lerretet stjålet av rammen hos galleriet MGM i Oslo. Nyhetsverdien gikk i taket, og verket nådde utover gallerirommet. Hendelsen karakteriserer han verken som spesielt uheldig eller heldig.

– Det var med på å fremheve poenget ved verket. *Relativ verdi* tilhører en del av min virksomhet som retter betrakterens fokus mot hvilke verdier som egentlig ligger bak samtidskunsten, og tar for seg forholdet mellom estetisk og økonomisk verdi. Et slikt perspektiv kan få kunst til å virke meningsløst.

Meningsløshet i samtidskunsten er et tema som går igjen. *What could possibly be missing*



Marius Dahl og Jan Christensen, *Kink*, 2013. Laminert finér, linoleum og aluminiumslistor. Courtesy: Anker-skogen svømmehall og idrettspark, Hamar kommune. Foto: Dahl-Christensen

*from an artwork with complex references, conceptual considerations and universal poetic impact?* (2009) fremmer en nihilistisk idé om at kunstneriske konsepter kan bli så innadvendte at ingen lenger stiller tør å stille spørsmål ved kvalitet i kunsten.

– For meg kan det å arbeide i et hvitt rom fremme en følelse av meningsløshet. Da jeg stilte ut på Gerhardsen Gerner, Oslo i 2013, valgte jeg å bruke hele rommet som et enormt lerret. På hver vegg hang det ett enkelt maleri som jeg flyttet rundt i rommet og dermed fortsatte prosessen. Slik ble alle maleriene en del av hverandre, og de mindre lerretene utgjorde en helhet som vokste i hverandre.

Utstillingen hadde også en kulturpolitisk brodd, med et dobbeltportrett av Knut Olav Åmås, daværende statssekretær i Kulturdepartementet og kulturminister Thorhild Widvey. Utstillingen ble produsert og vist i en periode der kunstnere i Norge sto ovenfor den blå-blå regjeringens tilleggsproposisjon til kulturbudsjettet, hvor forslaget om radikale kutt i kunstneres stipendordning truet den norske kunstscenen. Dermed befant Christensen seg midt i øyeblikkets pågående debatt med en tydelig kulturkritisk tilnærming.

**Å MESTRE BYRÅKRATIET** Til tross for kritiske galleriutstillinger og ulike kuratorprosjekter, er det den offentlige kunsten som i dag veier tyngst i Christensens kunstnerskap. Prosjektene utføres som oftest i samarbeid med kunstneren Marius Dahl.

– Dahl og jeg samarbeider om større offentlige

## – For meg kan det å arbeide i et hvitt rom fremme en følelse av meningsløshet.

prosjekter fordi de er krevende å gjennomføre. Vi har et godt samspill og kan dermed satse på mer omfattende prosjekter. Store og kompliserte verk krever ofte en høyere form for profesjonalitet, det oppstår ofte situasjoner hvor vi trenger kunnskap om entreprenørskap og byggkonstruksjoner, og da er det ingen unnskyldning å «bare være kunstner».

Christensen forteller om et rotterace av byråkrati, papirarbeid, komitémøter og organisering, og en stadig utfordring knyttet til at kunstnere fortsatt ikke lyttes til på de største arbeidsplassene. Han lar seg dog ikke vippe av pinnen, og har både som kunstner og konsulent i KOROs innkjøpskomité opparbeidet seg solid erfaring.

I KORO er han med på å avgjøre hvilke kunstnere som skal bidra i prosjektene KORO finansierer og produserer, en jobb han søkte for å øke kunnskapen om prosessene rundt kunstprosjekter i offentlig rom og fremdriften før kunstneren er med, noe han tror har ført til økt bevissthet om hva som forventes av ham som kunstner i en slik prosess. Denne rollen har også gitt ham kunnskap om hvor mye byråkrati som styrer en konsulentens arbeid.

– Konsulentenes ansvar er i stor grad å forutse alle mulige problemstillinger som kan dukke opp. Etter hvert som prosjektet utvikler seg, må det skrives nye kontrakter, nye budsjetter må lages og

nye fremtidsplaner med rutinemessige detaljer må utformes. Papirarbeidet bak et offentlig prosjekt er en jobb i seg selv, forteller Christensen.

**FORSLAG TIL PROSJEKT** Akkurat nå utvikler han og Dahl et nytt prosjekt til Sentralen, Sparebankstiftelsens nye kulturhus i Oslo, sammen med kunstnerne Vanessa Baird, Hanne Friis, Are Møkkelbost og Camilla Løw. Samtidig arbeider de med et verk til det nye sykehuset i Østfold, og et prosjekt på Universitetet i Stavanger, blant annet.

I løpet av 2015 skal det nye sykehuset på Kalnes i Østfold stå klart, hvor Dahl og Christensen er i gang med å produsere vinnerverket *Assembly* utenfor sykehusets inngangsparti, på oppdrag fra PNØ (Prosjekt Nytt Østfoldsykehus) som forvalter tolv millioner kroner til kunsten. At prosessen er omfattende og ikke typisk «kunstnerisk» blir fort tydelig.

– I dag kommer jeg fra en overveldende byggeplass med 500 ansatte, hvor alle skal manøvrere sine forskjellige oppgaver for å fullføre et bygg til 5,6 milliarder kroner. En prosess som dette er kaotisk, men energigivende. Derfor er et godt samarbeid mellom meg og Dahl essensielt. Det er snakk om så store mengder arbeid at å utføre prosjektet alene hadde vært umulig.

*Assembly*, et av hovedverkene på det nye syke-

huset i Østfold, skal ønske besøkende og pasienter velkommen, og ha en praktisk funksjon ved å fremheve inngangspartiet. Christensen viser meg 3D-tegningene fra planleggingsprosessen som viser en stilisert konstruksjon i cor-ten stål, formet som et hus. Cor-ten stålet er et kraftig materiale med rustfød farge og taktill overflate, i kontrast til de lette aluminiumsplatene og glasset i sykehusbygget. Konstruksjonen er større enn et mellomstort hus, men likevel vil det se lite ut foran det enorme sykehusbygget.

– Vi gjorde en omfattende planlegging i forkant av *Assembly*, siden det er et sensitivt område som krever god overveielse og et gjennomtenkt uttrykk. Den symbolske verdien ligger i *Assembly* som «et bygg i en prosess». Slik kan det virke trøstende for en pasient eller besøkende; i likhet med en pasient i behandling er det verken ferdig eller uferdig, det kan like gjerne være i ferd med å rives som at det skal bygges opp.

**KORO-DEBUTANT** Parallelt med *Assembly*, jobber Christensen og Dahl med enda et verk, det første Christensen gjør på oppdrag fra KORO. Det er påfallende at han med sin lange fartstid innen offentlige kunstprosjekter ikke har utført noen verk i regi av KORO tidligere. Men, som Christensen understreker, finnes det mange andre alternativer enn KORO som ansetter kunstnere, til tross for at institusjonen er den største oppdragsgiveren for offentlig kunst i Norge i dag.

Prosjektet, som har fått tittelen *Fun Games Lose Eye (a Cautionary Tale)* skal plasseres i et nytt laboratorium på Universitetet i Stavanger.



Marius Dahl og Jan Christensen, *Assembly*, 2015. Betongfundament, sveiset Cor-Ten stål, innebygget belysning og drenering (under montering). Prosjekt Nytt Østfoldsykehus (PNØ), Kalnes. Foto: Dahl-Christensen

Blant studentene kalles avdelingen for «betonglabben», og det drives daglige eksperimenter og forskningsforsøk med kraftige materialer som metall, jordmasser, betong og asfalt.

Prosjektet er fortsatt bare i utviklingsfasen, men Christensen og Dahl laget en 3D-skisse allerede før kunstverket var godkjent av oppdragsgiver og konsulent.

– Etter å ha sett våre 3D-tegninger kan selv

arkitekten bli overrasket over hvordan lokalet vil se ut når byggingen er ferdig. Vi forbereder oss på denne måten for å kunne skape den konteksten kunstverket vil befinne seg i. Tegningene er i noen tilfeller ferdige før vi har blitt tildelt jobben, dermed kan vi vise oppdragsgiver akkurat hva de vil få.

Tittelen på verket, *Fun Games Lose Eye (a Cautionary Tale)*, er hentet fra ordtaket «It's all fun and games until someone loses an eye», og



Marius Dahl og Jan Christensen, *U000*, 2013. Armert betong, stålfundament og marmorgrus. Courtesy: Ranheimfjæra, Ranheim og Trondheim kommune (området er et pågående anleggsområde). Foto: Dahl-Christensen

– Vi får ofte kommentarer om at folk ikke kjenner igjen arbeidene våre, men det er ikke vesentlig. Jeg synes det er mer spennende at ting ikke repeteres.

telefon og Dropbox, gjerne på tvers av geografiske grenser siden Christensen støtt er på reise. Samarbeidet fungerer likevel godt, takket være like tankeprosesser og ambisjoner, hvor begge har en felles innstilling om å tenke stort både i format og konsept. Det tette samarbeidet fører imidlertid ikke til en gjenkjennelig «Christensen & Dahl»-estetikk.

– Vi får ofte kommentarer om at folk ikke kjenner igjen arbeidene våre, men det er ikke vesentlig. Jeg synes det er mer spennende at ting ikke repeteres. Det skal likevel sies at konsulenter kan bli fascinerte, men også skeptiske når de ikke kan forutse hva de får.

For Christensen er det sentralt at verket han lager er interessant for publikum, og at kreativitet er grunnleggende i utviklingen av et arbeid. Dette er spesielt tydelig om en tar ett skritt tilbake og forsøker å se hans produksjon som en helhet; en ser aldri to identiske verk.

– Alle mine offentlige kunstprosjekter vokser ut fra ideer om *stedets* tematikk, arkitektur og område, og derfor er prosjektene så forskjellige fra hverandre. Mens *Assembly* er et verk som viser en stilistisk bygningsstruktur i Cor-ten-stål, er *Fun Games Lose Eye (a Cautionary Tale)* en fargerik lysinstallasjon. Begge er utfall av et konstant fokus på hva som preger det spesifikke stedet vi jobber med. Jeg vil være en kunstner som tar sjanser, men som alltid er bevisst og tar veloverveide valg.

**GODE FØRINGER** I dag snakker man mindre om «utsmykning» og mer om «kunstprosjekter i offentlig rom». Målet med begrepsendringen er å bygge ned det negative ryktet offentlig kunst fortsatt synes å ha, et rykte som i stor grad er knyttet til en oppfatning om at den kunstneriske friheten begrenses når det stilles krav til kunstprosjektet. Men Christensen mener at visse føringer for et prosjekt faktisk kan være et gode.

– Min erfaring er at å jobbe ut fra et konkret utgangspunkt kan skape en bedre kreativ prosess, enn hva en kunstner kan oppnå stående foran en hvit vegg. Jeg mener også at kunstnere alltid forholder seg til et sett med regler, enten det er innenfor kunstsjangere eller produksjonsmetoder, hvit kube eller offentlig rom.

Norsk fagmiljø har fortsatt liten respekt for offentlige kunstprosjekter, mener Christensen, noe han synes er ergerlig. Særlig mener han begrepet «utsmykning» er problematisk.

– Begrepet «utsmykkingskunst» refererer til den offentlige kunsten som dekor eller pynt.

Begrepsbruk er essensielt fra begynnelsen av en prosess, slik skaper kunstneren selv premisser og begrensninger i utarbeidelsen av verket. Jeg mener offentlige *prosjekter* alltid skal integreres, og ikke bare være et supplement til en allerede eksisterende kontekst.

**FOLKELIG KU(NST)** På sine nettsider formulerer KORO grunntanken for statlig forvaltning av offentlige kunstverk: at kunsten skal gi mening for flest mulig, og at informasjon og formidling en svært viktig oppgave for institusjonen. Bakgrunnen for offentlige prosjekter baseres ofte på en konkurranse mellom kunstnere, og det er hard konkurranse. Derfor settes de konseptuelle grunntankene som knytter verk til kontekst på spissen.

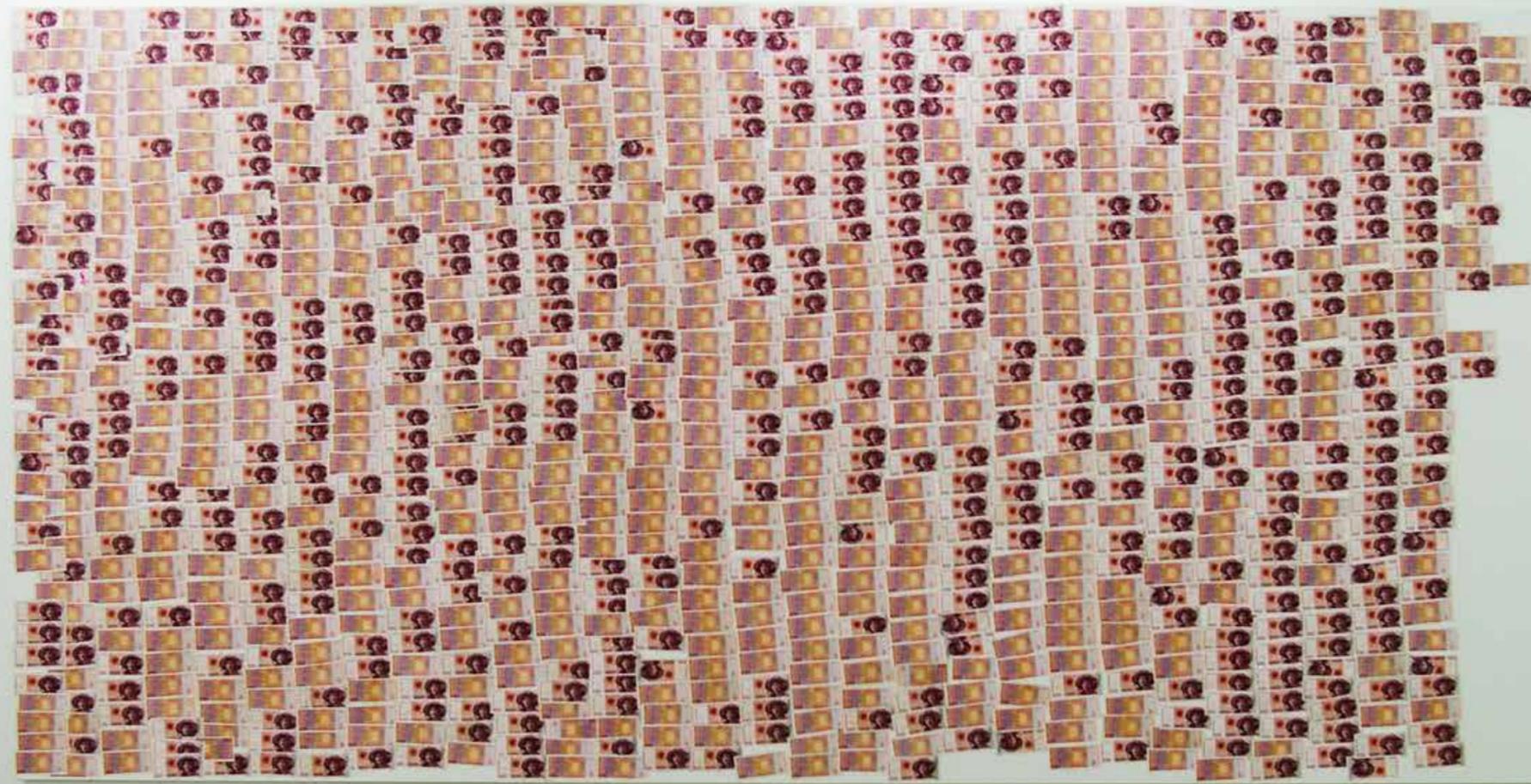
Christensens styrke er evnen å fange det gitte stedets essens, og det er særlig ett verk som utmerker seg: *Sehnsucht* på Ankerskogen svømmehall og idrettspark.

Av Dahl og Christensens offentlige verk er det denne skulpturen som har fått mest oppmerksomhet fra publikum og presse. Utenfor badeanlegget på Ankerskogen i Hamar står en ku som har blitt så populær at ledelsen vurderer å lage en miniatyrversjon som skal selges som suvenir.

Umiddelbart har *Sehnsucht* et humoristisk uttrykk. Kua står og ser nølende på badeanleggets inngangsparti med en enorm svart badering rundt magen. Hun har mistet en av svømmeføttene sine, og det virker som hun har stått der en stund og vurdert sine muligheter. Tittelen kan oversettes til «lengsel» og Christensen mener den er en hybrid av *Gary Larsons' the Far Side* og geita til Robert Rauschenberg.

– Vi har fylt kua med et ubegripelig stort innhold. *Sehnsucht* står som et symbol på outsideren som vegrer seg for å ta på badetøyet og gå med hodet hevet inn i en svømmehall. Badeanlegget er et av de største i Norge og har derfor et mål om å kunne nå brede brukergrupper som barn, handikappede, foreldre og eldre. Vi ville at det skulle ha en funksjon for alle, og verket ble dermed en humoristisk figur som alle besøkende kan identifisere seg med.

Som de andre av Christensens offentlige prosjekt har kua sitt fundament i de mulighetene som finnes for det spesifikke verket i den spesifikke konteksten. Slik har det en relevans utenfor seg selv. Kanskje det er derfor han ikke har et atelier, om meningsløsheten tar grep når han står alene foran den hvite veggen.



Jan Christensen, *Relativ verdi*, 2011. Tusen hundrelapper, blindramme, lerret og tapetklister. 200 x 400 cm. Courtesy: Gerhardsen Gerner, Berlin/Oslo. Foto: Jan Christensen

Dahl og Christensen valgte å sikte inn på farene som kan oppstå på i en lab. Verket vil ta form som tre fareskilt i med innebygd belysning som beskriver hva som kan skje når skaden inntreffer. Verket forholder seg også til hensyn som at det foregår en del annet i rommet, så et rent uttrykk ville fungere best. I tillegg måtte rengjøring av verket være enkelt.

**FRA DRIKKEVANN TIL MATFAT** Banale krav som «enkel rengjøring» er blant premissene kunstnere må forholde seg til i idéutviklingen i av et offentlig kunstverk. Det kan også være institusjonelle ret-

ningslinjer som historie, eller rent praktiske forhold som terreng og arkitektur. Offentlig kunst har ingen ensartet betraktergruppe og flere oppdragsgivere ønsker dermed at verkene skal være eksplisitte for alle, til forskjell fra kunst som produseres til den «hvite kuben».

I lys av dette trekker Christensen frem et prosjekt han og Dahl gjorde i 2013 på Ranheim for Trondheim kommune. Det var en del av kunstprosjektet «Fra drikkevann til matfat», en lokasjon som går langsmed Vikelva, fra Jonsvannet til utløpet i Strindfjorden. Prosjektets tittel er forkortet til

*U000* (2013), fra det formelle navnet *Uventet overdimensjonert ordinært objekt*.

– I invitasjonsteksten ble vi introdusert for et konsept som ba oss ta utgangspunkt i Ranheims historie, med et spesielt fokus på Vikelva som renner gjennom bydelen. Da vi kom til stedet hvor vi skulle finne vår inspirasjon, var det fremdeles en myr. Alt vi kunne se av menneskelige spor, var en forlatt handlevogn.

Resultatet ble en enorm installasjon; en 14 x 15 meter stor konstruksjon armert betong, som i plan er formet som en monumental handlevogn.

– Vi ville åpne for tanker om hvilken rolle van-

net hadde i gamle dager, da elven var både matfat og transportvei. Samtidig peker verket mot vår samtid som forbrukernes tidsalder, hvor de enorme dagligvarebutikkene serverer oss all verdens mat på fat. Slik ønsker vi også å skape et større perspektiv, som både belyser fortiden og fremtiden, med fokus på hvor fort matproduksjonen har forandret seg fra det lokale til det globale.

**UFORUTSIGBARHETEN** En skulle tro at omfattende prosjekter som de Christensen og Dahl gjør, krever en felles fysisk møteplass. Men ingen av dem har studio, da de i stor grad arbeider med ideer som ikke lar seg realisere i et tradisjonelt atelier. I stedet jobber de som regel over Skype,

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### A Fresh View on the City

The use of art in public spaces is giving England a fresh view on Birmingham.

BY NICOLAI STRØM-OLSEN

The decline of Birmingham started in the 1950s. Until that time, the city had been a British success story. Cars like the MG Rover, Jaguar, and Range Rover were produced on the outskirts, chocolate maker Cadbury had its main offices there, and renowned Lloyd's bank was founded there. Furthermore, excellent art collections were amassed there, at institutions like the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery collection and the Barber Institute.

The city bubbled with creativity. Between 1750 and 1850, three times as many patents were registered in Birmingham as in London, part of why Birmingham was known as the 'City of a Thousand Trades.' The city's coat of arms underscores that innovative spirit, featuring an engineer and an artist working to create a more prosperous city, its motto is 'Forward.'

Gavin Wade, Director of Eastside Projects, explains that it was the Lunar Society's legacy that saw Birmingham commit to cultural investment, and made the city an intellectual powerhouse. The Society's members included industrialists Joseph Priestley, Josiah Wedgwood, Matthew Boulton, and James Watt.

'Watt and Boulton invented the steam engine in Birmingham, Joseph Priestley discovered oxygen and invented soda water, and Wedgwood gave us the renowned china of the same. William Murdoch created the train and the gas lamp.'

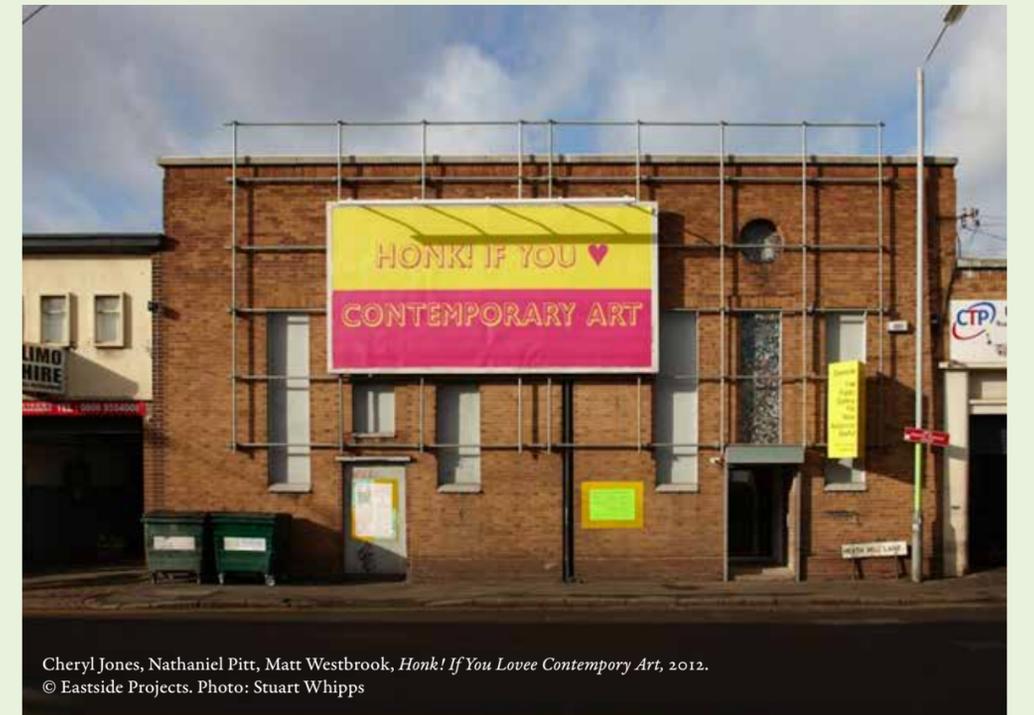
Wade questions whether culture was treated as more important for Birmingham 100 years ago than it is today.

'It was a modern, innovative city. There's a reason George Cadbury, who ran Cadbury, sited Bournville model village here in 1893.'

Bournville was intended as a utopian village, housing Cadbury employees around a 'factory in a garden'. The houses were built in the Arts and Crafts style, but with modern interiors. Swimming pools, football fields and parks were also built.

'They wanted to make the city of tomorrow. And they chose Birmingham to do so in because this was the obvious place to bring new ideas.'

**HOW TO KILL A CITY** Then came the decline. Birmingham is Great Britain's second largest city, about the size of Munich, larger than Amsterdam, Stockholm, and Copenhagen. Their brand, however, is a virtual nonentity; until recently no-one went to Birmingham for a weekend getaway. And that was down to policy gone wrong.



Cheryl Jones, Nathaniel Pitt, Matt Westbrook, *Honk! If You Love Contemporary Art*, 2012. © Eastside Projects. Photo: Stuart Whipp

'I couldn't believe it, but in the 1950s, Birmingham was actually threatening to catch up with London. At the same time, the North of England, and Wales were all seeing poor growth. So, Westminster decided to sacrifice Birmingham. Businesses were forced to move elsewhere, and a ring road was built that made the city centre very small. Their vision was that Birmingham should become the "Concrete City", reducing its population and competition with London.'

Perhaps the most egregious example of this is the Paradise Forum, the old city library, a concrete building right by the museum, acting as a wall between the museum and the city's largest open space, Centenary Square. 'The Economist ran an article on this in 2013, entitled "How to Kill a City".'

When the automotive industry suffered decline in the 1970s, Birmingham was hit hard. These days, the city is full of empty factories and run-down neighbourhoods. However, at the end of the 80s, city officials realised their mistake. Gradually the ring road was demolished, and attempts were made to merge the city centre with the surrounding areas. In addition, the 'Big City Plan' was launched few years ago.

A prominent example of the plan is the building of the Bullring shopping centre, which connects the old city centre with the market and high street in the Digbeth industrial area. Birmingham has now built the largest library in Europe, and the eyesore Paradise Forum is slated to be torn down.

'For a long time, the people of Birmingham haven't been proud of their city, but these new buildings – like the new public library – have restored some of their pride.'

At present, Birmingham is a mess. There are gorgeous old buildings and exciting new buildings – channels for human traffic have been opened – but there are still an enormous

number of astoundingly hideous buildings. Nevertheless, the city comes across as vibrant. And at the heart of the city's revival is the use of art in public spaces.

**THE BIRMINGHAM ART PROJECT** A group of business owners and public sector representatives have come together to advocate for a large public artwork that can contribute to Birmingham's status as an international city.

Co-Director of GRAIN photography hub, Nicola Shipley, is optimistic.

'We've all seen the impact Anthony Gormley's huge statue, *The Angel of the North*, has had on Gateshead. And we mustn't forget Bilbao – who'd ever heard of Bilbao before the Guggenheim?'

Shipley says they are looking at good locations in the Digbeth area, a district synonymous with artist-led activity and the creative heart of Birmingham. Digbeth is also right next to a planned station for the new express train lines High Speed 2.

'Digbeth is transforming, and everyone who comes to the city will see the artwork.'

Gavin Wade is working on the project.

'Eastside Projects are commissioning agents for the Birmingham Big Art Project working with civic and business leaders in Birmingham to commission a major new public artwork for the city. We have put together a selection panel of artworld experts and influential Birmingham individuals, and I am the chair person.'

The project has emerged out of genuine conversations and arguments about what public art should be for Birmingham, he points out.

'You can't just walk into "the Spectacular Art Shop" and buy a landmark, you need to apply good curating practice and work with the best artists taking on board the full

context of the city. Working with members of Birmingham Civic Society brings together old and new traditions of Birmingham, there is an element of 'artist and engineer' and collaboration, lots of learning is going on all round.

The entire point, says Wade, is that the artwork should be placed in an area that is full of potential and will be part of the coming changes in the city. It has to work with past, present and future architectures but hopefully not compete.'

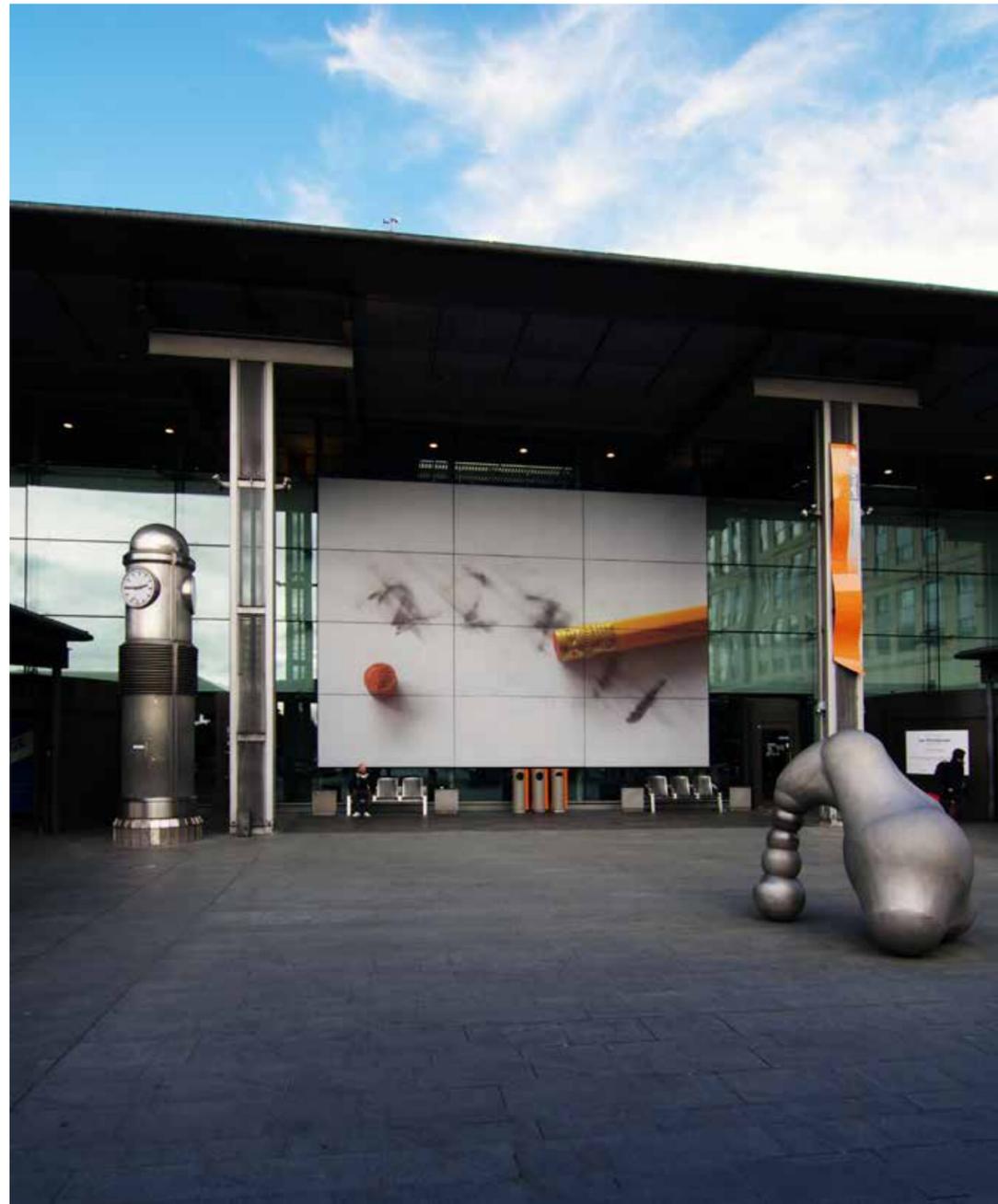
'I'm interested in the idea that the art could help to define the area. If the art is placed first, it influences what can be built and experienced after.'

#### THE ART OF TRANSFORMING AREAS

Art is also supposed to help change how people see Birmingham. And there are numerous areas that have had to be redefined. The old post sorting centre has been made into offices, and named 'The Mailbox'; an old industrial area has been renamed Brindley Place, and is now home to shops, bars, restaurants, as well as a number of start-ups. Contemporary gallery IKON can also be found there. In Digbeth, once the industrial heart of Birmingham, one can find 'The Custard Factory', a cluster creative enterprises, and Eastside Projects, both gallery and talent development hub.

Claire Farrell, a curator who runs art organisation WERK, has been focused on creating art projects that change people's perceptions and experience of the built environment. In 2012, she produced *48Sheet*, which consisted of over 100 advertisement billboards featuring work by various artists including MadeIn Company (Shanghai) and Raqs Media Collective in partnership with the Ikon Gallery.

'The hoardings were selected to form clusters of non-advertising across Birmingham



Jan Christensen, *En melankoli*, 2011. Tre-delt kunstprosjekt på Oslo S: Fotoprint på duk, vinyl på fasade og HD video. Gjengitt med tillatelse fra: Rom Eiendom og Mesén, Oslo. Foto: Jan Christensen

to transform parts of the city into outdoor galleries. In order to see the art, people were encouraged to walk or cycle suggested 48Sheet route maps to discover parts of the city that they might not have seen before.’

She has also worked with public art in Longbridge.

‘The car factory dominated the area physically, socially, visually and economically for nearly a century, providing jobs and skills in manufacturing for up to three family generations at a time, after the MG Rover Group went into administration in 2005, the whole area as you can imagine was devastated. During the following years hoardings went up and the site was under construction. The community suddenly found themselves in limbo with two strong opposing narratives emerging: 1) Understandable loss, grief and fear of change, and 2) welcoming change and a positive new era for the area.’

About two years ago when she started the project, Bournville College and the new Technology Park had opened, twelve months earlier, a new town centre opened, but this combined is only ten percent of 468 acres that is now publicly accessible – the site is enormous, she adds.

‘The regeneration scheme is unique on many levels and privatisation of public space is rapidly increasing through numerous developments across the UK. Artists can add intrinsic value to place-making and therefore working so closely with a developer on such a significant scheme is a very exciting opportunity.’

‘When I started working in Longbridge looking around at such a vast site of construction and brown field it was very important to think about how we could support the regeneration process by encouraging people to come to the area again, use it, be part of it, and collectively look to the future.’

They started with a critical artist-in-residence programme for socially engaged artists who wanted to work within the context of place-making and urbanism. LPAP (Longbridge Public Art Project) is a contemporary site-specific project created in response to Longbridge. A number of outcomes have evolved organically, including an annual light and art festival that aims to bring people together in their new environment. The first festival included a fringe programme with artist workshops, performance and film for children and families taking place across multiple locations. During one evening over 3500 participants were recorded in the College alone.

At the same time, many of the artists are researching individual areas of the past, present and future of Longbridge. Artist Stuart Whipples, who did a big photographic project at the factory between 2004 and 2007, has now returned and will be making a number of new works in response to the site.’

Another commission taking place in 2014 line-up was entitled *Will I Be Missed*, by the artist group called Famed (Leipzig). It was a neon light piece intervention above the train station entrance during the October light festival. The work was created in response to the area, the question ‘who’ or ‘what’ will be missed can point not only to the past or

present, but looks ahead to the future (both personally and socially

**PRIESTLEY, BOULTON, AND MURDOCH** Gavin Wade has, like Claire Farrell, been interested in interacting with surroundings, but has also been working with the principle that art does not just ask questions about society, but can also provide the answer. That has been the basis of his little imprint, Strategic Questions, on which he has published twenty six volumes to date since 2002, one for each of eventually forty volumes answering forty questions that futuristic architect R. Buckminster Fuller (1853–1983) felt man needed to answer to create a perfect society.

‘Fuller felt that if we could answer all these questions, all the world’s problems would easily be solved. We’re trying to answer the questions as artworks, so you can solve all the worlds problems with art,’ says Wade with a smile.

‘I made two projects in a district called Kings Norton in 2006-8, one with poet Paul Conneally and Alec Finlay.’

One of them was called ‘100 Verses for 3 Estates and was a public artwork as a year long poetry project around the Kings Norton council estates.

‘It was written by ourselves and sixty residents, sitting in squares, shopping malls, a private house, a pub, writing and reading out-loud *renga* poems.

One day, Wade and Conneally found that a group of young people, unemployed had started listening in.

‘We had mentioned a poem containing the text, “Boulton, Murdoch, Priestley and Watt, the other side of town”. The reference was not to the rich industrialists forming the Lunar Society, but to Council tower blocks on the other side of town named after them. The kids picked up on the name Murdoch and started singing the theme to the A-Team! Suddenly, we were talking about something these kids knew about. It reflected the ‘link and shift’ principles of the thousand year old Japanese *renga* writing.’

After the project was wrapped up, Wade printed five thousand books, and had them distributed for free in the area.

Another project in the same area was ‘Super Tudor Fold’, the renovation of a run down shopping precinct called The Fold in a faux Mock Tudor style.

‘There is a well-known, somewhat exclusive school near there. It’s a famous Tudor building. The artist Richard Woods wanted to put up a mock Tudor facade in the area, so we’d, in a sense, be giving this disadvantaged area their own super-charged Tudor. The fascinating thing was that the local population started looking after the mock Tudor, protecting and cherishing it.’

**SINGLE MOTHERS** Among the challenges to projects in Birmingham is funding. Claire Farrell says she spends a lot of time finding sponsors, or persuading businesses to invest in art in public spaces. Nicola Shipley from GRAIN feels that a further issue is that Birmingham borough does not require contractors to spend on art. Just as in Norway,

there is a regulation in the UK that says that one percent of the cost of a new building is to be spent on art. However, not everyone adheres to that regulation.

‘We call it % for Art. Some cities adhere to the policy, but its not statutory so others don’t. In Birmingham it appears to be followed on an ad hoc basis. The new Library of Birmingham did implement the policy’

The library is located on outskirts of the old ring road, at Centenary Square, and is the largest public library in Europe. Outside the building is a sculpture by Gillian Wearing depicting a ‘real’ Birmingham family.

‘As you approach the sculpture, you see that it’s two mothers and two children, and one is pregnant. The fathers are not present. The sculpture was controversial in some quarters. The Fathers for Justice national interest group were not impressed with the sculpture. They think women are given too many rights relating to children, and that the sculpture fosters stereotypes, but I think it’s good that the piece has prompted debate.’

Shipley thinks that a focus on public art makes the public more accustomed to engaging in the public realm and in being challenged, as well as making Birmingham ever more relevant as a hub for great art in the UK.

‘There are a lot more artists living here today. When I read for my MA at the School of Art twenty years ago, everyone was leaving. You don’t see that anymore. People are noticing that you can have a higher quality of life in Birmingham than in London, the city’s got some fantastic collections, good exhibition spaces, and loads of locations to make work.’

Gavin Wade agrees. ‘I moved back to Birmingham in 2004 to join in with a little artist-run renaissance happening in the city. Now, more and more artists are moving here. The scene is growing, there is more demand for art and culture in the city. The uber-curator Hans Ulrich Obrist popped in last week to meet young artists. Birmingham is having a real moment, a combination of art, food, music and vision. People are starting to see that Birmingham is an exciting place to be.’

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## Guidelines from Nature

Given its natural backdrop of green beech forest, Wanås Konst wants to facilitate artistic exploration of this unique space.

BY MAGNUS BONS

Wanås Konst is idyllically located, in the middle of the Scanian farmlands of southern

Sweden, and its front exhibition room is a green beech woodland. The institution’s growing collection of sculptures is on display there, including works by renowned contemporary artists. It encompasses permanent and site-specific work by the likes of Dan Graham, Jenny Holzer, Mirolaw Balka, and Maya Lin. Additionally, there is a hall featuring various themed exhibitions. Wanås also houses one of my favourite pieces: American Ann Hamilton’s installation *Lignum* from 2002, which occupied all five storeys of an old grain silo from the early 1800s. Hamilton’s piece is a walk through rooms bathed in reddish light, dotted with carved tables, textile hiding spots, and recordings of cows bellowing.

Wanås Kost is a private trust that, since 1987, has showed contemporary art – Swedish, Nordic, as well as international – with a focus on sculpture and installation. Following founder Marika Wachtmeister’s departure in 2011, Wanås has been under the direction of Elisabeth and Mattias Givell, both with considerable experience from influential art institutions in Stockholm, Magasin 3 and Bonnier’s Art Hall.

*What would you say characterises what you do here at Wanås?*

‘We produce contemporary art, and there aren’t that many other institutions doing that, especially in an outdoor environment. We deal very little with borrowed work, preferring a close working relationship with our artists. We want them to explore the possibilities of this rare space, a space that can be quite challenging. How do one relate to the nature and find a space? All the artists whose work we display come to Wanås one or more times, with some visits being short and others long. Some stay here throughout the exhibition period, as part of their process for that piece. I think the fact that we’re located so far out in the country gives the artists a freedom to try new approaches and take new strides in their art.’

*Could you describe your and Mattias’ vision for the business here at Wanås?*

‘We want to develop our operation by managing, renewing, and going in-depth. A founder often keeps going along the same track they started, but both art and how we view it change over time. That means that fresh ideas may come easier to someone coming from outside. It gives you an opportunity to reflect on what the common thread is, which in our case is an examination of what sculpture is. What can we do that hasn’t been done yet?’

‘Artists are invited without stipulations, and the outcome needn’t be a permanent piece. We want to expand how people see public art, which doesn’t always have to be bronze or stone. There are a number of different materials, different feelings and experiences, and that is why here, you’ll find permanent pieces like Malin Holmberg’s tree trunks painted yellow, and Anna Thulin’s red inflatable balls stuck to trees, to name two.

‘We wanted to challenge the notion that art is or should be static, as well as examine the relationship between art and observer. Interactivity is ever-present in this day and age, and so – for example – we invited Yoko



Yoko Ono, *Wish Trees for Wanås*, 2011. Wanås Konst, Sverige. Foto: Wanås Konst

Ono and the Swedish artist Jacob Dahlgren, who now each have a permanent piece here. They are different ages, but based their work on the same mindset: that art is a collective event put on in collaboration with other people. We’ve also worked with dancers and choreographers to push the boundaries of how people view art. It’s about art inviting a physical work.

‘We feel that expanding people’s horizon to encompass areas outside the West is important, and we invited artists from other parts of the world, together with Nordic artists at a more local level. We want to better reflect our region; who really lives in Scania? It’s quite a multicultural population, with many people from the Arab world and Africa. Part of the idea is to see yourself and others through art in a place where a lot of people vote SD [Sweden’s BNP].’

*Who visits Wanås?*

‘We have a wide audience that we try to look out for. Giving visitors an immersive experience is a big challenge, and one that takes time. But we have the ability to offer that here; we can present people with way into the piece. When you walk along a path in the woods, it may be more important to ask what you can see in the clearing ahead than what art means.

‘The public space here may be somewhat different than what you’d see other places. You can embrace a piece in a different way here, perhaps because you’re outside, in nature. And it is, after all, private land.

‘We also get a lot of school trips, who participate in workshops, and thus encounter a piece as it takes shape. They do hands-on work, and are given the chance to tell others

about the piece and explain their understanding of it at a public exhibition. We have also worked with audio guides on which some of the tracks are 10 year-olds speaking Arabic. That is a real example of hearing from someone other than the usual experts. The theme is the nature and art at Wanås, but the creators of the book are free to decide content. This year’s children’s book is written by Johanna Koljonen.’

*How do you work with your collection of statues?*

‘As a part of our programme, entitled Aterblick [A Look Back], we invite artists who have shown work here before, back to do an in-depth presentation. Many of our visitors have only seen one piece by each artist, and don’t know any more about the artists. For example, the Norwegian artist Sissel Tolaas, who in 1989 made *Terra Maximus*, a large, glass portal full of fallen leaves that stood out in the woods. In 2012, she returned, and since she works with smells, it was only natural that she would make a scent from the composted leaves.’

*What does your programme for 2015 look like?*

‘The working title for next year’s exhibition is *Barrier*, and focusses on six artists who work in South Africa: Igshaan Adams, Kudzanai Chiurai, Hannelie Coetzee, Nandipha Mntambo, Mary Sibande, and James Webb. They all have a performative method, and they’ll be working in relation to the body and this location. In South Africa, there is a long history of performance, and most cases result in new pieces. We’ve chosen South Africa because it acts as a hot spot; artists from the entire African continent travel there.

James Webb will be doing a new version of *Prayer*, which will fill the entire hall. He’ll be playing prayers from various congregations in Malmö and making an installation using those voices. The rest of the pieces will be outside and exhibit all kinds of expression, from text to stone.

‘During Aterblick, we want to look at what has been made past performances at Wanås, for example those by Ulay, Jason Rhoades, and Kristina Matousch. Though we are still working on our plans, I hope to have a series of talks with lectures on and by artists who work with performance.’

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## Paintings by a Poet

‘I decided I was a poet when I 14 years old because I liked poetry. Since then I focused my life on being that.’

BY ANDRÉ GALI

American artist John Giorno (b. 1936 in New York), is perhaps best known as the model of Andy Warhol’s first film, *Sleep*, from 1963. Though he is known for sleeping, he has worked continually as a poet since the age of fourteen. Something about the way he underscores the fact that he is a poet gives me the impression that he sees it as essential work and a significant part of his being. Today, he is counted among the avant-garde of American and European poetry. Aside from writing poems, he runs a production company specialising in poetry LPs, engaging in poetry performances, making paintings of his poems, and once masterminded the phone service *Dial-a-Poem*, where there caller will hear a poem read aloud. *Dial-a-Poem* was made in 1968, and has been recreated a number of times since then, most recently under the direction of the Norwegian National Museum at the Museum of Contemporary Art, for the exhibition *Rameaus’ Nephews: Sofie Bernisen and Karl Holmqvist*.

*Dial-a-poem* signifies a modern way of thinking, which employs technology to distribute poems in a new way to a new audience. When the piece was put on in connection with exhibition *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1970, an ad with the number was placed in the NY Times, and according to Giorno, ‘over a million people called.’

**‘THE BOOK THAT CHANGED MY LIFE’** When I meet Giorno in connection with a performance and a talk he’ll be giving at the Museum of Contemporary Art, I am particularly keen to ask about his part in the split between modernism and postmo-

dernism in the New York cultural scene of the 1960s. How did he develop his unique form of poetry, and how did he conceive his various systems of distribution? Quite simply: how did the poet and artist John Giorno come into being?

‘I grew up with the inheritance of modernism and the lyrical poetry of the beat generation. When I was studying at Columbia University in the mid-fifties, a friend came to see me, bringing me a gift. He gave me a book and said, “John, it’s going to blow your mind.” It was *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg.’

The year was 1956, and *Howl* had been published a few months earlier by City Lights, an independent book shop and publishing house in San Francisco, which became something of a landmark for the anti-authoritarian beat generation that grew up in post-war America, with frontmen like Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs, not to mention Ginsberg.

‘I didn’t know Ginsberg, and this book label didn’t mean anything to me at the time, so I just flicked through some pages thinking, “All I do all fucking day is reading poetry, and here’s another book to read.” My friend said, “No, John, you don’t get it, you really have to read this one. There’s three joints in there for you, smoke them and read the book». But I just put it in a drawer and forgot about it.’

Two weeks later, Giorno recalled that had three joints lying around.

‘And the book was there, so I read it. Needless to say, it blew my mind – in the sense that I was a gay man, and gay writers at the time were so conservative... But here was Allen Ginsberg with something that was a reflection of my mind. That was the moment in my life when I was transformed into an adult.’

The radical thing about Ginsberg’s poem was his use of words like ‘blowjob’, ‘junkie’, and ‘shooting up’: modern words and experiences tied to homosexuality and drugs, and seen as exceedingly provocative in a conservative US, where obscenity litigation was rife. *Howl* and *City Lights* were taken to court, and were not the first beat publication to be tried.

**FROM BEAT TO POP** The early 1960s were an energetic and vibrant time for art, music, literature, film, and dance in New York. The scene was small; everyone knew one another, and many of them became defining artists of their generation: Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Allen Kaprow, John Cage, and Philip Glass. Giorno was in the thick of it, an innovative poet and socialite. He is probably most well known for his relationship with Andy Warhol, whom he met in 1962, when Warhol had his first exhibition in New York, at Eleanor Ward’s Stable Gallery.

Giorno’s encounter with Warhol turned into an association that would last until 1964. During that time, they worked a lot on film together, and Giorno became the star of Warhol’s first film, *Sleep*. The film shows a naked, sleeping Giorno, and is cut to last six hours.

‘I slept a lot and he was looking for a subject. But it was complicated, he didn’t know

how to do it, so he shot and shot, 2 minutes reels that he slowed down to 3 minutes. In any case, he made a great movie.'

*Sleep* premiered in January 1964 at the Gramercy Arts Theater, and was presented by Jonas Mecas, often referred to as the 'God-father of American Avant-Garde cinema'. Only nine people came, and rumour has it that two of them left after the first hour. *Sleep* has subsequently stood out as one of Warhol's most iconic works of film, amongst other things, for its implication of homosexual sensuality and love.

**'EVERYONE WAS THERE.'** At the time, Warhol was part of a relatively small scene of aspiring artists. Just how small the scene was something Giorno discovered on 4 December 1964, on this birthday. A friend of Giorno's, who lived on the top floor of Giorno's building, threw him a party and invited most of people who would later become 'somebodies'.

'80 people came, and this was the scene: Andy Warhol, Jim Rosenquist and Roy Liechtenstein; dancers like Yvonne Rainer, and Merce Cunningham; the composer John Cage; Robert Rauschenberg, Steve Paxton; Jasper Johns – it was everyone you could imagine: the film people, like Jonas Mecas; and musicians like Steve Reich and Philip Glass; and the poets John Asbury and Frank O'Hara. For me, it was like an opera, but they didn't come for me, they just wanted to be together.'

Giorno saw the time as emblematic – only a few years later, most of these artists were famous, and had become like 'kings with their own courts'. He contends that the social energy manifest in the early 60s was unique.

'That is part of why the 60's happened. They were all there because they liked each other, even though their work was quite different.'

**POP POETRY** To Giorno, the art, music, and film world of the day was more inspiring than the literary world.

'These artists all used the found image. I saw them on a daily basis in their studios – how they worked with it. It was quite profound, these images weren't flippantly decided upon. They were a real influence. And I figured, "I can do that with poetry." At that time, no one had ever done that in this kind of way. Those poems went into my first poetry book published.'

The volume was *The American Book of the Dead*, written in 1964. He plucked quotes from newspapers, advertisements, and the like, in the way the pop artists took photos from the consumer culture that surrounded them. Just as Warhol transferred pictures from newspaper articles about traffic accidents and deaths, Giorno, too, picked lines from articles where the theme was death or the treat of death. The collection includes a poem about the assassination of president John F. Kennedy. Both Giorno's method and execution were both.

His poems stood out from the more subjective, expressionist poems of the contemporaneous New York School of Poetry, poets who made their ties with abstract expres-



John Giorno, *WE GAVE A PARTY FOR THE GODS AND THE GODS ALL CAME*, 2014. Screenprint and oil on canvas. Courtesy of Max Wigram Gallery and the artist.

sionism, where figures like Jackson Pollock and Willem Koenig loomed large. Because his style used quotes, there is an ambivalent emotional air about Giorno's poems. They are at once personal and impersonal, which can easily be traced to his interest in Tibetan Buddhism, and is reinforced by the title's namesake, the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

'This period was the most important of my life. Poetry was still quite conservative. Even though you had names like Allen Ginsberg, John Asbury, and Frank O'Hara, they actually belonged to a strict academic tradition. I was a poet, and I knew them, but if I wrote modernist poetry like the New York School of Poetry, they wouldn't approve. The same with Allen Ginsberg, you had to write like him if you wanted anyone to respond to them, and I didn't write like him.'

**POESIE SONORE** The same year the book was circulating in New York, Giorno became acquainted with a man who would be of great importance to him going forward: Beat author William S. Burroughs. Both Burroughs's cut-out method, made famous in *Naked Lunch* (1959), and radical personality influenced Giorno. Starting in 1964, Burroughs had a room in Giorno's flat, a room Giorno assures me is still made up for him, despite Burroughs having died in 1997.

'His mind was so brilliant, more brilliant than his books because it was spontaneous. Maybe the most profound thing I got from him was the energy coming from his mind, which again transformed my mind in some way.'

Around this time, Burroughs was working with Brion Gysin on a collection of essays entitled *The Third Mind* (French version in 1977, English in 1978). Gysin, also a poet, was interested in *Poesie Sonore*, or audio poems. This interest spread to Giorno.

'It was about sound, not based on lyrical

poetry or any kind of modernism poetry. It was just sound and words. I started experimenting. No one else was doing it at the time.'

**NEW DISTRIBUTION MODELS** At the same time, Giorno was inspired by the world of music and new technology.

'In the early 60s, musicians like Steve Reich, Philip Glass and Max Neuhaus would make loops of tape and play them on an old fashioned tape recorder. I thought, "What a good idea, I can do that as a poet."'

This led Giorno to work with poetry as sound and performance. In 1966, he started Giorno Poetry Systems (GPS), held a poetry festival, and began recording poets he knew on tape. GPS was an artist collective, record company, and non-profit organisation, the aim of which was to distribute poetry and similar art forms to a wide audience through the use of communication technology, audiovisual materials and techniques, and everyday media like telephones, television, radio, as so on.

'We invented spaces to do poetry. Our albums became very popular, mini-bestsellers on the independent scene. We would send them out to various FM-radios all over the country, and they would play cuts from the albums. Suddenly, you'd get the weekly play charts and William Burroughs was number one.'

Burroughs rose to fame in 1966, when the Massachusetts Supreme Court, after a trial spanning years, overturned a ban on *Naked Lunch*, finding it not in violation of obscenity statutes. He wound up on the cover of Time Magazine and became a 60s icon, which helped boost GPS' success. GPS would regularly release albums until the end of the 1980s, and several of these were early recordings of musicians and poets who would later become widely known, including Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass, Frank Zappa, Dia-

manda Galás, Alan Ginsberg, John Cage, and Brion Gysin, not to mention Giorno himself, and his flatmate Burroughs.

**POETRY AND TECHNOLOGY** Burroughs work with GPS in combination with electronic and technological art experimentation under the direction of Robert Rauschenberg, gave Giorno the idea for a phone line one could call and hear poetry on: 1968's *Dial-a-Poem*.

'It was a moment of change for artists, a moment that permeated the 1960s. Technology had begun to happen. In 1966, Bob Rauschenberg put together what he called "nine evenings of art and technology". It was symbolic of the beginning of an era, connecting artists and musicians with high-end electronics and technology engineers. It was John Cage, Lucinda Childs, Yvonne Rainer, all those people. I was very young then, but I was a friend of Bob Rauschenberg and working on his piece.'

The story is that Giorno became bored listening to Rauschenberg on the telephone, and started fantasising that he'd rather be listening to a poem. The idea was simple, modern, and smart. He invited poets he knew to record texts. The piece was an immediate hit when it was staged in connection with an exhibition at the MoMA in 1970. It was also the high-water mark of his career in the art world thus far.

**RETURN TO THE ART WORLD** Towards the end of the 60s, Giorno started moving in more literary circles, writing volumes of poetry and going on poetry tours with Burroughs. It would take nearly 30 years for him to return to the art world.

But as early as 1968, Giorno had begun drawing and painting his poems on canvas and paper, which he carried on doing and of which he would occasionally make small printings. Inspired by Rauschenberg and Warhol, he started silk-screen printing, and received assistance from a friend who was a designer in setting up the lettering. In 1984, when Apple published design software that made stretching and enlarging the letters possible, Giorno found the style he uses today, reminiscent of newspaper headlines. His texts are short and striking: 'Eat the sky', 'Say no to family values', painted graphically, so the material itself gains expression. But his art is not what's important to him.

'I stress that I am a poet who makes paintings. I don't like the concept of "crossover", where you have a poet-cum-artist who paints. Because it's still words, it's just a different way of distributing them.'

He strives to give his paintings to give an immediate sensory impression, which both provide a certain feel and a poetic statement.

'The words have to be iconic; they have to be short and poignant so you can read them in a second. Sometimes, you can get four lines in there, but it has to be four lines you see instantly, because if you have too many words and it's difficult to read, then it's reading, and then it becomes something else.'

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### Art for Everyone's Sake

Berlin-based artist Jan Christensen (b. 1977) is currently working simultaneously on three different art projects in the public space. During the pieces' development process, he sets aside an estimated eight percent of his time for bureaucracy and communication. Only the remaining twenty percent are spent on creative work.

By JEANETTE ULRISKE LUND

On one of the snowiest days yet this winter, Christensen comes cycling along Tjuvholmen's quayside street. It is dark, but clad in a hi-vis work jacket he is hard to miss. He explains that high visibility clothing is required at the building site for a new country hospital in Østfold, where he is working with Marius Dahl on a substantial art project. With three projects going at once, it is not surprising that he has neither time to change nor to walk.

Over the last few years, Christensen has made a name for himself with public works of art, in particular *Sehnsucht* ['Longing'] (2013) in Hamar, and *En melankoli* ['A Melancholy'] (2011) at Oslo Central Station. The later came in the wake of the 22. July attack, and was one of the first pieces of art to be based on that topic. The former was a commission tied to a swimming pool, on which Christensen collaborated with Dahl, making a large sculpture of a cow with a swim ring around its waist. Symbolically, the two pieces indicate the breadth of Christensen's art, from poetically dealing with grief to clever humour, as well as conceptual and material range. He is too restless to stick to one medium, and moves between different forms and expressions depending on the ideas to be realised.

Besides art found outside the familiar arenas of the art system, Christensen has had an active career of gallery and museum exhibitions. His latest exhibition was *Time as Matter* with Dahl at the Viborg Art Hall. Before that, he has had an impressive list of solo shows, including ones at Gerhardsen Gerner in both Oslo and Berlin, the Southern Norway Art Museum in Kristiansand, Kubus Lenbachhaus in Munich, the Stenersen Museum in Oslo, and the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.) in Gent. With exhibitions all over the world and residencies abroad in France, Ireland, and South Korea, Christensen comes across as one of the most

internationally active Norwegian artists of his generation.

He has also tried his hand at curating, and one of his most extensive exhibitions was *Rykk tilbake til start* [*Go Back to Start*] in 2008. For it, he invited 92 artists, writers, and designers to exhibit work at Gallery 0047 in Oslo, in a series of six exhibitions lasting a total of six weeks. Additionally, he has been an active voice in debates within the art community. In many ways, Christensen is the prototypical post-disciplinary artist, who commands a number of different techniques and modes of expression, where the boundaries between the making of a piece, discourse, and context are constantly crossed and re-evaluated.

**DISCUSSIONS IN ART** Christensen's road from studies to active participation in the art community was relatively short. From 1997 to 2000, he studied at the National Academy of Art and Craft in Oslo, but he left his studies when he had the chance to go to Berlin with gallerist Atle Gerhardsen. There, he worked as a gallery associate, before getting started with his own exhibitions. Today, he works with the gallery Gerhardsen Gerner both in Berlin and Oslo.

Before public projects took over, Christensen made 'conventional' pieces in the white cube. They have a different character than his public works; often heavier and more ironic about the role of the artist and art itself.

Shining a critical light on discussions in the art community, like claims of painting's death or self-effacing reflections on being an artist, typified Christensen's early career, and were evident in pieces like *Painting Myself into a Corner* (2003–2005) and *I Will Never Make It* (2000).



Jan Christensen, *A Melancholia*, 2011. Three-part art project, Oslo Central Station: Inkjet print on canvas, vinyl on facade and HD video. Courtesy: Rom Eiendom and Mesén, Oslo. Photo: Jan Christensen

In 2007, Christensen started his turnaround, when he made the piece *Relative verdi* ['Relative Value'], as a challenge to the media's commercialised focus on contemporary art. The piece represents an aspect of Christensen's art that is fundamentally critical of the art system, generally of the politics of art and meaninglessness to the contemporary art scene. *Relative Value* was a collage of 1000 hundred-unit bills, executed in various currencies: dollars, euros, and kroner. But before the piece was sold for its value in bills, the canvas was stolen out of its frame at the MGM gallery in Oslo. The news value skyrocketed, and the piece reached far beyond the gallery space. Christensen describes the event as neither particularly unfortunate nor fortunate.

'It helped make the piece's point. *Relative Value* is part of my attempt to focus the viewer's attention on what values actually underlie contemporary art, and deals with the relationship between aesthetic and economic value. A perspective like that can make art seem meaningless.'

Meaninglessness in contemporary art is a recurring theme in Christensen's work. *What could possibly be missing from an artwork with complex references, conceptual considerations and universal poetic impact?* (2009) promotes a nihilistic notion that artistic concepts can be so turned in on themselves that people no longer dare question the quality of the art.

For me, working in a white room can bring a feeling of futility. When I exhibited at Gerhardsen Gerner Oslo in 2013, I chose to use the whole room as a giant canvas. On each wall I hung a simple painting, which I would move around the room, thereby continuing the process. In that way, the paintings became

part of one another, and the smaller canvases formed a whole as they grew into each other.'

The exhibition also contained a cutting remark on culture policy, featuring a double portrait of Knut Olav Amås, then secretary of the Department for Culture, and Minister for Culture Thorhild Widvey. The exhibition was produced and shown at a time when artists in Norway were faced with the conservative coalition government's addendum to the culture budget, in which drastic cuts to the artists' grant scheme threatened the Norwegian art scene. Thus, Christensen was in the thick of the debate with a clearly critical approach to culture.

**MASTERING BUREAUCRACY** Despite critical gallery exhibitions and various curatorial projects, public art is the more substantial part of Christensen's art today. His projects are usually done in collaboration with artist Marius Dahl.

Dahl and I collaborate on large public projects because they are demanding to carry out. We have a good back and forth, which means we can go for bigger projects. Large, complicated pieces often require a higher level of professionalism; situations often arise in which we need knowledge of building and construction, and at that point, being 'just an artist' is no excuse.

Christensen tells of a rat race of bureaucracy, paper work, committee meetings, and organisational work, and a constant challenge in that artists still aren't listened to at the largest building sites. Nonetheless, he refuses to be discouraged, and has, through work as both an artist and as a consultant for KORO's [Art in Public Spaces] purchases committee, gained considerable experience.

At KORO, he helps decide which artists

will contribute to the projects that KORO finances and produces, a job he applied for to increase his knowledge of the processes surrounding art projects in public spaces and how projects move forward before an artist becomes involved. He feels it has given him an increased awareness of what is expected of him as an artist in such processes. This position has also given him knowledge of how much bureaucracy governs a consultant's work.

'A large part of a consultant's responsibilities is predicting all possible problems that might arise. As each project evolves, new contracts have to be written, new budgets have to be calculated, and new future plans full of routine details must be made. The paperwork behind a public project is a job in itself,' explains Christensen.

**THE BODY'S FRAMEWORK** Right now, Christensen and Dahl are working on a new proposal for a project at Sentralen ['The Central'], the Savings and Loan Trust's new culture centre in Oslo, with artists Vanessa Baird, Hanne Friis, Are Mokkelbost, and Camilla Løw. At the same time, they are collaborating on a project at the University of Stavanger, and have several other projects in the pipeline.

In 2015, the new hospital at Kalnes in Østfold will be ready, where Dahl and Christensen have started producing the winning piece, *Assembly*, outside the hospital's main entrance, at the request of PNØ [Project New Østfold Hospital], who have set aside twelve million for art. The fact that the process is extensive and not typically 'artistic' is readily apparent.

'Today, I've been at an awe-inspiring construction site with 500 workers, who all have to navigate their various tasks to complete a building costing 5.6 billion kroner. A process like that is chaotic, but invigorating. That's why smooth cooperation between me and Dahl is essential. We're talking about such large amounts of work that carrying out this project on your own would be impossible.'

*Assembly*, one of the main works of art at the new Østfold hospital, is meant to welcome visitors and patients, and serve the practical purpose of highlighting the main entrance. Christensen shows me 3D-illustrations from the planning process, which show a stylised structure in COR-TEN steel, shaped like a house. COR-TEN steel is a dense material with a rusty red colour and a pebbled surface, in contrast to the light aluminium plates and glass of the main building. The construction is bigger than a medium-sized house, but will all the same look small in front of the huge hospital building.

'We did extensive conceptual planning leading up to *Assembly*, since it's a sensitive area, which requires proper discernment and a well-thought-out expression. The symbolic value of *Assembly* is as "a building as a process". In that sense, it can be comforting to a patient or visitor; like a patient undergoing treatment, it is neither finished nor unfinished, it can just as easily be being broken down as being built.'

**KORO DEBUTANT** In parallel with *As-*

*sembly*, Christensen and Dahl are working on yet another piece, Christensen's first commission from KORO. It is remarkable that he, with his long years doing public art projects, has not done work for KORO before. Yet, as Christensen emphasises, there are many alternatives to KORO hiring artists, despite the institution being the largest employer for public art in Norway today.

The project, which has been entitled *Fun Games Lose Eye (a Cautionary Tale)*, will be placed in a new laboratory at the University of Stavanger. Among the students, it is known as the 'concrete lab', and there, experiments and research trials are carried out daily on heavy-duty materials, like metal, earth, concrete, and asphalt.

The project is still only in planning, but Christensen and Dahl had already made a 3D model of the piece before the employer and consultant approved it.

'After having seen our 3D illustrations, even the architect is sometimes surprised at how the place will look when the building is finished. We prepare in this way to be able to create the context where the piece will be located. The illustrations are sometimes done before we've been given an assignment, which means we're able to show an employer precisely what they'll be getting.'

The title, *Fun Games Lose Eye (a Cautionary Tale)*, is taken from the expression 'It's all fun and tames until someone loses an eye,' and Dahl and Christensen chose to zero in on the dangers that can arise in a lab. The piece will take the form of three warning signs with built-in illumination that describe what can happen when accidents occur. It also deals with issues like the fact that other things also go on in the room, so a clean expression was the best choice. In addition, the piece had to be easy to clean.

**FROM DRINKING WATER TO FOOD SOURCE** Prosaic requirements like 'easy to clean' are among the prerequisites artists have to deal with during the conceptual development of public art pieces. There can also be institutional guidelines like history or purely practical concerns like terrain and architecture. Public art has no homogenous group of viewers, and a number of employers therefore want the art they commission to be explicit to all, in contrast to art that is produced for the 'white cube'.

In light of this, Christensen refers to a project he and Dahl did in 2013 at Ranheim for Trondheim Municipality. It was part of the art project *From Drinking Water to Dish*, a location that extends along the Vik river, from Jonsvannet to the outlet at Stringfjorden. The project title is shortened *U000* (2013), from its full name *Uventet overdimensjonert ordinært objekt* ['Unexpected Oversized Ordinary Object'].

'The invitation text introduced us to a concept in which we were asked to base our work on Ranheim's history, focussing especially on the Vik river, which runs through that quarter of town. When we got to the place where we were meant to find inspiration, it was still a swamp. The only trace of

humanity we could see was an abandoned shopping trolley.'

The result was a colossal installation: a 14 x 15 metre construction made of reinforced concrete, the flat of which is shaped like a monumental shopping cart.

'We wanted to open the piece up to thoughts on the role water had had in the old days, when the river was both a source of food and a means of transport. At the same time, the piece points to our time as the age of the consumer, where the giant supermarkets are our source of food from all over the world. In that way, we also wanted to create a larger scope, that both illuminates the past and the future, focussing on how fast food production has gone from local to global.'

**THE UNPREDICTABILITY** One would think that with big projects like those that Christensen and Dahl undertake would require a shared physical place to meet. But neither has a studio, as they largely work with ideas that cannot be realised in a traditional atelier. Rather, they usually work over Skype, by phone, and Dropbox, not uncommonly across geographic borders, since Christensen is constantly on the go. Nevertheless, their partnership works well, thanks to similar thought processes and ambition; both have a shared attitude of thinking big, both in terms of format and concept. However, this close cooperation does not lead to a recognisable 'Christensen & Dahl' aesthetic.

'We often hear comments that people don't recognise our work, but that's neither here nor there. I feel it's more exciting when things aren't repeated. Still, they say consultants can be fascinated, but also sceptical, when they can't predict what they're going to get.'

For Christensen, it is vital that the work he makes is interesting to the public, and that creativity is fundamental to the development of a piece. This is especially apparent if one takes a step back and tries to see his production as a whole; there are no two pieces alike.

'All my public art projects stem from ideas of the *location's* theme, architecture, and area, and that's why the projects are so different from one another. While *Assembly* is a work showing a stylised building structure in COR-TEN steel, *Fun Games Lose Eye (a Cautionary Tale)* is a wall-based sound installation. Both are the outcome of constant focus on what characterises the specific site we're working on. I want to be an artist who takes risks, but who's always aware and makes prudent choices.'

**GOOD GUIDELINES** Today, people talk less about 'decoration' and more about 'art projects in public spaces'. The goal in using a new term is to take apart the negative reputation public art still seems to have, a reputation that is largely tied to the perception that artistic freedom is limited when demands are made of the project. But Christensen thinks that certain guidelines for a project can actually be a good thing.

'My experience is that working from a concrete starting point can yield a better creative process than an artist might achieve

standing in front of a white wall. I also think that artists always deal with a set of rules, be it within artistic genres or production techniques, the white cube or public spaces.'

Norwegian professional circles still have little regard for public art projects, feels Christensen, which he finds regrettable. In particular, he finds the term 'decoration' troublesome.

'The term 'decoration' frames public art as décor or ornamentation. Terminology is essential from the start of any process, that's how the artist creates premises and limitations is developing the piece. I feel that public projects should always be integrated, and not just be supplements to an already extant context.

**POPULAR ART** On their webpage, KORO states the basic concept underlying government administration of public works of art: that art should be meaningful to the largest number of people, and that information and communication are very important tasks for the institution. The reason behind public projects is often a competition between artists, and competition is fierce. That is why the conceptual underpinnings that tie a piece to its context are pointedly examined.

Christensen's strength lies in his ability to capture the essence of a given place, and one piece in particular, stands out: *Sebnsucht* at Ankerskogen public pool and arena.

Of all of Dahl and Christensen's public art, this sculpture is the one that has received the most attention from the public and the media. Outside the bath at Ankerskogen in Hamar is a cow, which has become so popular, management are considering making a miniature to sell as a souvenir.

Right off the bat, *Sebnsucht* has a humorous expression. The cow is stood looking apprehensively at the baths' foyer, with an enormous black swim ring around its waist. She has lost one of her swim feet, and appears that she has been there for a while, weighing her options. The title can be translated to 'Longing', and Christensen feels it is a hybrid of Gary Larson's 'the Far Side' and Robert Rauschenberg's goat.

'We've filled the cow with an unfathomably huge contents. *Sebnsucht* symbolises the outsider who is reluctant to don their swim gear and walk into the hall, head held high. It's one of the biggest indoor pools in Norway, and therefore has a goal of reaching broad user groups, like children, the physically challenged, parents, and the elderly. We wanted it to have a purpose for everyone, and so the piece grew into a humorous figure that all visitors can identify with.'

Like Christensen's other public projects, the cow is based on the possibilities available to that specific piece in that specific context. Thus its relevancy extends beyond the sculpture itself. Maybe that is why Christensen does not have a studio, if the feeling of futility seizes him when he's alone, facing the white wall.

**TRINE FOLMOE**  
**MINE MALTE DAGER**  
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**ZANELE MUHOLI The Art of Activism**

Muholi er blant Sør-Afrikas mest fremtredende kunstnere, der hun har gjort seg bemerket med sine slående fotografier av svarte lesbiske, homofile og transseksuelle. Sentralt i kunstnerskapet står retten til å være seg selv. Muholi har vært presentert på Documenta i 2012, Veneziabiennalen i 2013 og Dak'Art i 2014. Tildelt Carnegie Art Award i 2013.



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