

Foreword

ERUPTION is the result of a collaboration between visual artists Julie Nord, Louise Hindsgavl, Mie Mørkeberg, Nina Saunders, author Merete Pryds Helle and Trapholt. The aim of the project is to create a complete universe with an exhibition installation where sound, space and image come together as one.

The starting point for the exhibition is the so-called *unheimlich* elements which exist in the universe of each of the participating artists. The Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) employed the term *unheimlich* in response to the dual meaning of the word *heimlich*, meaning both homely and hidden. In regards to the exhibition, conversations between the four artists have focussed on how they each tackle the homely and the hidden in different ways. The familiar tidiness and the hidden are turned inside out or lurk just beneath the surface.

The title of the exhibition has been a topic of discussion throughout the process. Should it be called DANISH NOIR? UNHEIMLICH? PRESSURE? In the end, ERUPTION was settled on, since all the works exhibit a fierce clash with the stifling and tyrannic tidiness of conformity and the efficiency of the optimisation society. The works of art are a result of this ERUPTION and express more than we are capable of explaining with ordinary language, offering observers the experience of a hidden pre-linguistic universe which art is able to unlock for us.

Early on, the four visual artists and Trapholt invited author Merete Pryds Helle to participate in the process, with a desire to incorporate a poetic sound piece into the exhibition, one which would articulate the unspeakable in harmony with the pieces. Trapholt also invited the cultural critic Klaus Rothstein to contribute to the publication. In his essay he employs five examples to put into words how the 'unheimlich' can be experienced.

The exhibition and publication have been realised thanks to the generous support of the Augustinus Foundation, the Danish Arts Foundation, and 15. Juni Fonden. Trapholt would like to thank all of the grant donors for appreciating the importance of this exhibition. Most importantly Trapholt would like to thank Julie Nord, Louise Hindsgavl, Mie Mørkeberg, Nina Saunders and Merete Pryds Helle for their participation in this project: a project which has been characterised by a high degree of trust and a fantastic collaborative effort. Also a big thanks to cultural critic Klaus Rothstein for the essay he contributed as well as to Director of Horsens Museum of Art, Claus Hagedorn-Olsen for peer-reviewing the publication. Last but not least, thanks to Team Trapholt for their professionalism and dedication in bringing about the exhibition and the publication.

Karen Grøn

Museum Director, Trapholt

THE INTERIOR OF THE EXTERIOR

By Karen Grøn
Museum Director, Trapholt

As a rule, reality looks nice and tidy. For instance, most of us make an effort to look nice when we go out. When we have guests we tidy up and put a cloth on the table. The kids are told to be on their best behaviour. We scan ourselves in the mirror when we walk past, making sure everything is as it should be. To the outside world, we want to be perceived as people who have everything under control. However most of us are aware that the facade comes to an end when we shut the door and are in the privacy of our own home. There, most people are less than perfect. It would be discomfiting if you also had to appear perfect and without cracks in this internal sphere. If life had to be perfect on the outside and on the inside, what would you do with the imperfect elements? Would they end up becoming an intense ERUPTION?

The artists of ERUPTION show us a world far from polished perfectionism. Louise Hindsgavl (1973) reinterprets the classic white porcelain motif, creating a series of fantasy worlds where we as observers enter frozen horror scenarios with bestial bodies or bodies deformed in beastly ways. Nina Saunders (1958) pierces the bourgeoisie with her furniture hybrids, adapting iconic furniture and letting them bulge outwards, as if they have developed a cancerous tumour. Julie Nord's (1970) intricate drawings place creatures from the subconscious in a dreamlike universe, where people and animals are mixed and spiritual creatures step out of the shadows. Mie Mørkeberg's (1980) paintings invite the observer to enter a 'mucky' homely atmosphere, where everything has broken down and the complete chaos of objects, filth and rubbish personify the room.

All four artists masterly employ craftsman-like precision in their depictions of the indescribable. They look to the margins, stimulated by that which is located outside the normal. On the one hand, fascination with these four universes can be explained as a titillating anxiety to drop the facade and descend into complete decay or excess. On the other hand, it can also be explained as a release from the everyday neatness and tidiness, as surrendering to the mysteries of the subconscious.

In addition, the four artists tackle social criticism in their work. Julie Nord speaks of making a break from the optimisation society, where everything has to be neat and tidy, and where we have to be efficient. As though efficiency were a goal in itself. All the while she allows the subconscious to put forward a comment which immediately contorts her captivating universe. Mie Mørkeberg confronts the society of control where everything must run smoothly. Her paintings invite us inside a dimly-lit room where all control is lost. Nina Saunders wants her furniture to speak of all of the things we normally sweep under the carpet and keep hidden. She lets the furniture deform as an expression of the unspoken. Louise Hindsgavl pokes holes in our fondness for the banal, as observers are confronted with the horror resulting from the complete collapse of order.

These works will disturb most people. They are not created to make us feel like our toes are being tickled. On the contrary they should feel like a slap in the face and keep us on our toes. In conversations with the artists, the American artist Paul McCarthy (1945) was often mentioned as a source of inspiration. Paul McCarthy's art tackles every taboo imaginable. Conventions, authorities, banalities, people and their bodily fluids are taken on a frightening but loving tour through his installations, videos and pictures, where he smears himself with food, dirt, excrement, sex and dolls. Paul McCarthy's artistic work is a culmination of so-called abject art which was prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s. The term abject is now used to describe art at the margins. In abject art, elements such

as dirt, excrement, rotten food, blood, urine, semen and other taboos are explored. The elements of this art often come from the margins, where body and object become one. These objects are found inside the subject, but also become an 'object of the body' when they are contained outside of the body.

In the book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*¹ from 1982, the French-Bulgarian philosopher Julia Kristeva writes that 'the abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I.'² Julia Kristeva draws on the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and his idea that people have a clear understanding of themselves as a physical and psychological whole – in contrast to everything else in the world which is *other* or *object*. Abject thus refers to a middle ground which is neither subject (me) nor pure object (it). But the term abject can also be expanded to encompass everything which does not have a precise definition. Hermaphrodites, who are both woman and man, are an example of such an ambiguity. The same is found when people and animals are combined by Louise Hindsgavl and Julie Nord. When Mie Mørkeberg paints filth so well that we can almost smell it. When Nina Saunders allows furniture to unfurl its internal life and break from its form. In this, each of the four artists establishes a universe possessing elements which are not known or clearly defined. They break into our conforming zone of recognition, and confront the observer with something abject which disturbs us.

MIE MØRKEBERG

Mie Mørkeberg paints rooms, interiors, and homely environments. There are no people in her pictures. The only one present is the observer, looking at the painting, invited inside Mie Mørkeberg's provocative universe. The rooms vary. At times they are great pompous halls, other times intimate living rooms. In all of her paintings the motif is straightforward, but the execution is disquieting. The paintings ooze of chaos and muck. What could be so lovely is distorted by a room in decay. The rooms are discomforting places, and an internal space appears in the cracks. Mie Mørkeberg pulls back the floorboards of neatness, revealing a disorder and a chaos beneath which simultaneously attracts and repulses.

Her inspiration for these pieces includes bag ladies and people with a compulsion to hoard. These people normally live alone. Their homes are overflowing and filthy to the extent that they have to be torn down when they are vacated. They can be individuals who seem normal on the surface, for example at their workplace. Mie Mørkeberg paints the aesthetics of disgust in these rooms, where at one and the same time she is repulsed and attracted, like walking to the edge of an abyss and feeling the urge to jump.

In the paintings from the series *Vakuum* (Vacuum, 2013) Mie Mørkeberg enters a number of very concrete spaces. In *Vakuum 1* we immediately encounter something resembling a kitchen, where a washing machine, the ultimate symbol of cleanliness, is surrounded by dirty dishes and rubbish. A snake is coiled up on the floor of this ultimate disorder, where it has escaped the terrarium and has found its place alongside the hoards. In *Vakuum 2*, there are stacks of books and mountains of newspapers in something resembling a living room. The tables and bookcases indicate that control may once have resided in this room, but now control has been lost to the hoards of objects. In the midst of the image, there is a small glass globe containing an idyllic snowscape, a remnant of the dream of control and order. The dirty dishes reappear in *Vakuum 3*, where you peer into a pompous room with a long hallway and ceiling decorations. A vacuum cleaner has sucked up the carpet, and at the very front of the dirty dishes there is a charming royal porcelain-like jar which contains a dying plant.

For *ERUPTION*, Mie Mørkeberg has abandoned the concrete space. She constructs the rooms in her paintings from objects, as though walls and doors do not exist. The main colour is turquoise green, a recurring feature in Mie Mørkeberg's work. The colour is not clear, but muddied with ochre and black, so that the room as a whole oozes of a time which once was, but has now disappeared. When the base colour has been established, Mie Mørkeberg constructs the work. The process is intuitive, and the elements are introduced gradually as the rooms are built up with objects.

The rooms themselves are formed entirely from hoarded objects, mess and chaos. In the midst of *AI Kødets Gang 1* (The decay of the flesh) (2016) there is a gap. Like a kind of tunnel vision, where you look into nothingness. Below, a large control panel is visible. As though you can control everything, but are steering towards the void. The objects in the painting include containers, baskets, children's beds, books and kitchen utensils. In *AI Kødets Gang 2* (2016) we find ourselves in a room which looks inhabitable. On one side there is a bed and in the middle, an exercise bike. Everything is held together and supported by pillars of hoarded objects. Remove the objects, the room collapses. Scattered around, more exercise equipment, which normally symbolise a body in control. Here they are in sharp contrast to the chaos they are situated in.