

AND THE WORLD CRACKED OPEN  
Paintings by Anki King & Sol Kjøk  
Performances by Elisabeth Færøy Lund  
Curated by Bjørn Inge Follevaag



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*Queer theory is "...the idea that identities are not fixed and do not determine who we are."*

Teresa de Lauretis, 1990

In her artist's statement Anki King states that she paints "life-sized figures that act as symbols for feelings that can't accurately be described in words. They are characterized by the object symbols with which they share space. Each figure, or fragment of a figure, stands still in readiness for a charged meeting with the viewer. The viewing activates a series of responses, where identity is projected onto the faceless figure, similar to a reflection that offers the gazer another view of him-herself. This frees the narrative from being contained within the subject matter of the artwork and allows it to exist in the viewing space".

My grandmother was a farmer's wife. As far back as I can remember she was always there. The farm and family was her life. She accepted her fate and came to terms with her role and place within the social fabric of her farming community. As the mother of seven children, she was always busy. Her duties were clearly defined and her compliance taken for granted. Her life must have been hard. While using her body working the land, caring for the animals or cooking, she used to hum. Her humming of old psalms has for me come to represent a surrender to the inevitable; a coping strategy in a world which defined her place once and for all. Somehow I don't remember her face clearly, but I remember her body's language and the emotions it spurred. Today, I realize that she must have been extremely patient. Somehow I don't think she ever asked for recognition; in those days praise was hardly ever given or expected.

*"My large-format drawings and paintings, says Sol Kjøk, are the visual terminus of a much longer method, and perhaps their extra-visual meaning is to be found in the archaeology of their making: Driven by a desire to first experience as manifest reality the symbolic content of my images, my process starts with performances staged in my studio, where my models and I make pitiful attempts at acrobatic exercises: We walk the tightrope (poorly), strenuously climb wires suspended from the ceiling, balance on balls and twist our pale and puckered bodies into a myriad of uncomfortable positions. It is important that this initial physical experience, ripe with the potential for injuries and skin-against-skin contact, lives on in the final pieces, as I strive to convey a bodily awareness of the paradox of strength and vulnerability that is the human condition".*

My grandmother's position as *mater familias* was unquestionable, but limited to domestic affairs. Working the land, bearing children, holding the family together, cooking and cleaning, sewing and knitting, nursing and loving and bending her knees in prayer; this was her life, and according to the values of the time, an epitome of womanhood. She was a strong, hard-working woman who sought refuge in her God in difficult times. What could she have done with her life if she had been given the opportunity to grow and expand beyond the borders of domesticity?

*"In her work, Elisabeth Færøy Lund creates different settings for an initial encounter. Whether it is a first meeting between the audience and herself in the gallery space, between random people she approaches in the street or between the invited participants in her performances, she encourages the audience to partake actively".*

Although my grandmother hardly ever left the farm, she always kept herself informed about the world around her. Sons and daughters in the merchant navy brought the world to her in their stories and accounts of faraway places. One son married and gave her a grandchild in South America, and through his telephone calls and stories she was able to imagine her future daughter in law and grandchild. In her mind, all her children's shared experiences became encounters with people she came to know – if only by name or description.

Epistemology – how we perceive the world around us as true or false, adequate or inadequate – and ontology, what we perceive as real in the world, is very much a question of time and place – it is the time we live in, and the conditions we live under, that decide. Women like my grandmother are just a sweet memory, and the changing values in society have made women like her almost extinct. So, contrary to De Lauretis's theory that our identities are not fixed, my grandmother's reality and identity were defined by her time and historical context.

De Lauretis's definition, which allows for the switching of character and identity, is definitely a contemporary phenomenon – it is also contextual and bound to a specific time and place in our evolution – perhaps also to a class. But is her definition valid? How much of our lives is a consequence of planning, making the right choices or being in the right place at the right time? Over the years, I have come to realize that most life-altering decisions are coincidental rather than planned. What we want to become, or who we want to be, seems only marginally our own achievement. It is what we were given at birth which makes us who we are today.

Our parents, culture, society, schools and teachers, a social security system, the right to vote and express ourselves freely - and our friends - and what they teach us. And all of these factors depend on the time we live in and the value systems to which we adhere. In general, most of our decisions are intuitive rather than based on knowledge or the careful weighing of options. In life, intuition seems to offer the right choice through seemingly no effort of our own, and Intuition is based on all we were given at birth. From a phenomenological perspective, the term *intuition* refers to immediate recognition. Recognizing something from a collective world, and using what we were given in order to make sense of it.

The intuitive body is a conscious body. It is the sum of our personal history; a subject aware of its environment reaching out to other subjects and recognizing them as similar. Our spontaneous, subconscious and intuitive responses and reactions to other human subjects, or to life, are in philosophy – as defined by the Danish philosopher K.E. Løgstrup – referred to as *sovereign life utterances*; they do not depend on human culture or anything man-made to exist or be expressed. They are emotional and universal. The sovereign life utterances are *trust, open speech, compassion, mercy, anger and hope*. In effect, the sovereign life utterances are life's essence; they are unavoidable and the core of our being. They are what we rely upon when all else fails. They are truth. They are spontaneous, and they shy away from control.

From my perspective, sovereign life utterances are what is being conveyed in the works in this exhibition at NOoSPHERE. On closer inspection of the artists' backgrounds, it is interesting to see how they all originate from farming communities. The little narrative at the beginning of this essay could be linked to almost all closed social structures or communities in the world. Breaking with traditions, cracking one's world open by acting contrary to expectations or demands from society is a daunting task. Distance from one's heritage is sometimes necessary in order to grow. Yet evidence suggests that what we were given at birth remains a core substance in our lives affecting our choices, actions and attitudes in a fundamental way. In phenomenological terms – seeing the spectator and the art as one contextual situation in which reading, comprehending, perceiving or being with the artwork amalgamate to create a singular sensuous experience.

In the project at hand, my theory has been that cultural understanding is an unnecessary prerequisite for identifying the issues in question in this exhibition. The works can be understood from a phenomenological perspective as contextual to the spectator – since – in all likelihood – we share similar experiences. The three artists Anki King, Sol Kjøk and Elisabeth Færøy Lund crack their worlds wide open through embodied artistic practices, yet remain solidly grounded in tradition. Albeit in different media, expressions and methods, they all use the actual, fictional and medial body to share their understandings.