

n.paradoxa

online, issue 20

April 2008

Editor: Katy Deepwell

Published in English as an online edition
by KT press, www.ktpress.co.uk,
as issue 20, *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*
<http://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/nparadoxaissue20.pdf>
April 2008, republished in this form: January 2010
ISSN: 1462-0426

All articles are copyright to the author
All reproduction & distribution rights reserved to n.paradoxa and KT press.
No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or
by any electronic, mechanical or other means, including photocopying and recording,
information storage or retrieval, without permission in writing from the editor of
n.paradoxa.

Views expressed in the online journal are those of the contributors
and not necessarily those of the editor or publishers.

Editor: ktpress@ktpress.co.uk
International Editorial Board: Hilary Robinson, Renee Baert,
Janis Jefferies, Joanna Frueh, Hagiwara Hiroko, Olabisi Silva.
www.ktpress.co.uk

List of Contents

Issue 20 (April 2008)

Gisela Weimann Shared and/or Divided Times: Questions and Answers and Europe in Exile	4
Brigitte Hammer Shared Times II / Pictures and Sculptures	12
Moira Roth Widening the Spiral: Musings and Readings in a Berkeley cafe, California, March - April 2007	15
Katy Deepwell More than Seven Urgent Questions about Feminism	24
Sanne Kofod Olsen Feminist art in Denmark a short introductory history and an interview with Kirsten Justesen , (artist, born 1943)	30
Eli Bartra Displaced or Nomadic Subjects	36
Ramona Novicov Three Female Hypotheses of the Romanian Avant-Garde	43
Ursula Neinhaus Preserving, Describing, Conserving Cultural History and Making it Accessible FFBIZ, The Women's Research, Education and Information Center, Berlin	51
Mercedes Replinger A False Interview with Real Answers	54
Amaya Martínez de la Escalera Castells THE DYNAMICS OF A LEGACY Living where you don't belong	64
Concha Jerez Installed Ideas	70
Gabriele Kamper Equality - a call to and from all politicians	73

Feminist art in Denmark a short introductory history and an interview with Kirsten Justesen, (artist, born 1943)

Sanne Kofod Olsen

Since the late 1960s feminist art appeared on the Danish art scene, there were a number of significant events that outline a short history of feminist art in Denmark. The feminist art activities centered around Copenhagen and Århus. In Copenhagen the feminist art movement came out of the Royal Danish Art Academy, where a group of students worked with contemporary aesthetics and experimental art. Some of the first feminists belonged to the male/female collective Kanonklubben and some worked independently.

In 1970 a collective of female artists realised the project *Damebilleder (Womens' images)*. It was a series of seven works and actions/ events that took place at different locations in Copenhagen. All tableaux dealt with the woman's role in society from the beauty parlor to dish washing. The group consisted of Lene Bille, Marie Bille, Rikke Diemer, Kirsten Dufour, Kirsten Justesen, Jytte Keller, Jytte Rex and Gitte Skjoldjensen. The first of the seven images produced was *The Hooker*. This scenic event lasted 2-3 days. A woman sat in a window (similar to Dutch style prostitution) and was in this way "framed". The second image was called *Dish Washing*. For this, the artists collected their dirty dishes and brought them all to the exhibition space in the Danish Art Academy. The third image was entitled *The Beauty* and a make-up company was invited to give lectures in beauty care. The fourth image was *The Wedding Cake*. In this installation an outdoor building was decorated like a wedding cake. The fifth image was given the title *The Defense* and consisted of a self-defense course for the group and the visitors of the exhibition. In the sixth image, with the title *The Garments*, the exhibition space was changed into a sewing factory, where

the group produced red dresses that they were going to use in the final image number 7, called *The Camp*. The group lived together for four days and discussed the themes of the exhibition with the visitors. The exhibition project ended in a big party in red!

A lot of feminist art works were produced during the early 1970s. Kirsten Justesen, Jytte Rex, Ursula Reuter Christiansen and Lene Adler Petersen, and group oriented projects by Kirsten Dufour among others, did very significant works during these first years of the feminist art movement in Denmark. Lene Adler Petersen had done provocative collective performances with her husband Bjørn Nørgaard, for example, where she wandered through the Copenhagen stock exchange stark naked. In the early 1970s she did a number of works, dealing with women's liberation and at the same time their cultural attachment to the domestic sphere. In 1977 she did the installation *Liberty leading the people* in which she had appropriated the well known Delacroix painting and turned it into a socialist feminist scenery, in which a woman's figure and a stove are the central elements. The focus on the liberation of the domesticated woman was a central theme. Kirsten Justesen (see interview below) did several works on her life as a woman, mother and artist, in which these various elements coalesced. Some works dealt with the experience of the revolution of liberation seen through the kitchen window and others dealt with the female body as a vehicle of significance.

The works of Ursula Reuter Christiansen also specifically took its point of departure in domestic life and how to be a mother, a wife and a professional working artist at the same time. The film *Skarpretteren* from 1971 is a psychological drama about a pregnant woman, a wounded soldier and an executioner (as well as several other figures). The story ends with the decapitation of the woman. In this way, as many of the other works, the film deals with the complications and frustrations of being a woman, a wife, a mother, etc and at the same time how to act as a professional artist.

The domestic theme is also the central theme of the film in three acts *Three girls and a pig* from 1971 in which Ursula Reuter Christiansen, Lene Adler Petersen and Elisabeth Terkelsen are the three leading female characters. It was conceived as a vampire movie with Dracula as the main character. However Dracula became the invisible factor and the film shows instead the domesticated women's fear - expressed by both knitting and gossiping - of the invisible dangers outside. The women are all dressed in Victorian dresses in the first part. However, they do overcome their fear at some point. In the last part of the film, the women have become soldiers in a "field kitchen", cleaning potatoes and singing German soldier songs. In the room is a small male pig, which in the end is castrated by the three women. The man or the male element obviously plays a significant part in the film but he is finally overcome.

Among some of the most significant events in Denmark during the 1970s was the women's exhibition at Charlottenborg I in December 1975/January 1976, shown in the Women's galleries in Århus and Copenhagen, the publication of the feminist

journal *Land og By* and the opening of the Women's Museum in Århus, just to mention some of the highlights. The period is still poorly documented, and if documented at all, this has been done by artists who have made a major effort to keep a record of this period.

During the 1980s, feminism was more or less taboo in Denmark. By the early 1990s, everything of this early history seemed to have been forgotten. However, a new interest in feminist practices arose, especially among the young generation of women artists and curators but also in the established museums, various exhibitions on deceased women artists were also produced. Most significant, however, were the major feminist exhibitions at Kunsthallen Brandts Klaedefabrik, curated by Lene Burkard, one partly in collaboration with Kirsten Justesen. The first exhibition *Dialogue with the Other*, which took place in 1995, combined past feminist art with the present and showed a lot of impressive works by older and younger women artists. In 1996 the second exhibition (with Kirsten Justesen) called *Body as Membrane* focused on the aspect of the body in feminist art.

Together with the two visual artists, Susan Hinnun and Malene Landgreen, who had initiated the project in the first place, I took part in the first publication on Danish women artists in 1990. Because of difficulties of finding sponsors, the publication ended up as a internet publication in 1997 entitled *Inserts - 69 Women Artists in Denmark* (website 1997-2007 has now closed). At the time we wanted to publish the book, but we had already tried and failed to find financial support since 1995. A lot of young women artists participated and others declined. It seemed still to be the most prevailing opinion, that feminism was a closed chapter and women's liberation was something we didn't have to talk about anymore. Our opinion was somewhat different. The *Inserts* project developed into an exhibition in 1998 called *Boomerang* with more or less the same intention: to focus on women artists and the unequal opportunities in the art world. The whole project was initiated on the basic question: where do the women artists go after their academy graduation? Despite an equality in the number of male and female students at the academies, the art scene seemed still to be dominated by male artists and professors. The same feminist agenda was shared by some students at the academy in Copenhagen, who arranged study groups and lectures in an open school project named *Aircondition*. They invited several feminist art historians and feminists to teach or give lectures at the academy, an act that emphasized the implementation of feminist strategies in art and theory.⁽¹⁾

The domination of male artists was proved in the same year (1998), when the Agency of Cultural Heritage published a report on gender representation in museum collections. This report revealed the terrifying fact, that only 6% of the artists represented in public collections were of female gender. These hard figures were little noticed at the time. Five years later they came to attention in a seminar called *Before Invisibility*, which addressed this very problematic. Sadly enough nothing had really changed during these five years, but it came into focus in the seminar,

which was arranged and supported by women artists who are quite influential in the art world - among others Kirsten Justesen, Elisabeth Toubro, Dorte Jelstrup and Susan Hinnun - most of whom had works in the museums.

So where are we now? Most recently a new seminar was arranged by the Visual Artists' Association (BKF) called *The Blind Spot*. This seminar addressed the same complex of themes and examined what had changed during the past years. A slight improvement is recognizable, but there is still a long way to go.

Interview with Kirsten Justesen, June 2007.

Kirsten Justesen belonged to the feminist art movement in Denmark during the 1970s to which she has contributed richly. During the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s she has played an important role in the contemporary Danish art scene by being almost the only continuous representative of performance art seen from a visual art perspective. This gives her a very unique position in Danish art history.

I decided to ask her the following questions in order to get a taste of what was going on and which topics were discussed during the 1970s in Denmark.

You were one of the pioneers in Danish feminist art in the late 60s and early 70s. Which feminist art projects do you consider the most significant in feminist art in an attempt to give a short historical overview?

If you mean a work from my own production I will point out CIRCUMSTANCES.(2) A super 8 recording of my pregnant torso [at a specific moment during pregnancy] and a plaster cast from which I made several epoxy prints. These torsos contain both the facts and the conception of that kind of female adventure which is taking place during pregnancy. Only women artists have that possibility of being inside their own work! It is a very challenging exercise, a consciousness that leads to a clearly feminist gaze, which is fulfilled by that process.

As a trained classic sculpture(ress!) confronted with art history through education, reviews, museum visits, [I have the experience of that] my generation is brought up with a male gaze. A gaze that still seems to be synonymous with defining the history of art.

I understand feminist aesthetics as a visual attempt to investigate the female gaze to be then developed on the canvasses, on the plinths and as actions in space. That was not easy back in the 1960-70s. (1)

We want our gaze back in history, to secure diversity and in order not to be ashamed to show our grandsons the heritage of the visual arts, and this goes for everyone, not just for the Western heterosexual welfare women.

[Kirsten Justesen now mentions feminist events that impressed and/or influenced her or in which she took part.]

I saw Niki de St.Phalle's *SHE - a Cathedral*, at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, 1966. In the same year Siri Deckert carved the names of women artists throughout history as a mural in a subway station in Stockholm to secure that they will not be forgotten.

Our project *DAMEBILLEDER*, Copenhagen 1970. We were a small group of art students who installed a series of tableaux, uncovering female roles over a period of time in the available exhibition spaces.

Valie Export's organisation of the exhibition: *MAGNA FEMINISMUS* 1975 in Vienna including the catalogue in which a huge number of questions to Meret Oppenheim were answered. The same year *LA MOITIE DU CIEL/ HALVDELEN AF HIMLEN* by Claudie Broyelle about the women's movement in China was published in Danish. And Lucy Lippard's articles in *Ms Magazine*.

I will point out Jolanda Prinsens work *CANVAS* from 1979. It is 80% framed canvas with the last 20 % tied to the stretcher with 1960s garters from the first global feminist exhibition: *FEMINISTISCHE KUNST INTERNATIONAL* organised by the Gemeentemuseum in Den Haag, Holland in 1979. The catalogue is in Dutch, but there is a summary in English and a list of the so far very few books, articles and exhibitions on feminist art.

Quite a lot of feminist art works including your own focused on the conflict of being a woman and an artist in relation to patriarchal society. You have yourself combined the subject/object position of the woman artist and the conflict of being wife, mother, etc. and a productive artist at the same time. Why were these topics so relevant?

In the first part of the 1970s my studio was between the kitchen and the nursery. At that time I did not find one among the few available role models within public history that included kids.

My generation just wanted everything and language cannot talk about this as a conflict, that's the whole point. As well as on my body, the kids were at my hand from 7 to 24 hours a day. It was obviously a focus for me. It is interesting that earlier generations of known Danish female artists mainly painted flowers and patterns and happened to paint these from the inside of their houses - they went as far as to the window frame and saw it only from inside.

The European feminist wave from the early 1970s was a part of a socialist revolution and included a good knowledge of Marxist thinking. We did not want to make a single cup of tea for the revolution after the 1960s, we just wanted to secure it so that we and the kids could safely enter the new barricades and that the utopian spaces included us and would provide us with a breathing space.

Through our upbringing we were defined as reproduction tools and were supposed to behave in order to find suitable husbands. But we were now, thanks to

the post war growing western prosperity, wanted by the industry as production tools as well. We intended TO SURVIVE ALL BLOODSHEDS, not just the one in the art world. 1975 I made my first Solo exhibition HOUSE WIFE IMAGES/ HUSMORBILLEDER at Tranegaarden in Copenhagen. The image on the poster was LUNCH.

What do you think feminist art in the 70s has achieved (if anything)?

Everything, what the hell would you have in your mind, in your luggage, your museums, in your underground art scene without it? Duchamp could not find anything more to do, but for us there was a lot to investigate. And I know that you are paid 80% of a male curator's salary for your work. I know that the state supported art museums in Denmark bought just 6% of their art from female artists during 1990-2000. What might the % of the amount of money tell you? Are our works still bad investments? It was just a beginning, so go on girl!

Notes

1. The major literary works representing the period is the survey edited by Jytte Rex, entitled *Billedet som Kampmiddel*, 1977 and lately a book published by the contemporary artist group Women down the Pub called *Udsigt - feministiske strategier i dansk billedkunst* (*View - feminist strategies in Danish Visual Art*), 2004 (both Informations Forlag).

2. The piece has been described in following article: Vibeke Vibolt Knudsen 'Circumstances - 1973 - An Unknown work by Kirsten Justensen' Statens Museum for *Kunst Journal*, 2001

These papers were presented at the Symposium Geteilte Zeit: Kunstgeschichte als Internationaler Dialog / Shared Times: Art History as International Dialogue, at the European Academy in Berlin, 25 - 28 March 2008. This text is available in Gisela Weimann (ed) *Geteilte Zeit: Fragen und Antworten* (Edition Eselsweg, 2008) in German.

Copyright © : Sanne Kofod Olsen and Kirsten Justesen

N.Paradoxa : Issue No. 20, 2008