IDEAS FROM IKEA
Art Club*2000*

We were preparing for the group exhibition *New Pictures, New Sculpture* and were eager to show works by the collective Art Club*2000,* specifically their photographs *Untitled (Donut Shop 1)* and *Untitled (Donut Shop 3)*. What's so striking to us about the photos and Art Club*2000*'s general practice is not that they were so young when they made these works, but that the works were so *great* and still are. *Untitled (Donut Shop 1)* looks like a snapshot of a group of youths in a café, but it was staged and beautifully lit by the portrayed themselves. Hanging out with your friends is a great way of making art. Without any solid connection to the members of the group, or knowledge about their current whereabouts, we reached out to Artists Space, where they'd mounted a retrospective in 2020, and took it from there.

In the conversations leading up to *New Pictures, New Sculpture* we learnt that the group had made several works related to IKEA in the early 90s, and to our surprise that they'd never been exhibited before. We received a compilation of footage from their 1994 performance at the Aspirin Design Conference and of the group posing in IKEA's dioramas during a field trip to the fast-furniture mega complex soundtracked by Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit*. Maybe it was because we were so unprepared for what we were about to see, maybe it was triggered by our own nostalgia (as teenagers in Stockholm suburbs in the 00s, we'd (try to) get drunk (on Folköl) on field trips to IKEA and jump around in the bedroom department, hot dogs on the way out), maybe it was the soundtrack (that feels engineered to evoke strong emotions in people who were once teenagers) but upon viewing this material we felt an immediate and strong rush of adrenaline.

We later approached Art Club*2000* about the possibility of showing the video material in a solo-presentation. You're looking at never-before exhibited footage that has been assembled into a 2-channel video installation for the occasion of this exhibition.

Whenever an artist from abroad is invited to exhibit in Sweden, it's a go-to to do a show about IKEA and Scandinavian design in order to question mass-production and the neutrality of Minimalism. Maybe it's because it's the Swedes' most significant personality trait according to outsiders–our naive belief in fast fashion and fast furniture and our "good taste". IKEA furniture is also the go-to content and aesthetics of institutional critique because of similar reasons, present already in the context of the early 90s ("The LACK tables!"). Arriving in NYC in the late 80s, IKEA was a fairly new phenomenon that supplied the city's youth with the cheapest available furniture and its art spaces with minimal and equally cheap exhibition architecture. IKEA Elizabeth was a field-trip destination for the members of Art Club*2000* and other college kids, as the canteen provided them with affordable meals and a striking view over Newark airport.

We enjoy playing around with the dead-pan do-what-your-told logic of doing an IKEA-related show in Sweden, a feeling perhaps similar to what Art Club*2000* felt when they staged a performance of assembling furniture at a cutting-edge design conference. Are we selling sand in the desert? Are we being entertaining? After the conference, the $500 worth of furniture was disassembled, packed in its original

boxes and returned in line with IKEA's return policy, in the same vein as the collective's ventures involving The Gap brand. They had entered the fast-furniture complex wearing visitor badges and smoking on stage of Cooper Union's Great Hall was allowed if conducted for theatrical reasons. These videos show Art Club*2000* tagging along with corporate consumer policies and the ingratiating language of advertising, only to make good use of it in an artistic practice that carried on a legacy of consumer activism. The resulting "moving still-images" from the group's IKEA enterprise are hybrids between the staged photographs that have become Art Club*2000*'s signature artworks, and the advertisements depicting IKEA's target groups that circulated at the time.

On our minds has also been Josh Kline's essay *New York Real Estate and the Ruin of American Art*. Who can afford being a conceptual artist these days? Over the summer we discovered IKEA's most recent ad campaign Kompishäng "Friends hanging out", depicting young New Yorkers happily moving from one uncertain housing situation to another: "One minute you're settled, the next you're on the move. That's why we designed KOMPISHÄNG, a flexible, budget-friendly collection made to keep up. It's lightweight, easy to transport and ready for whatever comes next, so you can say yes to every adventure and create a home wherever life takes you." Being homeless and unemployed is now marketed and sold as an enviable lifestyle.

IDEAS FROM IKEA feels more timely to us than we could have imagined and we're very curious how this footage comes across to a Stockholm audience in 2026. People don't really drink or smoke anymore. Nor is there much room for a true collective spirit when focus has shifted to the individual's constant marketing of the self. Words like "community", "subversion", "conceptual" are watered-out by their use as unique selling points by anyone who gets the idea to use them. In our summer read *Talking Prices: Symbolic Meanings of Prices on the Market for Contemporary Art* (2005), Olav Velthuis wrote that pretty much every gallerist he had spoken to said that they always had the artists' best interest in mind, that they did it for the community and not for the money. Really?

Next up is a solo-show with David Permén! Sebastian Dahlqvist came by the gallery and we realised that we must do a conference in 2027 and that its name has to be the IDEA Conference. Stay tuned.

The seven SMÄLLEN chairs that are part of the installation will be returned to IKEA after the end of *IDEAS FROM IKEA*.