I Was Moved
Vilhelm Christensen

Gamle Munch
29.03 – 07.05

Opening hours:
Wednesday 11 – 18
Thursday 11 – 20
Friday 11 – 18
Saturday – Sunday 11 – 17
And by appointment

"From my rotting body, flowers shall grow and I am in them, and that is eternity." – Edvard Munch

Entering the lobby of *Gamle Munch*, visitors are greeted by a large off-white canvas resting on the gallery floor. Instinctively nondescript, like a tarpaulin laid out to dry, or to protect the floor from staining. The canvas in fact finds its original use in protecting one of the museum's most revered paintings: Munch's *The Sun* (1911). Carried out in several versions during his career, the painting (being the second largest in the museum collection) not only hung as a centerpiece of the old museum exhibit, but here also points to a kind of oscillating relationship between objects and the spaces they inhabit, which in turn can be followed as a leading thread throughout Christensen's exhibition. Venturing further into the ground floor galleries would lead a viewer to where the painting was originally hung, and to where its namesake will show its inescapable effect: the section of wall once obscured by the large canvas, having left behind what appears as a large rectangular negative, the hue of its wooden cladding still intact; meanwhile the boards surrounding it have yellowed with age.

Designed by architects Gunnar Fougner and Einar Myklebust, the old Munch Museum once stood as a prime example of modern museum architecture. Financed partially through revenues generated by the Oslo Municipal Cinemas, the project of constructing a museum for housing the estate of Edvard Munch was part of an initiative aiming to democratize access to culture for the broader masses. Although, with time the building proved unfit both for presenting and storing what has today become one of the most valuable bodies of work in the context of Scandinavian and northern European art of the period.

On a temporal level, the exhibition dwells on prospects of permanence, or the potential afterlife of the objects and structures once working to support the institution from the inside. Acting as suggestive extensions of the museum body—or phantom limbs—many of the elements of the installation will also speak of and from a position of individual suspense. Inventories and appliances, alongside the functions that they originally carried (be them practical or symbolic) are found in varying degrees of obsolescence: in par with technological advancement and the shifting organization of the museum, which has pushed them out of circulation or use.

Within the context of Christensen's exhibition, dynamics between exposing and withholding are subject to inversion, as if turning a garment inside-out only to accentuate the joints and seams of its tailoring. As the viewer enters the basement floor they are faced head-on with a small monitor showing live-streamed surveillance imagery from several of the museum's now (albeit temporarily) vacant exhibition spaces. As such, acts of *seeing* are directly intertwined with *being seen*, and the negotiating of one's body in the presence of a constant watchful eye. Surveillance returns simultaneously doubled and deconstructed. In a photograph mounted onto an upturned light-table, we catch within the image of a low-lit gallery interior, one of the very cameras producing the constantly renewing content shown on screen; introducing a temporal split between past and present. This suggested voyeurism is in itself also a multidirectional gesture, as the meticulous probing of the museum and its supporting systems similarly opens an intimate window onto the quotidian life and workings of and within the building. Interventions will act to amplify existing infrastructures, or, as articulated by Juliane Rebentisch, in her eponymous book *Aesthetics of Installation Art*: "render the space of presentation itself and its laws thematic."[1] Appliances such as the repurposed lamps and fixtures moved from the conservation workshop, to be used as the main lighting of the show, see their original functions transposed into new registers. A hidden speaker playing back the sounds of the gushing and dripping water of the museum's climatization system—simply through rehearsing the sounds of its own machinery—will generate an undulating effect between the facsimile and the hyperreal.

A trio of steel security frames appropriating the formal language of minimalist sculpture, are assembled as if to suggest a set of film frames, or *vessels* for the depositing of imagined imagery. These devices—in the guise of their extended support—sit in a catalytic position against the contextual backdrop of the exhibition. The theft of two

of Munch's most famous artworks, the paintings *Scream* (1910) and *Madonna* (1894), which were stolen through a robbery at gunpoint in 2004, turned a light onto the substandard safety routines of the museum, and much fueled the processes of finding a new home for the collection and Munch's artistic legacy. The intricate relationships between maintenance, care and surveillance that are embedded in layers throughout the exhibition—testify to the sometimes-paradoxical nature of the *museum* as an apparatus—and the oftentimes-conflicting interests of the institution. Claims of openness and accessibility must always be scrutinized in relation to questions of security, as 'care' finds itself entangled with various iterations of capital, affective as well as economic, exposing how the growth of a globalized and speculative art market will always be a force that shapes the workings of cultural institutions in various ways.

By format the exhibition appears as if to hijack and subsequently undo the very narrative, or dramaturgical frameworks that it is simultaneously working to construct. As visitors are given the possibility to tour the adjacent backrooms and workspaces previously kept outside the public eye, it comes to act both as the stage and backdrop against which multiple sequences of unveiling are taking place. Decisively structured in a way where no object finds itself defined as an individual work, the position or location of 'work' is rendered productively vague territory. Rather than being assigned with titles, each element of the installation is signified by a designated reference number, hinting as much to their functional and organizational roles within the machinery of the institution, as to the spaces from which they were sourced.

Utilitarian in part, in the larger scheme of mapping out the remaining inventory left behind after the relocation of the museum, this method points to a core interest in Christensen's practice: that of approaching spaces and the objects within them as containers of overlapping affects and histories. Returning to the discursive pathways charted by Rebentisch, one rings especially true: namely the two-fold infliction of *installation* as not only referring to a genre of sculptural and spatial practice, but to a process which must be held as entirely integral to a work's production.[2] Again, we are faced by an understanding of 'work' which interrogates the position, or location of sculptural production. And, rather than taking on the position of the author, one can argue that Christensen has opted to act from the position of 'the editor', with an interest in how subtraction, rather than quantification will generate another kind of spatial grammar.

As if speaking from the first person, the title *I Was Moved* can be seen as directly addressing the current position of *Gamle Munch*, in light of the recent relocation. At the same time, it plays with sentiments frequently ascribed to Munch's artistic persona, being a conveyor of great emotion and psychological complexity, whose pictures are often gripping and turbulent—a sentiment by which he is described in the film footage covering the inauguration of the museum at Tøyen in 1963. Relatedly, the issue of how to best facilitate his life's work has been a longtime subject of public cultural debates for decades. The conditions surrounding the construction of the new museum premises, and the institution's alleged financial ties to enterprises in the fossil industry, were trailed by critique, as was the choice of relocating its premises away from the neighborhood of Tøyen, in favor of its current position by the city's waterfront. In what seems today (even if being a long ongoing process) as a reconciliation with the functions, role(s) and responsibilities of the museum—many institutions are working to rearticulate, or rebrand, also on the level of terminology. Notably, both the new Munch Museum, and the Nasjonalmuseum—another beacon amongst Oslo's museum enterprises—now seemingly shy away from the 'old' idea of *the museum*, the first opting to shorten its name and pose with the single denominator *Munch* and the second through simply adopting the abbreviated *NaM* as their logotype.

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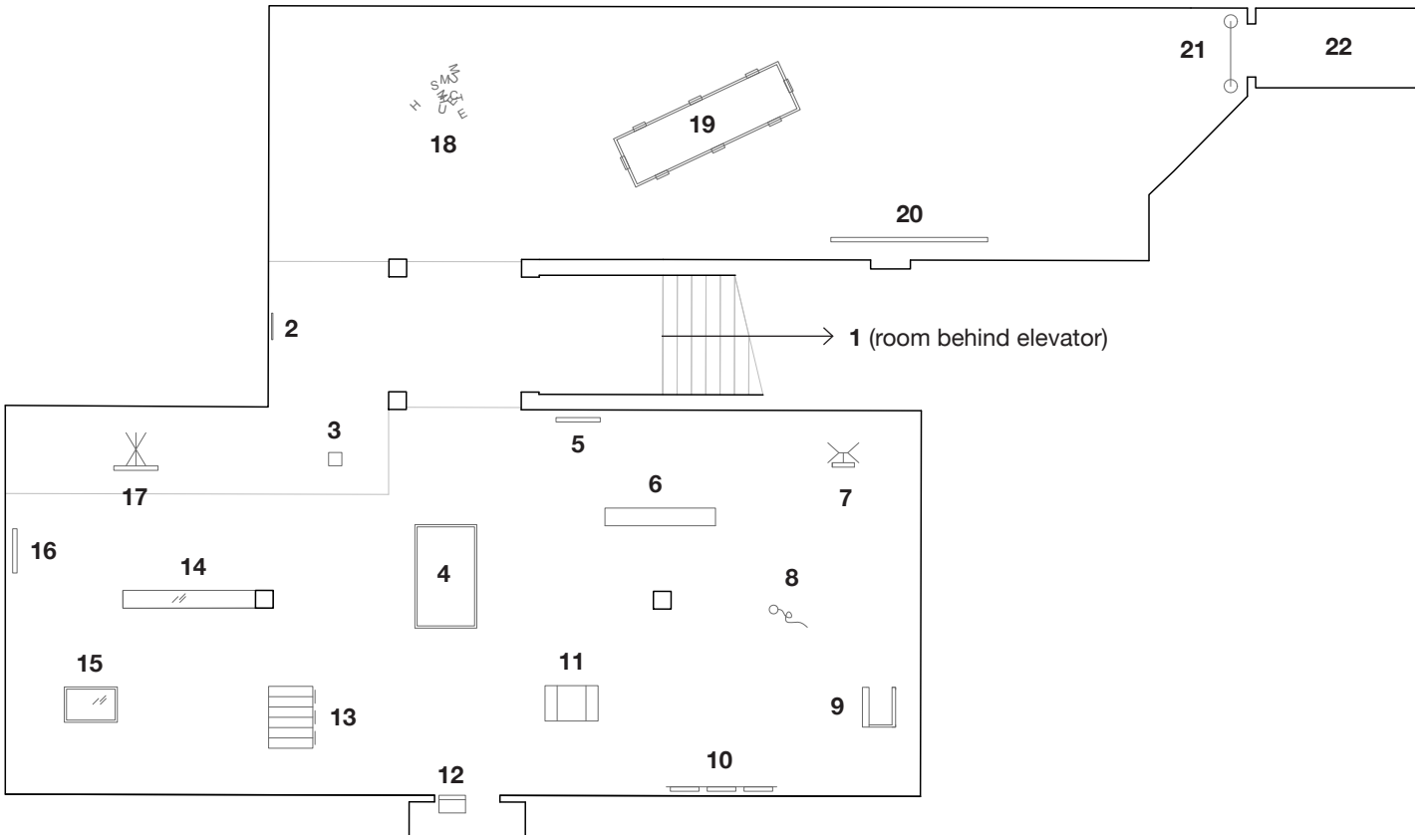
In *I Was Moved*, Christensen works to generate a rift through the otherwise opaque exterior of the museum, encouraging us to approach the idea of the institution as a porous entity. The exhibition shows that affects and effects of collecting and preserving, are bound to always extend beyond their material borders, and that an empty shell is perhaps the perfect architecture through which to record their persistent echoes.

Emil Sandström

Footnotes:

1. Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 256.
2. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, 251-266.

Plan installation:



Overview of objects and from which room they are sourced:

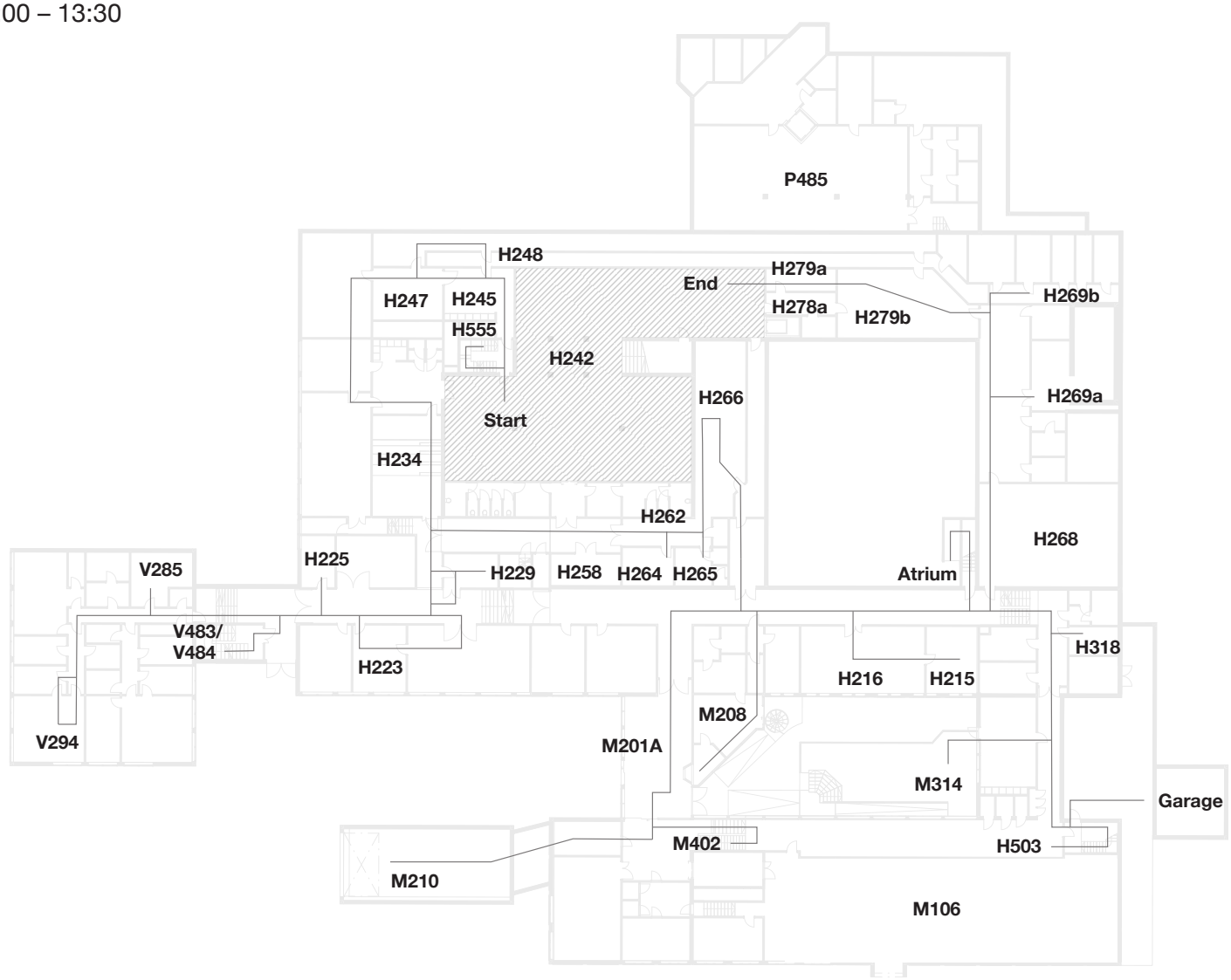
	Object	Room
1	Canvas for covering *The Sun* (1911)	H450: Lecture hall
2	Surveillance, monitor	H555/H531: DVR room/office
3	Crackled pidestal, measuring instrument	Unknown/H450: Garage/lecture hall
4	Bath table	H216: Paper conservation
5	Protection frame	M106: Painting storage
6	Shipping crate, 16mm film, dia projector	M402/H554: Photo studio/projection room
7	Conservation lamp	H215: Paper conservation
8	Surveillance camera	H555: DVR room
9	Light table, photo from gallery	H279b/H430: Technical room/exhibition
10	Security devices	V483: Workshop
11	Acrylic display cases	V483: Workshop
12	Conservation lamps	H223: Conservation
13	Archive shelf, photo frames	M402/H264: Photo studio/frame storage
14	Security glas from facade	V483: Workshop
15	Vacuum table, painting remnants	H215/H503: Conservation/library
16	Sink, feather brush	H216/H503: Paper conservation/library
17	Conservation lamp	H215: Conservation
18	Facade sign	P485: Pavillion
19	Exhibition lights	V483/V484: Workshop/storage
20	Gold frame, protection pillow	M106: Painting storage
21	Security barrier	P485: Pavillion
22	Climatization system, sound installation	H279a: Humidifier room

Join walks in the basement floor:

Saturday 15.04
12:00 – 13:30

Saturday 29.04
12:00 – 13:30

Saturday 06.05
12:00 – 13:30



H242	Exhibition space	M201a	Reception
H555	DVR/projection room	M402	Photo studio
H245	Artists' wardrobe	M210	Art delivery
H248	Ventilation shaft	M208	Security central
H247	Suction chamber	H216	Paper conservation
H234	Screening room	H215	Conservation lab
H229	X-ray room	M106	Painting storage
H223	Conservation	H503	Library
H225	Chemistry	M314	Kitchen
V483	Workshop	H318	Wardrobe
V285	Shower	H268	Boiler room
V294	Janitor's apartment	H269a	Maintainance
H258	Hydraulic elevator	H269b	Ventilation rooms
H262	Shelter	H279b	Mechanical room
H264	Frame storage	H278a	Cleaning room
H265	Art handling storage	H279a	Humidifier room
H266	Paper storage	P485	Pavillion

The exhibition is supported by:
Oslo kommune