

Exhibition title: The End

Artists: Freja Sofie Kirk

Duration: Jan 20 – Mar 31, 2024

Venue: Simian

Photography: GRAYSC

Images courtesy: the artist, Simian

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Exhibition text:

O

1. O

exclamation mark

untimely death

full stop

new line

Death

Exclamation mark¹

2. The medical actor plays the role of a man who does not know he is dying. He speaks of his recent chest pains in a room with a two-way mirror.

3. Medical actors have scripts. A detailed document outlines the character that they will play in a clinical scenario. This file describes not only their physical symptoms but also their fears and passions, the undercurrents of trauma that run below the surface, and the pieces of information that they are hesitant to share. Much of this information has a connection to their diagnosis, because it is connected to the patient's life.

4. 'No trauma has discrete edges.'²

5. The script of the medical actor is a work of fiction. A life given narrative shape, which leads to this critical moment in the doctor's office.

6. 'Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so.'³

7. O

8. Doctors do not have scripts, they have training. Medical actors are employed mostly in training and examination scenarios for doctors and medical students.

9. The space seems familiar. Rooms, corridors, windows, equipment, mobile furniture, wipe clean surfaces. Framed photographs, flowers.

10. In Leslie Jamison's *The Empathy Exams*, the writer describes her own experiences as a medical actor. While using a standard checklist to score the doctors on their performances in examinations, she becomes preoccupied by Checklist item 31: "Voiced empathy for my situation/problem."⁴

11. And yet, empathy might be more properly located in a doctor's questions: 'Empathy isn't just listening, it's asking the questions whose answers need to be listened to. Empathy requires inquiry as much as imagination. Empathy requires knowing you know nothing. Empathy means acknowledging a horizon of context that extends perpetually beyond what you can see.'⁵

12. On the brink of a terminal diagnosis, an empathetic doctor must navigate an ontological region beyond the world that they know. The home of the dying, the limbo between two rooms.

13. A doctor tells me about his medical school training for delivering bad news to patients. He describes protocols such as a verbal 'warning shot,' that must be given to flag that the outcome is not a happy one. 'Do you know what you have to say after you have given the bad news?' he asks me.

14. I don't.

15. 'Nothing. The doctor remains silent until the patient responds.'

16. O

17. The scene moves into something unrehearsed. An infinite space opens in the silence.

18. O

19. After her own terminal diagnosis, the philosopher Gillian Rose wrote: 'When something untoward happens, some trauma or damage, whether inflicted by the commissions or omissions of others, or some cosmic force, one makes the initially unwelcome event one's own inner occupation... In ill-health as in unhappy love, this is the hardest work: it requires the taking in before letting be.'

20. O

Text by Laura McLean-Ferris

¹ Oswald's lines in William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act IV, Scene VI, as written on the first page of Gillian Rose's lecture "O! Untimely Death./ Death!," delivered at University of Exeter, December 1994.

² Leslie Jamison, "The Empathy Exams," *The Believer*, February 1st, 2014, Issue One Hundred Five at www.thebeliever.net/the-empathy-exams

³ Henry James, *Literary Criticism Vol 2: French Writers, Other European Writers, Prefaces to the New York Edition*, ed. Leon Edel. (New York: Library of America, 1984). p. 1075.

⁴ Jamison, *ibid.*

⁵ Gillian Rose, *Love's Work* (New York, NYRB Classics, 2011). p. 98.

Biography:

Freja Sofie Kirk (1990, Copenhagen) lives and works in Copenhagen. Recent exhibitions include 5533, Istanbul; Copenhagen Contemporary, Copenhagen; Bianca D'Alessandro, Copenhagen; Annual Reportt, Copenhagen; Kunstforeningen GL STRAND, Copenhagen; ALT_CPH 18, Fabrikken for Kunst og Design, Copenhagen; Kunstverein Wiesen, Frankfurt. Her films have been screened at CPH:DOX, Oberhausen International Shortfilm Festival, Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin, Uppsala International Shortfilm Festival among others. Freja Sofie Kirk will graduate from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts – Schools of Visual Arts in 2024.

Photos are named in numerical order according to list below:

1. *The End*, 2024

HD video with sound, 08:56 min. Studio flash, mirror film.

2. *The End*, 2024

HD video with sound, 08:56 min. Studio flash, mirror film.

3. *The End*, 2024

HD video with sound, 08:56 min. Studio flash, mirror film.

4. *The End*, 2024

HD video with sound, 08:56 min. Studio flash, mirror film.

5. *The End*, 2024

HD video with sound, 08:56 min. Studio flash, mirror film.

6. *The End*, 2024

HD video with sound, 08:56 min. Studio flash, mirror film.