

# Abuse is the Beauty of the Working Class

Bjarne Melgaard,  
in collaboration with  
Bjørn Kristian Hilberg  
(Malbrum) VI, VII, Oslo  
25.10. – 15.12.2024

VI, VII is delighted to present an experimental, collaborative exhibition by Norwegian artist Bjarne Melgaard (b.1967) and Bjørn Kristian Hilberg (b.1984), the founder and creative mind behind Malbrum fragrances.

Known for its ability to unsettle expectations and norms through a chaotic and hypervisual, almost unceasing proliferation of drawings, images, objects and texts, Melgaard's wide-ranging practice extends across the mediums of drawing, painting, installation, sculpture, video, fashion and the production of literature, and is considered among the most widely exhibited by Norwegian artists of his generation.

Mentored by Rosendo Mateu following a lifelong interest in scent, Bjørn Kristian Hilberg founded the fragrance company Malbrum in 2010 and has lent technical knowledge and support to Melgaard's own interests, improvising a scent laboratory in the artist's studio from January-October 2024.

For Abuse is the Beauty of the Working Class, the laboratory has been relocated to VI, VII where three fragrances—the result of their ongoing experimentation—are presented alongside several new sculptures and video work.

With the fragrance 'Stabfrenzy Forever' Melgaard and Hilberg worked towards a composition that reveals the darker sides of art. The scent 'Joey,' an homage to gay porn

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actor Joey Stefano (1968-1994), is a formula marked by softness, while a third fragrance, 'Speedball' — can be best described as uplifting.

Percolating in glass canisters, where it undergoes a maseration process—a fourth fragrance, Crispo, is in development during the course of the show.

A fifth fragrance randomly and unintentionally arrived at envelops the space, from bottles of scented oils broken on the floor.

In addition to fragrances the duo collaborated on a series of stone and marble sculptures, which take the form of tables of varying heights.

In the exhibition, many of these elements—both the table sculptures, and two-dimensional works feature drawings and/or text etched into the surface of the stone.

One such table, engraved with the words 'BECAUSE I'M WORTH IT' in centuries-old Italian marble, holds test bottles—offering structural support to fragile essences, as well as a sense of permanence and weight against scent's fleeting nature.

Alternately calling to mind Viking runes, gravestones and the tablets of many ancient cultures inscribed with poetry and verse, these tables become a support for the fragrances, as well as canvases for painting of another kind.

Amidst the crushed perfume bottles and facial creams are various elements that help to illustrate the artist's life: an artist book,<sup>1</sup> key exhibition catalogue,<sup>2</sup> a magazine opened to a review of Melgaard's 2013 show with Gavin Brown<sup>3</sup> and more recent publications that Melgaard has contributed to, such as the

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1 Melgaard, Bjarne. 'Pain Poems and other drawings,' published by Bohman-Knäpper, Stockholm, 2017.

2 Black Low, published on the occasion of a 2002 exhibition at MARTa Herford Museum, Germany. Edited by Ann Demester with contributions by Bjarne Melgaard and Jan Hoet.

3 Saltz, Jerry. Bjarne Melgaard's "Ignorant Transparencies," New York Magazine, October 14, 2013.

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Opioid Crisis Lookbook,<sup>4</sup> which the initiators market as the first narco-capitalist fueled lifestyle magazine.

For the artist, every item holds meaning.

A selection of stuffed animals used in the psychotherapy for children with schizophrenia are dotted throughout the show where they appear individually, and in herds.

On a lonely pink pedestal a framed photograph of Melgaard's father rests on one such animal, above the words 'Debt' and 'Court whore' scrawled by the artist repeatedly and obsessively in thick black marker, a reflection perhaps, on how the memory of individuals from our past support us in the present moment.

The stones in this exhibition were formed millions of years ago. Through the use of these inanimate materials and the perfume in the show, which is organic and fleeting, the artist combines material references to timelessness and eternity with more palpable bygone personal histories and lived experiences that explore the associations of perfume and marble as expressions of smell and death.

Recently, Melgaard explored bottling the unique scent of a French bulldog mixed with Chinese Crested Dog.<sup>5</sup> With this show he was interested in bottling the scent of an individual: the expression of personality and nature.

Delving further into a material exploration of how the historical proper crosses with personal histories — a new video work, also collaborative, montages film clips from different eras and sources,<sup>6</sup> as a promotional video for the perfumes. After a 30 second long opening of a calm sea view, the waters are disrupted by a detonation cloud. The footage, from the Atomic Testing Channel, introduces The End, the name of Hilberg and

4 Edited by Dustin Cauchi, Pierre Alexandre Mateos, Charles Tessyou and Dasha Zaharova, Opioid Crisis Lookbook, Issue 1, September 2020

5 The resulting fragrance, 'I am your Dog,' was launched at Dover Street Market in Paris in October, 2024, in collaboration with Reference Studios, Berlin.

6 Sources include John Carpenter, 'They Live,' Ron Fricke, 'Samsara,' and Derek Jarman and Paul Humfress, 'Sebastiane.'

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Melgaard's perfume brand. The beginning of the film is thus the End. An animated figure drawn by the artist falls from the sky... clothes scattered. When viewed in reverse, the following scenes which are filled with drugs, sex, mirth, and libidinal pleasures represented through film clips and racy scenes excerpted from advertisements and porn, together with brief insertions of Melgaard's own drawings, culminating in a transition between footage backed by 1970s Norwegian disco<sup>7</sup> and British psychedelic pop,<sup>8</sup> the latter timeframes marked by images of war, tanks, military exercises, and the failed takeoff of the Challenger explosion in 1986, a failure for which the news presenter says there are "no explanations, just sorrow at the tragedy."

When viewed in reverse, scent, and breath are presented as the last of the best time.

Dance clips mix with heaty porn and documentary footage of a penguin breaking from the pack to walk across a great expanse of ice and snow. The transition from a youthful good time to more sobering footage of the Challenger explosion, reminds us of the deep pleasures of life coming up against the present reality of uncertain futures – changing states, disappearing landscapes, environmental ruin and war.

Again, each element in the dense and highly chaotic moving image work is a vessel for meaning and reflection on our connection to, and collaboration with others, across generations and time:<sup>9</sup> Even the final frame of the video is a portrait of Stefano, who before his tragic and untimely death at the age of 26, was a close personal friend of the artist. Eyes closed, the film frame pictures a quiet moment of reflection, or perhaps gratification, a buildup and then a breakdown of life's highs and lows.

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7 Anita Skorgan, 'Oliver,' 1979

8 The Zombies, 'Time of the Season,' 1968

9 For this exhibition, Melgaard also collaborated with Josie Rose Hilberg, Bjørn Kristian Hilberg's 9 year old daughter, who was in the studio while both artists worked on the scents. Melgaard received Hilberg's permission to intervene over the paintings that she made, with text. The younger Hilberg agreed, and the entire back wall holds their joint work.

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## Artist Biographies

Bjarne Melgaard was born in Sydney, Australia to Norwegian parents in 1967 and after several failed attempts to get in attended the Academy of Fine Arts, Oslo; the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam and the Jan Van Eyck Academy in Maastricht. In 2017, after several decades living abroad, the artist relocated to Norway and currently resides in Oslo.

Through prolific output which encompasses drawing, painting, sculpture and large-scale installations Melgaard pushes the limits of social acceptance and forges a space where subcultures and parallel worlds can coexist. A frequent curator and collaborator, Melgaard has written 14 novels, produced a fashion line and a number of films.

His first solo exhibition outside of Norway was organized by legendary Belgian curator Jan Hoet. Since then, his work has been exhibited extensively in Europe and the United States. Solo presentations of his work have taken place at Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London; de Appel arts centre, Amsterdam; Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo; Bergen Kunstmuseum, Norway; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; MARTa Herford, Hannover; Red Bull Arts New York; Julia Stoschek Foundation, Berlin and commercial galleries including Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne; Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin; Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London; Greene Naftali Gallery, New York and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York.

In 2011, Bjarne Melgaard represented Norway at the 54th Venice Biennial. His work has also been included in the 2014 Whitney Biennial, the 5th Lyon Biennale, 12th Lyon Biennale and group exhibitions at Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; Kunstmuseum Bonn; S.M.A.K., Gent; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Palais de Tokyo, Paris and White Columns, New York.

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Melgaard's work is in the collections of major museums such as MoMA, New York; MOCA, Los Angeles; the Stedelijk Museum; Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain in Strasbourg, the Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo and Moderna Museum in Stockholm.

Born in Norway in 1984, Bjørn Kristian Hilberg is an emerging artist and olfactory expert, exhibiting for the first time in 'Abuse is the Beauty of the Working Class.'

As the founder of Malbrum, an artisanal fragrance brand established in 2014, Hilberg draws on both technical precision and his creative experience developing perfumes of exceptionally high quality.

With a background in areas as diverse as engineering, physics, technical drawing and computer-aided design, his interest in scent was enriched and enhanced through a mentorship with Rosendo Mateu from 2017 to 2022, a period during which he refined his expertise in perfumery.

Together with Melgaard, in 'Abuse is the Beauty of the Working Class' he combines marble sculptures with intricate fragrances, bridging technical expertise with artistic experimentation in an immersive, multi-sensory exploration that offers a distinctive approach to the interplay of scent, texture, and form.

### THANK YOU

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