

This September, the National Gallery of Denmark (SMK) opens a major exhibition by Scandinavian artist duo, Elmgreen & Dragset. The exhibition is the second in the series, *Biography*, which started in February at Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo.

*Biography* takes over the entire ground floor of the museum, which has been remodelled for the exhibition, altering the way visitors and staff interact with the space. It features over 50 works from the artists' career of almost 20 years, with some of their best known works shown alongside new site-specific commissions including *Welcome* (2014), a full scale Airstream caravan crushed by a giant 'Welcome to Las Vegas' sign. Also on display for the first time is a smaller bronze sculpture depicting a Rolex watch, *The Award* (2014), which has been re-cast using the bronze from the artists' own Eckersberg Medal, one of the highest Danish cultural honours awarded by the Queen.

*The One and the Many* (2010), a 12 metre tall social housing block where visitors can look into the homes of its fictional tenants, sits in the main foyer, juxtaposed against the grand architecture of the museum. From there a labyrinthine corridor system takes visitors onto a Kafkaesque journey through a series of institutional spaces such as the waiting room of a job centre, a homeless shelter, a public restroom and a morgue. Using humour, poetry, and spectacular visual devices, Elmgreen & Dragset create universes in which even familiar, mundane institutional spaces and banal domestic settings suddenly appear as magical. Through the artists' alterations and displacements of ordinary designs, new realities start to unfold. Often the artists' merge the seemingly real with the fantastical in their extensive installations, as evinced in *The Collectors*, their lauded contribution to the Venice Biennale in 2009, their critically acclaimed exhibition, *The Welfare Show* at the Serpentine Gallery, London in 2006 and most recently their large scale installation *Tomorrow* at London's Victoria & Albert Museum in Autumn 2013.

"The exhibition takes shape as a filmic scenography where visitors will actively participate as protagonists, not just as passive spectators. When we do an exhibition such as this, we consider the exhibition format an artwork in itself" say Elmgreen & Dragset.

In spite of its title, the exhibition can by no means be regarded as an autobiographical statement. It is rather a personal investigation into the very conditions that constitute an identity in today's celebrity driven culture. What the term "biographical" means in the context of social media and how self-staged identities seem to have dissolved the classic notion of community, class belonging and social roles, will all be explored in the exhibition.

Elmgreen & Dragset show us the urgency of daring to stand out from the crowd, and at the same

time they make us painstakingly aware that we have to construct our identities, live out our desires and control our fears within the rigid systems of society. Although we remain merely “one of many”, the exhibition portrays humanity’s inherent will to stubbornly dream and create one’s own narratives in the midst of conformity.

The newly appointed Director of the SMK, Mikkel Bogh, says “Elmgreen & Dragset’s exhibition Biography takes an open, unprejudiced approach to the question of life as it is lived today, suspended between system and freedom, between a culture of consensus and the pressure to act individually. These are questions that we all have to relate to. It is rare to see visitors accorded such a major role – perhaps even that of a main protagonist – as they are in Elmgreen & Dragset’s exhibition, which prompts them to enter a theatre of dreams and imagination.”

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