

SIMIAN





Parmigianino, *Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror*, 1524
Oil on convex panel, ø 24,4 cm.

Did you hear the one about the MRI machine that went to prison? It's a scary thought. The whirring, clanking magnetic resonance imager can render any ferromagnetic material a lethal projectile, and is typically housed in a metal-free restricted area. But in the carceral system, the MRI attracts the graveyard comedy of contraband silverware and steel cages. Its gentle, donut-like address to the patient on behalf of modern medicine is stripped of its casing to reveal its churning guts.

Rasmus Røhling sends me a video of an MRI "quench," a process whether by emergency or design you power down the machine's fearsome electromagnet and out hisses a hot white cloud of helium, a cottony exhalation like a death rattle or the curse rushing out of a sarcophagus. The MRI machine, a decommissioned miracle, surrenders its magic. Like the containment unit in *Ghostbusters*, it unleashes a torrent of bad energy, the illness the machine has seen and absorbed in its role in a chain of procedure, diagnosis, and treatment. And, like the *Ghostbusters* headquarters, the hospital uses cartoons as its ambassadors: the friendly undead faces of corporatized medicine.

For Røhling, the MRI machine is a nexus of symbolism. This impressive piece of medical equipment is the progeny of the panopticon. The robot sees, with scientific fealty—but in an anti-retinal, anti-surface way. The caterwauling void of the MRI actually realigns the protons of a body's atoms, then uses pulses of radio waves to produce images of differing tissues. It takes impressions of physical states, unlike the less clinical emotional verve of the Van Gogh painting hanging in the doctor's office. It turns out that the MRI machine wasn't the prisoner, but the guard, performing cavity searches and clanging gates shut, keeping a spinning eye on things.

Likewise, at least in the mythology, artists are said to *see something others don't*. They can penetrate surface and access submerged truth, malignant or benign. Often through intuitive shifts in context, their associative,

artistic logic is supposed to bring out the inner nature of their subject, rescuing hidden assumptions and beliefs. And the artist can also devise surfaces, reverse-engineering the insights of their research into formats pictorial or sculptural or conceptual that convey their complex animus at a glance. The figurative leaps in Røhling's work travel through appearance to the coded interior, where a Lee Bontecou wall sculpture resembles an MRI machine not only formally, but spiritually: both revolve around the abyss.

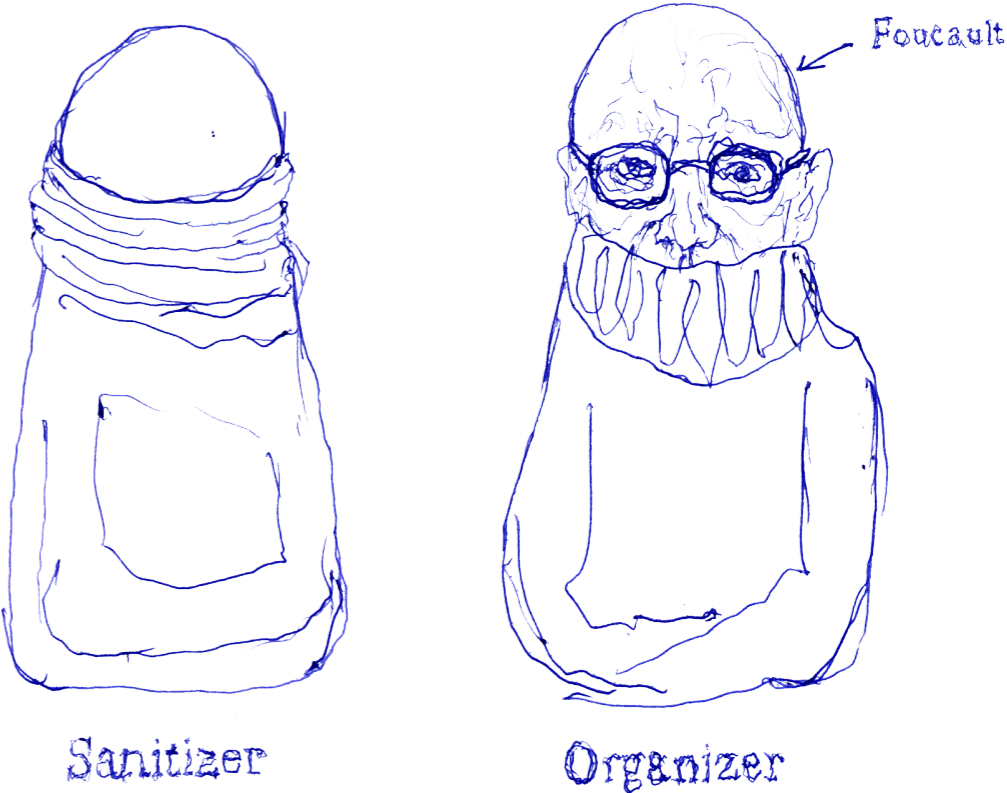
In fact, the MRI machine was an artist. It only took the job at the jail to gather material for a new project about the biopolitics of the carceral system and congruent humanist institutions of control like hospitals and museums. In its charges, the machinery saw links to post-structuralist theory, like the writing of Foucault, and by extension the medicalization of philosophy and art and human creativity into a formalized myth of the clairvoyant artist.

For a few hundred years, science has made the unthinkable possible, and has required the unthinkable—transgressions like grave-robbing and dissection—a brutal materialist view of bodies. Art is ostensibly less rigorous than science, almost by definition, but both disciplines demonstrate the limits of how fully we can demystify the world. Foucault's thinking has a squishy poetry to it, not only exposing the currents of power but reconstituting a different steamy mystique around analysis itself. The incidental beauty of anatomical art or the associative interpretation of medical scans leave some mystery to humanness. The atomic truth of art remains elusive, an enterprise of analysis without cure, propping up its necessity. A runaway reaction, an accidental quench—the cascade of artistic logic resembles paranoia and self-satisfaction. Røhling probes the constitution of the petulant and *melancholic* artist who exhibits their spleen. He models the folding-over and self-sabotaging feedback loops of artistic idiosyncrasy and tries to image both the off-stage agony of process and the underwhelming moment of display. These displacements also reprise the innate myths of artmaking—research,

production, exhibition—analogous to the cycle of research, diagnosis, and treatment by which modern medicine staves off death.

Five hundred years ago we might have bled artists or made them saints, now we give them shows. Yet while we've moved beyond a literal understanding of "the humors," an alchemic, pseudo-medical layer persists in our conception of the artistic process. In Røhling's schema, the figure of the barber-surgeon lives at the crux of superstition and science. A physician practiced internal medicine, while a barber could style your hair or drain your blood or amputate your arm. Now, the artist-seer lances the surface of familiar structures and symbols to release the pressurized secretions of meaning. Yet contemporary artists train to approach this hot mess clinically. They operate always on themselves. The MRI machine's penetrating exhibition was such a success, actually, that it won the *Turn-er Prize*.

Travis Diehl

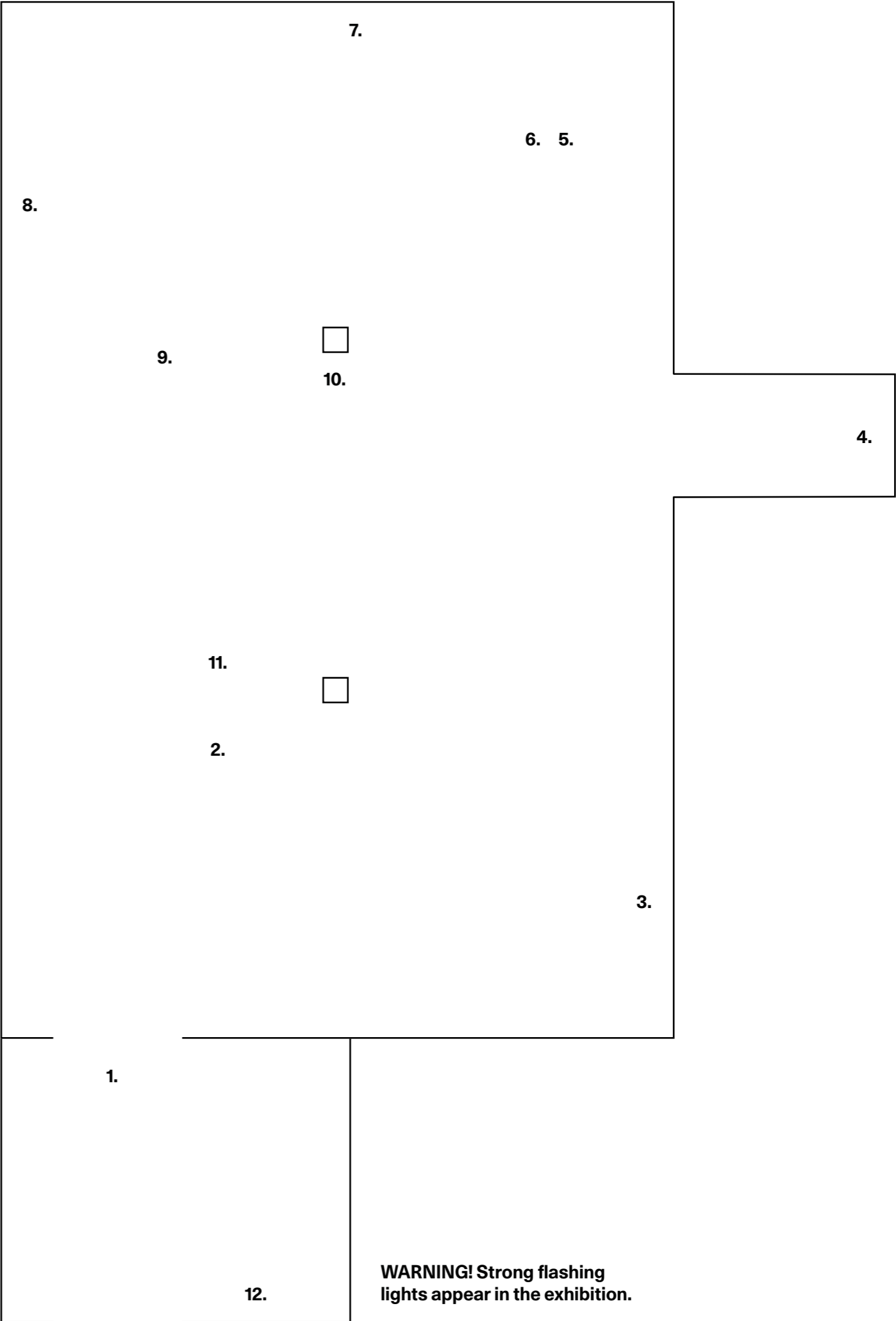


Rasmus Røhling, *Sanitizers*, 2024
Ball point pen on paper, 29,7 × 21 cm.

List of works

Exhibition overview

- 1. **“Schneefal”, 2025**
Weight blanket with roller balls from roll-on deodorants, 200 × 140 cm.
Courtesy of Kugledynehjælpen.dk.
- 2. **Open Label Placebos, 2025**
Pen and marker on paper, 22 × 28 cm.
- 3. **Untitled (Fuzzy), 2023**
Getty Center canvas tote bags, welded steel, steel wire, Warhammer plastic sprues, CD, tape, 101 × 101 × 94 cm.
- 4. **Animated Health II (Let Down), 2023**
Beocenter 2300, surgical marker pen on CD, sensor, strobe-light, dimensions variable.
- DO NOT TOUCH! To activate waive your hand in front of glass doors.**
- 5. **“Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror” (Parmigianino/Sanex), 2025**
Ball point pen on deodorant, 12 × 4,5 cm, ø 3,5 cm.
- 6. **“Self-portrait, Study of a Hand” (Dürer/Palmolive), 2025**
Ball point pen on deodorant, 12 × 4,5 cm, ø 3,5 cm.
- 7. **Roll-ons, 2024**
Ball point pen on paper. Nine drawings, 29,7 × 21 cm each.
- 8. **“Circumcision January”, 2025**
Cardboard, acrylic paint, glue, found objects, 12 × 23 cm.
- 9. **Balm Sequence, 2025**
Antiperspirant on Buddha Boards. Three panels, 40 × 30 cm each.
- 10. **Animated Health III (Endless Column), 2025**
Revolving, illuminated barber pole, 96 × 23 × 34 cm.
- 11. **Eremit im Baum, 2025**
Video with audio, 20 min.
- 12. **Animated Health I, 2023**
Acrylic paint on MDF, 104 × 30 cm.



WARNING! Strong flashing lights appear in the exhibition.

Simian is supported by:

By & Havn
Realdania's campaign Underværker
Lauridsen Skilte
Kvadrat
Fredericia Furniture

The 2025 program is supported by:

Aage og Johanne Louis-Hansen Foundation
The Obel Family Foundation
Augustinus Foundation
Danish Arts Foundation
New Carlsberg Foundation
City of Copenhagen

Open Label Placebos is supported by:

Danish Arts Foundation
Knud Højgaards Foundation
Grosserer L.F. Foundation
Danish Art Workshops
Art Hub Copenhagen
Kugledynehjælpen
Leuchtturm 1917
Rådet for Visuel Kunst

Works courtesy of:

The artist
CCC Gallery

The artist would like to thank:

Travis Diehl
Anders Toft Pedersen
Simon Rasmussen
Art Hub Copenhagen
Kugledynehjælpen
Michala Paludan
Vito
Lutz

Rasmus Røhling has exhibited at Soldes (US), C.C.C. Gallery (DK), Human Resources (US), Artist Space (US), Art Hub Copenhagen (DK), Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel (CH), Primer (DK), Sismografo (PT), SMK (DK), SixtyEight Art Institute (DK), Inter Arts Center (SE), Den Frie Udstillingsbygning (DK), among others. Røhling is educated from the Jutland Art Academy, Aarhus in 2008 and from the California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles, where he received his MFA in 2010.

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**Opening hours during exhibitions:
Friday, Saturday, Sunday 12-17
or by appointment**