SOCIAL DEMOCRACY REVISITED

curated by
Jonas Ekeberg

March 16 - April 16, 2005

Cathrine Evelid (NO)
Matias Fälldbakken (NO)
Katja Hest (NO)
Ulf Lundin (SE)
Jakob Kolding (DK/DE)
Ketil Nergaard (NO)
Aleksandra Mir (SE/US)

Curator talk: Saturday, March 19, 3 pm

Jonas Ekeberg is Director of Preus Museum in Horten, Norway, and was selected by Ute Meta Bauer, Curator, Germany, for apexart’s International Program.

apexart
291 church street new york, ny 10013
1-212-431-5270 1-646-827-2467
info@apexart.org www.apexart.org

apexart is a 501(c)(3), non-profit, tax-exempt organization and does not engage in sales or sales related activities. apexart is a registered trademark.

apexart’s exhibitions and public programs are supported in part by The Kettering Family Foundation, The Peter Norton Family Foundation, Art in Group, Inc., and with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the Department of Mayor’s Office for the Arts through the Fund for Creative Communities, administered by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. This exhibition received support from the Office for Contemporary Art Norway.

This brochure was supported in part by The Elisabeth Firestone Graham Foundation.

apexart ©2005


Social democracy has given Scandinavian countries the world’s highest living standard. The Nordic system is nevertheless full of paradoxes, which over the last decade have offered artists a large reservoir of material for investigation: What do we do when the system turns from treating us all equally to making us all equal? And, what do we do with our longing for the metaphysical, for risk, for transgression, in a super-rational system designed to reduce the possibility for all this?

The economic crisis of the 1970s marked the end of hegemonic social democracy in Europe. But social democracy as a more general term prevails as a justifiable description, at least if you look at the Nordic countries. More and more often, however, social democracy is talked of in terms of a crisis. Some even talk of the death of social democracy, forgetting perhaps that three dominant European countries – Sweden, Germany and England – are run by social democratic labor governments.

The fact, however, that remains the homogenous and prosperous European democracies of the post-war era have changed radically. Globalization and multiculturalism are quoted as two main factors in this development, but also the inner pressure against the strongly regulated, semi-socialist tendencies of the 50’s and 60’s is part of the process which started the downturn.

The exhibition Social Democracy Revisited proposes that the Nordic discourses on the subject may have a value in the current international political climate. At the same time, the exhibition highlights artworks that seem to contest this kind of purposefulness. Ultimately then, the exhibition intervenes into the realm between art and politics with the same ambivalence which is so prevalent in the Nordic system.

Matias Fälldbakken is perhaps most known for two novels written by his alter ego, Aba Rasul, under the heading “Scandinavian Misanthropy.” His training, however, is as a visual artist, and he has been showing his video work at apexart and other venues for the past decade.
extensively in Europe, both together with his sometime partner Gerdar Eide Einarsen and by himself. The subjects of Faldbakkens books and his art are closely related. He investigates the gap between the comfort-
able middle class and the desire or necessity to trans-
gress the limits imposed by the system. In the video
installation Getaway, Faldbakken is using a visual
ready-made, an amateur video showing a subjective
view from the seat of the Swedish motorcyclist-
underground-cult-star “Ghost Rider.” The motorcycle
is speeding at 200 mph and upwards, thus tripling
the speed limit in a Russian roulette-style activity that is
becoming popular among motorcyclists also outside of
Scandinavia. The police can never catch them, the only
possible outcomes are success — which means complet-
ing the video — or disastrous failure.

Two of Katja Hæst’s early works carry the same title as
Eivind Gøffman’s 1959 social psychology classic, 
Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. This phrase still
sums up the character of her work, but in the photo-
graphic series Manenlyst Public School, the spaces
are — atypically — deprived of all human activity. The
school is empty, leaving the hallway, the gymnasium,
the wardrobe, the staircase, etc., open for the artist’s
stringent investigation. Hæst photographs the place in
a classic manner, almost as if the school was new and she
was doing the job for the architect who had just com-
pleted the building. The images describe the school as a
model, underlining the efforts made at making light flood through the building, a
typical feature of rationalist, social democratic architec-
ture. On a closer look, Hæst’s images also reveal the wear
and tear of a fifty year old building, but the work does
not seem to dwell on this sentimental level. The images
remain analytical, addressing the issue of institutionalized
childhood without prejudice or disregard.

Ulf Lundin has been deeply concerned with the legacy
of the Swedish Folkhemmet, the equality-based Swedish
socialism so heavily promoted by the Social Democrats
during the fifty decades after the Second World War.
In several photographic works and video pieces, Lundin
has investigated the patterns of Swedish social life.
Using the camera in the manner of a paparazzo, he has
confronted his fellow countrymen with their own
behavior, making the model country look remarkably
like Orwell’s 1984. In the video Work in Progress,
Lundin turns the camera on himself but sticks to the
subject of the everyday. He uses the digital technology
of morphing to create a continuous representation of
his own face as it changes over the years. Ongoing
since 1999, the project now consists of nearly a thou-
sand unique images constituting a 25 minute video of
the artist’s aging face.

Aleksandra Mir works with subjects as diverse as an
expedition to the Antarctic, a project under the title
Keep Abortion Legal and the installation of a
Hollywood-type walk of fame with names of newborn
children to list only the three most recent works pub-
lished on her extensive website. Mir approaches all these
subjects with a kind of open and process-oriented atti-
tude, using the opportunities offered by relational art
practice as a kaleidoscope or a magnifying glass through
which she rediscovers the world each time she looks at it. In Social
Democracy Revisited, Mir presents a reprint of the publication 
Danes in The Sun, which was originally made as part of the Danish art bien-
nial Socle du Monde in 2004. Mir collaborated with a communications
bureau to create a 32 page publication with images culled from vari-
ous local sources (the

Katja Hæst, Manenlyst Public School, 2000
8 photographs, 16x16 in. each

Jonas Ekberg © 2005

Ketil Nergaard. Titled Arse, 2000–05
Installation and live performance, various dimensions

Ketil Nergaard’s Titled Arse was first shown at the
exhibition Perforator which the artist himself curated in
2000. This exhibition consisted predominantly of media
art, but the curator’s contribution was different. He lived
in the space for the duration of the exhibition dressed up
as a fat, Kafkaesque character in striped pajamas, having
conversations with the audience and playing castrato
songs on a CD player at his platform bed. This imperson-
ation of otherness worked as a filter through which each
member of the audience was introduced to the otherness
of the art space. Transferring this performance from a
wooden barn in Oslo to a gallery space in New York City
radically changes its meaning. But the simplicity of the
gesture remains, and Nergaard’s figure can very well be
seen as the protagonist of this exhibition, marking the
connection between the social history at issue and the
real-time of the viewer in New York City.