

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY REVISITED

curated by
Jonas Ekeberg

March 16 - April 16, 2005

Cathrine Evelid (NO)
Matias Faldbakken (NO)
Katja Høst (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.

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apexart's exhibitions and public programs are supported in part by The Kettering Family Foundation, The Peter Norton Family Foundation, Altria Group, Inc., and with public funds from the New York Department of Cultural Affairs, and the New York State Council on 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.

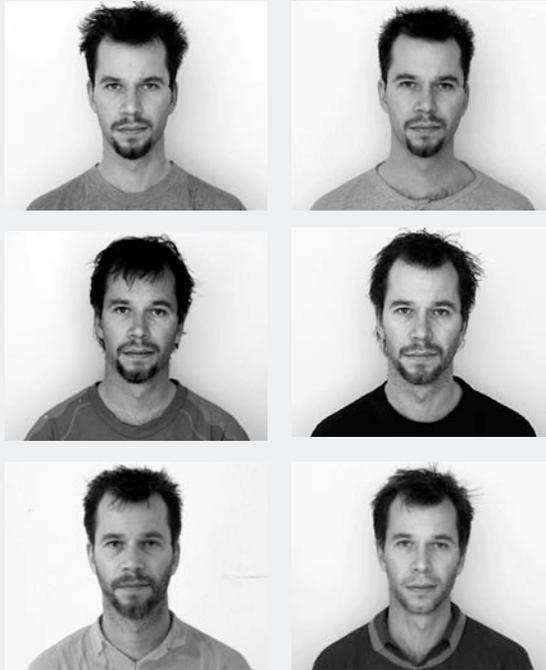
This brochure was supported in part by The Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation.

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ISBN: 1-933347-01-5

Cover image: Ulf Lundin, *Work in Progress*, 1999-2005
DVD Video, 25 min. loop

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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, remains that 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 50s and 60s 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 Faldbakken, *Getaway*, 2003
DVD Video, 5:53 min. loop

Cathrine Evelid, *17 May*, 1995/2005
Photograph, 24x18 in.

Cathrine Evelid's work is marked by a struggling relationship to the genre of relational aesthetics. In 2004, on the island of Lofoten just off the coast of Norway, Evelid and the London-based DJ Sophie Brown staged a full-scale rave party during a storm, for an audience of – none. Mocking the whole idea of participatory art practice, Evelid also made a parody of the idea of sisterhood, a subject prevalent in almost all her work. The performance *17 May*, originally executed in 1995, was one of Evelid's first works along this line. The Norwegian leaving-college-celebration consists of a month of heavy drinking and often violently wild partying, a ritual which is largely accepted as a last youthful excess before adulthood. For her piece, Evelid hired two graduating college girls and staged their rite of passage as a failure, symbolically depriving the two girls of their "rightful" way of finishing school, thereby capturing them in the drama of female adolescence.



Matias Faldbakken is perhaps most known for two novels written by his alter ego, Abo Rasul, under the heading "Scandinavian Misanthropy." His training, however, is as a visual artist, and he has been showing



extensively in Europe, both together with his sometime partner Gardar Eide Einarsson and by himself. The subjects of Faldbakken's books and his art are closely related. He investigates the gap between the comfortable middle class and the desire or necessity to transcend 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-come-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 completing the video – or disastrous failure.

Two of Katja Høst's early works carry the same title as Erving Goffman's 1959 social psychology classic, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. This phrase still sums up the character of her work, but in the photographic series *Marienlyst 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. Høst 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 completed the building. The images describe the school as a model, underlining the efforts made at making light flood through the building, a



Katja Høst, *Marienlyst Public School*, 2000
8 photographs, 16x16 in. each

typical feature of rationalist, social democratic architecture. On a closer look, Høst'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.



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Jakob Kolding, *Untitled (Class Structure)*, 2000
Two offset posters 33x24 in. each

Jakob Kolding's use of traditional collage techniques has given him a do-it-yourself kind of edge, similar to the style of the sub-, pop- and fan-cultures he frequently quotes. Kolding's work takes its strength from two opposing experiences. Firstly, it relates to his childhood upbringing in the totally planned new town of Albertslund outside of Copenhagen. Secondly, Kolding relates to a contemporary, international urban experience marked by a heterogeneous environment developing as a by-product of capitalist realities. One of the interesting elements in Kolding's work is his constant interest in the idea of class and class structure. This almost Marxist approach to society has been anathema even among political artists during the 90s, but has returned lately in the work of the emerging 2000-generation of activist artists in Europe. Kolding appears to be a connecting figure between the two generations, never leaving his retro/low budget style, but keeping it very fresh, just like the changing city itself.

Ulf Lundin has been deeply concerned with the legacy of the Swedish *Folkhemmet*, the equality-based Swedish society so heavily promoted by the Social Democrats during the first 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 thousand 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 published on her extensive website. Mir approaches all these subjects with a kind of open and process-oriented attitude, 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 biennial *Socle du Monde* in 2004. Mir collaborated with a communications bureau to create a 32 page publication with images culled from various local sources (the



Aleksandra Mir, *Danes in the Sun*, 2004
A 32 page full color publication, 16x22 in. (broadsheet)

local historical archive, the local newspaper, private responders to an ad) and Mir's signature style of offhand conversations with the people behind the images. The result is a feather light portrait of a happy, wealthy and slightly disconnected community, telling not only about their lives but also about their relation to images.



Ketil Nergaard, *Tilted Arse*, 2000/05
Installation and live performance, various dimensions

Ketil Nergaard's *Tilted Arse* was first shown at the exhibition *Performer* 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 impersonation 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.

Jonas Ekeberg
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