

OVERGADEN.

Naja Maria Lundstrøm
Well It's Not Going to Lift Itself
18.01 – 16.03 2014



Naja Maria Lundstrøm, *Well It's Not Going to Lift Itself*, 2014. Video still

Well It's Not Going to Lift Itself

By Anne Kølbæk Iversen

For her exhibition *Well It's Not Going to Lift Itself* Naja Maria Lundstrøm has turned the first floor of Overgaden into a crossfit gym with the possibility to train strength and stamina using kettlebells, jump boxes, medicine balls, cross-fit hammers and truck tyres. The installation is an imitation or representation of the gym as a place and situation, but it is also a workout facility to be used by the visitors.

As in most gyms, there are screens hanging in the exhibition space, but instead of American TV series Naja Maria Lundstrøm presents two new videos in which she attempts to motivate people to take responsibility for their state of health. In the first video, Naja Maria Lundstrøm delivers a series of arguments for why we are responsible for making a positive difference to our health, whereas in the second she presents herself as a role model

for a healthy lifestyle others can be inspired by and adopt.

Naja Maria Lundstrøm's point of departure in the exhibition is the contemporary health debate so prominent in Danish politics and media, where different health gurus, nutrition therapists and personal trainers have their say in how we as individuals and as a society can live longer and avoid illness and disease. The message of Danish health statistics is depressingly clear: low life expectancy and a high rate of cancer and other lifestyle diseases like type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, stress and depression. Diverse health campaigns try to get people to live a healthier life, whilst politicians try to regulate behaviour by lowering the age limit for buying alcohol and tobacco and increasing taxation on selected products. When such measures fail to make any signifi

cant difference, it raises the question of why we don't just do what's best for us. This is the same question Naja Maria Lundstrøm asks in *Well It's Not Going to Lift Itself*.

In the videos Naja Maria Lundstrøm uses herself as the site of different opinions, testing the boundaries of what can be said. This testing of opinions and assertions is characteristic of her art, in which she uses simple measures to puncture or twist conventional discourses to start a dialogue or debate. Like in the video *Fisse* ('Pussy') from 2012, where Naja Maria Lundstrøm experiments with a statement she is normally on the receiving end of. The work is based on the artist's personal experience of being met by comments like: 'She just needs some dick' when walking along the street with her female partner. The video is an experiment with what happens when the roles are reversed, and representatives of the majority are asked the same question minorities face every day. In the video Naja Maria Lundstrøm approach a couple on the street – a man and a woman – and ask the man if he doesn't think his wife just needs some pussy. The couple are shocked and offended and the man replies that he doesn't actually think so before they



Naja Maria Lundstrøm, *Onaniens By*, 2007. Banner in public space, Odense

hurry away, obviously uncomfortable with the situation. The work is an example of how Naja Maria Lundstrøm investigates and challenges the boundaries that define our social space.

In the video work *What's Wrong with Being a Dane?* from 2011 Naja Maria Lundstrøm uses herself as the mouthpiece for an exclusionary and patronizing immigration policy in her meeting with a foreigner in Denmark. In the conversation, Naja Maria Lundstrøm maintains that Danish society makes a major effort for the foreigners who come to the country, including teaching them to read and write free of charge – a position the person she's talking to finds highly provocative.

No, I just want to say that I think Denmark is a very generous country ... Really, I mean it! I know you're looking at me as if I don't mean it. But really, I think Denmark is a very generous country. (Naja Maria Lundstrøm, *What's Wrong with Being a Dane?*, 2011)

In this work the question 'What's wrong with being a Dane?' is directed at the person she is talking to, who does not share the artist's enthusiasm about Danish society, as well as the viewer, who can reflect on precisely this question: What – if anything – is wrong with being a (self-righteous and self-sufficient) Dane?

Naja Maria Lundstrøm's art is permeated by her interest in the power of words, both our everyday use of language and the political, scientific and marketing discourses that contribute to the definition of the reality surrounding us. With a work like *Onaniens by* ('City of Masturbation', 2007) Naja Maria Lundstrøm performs a détournement of an established gesture: the familiar attempt in local politics to attract attention and investment by branding oneself with buzz words. Naja Maria Lundstrøm's works operate within the post-conceptual, political tradition of interventions in public, social and political space, and the use of the art space as a free zone where market forces and linguistic logic are suspended to provide the space for contra-production.

An extension of this, the exhibition *Well It's Not Going to Lift Itself* focuses on issues of



Naja Maria Lundstrøm, *What's wrong with being a Dane*, 2011. Video still

sickness and health, but also on the broader level of the free will of the individual versus collective responsibility, both economic and ethical. Naja Maria Lundstrøm conjures up the image of a strong-willed individual, who like Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is able to take care of herself: 'Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the last man.' (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1885). The *Übermensch* defines his or her own values and judgements, as opposed to those who follow the slave morality of (self) pity and humility. In this context, the exhibition raises the question of what we define as responsible action, and how we define the good life from the perspective of the individual as well as the community.

By installing a crossfit gym at Overgaden, Naja Maria Lundstrøm offers free training to everyone. A counter-reaction to expensive fitness centres, the exhibition is an attempt by the artist to compensate for the social lopsidedness of Danish health statistics. But the installation of a gym within the walls of an art institution also provides the opportunity to reflect on fitness training as a situation and ideology,

where the focus is to optimise the self to be able to perform more and stand more. In addition, the construction of a fully functioning gym can be seen as an ironic comment on the role of the art space as engaging experience architecture. As a performative and relational work, *Well It's Not Going to Lift Itself* leaves a series of open spaces awaiting the interaction and reaction of its visitors.

Anne Kølbaek Iversen holds an MA in Modern Culture and Communication from Copenhagen University and is the communications officer and curatorial assistant at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde.

Translation: Jane Rowley

CV

Naja Maria Lundstrøm (b. 1981) graduated from Funen Art Academy in 2011 and also studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna for three years. Her work is conceptual, addressing political, social and cultural issues. Lundstrøm is co-founder of the exhibition space c4 projects, and has previously exhibited in Denmark, Berlin, Lausanne and Vienna.

EVENTS

Friday 17 January 6pm

Performance // Crossfit competition

In connection with the opening of the exhibition Naja Maria Lundstrøm has invited three teams of professional trainers from Copenhagen CrossFit to compete in disciplines that requires both strength and endurance.

Thursday 30 January 6-7.30pm

Lecture // Umahro Cadogan: *The Efficient Workout*

How should you eat, exercise and live your life if you want to optimize the physical condition and capacity of your body? Learn about this and much more when assistant professor and dietician Umahro Cadogan shares his knowledge on the topic, and get free food samples from the restaurant Palæo in Torvehallerne. The event will be in Danish.

Thursday 6 March 6-7.30pm

Talk // *Performance art?*

When is performance an art form? And does the definition primarily rely on whether or not the performance is staged within the confines of the art world, or can artistic performances also be found within popular culture and even every day life? With questions like these, Naja Maria Lundstrøm and Sanne Kofod Olsen, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde, will investigate the performance as artistic practice and genre. The event will be in Danish.

THANK YOU

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This exhibition folder can be downloaded from: www.overgaden.org

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

Friday 28 March 2014 Overgaden presents two new solo exhibitions by Jacob Tækker and Astrid Myntekær. The last day of the exhibitions is 18 May 2014.

The exhibition is supported by:



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