

OVERGADEN.

Uffe Isolotto
*The Pocket Philosopher's
Catharsis in the Winter Garden*
07.09 – 27.10 2013



"People say, "Be true to yourself." I'm more concerned with being true to my selfie."

Copyright: the artist, Hyperallergic

A Picture of Itself – on Uffe Isolotto and the Self-Sucker

By Toke Lykkeberg

As the author Norman Mailer once claimed: "The first art work in an artist is the shaping of his own personality."¹ The example par excellence is Marcel Duchamp, who considered his own masterpiece to be himself. In order to become an artist like all the other artists, the artist has to demarcate himself from all the other artists. And this is what makes the artist an ideal figure – a contemporary role model. In today's liberal democracies, if there is one demand made of every individual, it is that you have to be yourself. The liberated individual has to manifest itself by displaying initiative and a sense of responsibility. But the demand is contradictory, because whilst a demand comes from without, self-realisation has to come

from within.² This demand is reminiscent of another contemporary ideal: To be authentic, i.e. true to yourself.³ But the self we have to find, and the self we have to create, are not necessarily the same, and the two can be at odds with each other. As life in the social media shows, the self is not a given. It is, however, possible to create a self, and not least recreate it – again and again and again. Web 2.0 has become the technology of self-fulfilment; a channel to create oneself for others. The self-portrait of our age is the so-called 'selfie' circulating on Facebook, Instagram, and wherever else it can be posted. This is not Narcissus discovering his own reflection, but rather a photographer choosing one of many possible images of himself

– an image that is never just one image. It is an image that can be digitally manipulated, cropped and replaced at any time. It is therefore an image that has to be constantly chosen, even when you choose not to do anything about it.

In Uffe Isolotto's exhibition we also see an image that is not just one image. It has been made in different versions and printed on fabric. These versions are not hung on the wall, but rather thrown casually into the exhibition space, which Uffe Isolotto has filled with his own delicate copper furniture. Studying this series of prints of the same subject partially shrouded in fog, they emerge as different parts of the body spread out like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The images are stored in the mind of the viewer, and it is here that the image, fragmented into variations of itself, can be reassembled. In one image we see an arched back. A muscular leg extending under a bent body. In another we see an erect, oversized cock. A mouth gaping above it. As we move from image to image we see a series of different parts of the body intertwining. But this is not two people making love. Just a single fit and flexible figure. The man in the image has found the perfect balance, in a position that makes it possible for him to suck his own cock.

Due to the fog, the outline of the man does not form a single, distinct figure. The figure is not complete, since it is not clearly delimited. On the contrary, it forms a whole because it closes in upon itself, and the self-sufficient figure only becomes a whole to the extent that viewers can assemble the body parts in their mind's eye. And it is this viewer, which the male figure's wide-open eye peering out of the fog, stares at. The self-reliant figure in perfect balance relies upon and is himself. And yet this man, as paradoxically as the demand to 'be yourself', is not self-sufficient. He stares at the audience in whose minds the different versions of his image await collation in a single image.

The figure recalls the Danish artist N.A. Abildgaard's 1775 painting of the wounded warrior Philoctetes, seizing his poisoned foot after being bitten by a snake. Uffe Iso-

lotto's man is thus also modelled on another man – and seen as an artwork is modelled on another artwork. But nonetheless, Uffe Isolotto's images have the character of the self-portrait or photographic selfie, because the man in the images looks like the artist Uffe Isolotto himself. Although the images here are not photographs, but a photorealistic 3D rendition. Unlike a photograph, the images make no claim to be an impression of the world, but rather to mime it. As such, the images are – just as paintings can be claimed to be – interpretations of earlier paintings. Here the masturbatory male figure is an image of art's love of itself. Uffe Isolotto refers to a classical work in art history, marking his allegiance. Yet at the same time he points back at a predecessor from a position in the present, where art is dominated by excessive self-reflexivity; an art indebted to the conceptual art of the 1960s, when an artist like Joseph Kosuth could review his own exhibition and theorise about his own art. According to Kosuth, conceptual art can only address itself: "A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that a particular work of art is art, which means, is a *definition* of art."⁴

Despite the fact that Kosuth's statement is as convoluted as he considers art to be, it is frequently quoted. It is still relevant for a form of art in which reflections on art as art has become a continuous battle over its own territory. Today that battle is fought in the era of social media, where it is apparent to everyone that creativity is not longer the sole privilege of the artist or even the creative class. There is nothing new about professional artists making art alongside amateurs, but what is new is that they are competing for attention on many of the same platforms – like YouTube – to such an extent that the distinctions between them are blurred. And it is also new that almost everyone, as an integrated part of their daily lives, is apparently involved in a self-reflexive project of self-presentation. Isolotto's male figure, potentially swallowing his own sperm, thus becomes a comical representation of the artist constantly striving to create himself. He is no longer alone in doing so, but this makes

his efforts even more desperate. The artist is like Ouroboros, the snake eating its own tail: a figure that imperviously nourishes itself with its own poison; that is nourished by devouring itself.

The self-sucker brings to mind Pablo Picasso's self-mythologizing story: "When I was a child, (...) my mother said to me, 'If you become a soldier, you'll be a general. If you become a monk you'll end up as the Pope.' Instead, I became a painter and wound up as Picasso."⁵ According to Picasso's own story, Picasso became Picasso because he *was* a painter. But his story is also the story of a boy who learned how to draw so quickly from his father that his father dropped art, after which Picasso signed his works with his mother's name: Picasso.

Uffe Isolotto has also changed his name. In 2012 he signed his works Uffe Holm. But the change of name is nothing but a translation. 'Holm' means islet, and Isolotto means islet in Italian. Uffe Isolotto has thus become

his own progenitor: He chooses himself, he chooses his own name, but even though he has created himself he has also remained loyal to the name he has inherited. Uffe Isolotto acts as a model in the age of social media – just as his self-sucker is what he calls "The Poster Boy for a New Generation". He is a figure offering an ideal for those who want to be their own ideal.

Toke Lykkeberg is a curator and writer.

Translation: Jane Rowley

1. Quoted in Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, 1979.
2. Alain Ehrenberg, *La Fatigue d'être soi. Dépression et société*, 1998.
3. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 1992.
4. Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writing, 1966-1990*, 1991.
5. Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas*, 1933.



N.A. Abildgaard, *Den sårede Filoktet*, 1775. Statens Museum for Kunst, www.smk.dk

CV

Uffe Isolotto graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 2007. He is one of the artists behind the exhibition space Toves Galleri and has exhibited here and elsewhere in Denmark and abroad, including at Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art, Malmö Konsthall and Kunsthall Charlottenborg. For more information about the artist: www.uffeisolotto.com.

EVENTS

Friday 6 September 6pm

Performance // In Search of the Xtreme

In connection with the opening of Uffe Isolotto's exhibition, a stunt double will perform a reenactment of the Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader's film performances *Fall 2* (1970) and *Primary Time* (1974). Bas Jan Ader is the epitome of the sensitive, thoughtful artist, and the myth about him is closely linked to his disappearance at sea. It is this mythologizing and the construction that supports it, which is the starting point for Isolotto's updated version of Ader's life. The performance takes place by Christianshavn Canal.

Thursday 12 September 6-7.30pm

Talk // Uffe Isolotto vs. Toke Lykkeberg

Under informal conditions, curator and writer Toke Lykkeberg meets Uffe Isolotto for a chat about pseudonyms in an era of contrived egos. Based on Toke Lykkeberg's essay *A Picture of Itself*, they will talk about the design of the self up through art history and on the social media. Expect punch lines and anecdotes. The event will be in Danish.

Sunday 15 September 3-4pm

Guided tour

Overgaden invites you to a guided tour of the current exhibitions in the company of Thomas Ladeby, a member of Overgaden's curatorial staff. Afterwards we serve coffee and cake. The event will be in Danish.

THANK YOU

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

UPCOMING EXHIBITION

Friday 15 November 2013 Overgaden presents the exhibition *Ice Script – Meltingtime #17* by Kirsten Justesen. The last day of the exhibition is 25 December 2013.

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KUNSTRÅDET
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