

Christian Schmidt-Rasmussen with J&K, Ulla Hvejsel,
claus ejner and Kristian Byskov
Icarus Victorious

08.04 – 28.05 2017



Christian Schmidt-Rasmussen, *Icarus Victorious*, 2017. Installation view

OVERGADEN.

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Design: Anni's

Hubris

By Christian Schmidt-Rasmussen

Before I sat down to write this text, I didn't think I'd seen any theatre since I was a child. But as I wrote, a startling number of theatre experiences resurfaced that I'd totally repressed, even though some of them had really made quite an impression. One of these was *The Triumph of Death*, a ballet by Flemming Flint based on a play by Eugene Ionesco with music by Savage Rose that I saw with my youth club when I was nine.

The picture of theatre I'd had in my mind in all the years in between, when I thought I hadn't seen any, comes from a Swedish, socialist teen novel from the seventies by Sven Wernström. Like many other left-wingers at the time, he had an issue with anything popular, accessible or universal. He presumably would have thought Bertolt Brecht was too much. In the novel, a young girl is in Paris with her dad at the end of the sixties, and experiences all that indefinable stuff of teenage rebellion. And the theatre of the absurd. She sees a play in a dingy basement with a man standing in a barrel shouting something in French she doesn't understand, but that still really fascinates her. I didn't buy it myself, and with the odd exception didn't see any theatre for the next three decades. In the meantime, performance experienced a revival on the art scene, and for me there were lots of things that reminded me of a man standing in a barrel shouting something in French I didn't understand. The bodies were too close, and yet so yoga-perfect and remote. For numerous reasons I just didn't feel it, couldn't really get under its skin. But then someone like Olof Olsson turned up with his stand-up artist routines, and tuned me into the linguistic and literary potential of performing as an artist, something very different to the yoga bodies in the room. And that made artist theatre a possibility again. For me at least.

I've been working with something I've called plays since 1993. In the beginning these were small cardboard boxes hanging on a wall, open at the front so you could look inside at small dioramas, absurd collages with bits of handwritten dialogue on A4 paper. Most of them were inspired by the cardboard boxes I made into something else at nursery school in the sixties: TVs, aquariums, theatres. At some point in the mid-nineties I was working on a sci-fi musical that never got beyond the libretto. It's a field I've never really abandoned since, but that I only started to pursue seriously again in 2013, when I wrote and performed my first real play *We Live on the Ruins of a Glorious Future*, and again in 2015, when I wrote and performed *Anxiety*.

The other day I went to a matinee at Østre Gasværk Theatre to see three plays by Samuel Beckett. Time to see the man shouting in French in a barrel. And I saw

him, or to be more precise, her. In the impossibly fast monologue *Not I* the only thing visible on an otherwise pitch-black stage is the mouth of a woman. It's impossible to concentrate entirely on the monologue – it's really fast, it jumps, it hacks, and leaves only fragments of an older woman's breakdown (maybe), her horrendous life (maybe). And it's being cut off like this again and again during the fifteen-minute monologue that jolts us into empathy with the character, the circumstances, the ambiguities: an unavoidable condition of seeing the play. Even though I first saw it while I was writing this, it's as if I've seen it before. It's probably the background for what I mean with the man in the barrel shouting something incomprehensible in French. It's probably what I've always thought theatre was. But whereas I used to view it with faintly feigned contempt, it's now become something of an ideal: we're taking no prisoners here, it's take it or leave it, you eat what we serve, there's no à la carte. Kind of like an adult version of My Bloody Valentine or a Sunn O))) concert.

But artist theatre is not wired in the same way as 'real' theatre. The idea of an ensemble, a cast, where everyone has separate, well-defined roles has never really been a hit in the art world. Most of us artists are more like buskers with a big drum on our backs, a harmonica around our necks, a guitar, and maybe a dog that howls along. With all the pros and cons of that. Even if there is an ensemble, as artists we organise in a different way. And something like organisation seeps into form and content. The art academies probably play a role too. They were, and in many ways probably still are, relatively informal in the sense that there's no real curriculum or canon to structure things. Artists are trained for free play on the free market. It's a ruthless discipline, but it creates recklessness and daring. And daring in particular is what I hope we get to see in *Icarus Victorious* and the other plays during The Artist Theatre Festival *HUBRIS*.

The reason I call it artist theatre is because it's different to real theatre but also to the kind of performance art where the body is central and that probably has more in common with dance and rituals than theatre. There is narrative and scenography in The Artist Theatre Festival *HUBRIS*, and the sets have been created to stand alone as art installations between performances.

To introduce the performances, I'd say they all share Beckett's alienation. The fact that the world is a self-reflecting labyrinth where we're all actors and our only salvation is to surrender to the labyrinth on a daily basis. To start over again every day, like Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*:

Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?

Estragon: Yes, let's go.

They do not move.

Curtain.

THE ARTIST THEATRE FESTIVAL HUBRIS
claus ejner performs a play in four acts. *Portrait of an Artist* is not a psychological portrait; we do not crawl under the skin of the artist in any usual sense. We're shown a twisted, dysfunctional and very naked portrait. It might be honest in its own way, but the honesty is something other than we're used to. The play consists of a series of very different parts building on absurd theatre like mother used to make it.

In a quiz on stupidity, its history, possibilities and pitfalls, Ulla Hvejsel talks out of her ass. Something she does literally with *Talking Out of My Ass*, an 'ass puppet show' where her ass sticks out of a hole in a classical etching by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The quiz is run according to democratic principles: anyone can at any time call for a vote on the reasonableness of a question or the accuracy of an answer. In the end, real stupidity is what most people agree on.

Kristian Byskov's art draws on science fiction in the broadest sense. His work deals with painful adjustments to worlds in constant flux, the entwinement of bodies and machines, and fluid identities. The play *The Dance* is about cyborgs, cross-species empathy and the nature of the monster.

In the piece *The Emancipation of O.O.O.*¹ the artist duo J&K present us with object theatre. The scenography consists of sculptural objects, lights and loudspeakers, all of them animated. Objects revolt, refuse to be part of the human world. They also share their memories with us. J&K break down barriers between living and non-living forms: things have a life, nature has a consciousness. The script for the performance has been written in collaboration with Jonathan Bonnici.

ICARUS VICTORIOUS

Christian Schmidt-Rasmussen continues to work with the figure of Icarus in *Icarus Victorious*, a choleric attack provoked by events in the spring of 2016, when refugees took to the E45 from Denmark to Sweden on foot. The text is confused and desperate, and ends by eating Africa. We are all Icarus, and in this version we extinguish the sun. The scenography is a surrealistic but friendly version of the text. It represents everything the

text cannot: a world where animals dance and where when things can fall apart they can be reassembled again and again.

1 objecting outcast objects

Translation: Jane Rowley

CV

The curator of the exhibition Christian Schmidt-Rasmussen (b. 1963) is a visual artist based in Copenhagen. He works primarily with painting and poetry, and studied at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts from 1986-92. He has also exhibited extensively in Denmark and abroad, most recently at X and beyond, Bendixen Contemporary Art, Skagen's Museum, Galleri Nicolai Wallner, Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art and Vestjyllands Kunstpavillon.

PERFORMANCES

Performance dates will be announced on overgaden.org

8 April – 28 May: *Icarus Victorious* by Christian Schmidt-Rasmussen

8 – 30 April: The Artist Theatre Festival *HUBRIS* Part 1
Portrait Of An Artist by claus ejner
Talking Out of My Ass by Ulla Hvejsel

6 – 28 May: The Artist Theatre Festival *HUBRIS* Part 2
The Dance by Kristian Byskov
The Emancipation of O.O.O. by J&K

THANK YOU

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UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

Friday 16 June 2017 Overgaden presents *The Cloud Document* by Pia Rönicke and *Peter and the Danish Defence* by Peter Voss-Knude.

This exhibition folder can be downloaded from: overgaden.org

The exhibition is supported by:



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