

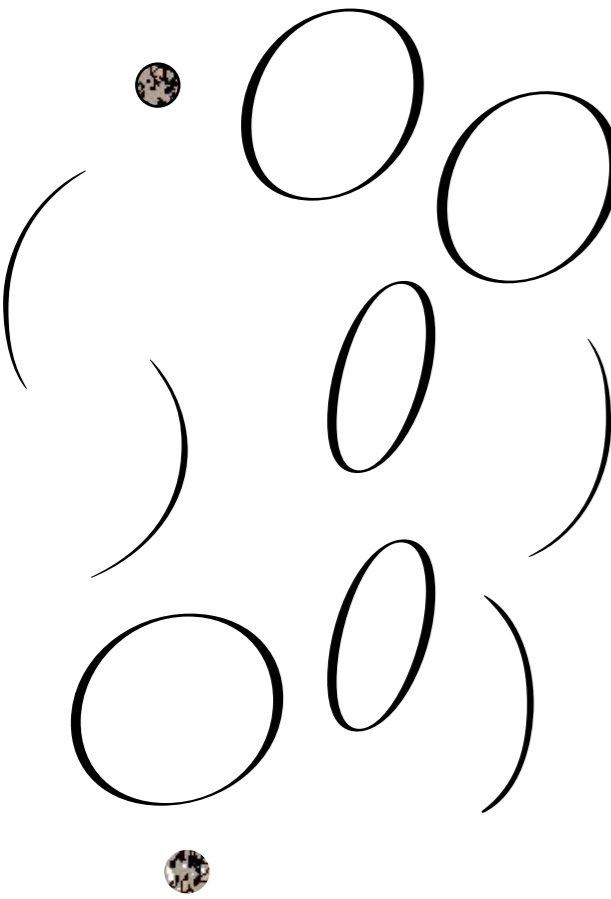
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication—which revolves around Carl Mannov’s exhibition *Kammerspil* at Overgaden—is one of the first in a new monographic series produced in conjunction with our institutional solo exhibitions from 2021 onwards, focusing on new artistic voices in the Danish art scene and, hopefully, on catapulting these into a larger readership, following, and distribution, as is well deserved.

Each edition in the series will be published both in print, with a special, grand fold-out poster as its cover, and in a free-to-download PDF version, adding a full batch of documentation images to the online edition. Like this, the hope is that the content made possible by these publications—both the artistic expressions and the expanded conversation around these—can travel as far as possible.

The series has been made possible by generous support from the Augustinus Foundation and by the creative and editorial oversight of Overgaden’s editor Nanna Friis, alongside dedicated work by Freja Kir and Miquel Hervás Gómez, our graphic designers at fanfare. Moreover, a great thank you goes to artist and author Melanie Kittí for her poetic contribution, to Lars Nordby, Mannov’s friend and former classmate at the Art Academy in Oslo, for taking part in an intimate conversation with the artist and, of course, to the whole team at Overgaden. Last, but not least, a heartfelt thank you goes to Carl Mannov for the great collaboration.

Rhea Dall (director) & Aukje Lepoutre Ravn (curator)
Ooooooovergaden



A SWEATY ECHO CHAMBER FILLED WITH GHOSTS

Lars Nordby & Carl Mannov in conversation

(Lars Nordby)

Kammerspil (*Chamber Play*). This must be the most personal exhibition you’ve produced to date. Perhaps even the most intense, keeping in mind how your Self—figuratively speaking—is confronted by self-reflecting material on the human, all too human. I am pleased that you invited me to have this conversation with you. This is perhaps the first time we’ve made public a subject that we’ve been discussing for some time. Theatricality as a medium is something I’ve researched as part of my artistic practice. And I suppose this is what our conversation revolves around. Relevant, if nothing else, to your exhibition title?

(Carl Mannov)

The title is of course a reference to the theater through my own childhood and my family, who are theater people. That’s one of the reasons I asked if you wanted to contribute to this material. Apart from the fact that you work with the theater yourself, as a concept and material in your artistic practice, I also consider you family. And talking of the intensity of the exhibition, as you said, our families have certain common denominators.

(LN)

That’s probably where the title acquires a different tone. No decent chamber play can be performed without drama, and drama needs desperate actions. This messy exhibition appears, at first glance, to be the result of a desperate action.

(CM)

A crime scene?

(LN)

Actually, I’ve often thought that the metaphor for art as a forensic investigation doesn’t quite tally with what we do. When all is said and done, a detective hunts an objective truth. I’m thinking more of this as a game.

And you, of all people, know that all games have their own set of rules, their own logic.

(CM)

Yeah, and a game is also often synonymous with play, and play is perhaps first and foremost about taking things apart and turning them upside down: puncturing reality for a moment and “pretending.”

(LN)

And in the last few years you’ve been playing quite a lot with the home and the private sphere as a frame of reference or material.

(CM)

That’s right. So, formally, the term *Chamber Play* could possibly also reference the play with space or chamber that takes place in the exhibition.

(LN)

So, there’s a method to the madness?

(CM)

The way one expresses oneself is very likely related to how one deals with emotionally charged symptoms, beyond oneself, i.e. how the family and public dictates.

(LN)

Yes, but —

(CM)

The chamber play is a kind of theater, of course, where the performance and the roles are set indoors in a limited homely sphere, but the type of social anxiety that we’ve discussed at length and that you’ve often addressed via the theater and performance as metaphors, takes place outside the home, in the roleplay that emerges when facing the public. Is this where Henrik Ibsen enters the stage?

(LN)

Actually, I’ve never been that keen on theater performances. Nor do I think Ibsen was. When, as an artist, one explores the themes to the extent you mention—the home, the public, the Self, and the Other; their power structures and unconditional complications—the theater as a metaphor fits in nicely. In particular, I find theatricality as a medium in itself and the theater as an idea more fascinating than the conventional meaning of the theater. Theater as a metaphor can be used in a variety of ways and is often used to define or expose certain rules of the game, hidden agendas, and identity formation—in psychology, for example, everyday language, philosophy, the political scene, the cultural sector, etc. Nevertheless, it’s a common denominator in the essence of theater, which feels immortal, even subjugating.

(CM)

Yes, theater is conditional; certain rules apply. A banal point of departure, for example, is the relationship between stage and audience.

(LN)

And this is where I believe Ibsen, and many others besides him, including myself, exploit the notion of theatricality precisely to express these perplexing emotions about conditions that one prefers to avoid or perhaps over-identify with. Even conditions one doesn’t actually know, yet subsequently wants to avoid. If that’s not a form of private and social anxiety, I don’t know what is.

(CM)

That’s exactly why I think one wants to reduce the complexity of it. That’s often what you do when you try to understand something; you construct a small manageable model of it. Like the essence of a theater performance or a film—a simulation of emotion.

(LN)

Exactly. People like to hold on to something, especially when they’re about to lose control. I notice that several of the sculptures in the exhibition have a sort of integrated model of a stage set, or perhaps a doll’s house? Both are tools of sorts, some kind of heuristics with which to navigate complex feelings and social dynamics.

(CM)

I couldn’t have put it better myself.

(LN)

Through my own artistic practice where I explore much of the interhuman action space and man’s obsessive approach to identity, I sense that, in *Kammerspil*, you’re examining the meaning of identity formation and the private sphere as if it were never to reach public attention, hence remaining a bit theatrical? This makes me think of the watercolor series in the exhibition, especially the work *Chamber Play* (*Steps*).

(CM)

Yeah, I think I’m into the idea of self-perception as a kind of storytelling to oneself. The painting you mention, *Chamber Play* (*Steps*), represents a character about to open or go through a door. To give a symbolic answer, I think a door opened in my work a couple of years ago that transformed the way I use my artistic practice.

(LN)

How?

(CM)

I found the courage to take an inward look and use my own story as material, work with some of my own pain through my work. The door has become a recurrent motif. I see it as a threshold between the private and public spheres, internal and external matter. It’s in this crack, somehow, that social anxiety emerges, something I’ve struggled with second hand, through people very close to me.

Editor: Nanna Friis

Text: Rhea Dall, Aukje Lepoutre Ravn, Melanie Kittí, Lars Nordby, Carl Mannov

Translation: Charlotte Lund, Nanna Friis

Copy editing: Susannah Worth

Images: Courtesy of the artist and Anders Sune Berg

Printed in edition of 250 copies

(LN)
It's clearly a new side of you we see in this exhibition. Somehow the symbolism has changed from the way the gallery space reflects its own metaphysical nature to a theme outside the gallery space—in your case your private life. Or perhaps it's not a clear-cut change, but rather a combination. At some point you seemed more interested in the administrative functions behind the scenes in the commercial galleries where you show. As a way to unveil the engine room running in the background—trying to come to terms with your own role in the machinery?

(CM)
That's quite true. The installations in this exhibition might be based on this kind of logic.

(LN)
Besides the door appearing in some of the sculptures, the drawer and the stage set could perhaps also be viewed as thresholds of sorts. Both are dichotomies comprising a front and a back: a presented fiction and a secret reality.

Isn't it in the tension between these two that one's identity is negotiated? Perhaps image-making operates in the gap between the external and internal?

(CM)
That actually fits quite well with how I see the watercolors for this exhibition. They're pictures rather than paintings, which I think is a way of thinking that I hadn't permitted myself to the same extent earlier.

(LN)
In a pictorial space, there's a short distance between the concept, or inner atmospheric image, to an outer representation of it.

(CM)
Yes, especially a line. So, those drawings have been a very direct way for me to express the ideas for this exhibition and play around with them.

(LN)
A kind of mental notes.

(CM)
It's a good feeling to free oneself from the specific rules one sets oneself and just let go. Nevertheless, I must admit that I also sense a great freedom when I finally discover a fixed framework to hold on to.

(LN)
Yeah, the fixed framework for these paintings is literally their frame or passe-partout. Besides, by inserting text and picture materials from books—likely sources of inspiration—directly into the works, you're also painting onto the passe-partout. It reminds me of the kind of corrections and sketches found in the margins, or directly on the pages of a treasured book. That's probably the most direct and honest expression,

I can imagine. It's often very private and instinctive—more so than a diary where you often play a performative role, although one would be hard-pushed to admit it. Like seeing yourself from the outside and playing a role—in writing.

(CM)
Well, yes, notes are different. It's a window into the head of someone in the process of understanding something and needing to express it outside themselves to find the meaning. That's not unlike the way I think about my own artistic production—it's a sandpit where I can play and try out things I don't fully understand.

(LN)
I agree. I don't get any kicks from dutiful and useful art. Such information centers are quickly constructed completely with glass, transparent all over. In a sense, Kammerspil breaks with the idea that sculptures must be raw and "honest" processual experiences. When, in an exhibition, one sees a casually arranged installation on the floor consisting of seemingly randomly placed objects, it is usually far more complex and thick with intention than the artist lets on. This is where the concept of function comes in, I guess?

(CM)
Yes. I try to embed the idea or anticipation of function into an object, only to undermine it. It's one way of protesting usefulness. It's not that the work must not be useful, as such, for example, by triggering a feeling or a dialogue, but that it shouldn't have to be.

(LN)
You mean, as a rule?

(CM)
I think every project sets its own rules. To use your own artistic production to work through things in your own life, for example, could well be interesting, but mainly when resonating dialogue with a larger, more public

(LN)
Otherwise, you risk it becoming an echo?

(CM)
Well, I like the frame of reference for an exhibition to be porous and able to morph into other dialogues and interpretations.

(LN)
Then it's probably also the case that if you make an exhibition interesting and try to avoid this personal echo, you will risk the exhibition becoming theatrical.

(CM)
True. The paradox is often that the more personal and idiosyncratic a project, the more intensely relatable it can seem to the receiver.

Graphic design: fanfare

The exhibition is produced by: OoOvergaden

The exhibition is supported by: The Danish Arts Council,

Typography: Glossy Magazine, Bold Decisions
Printed by: Raddraat, Amsterdam

The publication is supported by: Augustinus Fonden

OCA – Office for Contemporary Art, Norway,
Knud Højgaard's Foundation

(LN)
I like the idea that the passive artwork is more interactive than one thinks, and that art is not there to think for you. In that way, I think this personal expression, this echo, also has something to offer, and that it should continue to be so.

(CM)
It's a bit like the comedian using half the time practicing the lead-in to and delivery of their jokes so that everything appears as casual and improvised as possible. This exhibition is perhaps an attempt at puncturing that facade and admitting that it's a kind of performance.

(LN)
It becomes a triple bluff, a twofold self-reflection, mainly because we also create new facades while exposing ourselves. I think the videos *Gespenst-gestik* (Ghost—Gesture) in the exhibition are about that, in part. Is it important that they're made of video and textual material lifted from the nooks and crannies of YouTube and the internet forum Reddit, or is this a desperate attempt at actualizing something which is perhaps essentially timeless?

(CM)
It's difficult to reflect on self-image and performativity without including the internet and the spectrum it has created between extreme anonymity and extreme self-exposure.

(LN)
One shouldn't be an extremist... and as for the word spectrum—and, for that matter, anonymity—the title primarily sparks the idea of the ghost as an invisible actor.

(CM)
Which is often the role played by a visual artist.

(LN)
Historically, ghosts have also been viewed as a confrontation with one's own past—a trauma.

(CM)
Exactly. This is one instance where I believe a bridge emerges between the videos and the sculptures in the exhibition because storage furniture, such as cupboards and drawers, is often used in therapy as a metaphor for memory and the storage of recollections and traumas.

(LN)
It's mentioned in one of the videos, via the anonymous comments you found on Reddit, that ghosts portrayed in both films and literature often show their presence by violently opening drawers and cupboards and slamming doors. It almost becomes a double metaphor for the trauma that emerges.

(CM)
It seems there's often a need for physical things to act as metaphors for the conceptual, linguistic. Probably

because physicality came before language. I see this as a kind of defense of sculpture and one of the reasons you can never address it directly, only indirectly.

(LN)
I agree. It's experience, a trigger, a thoughtful gaze. Since I learn something new about myself and nuance my practice virtually every time I complete a new exhibition, I'll never be able to fully describe what I really do.

(CM)
In this way, we constantly ask viewers to open new doors that we also open to ourselves and our own practice.

(LN)
A sweaty echo chamber filled with ghosts.

(CM)
Sounds like Bobi Bar on a wet evening.

(CM & LN)
[Laugh]

(LN)
That's been a setting for many a dialogue over time. When you're in good company...

(CM)
... and have gotten enough liquid courage in you to dig a little deeper.

(LN)
Perhaps a good image to finish on.

