

KUNSTHALLE ZÜRICH

Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset, *Taking Place*, 10. 11. 2001 – 20. 1. 2002

Michael Elmgreen (Denmark, 1961) and Ingar Dragset (Norway, 1969) have been a team since 1995. In their work, which includes performances, objects, and installations, they examine the socio-cultural structures manifested in art and society. Since 1997, they have been working on a consecutively numbered series of *Powerless Structures* which makes use of two neutralities: the supposed neutrality of a minimalist formal vocabulary in architecture and art, and that of the color white. The institutionalized container for art, the White Cube, neutral and yet exceedingly charged with ideological implications, takes center stage in their investigations because they are "artists" and because the cube represents the space of social presence officially allotted to them. Their spatial structures and objects guilefully expose the blind spots in assumptions of the Cube's formal autonomy and neutrality by introducing sexual and paradoxical elements or juxtaposing inside and outside or private and public, not as ideological opposites but rather as issues under debate. They do not focus on the "building" as such, but rather on the process of building as a process of generating meaning and a forum for discussing the premises which apply to both artists and users.

In their studies of the White cube, Elmgreen & Dragset follow a venerable tradition of examining the premises of art and its reception, from Marcel Duchamp's contextual displacement of objects to the critical voices of the sixties and seventies, which revolutionized the institution of art and abandoned the museum – Robert Barry, Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Dan Graham to name a few salient exponents – to context art and its return to the museum and the institutional criticism that dominated the late eighties and nineties of the 20th century. In 1976, the artist and theoretician Brian O'Doherty was the first to engage in the theoretical study of social "placelessness" and the elevation of the White Cube, as an empty white cell, to an icon of the 20th century. His critical investigations (*Inside the White Cube*) still offer valuable points of departure in today's discourse on art.

Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset pursue their study of the places of art by following another and different track to examine their condition as public spaces. They explore the heterogeneous and specific social realities which engage neutral space, with a focus on its use by individuals: who uses which spaces under which conditions, and why. Through their combination of performance aspects with the presentation of objects, the latter acquire the quality of performative structures. *Powerless Structure, Fig. 55, Cruising Pavilion* (1998) is a white container set up for public use in a park in Aarhus. The labyrinthine layout of the interior is divided into rooms whose walls are punctured with holes. By deliberately placing their object, perceived as a minimalist "sculpture," in an area known to be a meeting place for homosexual couples or cruisers, the artists caused a clash between form and content. This collision led to the cancellation of their second attempt to install the piece at an exhibition organized by the Witte de With Museum this year. *Powerless Structure, Fig. 88* (2000) is a White Cube created for a group show at the Manifesta 3 in the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana. The artists placed it at the disposal of young curators from Ljubljana as a gallery space, thereby underscoring issues of selection and marketing in the art trade, and the interplay between highly profiled international shows and the shortage of commercial structures for local art. *Powerless Structure, Fig. 111* (2000) entailed the ceaseless renovation of the exhibition spaces in Leipzig's Gallery of Contemporary Art. In preparation for the Gallery's next exhibition, two unemployed house painters applied 35 coats of white paint to the walls, as a result of which the rooms ultimately required renovation. The exhibition thereby also exposed the ordinarily unseen conditions involved in the presentation of art.

The works of Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset target a complex and humorous but not ironic contamination of accepted theories, ideological rightness, and existing categories. They are not anti-art, they do not want to dissolve art; their aim is to subject the spaces of art to the same existential parameters of use as the spaces of daily life.

Process again prevails in *Taking Place*, the project created by the two artists for the Kunsthalle Zürich. They have transformed the Kunsthalle into a building site, where the ongoing construction of a "permanent installation" of their work represents a future display situation at the Kunsthalle. *Taking Place* reveals the space of art as a temporary work in progress, geared towards the specific creation of rooms for the presentation of art. For the duration of the exhibition, doors are opened to a "behind-the-scenes" scenario. We see offices being moved, walls being torn down and built, the details of construction, the suspended state

of administrative reorganization in the non-public spaces of art, and the public spaces of art presentation prior to their renewed accessibility as such.

The project includes an ongoing discourse on the use of the Kunsthalle, the ever growing diversity of needs which spaces of art are expected to satisfy, the way in which the use of rooms may influence or even constitute their form, and what the representation of objects in rooms actually means. As artists, Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset put their solo exhibition, the duration of their presence in the museum, at the disposal of their host. By so doing, they also address the significance of working individuals and bodies, of professional responsibilities and capabilities, and an open process for the formulation of art.

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Exhibition catalogue:

Elmgreen & Dragset, *Taking Place*. Edited by the Kunsthalle Zürich and Danish Contemporary Art Foundation, with essays by Markus Bröderlin, Dan Cameron, Coco Fusco, Adriano Pedrosa, and Beatrix Ruf. Numerous reproductions of the work of Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset, documentation of the current exhibition, c. 148 pages, Cantz Verlag. Publication date: January 20, 2002

Michael Elmgreen (1961, Denmark), Ingar Dragset (1969, Norway), *Leben und arbeiten / live and work in Berlin*

Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl) / Solo exhibitions (selected)

- 2002 Galerie Helga Aldevar, Madrid; La Caixa, Barcelona; Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte
- 2001 Kunsthalle Zürich, *Taking Place*; Gallery Tanya Bonakdar, New York; Schauspielhaus, Hamburg; *A Room Defined by its Accessibility*, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen; INDEX, Stockholm; Galleri Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen; Linienstr. 160, Klosterfelde, Berlin; *Powerless Structures*, fig. 111, Portikus, Frankfurt
- 2000 *Zwischen anderen Ereignissen*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig; Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
- 1999 Galleri Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen; *Powerless Structures*, Fig. 57 - 60, *The Project*, New York
- 1998 *Powerless Structures*, Fig. 45, Galleri Ingólfsstræti & Reykjavik Art Museum, Reykjavik
- 1997 *To Ken Ishii...*, Galleri Struts, Oslo; *Powerless Structures*, Gallery Campbells Occasionally, Copenhagen; *12 Hours of White Paint*, Galleri Tommy Lund, Odense

Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl) / Group exhibitions (selected)

- 2002 Sao Paulo Biennale, Sao Paulo; Museum of Contemporary Art, Bangkok; Pontevedere Biennale, Pontevedere Palais de Tokyo, Paris; The New Museum, New York
- 2001 *egofugal*, The 7th International Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul; AUDIT, Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg *Against Architecture 2*, Fondazione per l'arte, Pisa; Danish in The Gallery, Malmö Konstmuseum, Malmö *The end of all things*, Galleri Massimo de Carlo, Milano; *Neue Welt*, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt *Hortus Conclusus*, Witte de With, Rotterdam; *Inside Space*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge TV Tokyo, Palais de Tokyo, Paris
- 2000 *Leaving the Island*, Pusan Contemporary Art Festival, Pusan; *Manifesta 3*, Ljubljana *What If...*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm; *Sporting. Life*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney *Century of Innocence*, Rooseum, Malmö; *The works in this space...*, Neugerriemschneider, Berlin *Echigo Tsumari Triennial*, Echigo Tsumari; 5 shows, 5 curators, Staff USA/AC Project Room, New York *Waiting*, Mjelby Art Centre, Halmsted; *Sightings*, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson
- 1998 *Nordic Nomads*, White Columns, New York; *Berlin/Berlin*, Berlin Biennale, Berlin; *Zone Franche*, Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris; *Junge Szene*, Wiener Secession, Wien; *Nuit Blanche*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris