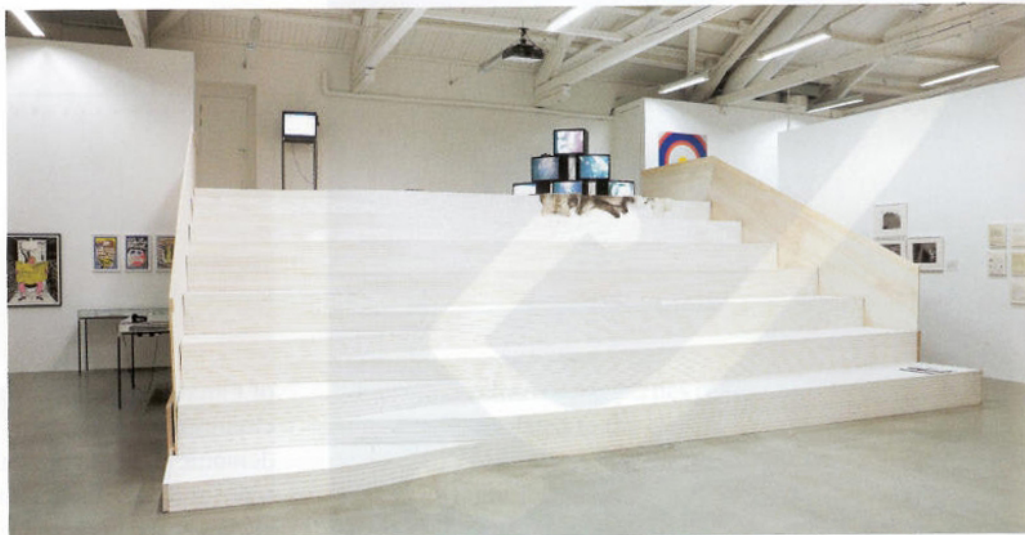


WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SEX

Office for Contemporary Art | Oslo, Norway



Inaugurating OCA's new premises in Oslo, "Whatever Happened to Sex in Scandinavia?" (through February 1)—a three-tiered program consisting of an exhibition, public events, and publications—included works by nearly 40 international artists and filmmakers, all reflecting on the historical roots of Scandinavia's sexy bad rap. Curated by OCA director Marta Kuzma (with the assistance of Tonja Boos), the show brings together the scientific work of Wilhelm Reich in Oslo in the late 1930s, Stan Brakhage's 16mm silent film *Prelude: Dog Star Man* (1961), Lee Lozano's graphite drawing *Masturbation Investigation* (1969), Marie-Louise Ekman's comic-strip painting *Livet och Döden* (1971), Barbara T. Smith's phallic sculpture *Field Piece* (1968-72), and even Edvard Munch's classic femme-fatale lithograph *Vampyr II* (1895). In addition to this extensive survey, there are screenings of Neil Ortenberg and Daniel O'Connor's 97-minute film *Obscene* (2008), along with relevant posters and magazines contributing to the sheer magnitude of OCA's inquiry into spectatorship and the erotic.

But "Whatever Happened to Sex?" does not solely concern itself with Scandinavian countries or their proximal offshoots. It also strives to offer the viewer a more universal overview of Western obscenity in both the private and public domains. Crossbreedings of every kind are on display, including videos by Lithuanian/New York artist Jonas Mekas, like *A Visit to Timothy Leary* (1965) and *Bed-In, John Lennon and Yoko Ono* (1970). Perhaps Kuzma and Boos recognize the inherent openness of the Scandinavian *genius loci*, while at the same time attempt to unfetter it from

native, essentialist claims. Visitors got a glimpse of this cultural displacement in the dialogue that took place (after the screening of *Obscene*) between Kuzma and Barney Rosset, founder of *Evergreen Review* and Grove Press and well-known opponent of literary censorship.

Many today view "Scandinavia" collectively as being more socially advanced than its European and New World counterparts. "Whatever Happened to Sex?", which is part of OCA's ongoing *Verkstad* series, tries to fathom this widely held perception and its link to the rise of democratic socialism in Nordic countries between the 1950s and 1970s. As if to surmise that things may have turned out differently, the show focuses on various pivotal moments in the development of postwar Scandinavian culture, pointing to late-1960s feminist interventions by the group *Kanonklubben* in both Denmark and Norway, and to other political influences like Bergen's *Gruppe 66* and *Konkret Analyse*. The inclusion of even older sources (among them, a 1910-11 woodcut by Erich Heckel and Kai Fjell's 1936 painting *Hanskesyersken*) and activist forebears (such as Elise Ottesen-Jensen and Käthe Kollwitz) provides further evidence for the radical promiscuity of these sexual themes.

Implicitly, the question the show raises does not imply any lessening in sexual activity in this part of the world—it's just that sexual

politics is no longer such a pressing concern. Whether this can be attributed to the national genius, cyclical fashions in public mores, or the current generation's short attention span, the show manages to raise a lot of heat around what is mostly nostalgia for bygone times. Meanwhile, the action on the ground is never what it seems. Why, for instance, were the Swedes the inventors of the rape-protection tampon *FemDefence*?
—Jacquelyn Davis



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) BARBARA T. SMITH, *FIELD PIECE*, 1968-72, FIBERGLASS RESIN "BLADES," ETHAFOAM, WOOD LIGHT BULBS, ELECTRONICS, 290 X 244 X 366 CM. "WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SEX IN

SCANDINAVIA?" INSTALLATION DETAILS, OFFICE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, NORWAY. PHOTO VEGARD KLEVEN.