

OVERGADEN.

Daniel Svarre gives the background for his first solo exhibition in Copenhagen; a meeting with invisible enemies and uniformed men.

INTERVIEW

By Line Kjær, Overgaden

Line Kjær Your exhibition at Overgaden is entitled Give Me Shelter. What is the concept and the background for this exhibition?

Daniel Svarre The exhibition consists of a series of recent sculptures that investigate concepts like group identity, community, desire and fear. On the one hand, the works reflect the intimacy, presence and solidarity of a community, and on the other hand the fear of dissolution and of that which lies outside the group.

One of the starting points for the exhibition has been the wish to create a critical contribution to the image of 'us and them' which has become an accepted expression in the political debate in Denmark. On top of that, the works represent an attempt to deal with feelings like desire and anxiety that relate to stereotypical perceptions of 'the others'. My works can be seen as a cross-over between the personal and the public and can be interpreted from both perspectives.

LK And the title?

DS The title *Give Me Shelter* indicates a wish to seek shelter or protection in a day and age marked by a turbulent, global development. The title is a form of opening to the works. All of them try to construct different forms of protection through unions, uniforms and overviews. There is also a certain passivity in the title, showing a desire for inertia - a state many of the sculptures are marked by.

LK You have explained the exhibition as a form of psychological interpretation of urban space. Can you say more about this?

DS I see my works as experimenting mindscapes. When I say mindscapes I mean that the works reflect my subjective reading of, or more precisely, my psychological interpretation of the urban sphere of the welfare state. My works are often the result of reworked sensual impressions of the city, mixed with private symbols in the hope of creating new meaning.

In the exhibition for Overgaden, for instance, I worked with a number of objects under the denomination *Public/Private*, which are combinations of elements from both private and public spaces. They include the work *Chair*, which took shape from a Modernist Danish armchair but which also imitates structures from public space like hierarchy and surveillance.

LK Apart from the *Public/Private* objects, the exhibition also includes a series of 'clothes sculptures' - a type of work that you have explored



Daniel Svarre, Uniformed2, 2007

over the last couple of years and which has developed into a characteristic, sculptural idiom. Do clothes, as materials, hold special meaning to you?

DS Garments are no more important to me than any other materials. I work with materials according

to their meaning(s) and rework them in connection with the form I want to imbue them with. An artistic strategy which has been inspired by appropriation art, among other things. But when I do work with clothes it is as symbols supporting identity that can direct us to some of the groupings and stereotypes

constructed constantly by the media and by our society. The clothes sculpture *Group5*, for instance, is a work with clear references to the hip-hop culture that challenges the viewer to find an attitude to the depicted group, putting into play a reflection on prejudiced and stereotypical perceptions of 'the others'.

At the same time I try to suggest some psychological and emotional layers in the sculptures through the reworked form they've been given, suggestions that open up to different stories, followed by questions like, "What are they doing?" This shift of focus creates a starting point for asking questions concern-

Photo: Henrik Lund Jørgensen



Daniel Svarre, Portraits of Danish Teens with Hip-hop Attitude, 2006

ing relations between aesthetical and socio-political issues.

LK The exhibition's highlighting and discussion of the discourse of 'us and them' makes the works highly topical in the current debate on normalisation. Do you have a political agenda? And how would you define the socio-critical involvement of your work?

DS In one form or another I think

all art is socio-critical, since it is implicit that it relates to its contemporary time and place. But I have never liked or been able to identify myself with the label 'political artist'. I am not interested in and have no desire to categorise art in different boxes.

The starting point for the works is an interest in current debates, and they might be contextualised in relation to Denmark and the

attempts of normalisation that are being employed here. But these initiatives obviously can't be seen as purely national or regional, they are connected to a global development that sees freedom of expression put under pressure as a result of the threat of terror.

At the same time there is great concern for issues like identity, nationality and European regionalism in the social debate. Viewed from that perspective, the so-called normalisation initiatives come to seem like a natural development - that which is different from accepted norms is affixed with a dangerous, hard-to-define mystique there isn't room for.

LK The theme of the invisible enemy, both in a social and a subjective context, can be seen in many of your earlier works. How do the works exhibited at Overgaden relate to your previous work?

DS For a number of years I have been taken with how masculinity and desire is constructed. In that process I have primarily focused on sculpture, text and drawings. Feelings like anxiety and desire have played big roles in my investigations. For instance in works like *Bedtime Fear of Invading Forces* (2005) and *My name is Daniel* (2004) which rework fantasies concerning Denmark's participation in the Iraq War, as seen through the matrix of the media, but also through my own dreams. In the portrait series *Portraits of Danish Teens with Hip-hop Attitude* (2006) I conduct a similar investigation into desire and anxiety, though more specifically placed and grouped in the latter instance.

In the exhibition for Overgaden I have worked with the sculptures in relation to each other, and with the synergy that comes from placing the works as part of narrative structures. I have tried to create a form of total installation rather than focus on individual sculptures. I hope the sculptures will work together as an coherent installation in the exhibition space, to hopefully give the viewer a more physical confrontation with the works.

This interview was conducted by e-mail in April 2007.



Daniel Svarre, Group5, 2007

GUIDE

Group5, 2007. Clothes sculpture made from textiles and wood. The sewing together of five identical hooded sweatshirts and five identical pairs of jeans form a uniformed circle of people with their backs turned to the viewer. The closed circle seems to reflect both a strong sense of solidarity, but also the fear of being outside.

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Uniformed2, 2007. Clothes sculpture made from textiles and wood. Two camouflage uniforms of two different nuances have been sewn together in such a way that the two hooded figures seem to either embrace each other, or fight, depending on the angle from which the sculpture is viewed.

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Group14, 2007. Clothes sculpture of textiles and wood. Fourteen identical shirts and fourteen identical pairs of trousers have been sewn together in such a way that the arms rest in a friendly fashion on each others' shoulders. The closeness and the uniformed identity seem to evoke a feeling of community and belonging in the viewer, yet it also defines a clear border between the group and the space around it.

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Group2, 2007. Clothes sculpture made from textiles and wood. Sewing together two identical pin-striped suits and two white shirts creates a symbiotic and dramatically deformed figure which seems to be undergoing a form of outer, corporeal metamorphosis.

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Public/Private (Umbrella), 2007. Umbrella and newspaper object. The object series *Public/Private* consists of a number of items that have been robbed of their intended functionality, including an umbrella where the nylon has been replaced by newspapers. The fragile construction can act as an image of the media shelter that often forms the basis for our reading of the world, the one from which we try to find our stand.

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Public/Private (Chair), 2007. Armchair object made from painted redwood. By extending the legs of an armchair, a typical piece of Danish Modernist design has lost its function. The hearth of the private sphere seems to grow into a hierarchical and dominant structure. From here we can try to construct overview and coherence.

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Public/Private (Table), 2007. Box object made of plywood and neon tubes. A table has been covered with plywood plates made of pine. The material is an imitation of the plates often used to barricade shop windows in connection with riots. The light in the box, however, leaves one in doubt as to whether somebody is trying to keep something out, or if somebody has boxed himself in.

ETYMOLOGY

Uniform: Adjective: 1. Always the same, as in character or degree; unvarying. 2. Conforming to one principle, standard, or rule; consistent. 3. Being the same as or consonant with another or others. Noun: 1. A distinctive outfit intended to identify those who wear it as members of a specific group. Verb: 1. To make (something) uniform. 2. To provide or dress with a uniform. [Latin *uniformis* : *uni-*, (uni-) + *forma*, (shape)]

Camouflage: Noun: 1. The method or result of concealing personnel or equipment from an enemy by making them appear to be part of the natural surroundings. 2. Concealment by disguise or protective coloring. 3. Fabric or a garment dyed in splotches of green, brown, tan, and black so as to make the wearer indistinguishable from the surrounding environment. [French, from *camoufler*, (to disguise), alteration (influenced by *camouflet*, snub, smoke blown in one's face) of Italian *camuffare*]

Suit: Noun: 1. A set of matching outer garments, especially one consisting of a coat with trousers or a skirt. 2. A costume for a special activity: a diving suit; a running suit. 3. *Slang*: One who wears a business suit. Verb: 1. To meet the requirements of; fit. 2. To make appropriate or suitable; adapt. 3. To please; satisfy. [Middle English *sute*, from Vulgar Latin *sequita*, (act of following), feminine of *sequitus*, past participle of *sequere*, (to follow), from Latin *sequi*]

Source: The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition

CV - DANIEL SVARRE

Daniel Svarre was born in 1976 in Vejle and lives and works in Copenhagen. He studied at Funen Art Academy and graduated from Malmö Art Academy in 2006. Svarre's sculptures, drawings and texts revolve around group formations, fear and desire in particular and have been exhibited at Rum46, Århus (2001), Göteborgs Konsthall, Sweden (2004), The Istanbul Biennale, Turkey (2005), Peep Gallery, Malmö, Sweden (2006), Helene Nyborg Contemporary, Valby (2006) and Gallery Luis Adelantado, Valencia, Spain (2006). The Overgaden exhibition is his first solo exhibition in Copenhagen.

GUIDED TOURS

Remember that every Saturday at 1pm we offer guided tours (in Danish) of the exhibitions by members of Overgaden's staff. The tours are free and everyone is welcome. Booking is not required, just show up!

NEXT EXHIBITION AT OVERGADEN

On Friday 6 July 2007 we open the exhibition *The Re-conquest of Space*, curated by French curator Fanny Gonella. The exhibition runs through to 19 August 2007.

The Daniel Svarre Exhibition has been produced with the support of Selected and The National Workshops for Arts and Crafts.

SELECTED

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