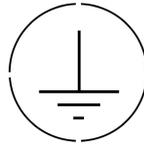


GROUND
N I N E T Y - N I N E



S E N G L E A
L - I S L A

BJØRN MELHUS



While the 4 works selected for GROUND 99, spanning 10 years of Bjørn Melhus's prodigious practice, are all apocalyptic warnings of impending doom, they are also extremely humorous - deploying satire, parody, and absurd exaggeration as tools of critique, using laughter as a way to expose uncomfortable truths. Bjørn Melhus's works extend the exhibition's broader investigation into the cultural and informational excess that defines contemporary life. If the Malta Biennale asks how we might *clean, clear, and cut* through the accumulations of images, narratives, and ideological noise that shape our perception of reality, Melhus approaches this task by dissecting the media languages themselves. His works operate like distorted mirrors of the broadcast era, revealing how the very formats that once promised collective imagination and connection now circulate recycled fears, desires, and political myths. Within the layered historical environment of Malta - where centuries of communication, trade, and conflict have shaped the movement of history and power - Melhus's fractured media performances highlight how contemporary identities are increasingly scripted by global image economies. By exposing these narrative mechanisms through humor and exaggeration, his works open a space for critical distance, inviting audiences to recognize - and perhaps rewrite - the cultural scripts that continue to frame our understanding of the present.

ARTIST STATEMENT:

"My approach may be seen as a personal critique on what was going on in the media world, going back to other decades and creating bridges to where we are right now....

Our world seems to be in a free fall nowadays. As our reality spins further out of control, we shift more and more into virtual realities and into the representation of what we call the world. I think we're going through one of the biggest changes in humankind at the moment, mainly caused by the digital revolution that really took off during the last decade of the twentieth century. I'm interested in how our social behavior is changing and how much this is influenced by the use of digital media.

How much loneliness does interconnectivity cause? How much do we design ourselves - or relinquish control to the happy capitalist consumerism that is conquering all parts of the world? And what about love, depression, and our own mortal physicality in times of artificial intelligence? What is the future of a society that is becoming increasingly imbalanced and unequal? What do we actually see? What not? We can't look toward the future without looking into the present and the past. Our

society is built on narratives that are stored in different media. How can we build bridges to connect the past with the future by recontextualizing existing media archives and literature? Isn't it time to have utopian ideas again? Is there enough air to breathe in a present that has already become a dystopia? Where and how can we position ourselves politically in a rather post-democratic world?"

- Børn Melhus



Børn Melhus, *FREEDOM & INDEPENDENCE* (2014), 4K video, 16:9, color, sound, 15'

FREEDOM & INDEPENDENCE confronts neoliberal elitist thinking using generic media fragments of religious prophecies about the end of time in the setting of a privatized habitat marked by architectures of megalomania. Børn Melhus's film questions the current global ideological paradigm shifts towards new forms of religious capitalism by confronting ideas and quotes of the self-proclaimed objectivist philosopher and novelist Ayn Rand with evangelical contents of US-American mainstream movies. This contemporary dystopian fairy tale, in which Melhus performs all characters himself, was partly shot in a Berlin morgue and new urban environments in Istanbul. It is a tour de force using elements of science fiction, musicals, comedy and horror films to scour our global psyche for ingrained promises of salvation, childhood traumas and the work ethic as it is affected by our desire for self-improvement.



Børn Melhus, *HOMESICK* (2022), 4K video, 16:9, color, sound, 14'

ARTIST STATEMENT:

HOMESICK is an attempt to process the trauma of pandemic and lockdown experiences, incorporating linguistic quotations from post-apocalyptic films. The video depicts nightmarish states of social isolation, illness, and scenarios of threat and defense. Various figures, who have secluded themselves from the outside world and permanently established themselves in seemingly separate basement rooms, negotiate the pandemic state of emergency using appropriated linguistic quotations. These are moments of crisis management, fear, illness, resistance, loneliness, and uncertainty, in an atmosphere of stagnation and lethargy that, in its exaggeration, can sometimes veer into the grotesque.

- Børn Melhus



Børn Melhus, *SUGAR* (2019), 4K video, 16:9, color, sound, 20'30"

ARTIST STATEMENT:

In a post-apocalyptic world not much unlike parts of the present, SUGAR (Frank Willens), a humanoid robot that can feel, think and dance, is sent out to bring back a human touch to people. SUGAR finally encounters a HON (Human Organism Normal) (Bjørn Melhus), a post-influencer who passes his time in a sort of eternal commercial in an underground techno cell. SUGAR tries to free HON from his prison of routines, speech and movement loops and hopes to build a true encounter – an interaction, a dialogue. The tragicomic narrative of this encounter and its failure raises general questions about consciousness, ego-turbo-capitalism and the dream of the collective. SUGAR is an experimental science fiction film. [- Børn Melhus]



Børn Melhus, *SUDDEN DESTRUCTION* (2012), HD video, 16:9, color, sound, 4'20"

ARTIST STATEMENT:

A man in a hotel. A newscaster. A corpse under a bedsheet which suddenly awakens and postulates the advent of "sudden destruction". Speech is gushing out in the rhetorics of the apocalypse taking itself to the absurd. The quotes are taken from youtube videos of self-proclaimed evangelist prophets. - Børn Melhus

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BJØRN MELHUS (born 1966 in Kirchheim unter Teck, Germany. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany and Rome, Italy.)

Bjørn Melhus is a German-Norwegian media artist, renowned for his incisive, darkly humorous explorations of mass media, identity, and the cultural myths embedded within popular entertainment.

Bjørn Melhus appropriates fragments of dialogue, soundtracks, and narrative tropes drawn largely from American film and television. These audio excerpts often serve as the conceptual starting point for his works, which he meticulously edits and recomposes into new narrative structures that exaggerate and destabilize familiar media stereotypes. Performing every role himself, through elaborate costumes, makeup, and carefully staged environments, Bjørn Melhus embodies multiple characters within a single work, constructing uncanny scenes in which the voices of popular culture appear to speak through a single body. By reenacting and reframing recognizable archetypes - from Hollywood heroes to television personalities - Melhus reveals the ideological scripts embedded within mass media, exposing how identities, desires, and power structures are repeatedly reproduced through cultural storytelling.

At the core of his practice lies an ongoing investigation into the psychological and social effects of the digital revolution. Melhus examines how constant connectivity, algorithmic culture, and the global spread of consumer capitalism reshape human relationships, emotional life, and political imagination. His works frequently oscillate between dystopian satire and melancholic reflection, questioning whether media saturation produces connection or isolation, empowerment or control. By bridging past media archives with present anxieties and speculative futures, Melhus exposes the fragile narratives through which societies understand themselves, while inviting viewers to reconsider the cultural scripts that continue to shape our collective reality.

Originally rooted in an experimental film context, Bjørn Melhus's work has been shown and awarded at numerous international film festivals. He has held screenings at Tate Modern and the LUX in London, the Museum of Modern Art (MediaScope) in New York, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris, amongst others. His work has been exhibited in shows like *The American Effect* at the Whitney Museum New York, the 8th International Istanbul Biennial, solo and group shows at FACT Liverpool, Serpentine Gallery London, Sprengel Museum Hanover, Museum Ludwig Cologne, ZKM Karlsruhe, Denver Art Museum among many other prestigious institutions worldwide. Melhus also shares his inexhaustible knowledge of pop culture with his students, teaching as a professor for Fine Arts and Virtual Realities at the Kunsthochschule Kassel, Germany.