

NOVEMBER 2014 VOL. 1 ISSUE 6

**COPENHAGEN
EDITION**

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culture
reflects on
its gender
crisis**

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Borgen –
What is
DR doing
right?**

**Troels
Carlsen on
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art and
why paint-
ing isn't
dead**



Longing for the Arctic

ISSN 2246-6150

**Writer Iben Mondrup reflects on growing up in
Greenland and her struggle to accept her identity**

CULTURE COLUMN

NOVEMBER is bad news because it's time for another round of Movember bollocks, which is almost as annoying as the ice bucket challenge. But it is also good news because it's time for CPH:DOX, one of the highlights in Copenhagen's arts and culture calendar. More than just a documentary festival – it's an overwhelming ten-day display of genuine enthusiasm for the issues facing modern society. It hits all the 'hot topics', from the newest in activism, technological developments, art, and music with international edge and dozens of impressive guests from around the world.

I would have loved to find a critical or ironic angle to CPH:DOX which is praised by everybody – and the only one I could find was that their head private sponsor has an strongly elitist slogan "the best or nothing" – in sharp contrast with the egalitarian spirit that thrives in Scandinavia in general and at CPH:DOX in particular.

But CPH:DOX, Movember and the ice bucket challenge have one thing in common – they claim to be rooted in making the world a better place. Every year, CPH:DOX founder and director Tine Fischer makes an impassionate speech on how the responsibility to make the world a better place lies on us – the elite in the western world.

I do not want to suggest that being a decent person is bad. But if there is one thing that religious crusades have told us, it is that certitude is at the root of much evil.

Let me be clear, I really admire Tine Fischer's passion. I have known her for many years and will continue to support her the best I can.

I just want to make a point that doing good has become really popular these

days in the educated circles of the western world. The problem is that I have yet to see any solid proof that we are actually changing things for the better.

Is wanting to change the world a lifestyle? The best expression of this is Copenhagen artist Colonel who wrapped a cobblestone in a headband imprinted with the word "coolness". Another striking example of this is the multitude of non-profit projects that are initiated with a clear non-profit agenda, when their project is years away from even making a profit – before you claim the "non-profit" virtue, you should first be concerned with making a profit to start with. I remember the words of Philip Agerbech (one of my colleagues in the party / culture / entrepreneurship world) who said, "people who want to build hospitals in Africa seem to be motivated by their towering ego".

I myself wrote an ideological manifesto for Distortion Festival a couple of years ago – Google 'distortion fonden'. I was obliged to do so by law in order to be allowed to register a "foundation". I don't believe being a non-profit foundation makes my project any better or worse. The complexity of the world and the randomness of cause and effect really makes it impossible for anyone to claim they are working for the greater good. Hopefully Distortion is cooler than viral self-promoting charities – CPH:DOX certainly is. But I wouldn't go much further than that.

Thomas Fleurquin

Thoughts? Email peter@murmur.dk

"I skated a lot growing up [...] I didn't think about it back then, but there was a lot of political, poetic statements and alternative modes of expression imbedded in that culture"

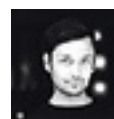
TROELS CARLSEN

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CONTRIBUTORS



Carl Coleman A 29-year-old Australian sexual refugee living in Copenhagen for the past six years. Carl plays in Sink Ships and Palace Winter and wrote about Danish TV dramas on page 14.



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PRINT Trykkeriet Nordvestsjælland, www.tnvs.dk

DISTRIBUTION THE MURMUR is available at a range of businesses, institutions, cafés and public libraries across Denmark.

THE MURMUR is also available as a free digital download. Visit www.murmur.dk

SUBSCRIPTIONS For home or corporate delivery of the printed edition please contact: subs@murmur.dk

THE MURMUR is published 12 times a year.

This issue was published on November 3, 2014.

Cover photo: Peter Stanners

Circulation: 20,000

CVR: 26644585

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DANSK?

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I thought I could get by with English here in Denmark. You can, too. But if you want to join the conversation during the lunch break, you have to learn Danish! I was surprised that the course is free, and that there is so much material online! I especially like the listening exercises. Listening is so important!

Chloe Trieu, from France

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OBSERVED

FOR THE LADIES

There are numerous pills out there to treat erectile dysfunction for men, but when it comes to fuelling the lady fires, there seems to be a serious shortage.

Now American drug company Sprout Pharmaceuticals is developing a new 'female Viagra', Flibanserin, which aims to combat 'Female Sexual Arousal Disorder'.



ICEY TIME RUNNING OUT

Have you noticed massive, majestic blue blocks of ice downtown and wondered why they were there? Artist Olafur Eliasson and Greenlandic geologist Minik Rosing brought twelve gigantic ice cubes to Copenhagen from Greenland to put focus on climate change. The blocks are structured as a slowly melting clock in the City Hall square, so everybody can watch as the climate clock runs out.

PUMPKIN CHAMP

The Murmur would like to send a special shout-out to West Jutland farmer Kim Engrob for winning the largest pumpkin in Denmark award. Engrob managed to grow his pumpkin to an impressive 276 kg, proving that you don't need to be a fairy to turn a pumpkin into a cart to success.

Lesley Price and Elias Thorsson

Dogvertising

Last month The Murmur reported on Forest Whitaker appearing in butter ads. Now Snoop Dogg has endorsed a Danish phone company. In the ads, Dogg sits on a couch alongside Dog, a Boston terrier. "Together with our popular dog Dog, Snoop Dogg can lift our brand to new heights," said Eri Tomi-Gottschau, marketing officer for 3 Mobile.



Dominic simpsonv



SILLO, THE FINAL FRONTIER

If you have partied in a club and on a boat, and Kødbyen has become your second home, there is really only one place left to go – a silo. Over the past few weeks, a burgeoning silo party culture has emerged with a series of 'raves' at the old Carlsberg brewery, where the the kids have been fermenting in hip music, cheap beers and happy balloons.

THE MURMUR



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TAKE YOU TO OTTER SPACE

What swims around holding paws, has a moustache, is adorable and loves salmon? The sea otters that recently arrived at the aquarium Den Blå Planet! As amazing as they are, the great otter puns all over the Metro were even better.

Otterly brilliant.



Den Blå Planet

LOVE THY BROTHER?

A Danish professor argues that consensual sex between adult siblings should be made legal. Thomas Søbirk Petersen, professor of ethics at Roskilde University, says we need to rethink the old taboo of family coupling. He reasons that donor sperm has given rise to the possibility that biological siblings could be created and grow up in different families. Could this be the dawn of the relative relationship?



David Shankbone

THAT OL' HEAP O' YOURS

Are you bored with just hanging out with your friends every weekend? Have you heard Stine tell that story of when she met Anders Fogh a hundred times? Has Mads' incessant instagramming started cutting into your soul like a razor? Fear no more, new app Heap allows you to take that boring heap of friends and merge them with a heap of strangers, who may or may not be interesting. It's like Tinder, but with groups!

Bike theft

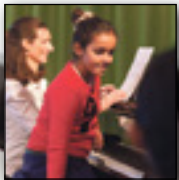
It's estimated that up to 200 bicycles are stolen every day in Denmark. Small wonder, since one in six Danes have admitted to stealing bikes in a recent YouGov poll carried out for Danish insurance company Alm. Brand.

All those 'borrowed' bikes that are never returned end up costing the insurance companies around 200 million kroner per year in compensation payouts.

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CULTUREMAKER

THE WAR OF 2014

Director **OLE BORNEDAL** has had a hard time convincing the critics that he is actually an artist, not a historian

LAST MONTH, the most expensive TV series in Danish history debuted on DR. The period drama, *1864*, cost 173 million kroner and required specially earmarked funds from the government to complete. The man chosen to preside over this massive budget was 55 year-old director Ole Bornedal, director of big Hollywood films like *Nightwatch* and *The Possession*.

The series recounts the story of Denmark's defeat to Prussia and Austria in the nineteenth century, which left the nation devastated and demoralised. But now, 150 years later, this retelling of an old war has sent people to the trenches to start a new assault — on Ole Bornedal.

You know things aren't going well for you when the ornithological society is criticising you for the incorrect use of nightingales, but sadly that is the least of Bornedal's problems.

SHOULD THAT BE THERE?

Electric fences in the trailer, medals that would not exist for another ten years, and making constitutional hero D.G. Monrad into a nutcase are just some of the elements that have come under volleys of critical cannon fire.

The show has also received frosty reviews from the TV critics. "A long erotic foreplay," wrote Jyllands-Posten about episode three. "Nothing new from the front," was the verdict from Berlingske. "Outrageously poor," proclaimed Ekstra Bladet.



Photo: DR

Ole Bornedal discussing the *1864* furore on TV.

Elias Thorsson

The criticism coincides with a shrinking audience. The first episode was watched by 1.7 million people, but by the third episode viewership had already fallen 13 percentage points, shrinking to 1.5 million.

The most conspicuous criticism, however, has come from a political party. Dansk Folkeparti (DF) has had a long-standing skirmish with television, casting their foreign policy spokesperson Søren Espersen in the role of frontline general. No fewer than six DR TV series have come under attack from Espersen, who has lobbed bombs at everything from the classic *Matador* to internationally-acclaimed political drama *Borgen*.

No TV show had incited such a DF anti-insurgency as *1864*,

however. The show's depictions of friendly gypsies being abused by Danes and the aristocracy engaging in bestiality, not to mention Bornedal's decision to focus on nationalism as the main cause for the war, have infuriated DF to the point of trying to use its power in Parliament to make sure this never happens again.

Last month, DF's cultural spokesperson Alex Ahrendtsen proposed that a committee of "two to five historians" be created by the government to make sure that DR only produces historically accurate shows. Citing a particularly galling example of historical inaccuracy, he mentioned a scene where two people have sex while bathing. "Ordinary Danes only started doing

such things in the 20s," he told Berlingske newspaper.

ARTISTIC FREEDOM

Whether or not Danes were frolicking in water before the 1920s is hard to say, but, as far as Bornedal is concerned, the criticism is ridiculous and shows merely that DF sees itself and its nationalistic rhetoric reflected in the warmongers of yesteryear.

"There is such a thing as artistic freedom. You take these characters and make them into living human beings. We dramatise, and that is what makes this different from a documentary," he told DR's Deadline.

He just sold the series to BBC4, and is now working on a script for HBO—so it seems like Bornedal will be just fine. **M**

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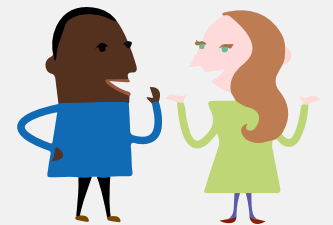
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The memories of an Arctic child

In her latest novel *Godhavn*, Iben Mondrup explores life through the eyes of children. The Greenlandic setting is close to her heart, and years after leaving the country, she continues to process the struggle of belonging to a culture and a community that doesn't accept her as one of their own

The interview has barely begun, but Iben Mondrup is in full swing. Seated in her home office in Vesterbro and speaking with lucid passion, she hardly pauses between critiquing the Danish art academy, discussing Greenland's racial hierarchy, and arguing for a need to accept the desires of children.

Blonde and Danish, Iben Mondrup is a Greenlander at heart. But resented by the people whose country she felt she belonged to, and unable to relate to the people she looked like, she suffered an identity crisis as a teenager.

"I completely broke down. I crashed. I quit university, divorced my husband, went to art school and said, 'Fuck Greenland! Fuck the lot of you.' I just threw it all away," she says, two middle fingers extended in the air between us.

ROOTED BUT HOMELESS

Mondrup moved to Denmark aged 17 with her Greenlandic boyfriend – who would briefly become her husband – after ten years living in Greenland. She was immediately taken aback by the treatment that Greenlanders received on the mainland, and was infuriated when asked

why she had moved home – moving to Denmark was moving away from home.

"They treated me like a Dane, and it made me furious. They were interested in my story and wanted to be friends with me, but my Greenlandic boyfriend was subjected to racism as soon as he arrived in Denmark. I was on constant alert, trying to protect him from my friends' condescending attitudes about Greenland. I couldn't ally myself with my Danish classmates because that would lead me away from him. I was caught between the two and it was incredibly stressful."

Her latest novel is *Godhavn*, named after the west Greenland town her family moved to in the 1970s to participate in modernising the former colony. The young Mondrup soon developed anger towards 'the white man', and rebelled against her identity as a member of the coloniser's class. But while she felt that her ability to criticise her white heritage earned her a place within Greenlandic society, she was never truly accepted.

"I couldn't understand why Greenlanders didn't want me just because I was a Dane. It didn't matter that I grew up there – they will always see me as a Dane. It was incredibly hurtful."



Godhavn is a small town on an island off the West Greenland coast. A Danish family with three children decide to move there and try to find their place in the community. It is a tale of the unforgiving Arctic and a moment in Greenland's history, when many Danes traveled abroad to try living in new and radical environments.

Her marriage crumbled under the pressure of being split between two worlds, and her former husband would later return to Greenland, where he now works as a doctor. She always thought she would return too, but 25 years on, she remains in Copenhagen. Despite settling in Denmark, she hasn't forgotten her roots. On the contrary – the very identity conflict that undermined her studies and her marriage now defines her as a person and permeates her work.

THE LIVES OF CHILDREN

Godhavn revolves around three children who move to the town – now called Qeqertarsuaq – with their Danish family. The novel's premise is based on her own experience, but Mondrup is adamant that it shouldn't be treated as a biographical work. Instead, she hopes the novel will revive childhood memories in her readers and instil in them that sense of vulnerability that is characteristic of being a child.

"The book focuses on the first-hand experiences of children in social environments over which they have no control. Children don't have free will. They can't move. So I'm interested in the space that children are placed in and how



Photo: Piotr Drabik

A competitor at the Intel Extreme Masters competition in 2013. The computer game community has been rocked by controversy this summer, resulting in concerns that it lacks inclusivity.

The hashtag that took the fun out of Games

Recent online debate has put the spotlight on the American Indie and AAA Games Industries. Is it time for Denmark to examine its own gaming culture?

GENDER no longer excludes people from being cultural consumers and producers, but it's still not completely safe to be a woman in the computer game community. Feminist media critics, game developers and tech writers have had their personal details published online and endured sexist slurs on Twitter. Some have even received death threats.

The increasing hostility to women in the computer game community climaxed this summer in a controversy now widely known as 'Gamer-gate'. The sudden eruption of tension arrived at a time when making and using computer games is becoming more and more widespread. Smartphones have made games accessible to those without consoles, and making your own games has never been easier with the development of free-to-use programs.

Danish computer game makers have now been drawn into the debate. IO Interactive, which makes the hugely successful *Hitman* franchise, has been accused of using sexist themes. Meanwhile, the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) – an international association of academics that includes several working in Denmark – has been accused of having a feminist bias and of trying to influence games with a feminist agenda.

MALE DOMINANCE

Jesper Krogh Kristiansen, a sound designer, game developer and, most recently, Denmark's first games industry historian, thinks that the debate could be helpful to the Danish industry, if it was happening in a more constructive way.

"As a game developer and an audio designer, I freelance often and get to see a lot of companies

#GAMERGATE

A hashtag started in August 2014. Some claim it is used to campaign for better ethics in games journalism, while others see it as part of a larger hate campaign targeting and harassing so-called "social justice warriors" – those who wish to make, play or discuss games from an ethical perspective.

from the inside. Many are almost entirely male, and while they may not be conscious of being sexist, there are certainly questions that aren't going to be asked," Kristiansen said.

The main Danish union for computer game developers, Producent Foreningen, takes an annual survey of the industry, and Kristiansen has suggested that they investigate the gender split of employees. While he doesn't know whether they will act on his suggestion, he acknowledges that feminism and gender are not issues that the industry is discussing.

"We are a Scandinavian country, and we think that we have already fixed gender discrimination, so there is no need to go into it. I also think we like to avoid the conflict because we think we are all friends here, so why bring up this unpleasant topic?" Kristiansen adds.

At the same time, there is no one place for a centralised debate on the Gaming Industry in Denmark.

"There hasn't really been a central platform for Danish game developers, but there are some things that work together to create a pretty strong identity. For example, Spilhuset, game jams, the Copenhagen Game Collective, Spil Bar and Growing Games all function as an excuse for the Danish games industry to meet each other. If you look at Twitter, there is a commonly used hashtag, #dkgames. This hashtag is not necessarily used to profile Danish games to the outside world, it's more a way of keeping each other in the loop," says Kristensen.

One game that has come out of Spilhuset is "Machineers" by Lohika ApS, a construction puzzle game located in an imaginary world of robots and machines that aims to teach basic coding principles.

"People here are interested if you can do your job, and if you are good at it," said CEO Henrike Lode, reflecting on how work culture in Denmark was benefiting her startup.

"It isn't just that people don't focus on gender, but they don't focus on hierarchy either. It is accepted that even the intern in a company can disagree with the boss if they can argue their opinion. It's a healthy attitude that allows people to speak freely."

STIFLED DEBATE

But according to Kristensen, the openness of Danish workplaces hasn't translated into a public debate about Gamergate by computer games developers. On the contrary, developers have become particularly wary of broadcasting strong views following the online campaigns of harassment that have spilled over into the real world.

"Few developers have reacted to Gamergate. They are waiting for it to blow over because if they address it, they know it could severely backfire. There is a huge amount of fear and anger online, and while I'm not sure where it comes from, it's clearly not constructive for discussions. There must be some people who feel really hurt and angry, and we have to accept that they feel like that. Dismissing those feelings will only make it worse."

Lecturer Torill Mortensen at the IT University of Copenhagen, who has served on the DiGRA board, thinks that while the internet can be a positive force in allowing new voices to be heard and new people to communicate, it has the potential to create echo chambers.

"Echochambers allow a group to talk to each other without listening to anyone else. People in these groups have the same interests, go to the same sites, and have their opinions confirmed by those sites. This creates a spiral of silence where you believe that your minority is the majority, because

you never hear anything except what your peers are saying."

Mortensen, who specialises in digital rhetoric, has not only spent the majority of her career exploring gaming culture, she is a gamer herself. She argues that Gamergate is a clear example of such an echo chamber, but hits back against accusations that DiGRA is itself an echo chamber for a group of feminist academics.

"Part of what academia consistently tries to do through its methods, openness and transparency is to fight the mechanism of the echo chamber. This is what conferences and gathering places like DiGRA are about," she says.

While the online world plays a role in increasing transparency, some platforms are problematic when trying to establish a sensible discussion, she argues.

"Twitter hashtags aren't a great way to have a discussion, because the hashtag can be easily co-opted by other groups that want to send their own message."

FEMINIST CONSPIRACY

The media discussion of Gamergate has been particularly confused, she argues, as those using the hashtag belong to a diverse set of groups with differing opinions. Some are also incredibly violent.

"If you talk about gamers as people who play games, the 'Gamergaters' are a minority of this group. I've played computer games a long time and have been interviewing gamers for 16 years. While I have occasionally met people with that kind of anger and aggression toward women, they are a minority. The majority that I meet are interesting, engaging and fantastic people."

Mortensen was puzzled as to why online communities have extended their criticism of journalism and feminist writers to DiGRA at all.

"It surprises me so much that Gamergate turned on DiGRA, because it has been protecting and arguing in favour of gaming from the start. Now, suddenly, alleged gamers are attacking the main advocate of gaming as an important pastime."

One group of Gamergate agitators has decided that DiGRA's real agenda is to influence and ultimately change the games industry – the fact that the association has published articles by several feminist academics has been enough for some within Gamergate to panic.

"The fear of having games changed is ridiculous, because as long as this particular group of gamers remain a strong demographic and are willing to buy and play games, there is no reason these games will go away."

"You can see it in film. Despite a long history of feminist film criticism, we still have sexist and violent male fantasy hero films coming out again and again. So there's no reasonable basis for this group to be afraid." ■

Kirsty Gifford

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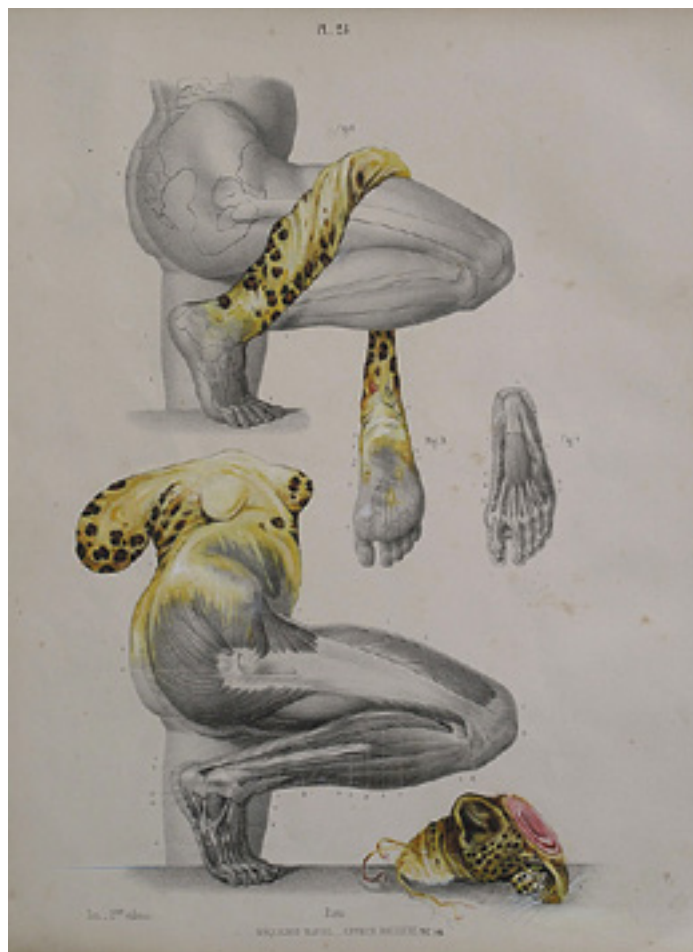
Danish artist Troels Carlsen works with figurative painting and drawing. Over the years he has developed a style of his own: starting with pages from an anatomy book, for instance, or from old photographs and newspaper clippings, he adds painted forms and figures, building images that border the surreal. We met Troels Carlsen for a talk in his flat in mid-city Copenhagen.

"I was always drawing as a kid – well more than average at least."

"And then in the mid-eighties I discovered graffiti. That was huge: the whole slime oozing down the top of the letters started a shift from a 2d to a 3d understanding of text. It is a huge visual event when graffiti appeared."

"I skated a lot growing up as well, I was mostly a skater actually. And I didn't think about it back then, but there was a lot of political poetic statements and alternative modes of expression imbedded in that culture, not just the graffiti but the music as well."

He pauses and clears his throat.



"Today it might seem as a cliché to have been inspired by skateboarding culture, but it wasn't back then when I was 13 to 17 – then you just got on the board and took off. All the painting and drawing stuff was something you did on the side. It was mostly about skating. Looking back that whole thing was a solid 'community' that propelled me onwards."

"I didn't really take my drawing seriously until my early twenties. Guess I had to satisfy my social cravings before sitting down alone in a room drawing for hours on end. You need to be able to add some life experience – I did anyway."

A smile turns into a grin.

"I really like the commentary style I've practiced for a while now. It was spawned from having worked with traditional canvas painting for a long time, which I had gotten a little bored with. So it actually started out as kind of an opposition to the tradition."

Carlsen works with a commentary style of drawing and painting where he adds layers on top of already existing imagery. For a recent series he has added flames to the edges of characters from military institutions and royal families posing.



"They're actually old generals of the Spanish army. The added flames have many connotations and I don't pretend to know them all, let alone define one as the true interpretation. But for me it's partly about the aesthetic consideration: the way the flames caress static figures. It is an attention to fire as an element and to the tactility of painting as a medium."

"It is definitely not to tell a story about the horrors of war or a call to action for burning down authorities; be it the military or the royal family. Rather it addresses the stoic calm of a person in a certain moment of time – the fiery edges, to me, open up a different atmosphere of intensity."



In which direction do you see painting evolving?



Written by
Erik Duckert
Portraits by
Martin Kurt Haglund

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"I don't really know actually, but one thing is certain: it isn't going away. Announcing painting as dead is pretty outdated these days. Painting is a way of containing a stream of images and I think people need that."

"What future paintings will depict will definitely alter as the world changes. I believe the world will continue to dwell on current events – and in that sense artists are entrepreneurs."



Sofie Gråbøl as the broody detective Sarah Lund in DR's 'The Killing'

Danish dramas are making a KILLING

W

ith the cold and dark months creeping upon us, the Copenhagen sky is like a thick grey blanket, suspended for a seeming eternity. The same sky provides the murky backdrop for such recent TV successes as *The Killing*, *Borgen* and *The Bridge*.

The entire world, it seems, has fallen for Scandinavia's bleak psycho-thrillers of murder, corruption, families and politics. Yet they're also stories that revolve around everyday characters living ordinary lives and working regular jobs. What is it about these shows that has taken the world by storm, and has led to American and British remakes by the reel-load?

IDENTIFIABLE CHARACTERS

"In Denmark, we like strong hero characters too, but we're always trying to do something based on reality," says Birger Larsen, conceptual director of *The Killing*.

"The most successful shows are grounded in the reality around us. You always add something more to your characters that is slightly bigger than the environment that we're in. But not too much, or people won't believe it. The audience won't buy it."

With the international successes of first *The Killing* and now *Borgen*, Denmark has become water-cooler material. But the chatter isn't about the Little Mermaid or snaps. Does the world audience relate to the everyday working-class characters in *The Killing*?

"They aren't all underdogs. They are just people doing solid jobs, with everyday problems that the audience can identify with," Larsen says.

"It flows through the screen to the audience as easy as soft-serve ice cream, because everybody has a piece of the character they're watching inside them," he says. "It doesn't matter if it's a female cop, a male cop, or a female prime minister, it has to be grounded in reality. It's important that the viewer feels like part of the universe that they are watching."

THE GAL NEXT DOOR

Another common thread in many of these

Crooked politicians, blue-collar workers, murdered schoolgirls and that famous woollen sweater. The rise of Danish TV dramas has put Copenhagen on the map, so we went on a 'whodunit' of our own to talk to the makers of these engrossing programmes

shows is that the lead character is often a woman. Detective Sarah Lund – the girl with the sweater – is our 'hero' in *The Killing*. Does Larsen see it as a sign of the times?

"The writers got together and thought, 'Hey, we haven't had a female cop as a lead character in Denmark, this might be something that works,'" recalls Larsen who is currently in Edinburgh shooting three episodes of the successful new series *Murder*, which won him his second BAFTA award in 2013 for best single drama.

"We didn't invent strong female characters. Agatha Christie had Miss Marple before World War II. We used Lynda La Plante's *Prime Suspect* – starring Helen Mirren – as a role model for our character Sarah Lund," he continues.

"We are not doing this because we think there should be more women in films, we're doing it because we think it's the most interesting thing to do for the story."

It's perhaps another example of the development of gender equality in Scandinavia – especially in the company of directors like Lars Von Trier, who seems to enjoy violating political correctness and taboos.

"Von Trier is so interesting and he always has really original ideas," continues Larsen. "He can do whatever he wants because there's always an artistic angle to it. You're watching an art form, not real life. Of course there are a few things that he won't touch, and I honestly think he has his own boundaries. But he's a true original and a great artist."

CRIME TV IN A NEW FORMAT

Asked whether Larsen feels a responsibility for the moral aspects of the stories he writes, he answers that his primary responsibility is making sure the stories are as good as possible.

"It sounds strange because on one hand, I'll kill people in a flash. I have an enormous body count in my films. But if the story is immoral, I won't make it."

But what explains the audience's fascination with dark issues – is it the Danish culture, the brooding climate, the darkness?

"For *The Killing*, it was a case of both good

"We are not doing this because we think there should be more women in films, we're doing it because we think it's the most interesting thing to do for the story"

**BIRGER LARSEN,
CONCEPTUAL
DIRECTOR OF
THE KILLING**

Carl Coleman

timing and a well-written and intertwining plot," Larsen says.

It was also a game changer for TV dramas – it was a taut, drawn-out, episodic story of a single murder, compared with the drive-thru style of murder stories found in American crime procedurals like *CSI: Miami* and *Dexter*.

"It pushed production companies around the world to do something different, realising that it's actually okay to have 20 episodes about one murder. Suddenly it had the English watching French and German series, and inspired shows like *Hinterland*, which is played in the Welsh language. When BBC4 first aired [*The Killing*] in the UK, it was like a public secret, and it was the first time that a foreign show with subtitles actually worked. And because it was a secret, people started talking about it and then it became immensely popular."

Apart from launching his career in the UK, Larsen's hit series paved the way internationally for other Danish programmes. Next was *Borgen*, a political drama based on the election and rise of Denmark's first female prime minister.

Its director, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen – also an acclaimed songwriter and co-founder of the Dogme movement – argues that the show not only reflects Danish politics, it also ended up shaping it: shortly after it premiered, Denmark elected its first real-life female prime minister.

"That was what we hoped for. When I first read the script, I found it important, and a possibility to give Danes the chance to look into the toolbox of politics," Jacobsen says.

"I also saw it as an entertaining way to teach people about democracy, because I think everybody should learn about it. I'm sure later on that it had an influence on Helle Thorning-Schmidt getting elected."

STRANGER THAN FICTION

It was clear that with the real political circus in full swing just outside the window, *Borgen* struck a chord and attracted an intelligent audience.

"The writer Adam Price wanted a light and

smooth-moving vehicle to hold the heavy political cargo," Jacobsen explains.

"The writers knew what was going to happen for the first six episodes. And every day, when they opened the newspapers, the real political situation was even more flamboyant and colourful than the fiction they were writing. I said, 'if you want inspiration for two more episodes take a look at what's happening on the real political stage.' It's absurd!" proclaims Jacobsen.

Following the success of *The Killing* and its gripping lead female character, *Borgen* had its own hero in the controversially cast Sidse Babbett Knudsen, who was more known for her comedic roles.

"I found it so strong and so right that a political figure could have all these facets, like being funny and charming and colourful," he says.

"Every time you see a political show from the States, it's always male characters. But engaging female performers keep the audience glued to the screens."

DOMESTIC POLITICS GOES INTERNATIONAL

It's not just locally that men and women have reacted to *Borgen*'s strong characters and thrilling plot twists – *Borgen* fever is still running hot from Norway to Australia.

"We Danes take our filmmaking very seriously. We've always made films with strong support from our government and fine subsidies compared to other countries and we have a very well-developed film school," Jacobsen recalls.

"When we first made *Borgen*, I asked, 'why do we have so little money per minute compared to other productions?' And everyone said 'because this programme can't travel.' So it took everyone by surprise when we sold it all over the world."

There's no shortage of riveting and engrossing television made right here in Copenhagen to see you through the winter. But is the future looking bright for more quality Danish TV?

Birger Larsen muses, "I think when DR stops trying to please the audience, something good will happen. They should have a responsibility to experiment and try something that is outside the mainstream." **M**



Sidse Babett Knudsen as Denmark's first fictional prime minister in DR's 'Borgen'.

Television drama, courtesy of the state

Professor Jakob Nielsen explains why DR is uniquely positioned to produce dramas with an international appeal, and why 1864 probably won't be a hit abroad

THE SUCCESS of dramas produced by state broadcaster DR is noteworthy for a number of reasons. Its shows are widely popular, drawing audiences of all ages and demographics. And while they were designed to please a domestic audience, they have also travelled well, literally putting Denmark on the map by raising interest in this brooding Scandinavian nation.

DR's success is also a boost to the left wing, which sees it as a shining example of a public institution that fulfils its obligations on budget (just don't bring up Eurovision). DR is funded through a licence fee of around 2,000 kroner per household per year, which some on the right argue gives the state broadcaster an unfair advantage over the private sector competition.

Jakob Isak Nielsen, professor of Media Science at Aarhus University, agrees that the licence fee is the only reason that DR is in a position to produce large-scale dramas, but also says that without it, the private sector would be unlikely to plug the gap.

"The license fee provides DR with a steady

I am grateful that we can even produce such an ambitious show in Denmark

Carl Coleman

income flow, which allows them to work with fairly high budgets and to plan years in advance. This gives DR an important edge in terms of acquiring talent both in front of and behind the camera. Particularly important in this regard are the head writer, the cast and the creative staff, such as the cinematographer, production designer, editor, and composer. In recent years they've also simply been more adventurous," says Nielsen, adding that DR is well-funded compared to public broadcasters in comparable countries.

DR has historically excelled at filling the 8 PM slot on Sunday nights, but its latest offering, *1864* (see next page), has garnered mixed reviews and plenty of criticism, particularly with respect to questions of historical accuracy. Period TV series tend to spark historical debates, says Nielsen, who thinks DR did fulfil its public service requirement to produce knowledge about a significant moment in Denmark's history.

"I am grateful that we can even produce such an ambitious show in Denmark. Its representa-

tions of transgressive sex and violence, along with its use of hard-to-grasp dialects and accents, make the show more in tune with HBO's *Deadwood*, for example, than DR predecessors like *Kroniken* or *Bryggeren*," says Nielsen, arguing that its ambition and aesthetics seem inspired not only by filmmakers such as Terrence Malick, but also by Eastern European directors such as István Szabó and Andrei Tarkovsky.

Nielsen is most impressed by DR's ability to create series that appeal to everyone, from American academics to Danish bus drivers. He is involved in a research project called "What makes Danish drama series travel?" that is trying to understand how Danish series are experienced in countries from Australia to Brazil and America to Turkey – are they 'Scandinavian', 'exotic', or just 'foreign'?

"Reviews of Danish series in The New York Times and in various British newspapers suggest that they are pooled together with series belonging to the third golden age of American series, such as *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad* and *House of Cards*."

1864

DR's latest high-profile drama is *1864*, a period piece that explores Denmark's devastating defeat by Prussia and its surrender of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. Director and writer Ole Bornedal began working on the 400-page manuscript in 2010, bringing the story to life to show Danes an important part of their past. It's a fascinating piece of history that played a massive role in forging the nation that Denmark is today. Time will tell if a homegrown historical drama will enjoy the same universal appeal as Denmark's current blockbusters.



His findings demonstrate the strong impact that DR's shows have had across the pond, but he's not convinced *1864* will fare as well.

"It has already been sold abroad, but I don't think it will be as successful as *The Killing*, *Borgen* or *The Bridge* due to its story design. The war of 1864 had important repercussions for the development of Europe as we know it today, particularly regarding Germany's position. But I don't think it will be a successful hook for international audiences."

The success of Danish series is well-established, and Nielsen is certain that the public is getting ample return on its annual investment. The final question then: what does the future have in store?

"I am confident that Jeppe Gjerulf Grams' forthcoming series *Follow the Money* will be a highlight in contemporary Danish TV history, and DR's new short-form series *Bankerot* is a remarkably well-produced series that bodes well for the future of series outside the Sunday 8 PM slot." **M**

WHAT'S ON • NOVEMBER

ALL MONTH

GHOSTS OF VESTERBRO
The V1 gallery unveils their latest exhibition 'Ghost Current', curated by American artist Ryan Wallace. The show features a range of local and international artists.
V1 Gallery
v1gallery.com
Ends November 22



BIOGRAPHICAL ART
Danish/Norwegian artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset take over Statens Museum of Kunst with their exhibition BIOGRAPHY, which showcases some of their most interesting works from 1995 till today.
Statens Museum for Kunst
smk.dk
Ends January 4

1

GET ART-SMART
Discuss the creative process with artists at a unique art and design market that opens its doors at Kongsgadehallen in Nørrebro, and features some of Scandinavia's newest talent.
Flid Art Market
flidmarked.com



Cody García

'DÍA DE MUERTOS'
Winter might be descending, but The National Museum of Denmark brings us a touch of the Southern Hemisphere with its 'Day of the Dead' celebration. Expect Mexican food and music.
The National Museum
natmus.dk
Nov 1 - 2

6

A CINEMATIC PINNACLE
The anticipated annual CPH:DOX festival kicks off this month featuring a vast range of stunning Danish and international documentaries screened at theatres scattered around the city.
CPH:DOX
cphdox.dk
Ends Nov 16



J - DAY
The only annual event that may trump the infamous 'julefrokost' for sheer drunken debauchery. Get yourself to your local bar to celebrate the release of Carlsberg's festive Christmas brew.

8

TIME TO FLEA INDOORS
Although the days of rummaging through vintage goods in the sun are long gone, the Carlsberg's indoor flea market ensures you won't have to go six months without getting your fix.
www.kbhmarkeder.dk
Nov 8 - 9

11

FOLK FOR THE SOUL
Dreamy American singer-songwriter Iron and Wine will be performing an acoustic set at Store Vega. The Neil Young-esque performer is one not to miss this November.
Iron and Wine
vega.dk

12

FOR THE TINY DANCERS
Elton John will be performing his classics at Forum on his 'Follow the Yellow Brick Road' Tour this winter. The show is set to be one of the most significant performances of the year.
Elton John
forumcopenhagen.dk

13

ULTIMATE A(MEW)SMENT
One of Denmark's most successful musical exports returns to their old stomping grounds for a show at Pumpehuset. A retrospective concert, they may just play some new material.
Mew
pumpehuset.dk



JOIN THE CIRCUS
Republique brings us yet another spectacular show pushing the boundaries of theatre performance. 'Donka' takes you to the circus with a stunning mix of acrobatics, dance, theatre and live music.
'Donka'
republique.dk
Ends Dec 6

15

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM
SMK Friday is back again featuring a range of artist talks, street food and DJ performances as the Danish National Gallery opens for another evening of free museum entertainment.
SMK Fridays
smk.dk

Lesley Price

YOU HAVE REACHED
THE CULTURE SECTION,
PLEASE TURN OVER

WHAT'S ON • NOVEMBER

15

GOOD TIVOLI TIDINGS

The Tivoli Gardens opens for the year-end festive season. The annual Christmas event will feature a bounty of stalls boasting seasonal treats as well as rides to get your heart racing in the November chill.

Christmas at Tivoli Gardens
tivoliigardens.com

Ends January 4, 2015



News Oresund

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

Ring in the Christmas season at one of the city's most iconic locations. The Nyhavn Christmas market will combine the pleasures of great food and wine with picturesque views of the quaint old harbour.

Nyhavn Canal Christmas Market
Website TBA

Ends December 23

25

A DANCING MADMAN

Leading contemporary dance company, Danish Dance Theatre, presents the chamber play 'The Dairy of a Madman' at Dansehalerne – a 'funny, grotesque and touching' solo performance.

The Diary of a Madman
danskdansteater.dk

Nov 25 - 29

28

PRE-CHRISTMAS CLASSIC

For one night only, The Royal Danish Orchestra will perform Beethoven's Fifth Symphony at the Opera House. If classical music is your thing, this is one to mark on the November calendar.

War and Peace, Symphony
Concert # 3
kgfteater.dk

ARE YOU AN ACCOMPANYING SPOUSE IN PURSUIT OF A CAREER AND RESIDING IN COPENHAGEN?

COPENHAGEN CAREER PROGRAM WOULD LIKE TO INVITE YOU TO AN INFORMATION MEETING IN INTERNATIONAL HOUSE, GYLDENLØVESGADE 11, 2nd FLOOR - 1600 COPENHAGEN V.

Friday the 21st of November at 12 pm - 14:30 pm

At the meeting you will receive information about:

- Danish courses
- Measures promoting employment such as internship, employment with salary subsidy, mentor at the work place and upgrading courses.
- Job seeking courses.
- Recognition of international qualifications.
- Unions and unemployment funds.
- Where to get information about starting up your own business.

Please register for the meeting by sending an e-mail with your full name and address, latest on Wednesday the 19th of November, to:

cphcareerprogram@bif.kk.dk

Sandwiches will be served during the meeting.

Copenhagen Career Program is based in Jobcenter Copenhagen International in International House, Gyldenløvesgade 11, 2nd floor, and is one of Copenhagen Municipality's services targeted expats.

www.facebook.com/copenhagencareerprogram

