



ADAM SAKS

**SETTING SAIL IN
A TEARDROP OF
FEAR AND DESIRE**

**KUNSTHAL
NORD**





Claw
2015, oil on canvas, 180 x 150 cm

BILLEDER KOMMER INDEFRA

"Man kan male enormt stort på bagsiden af en tændstikæske, og man kan male kæmpe stort uden at sige noget som helst", siger den 41-årige billedkunstner Adam Saks.

Af Henrik Broch-Lips
kunsthistoriker, journalist og leder af Kunsthall NORD

Adam Saks har forvandlet Kunsthall NORD til en malerisk totalinstallasjon. Den internationalt anerkendte kunstmaler har tidligere udstillet solo på en række prominente museer og udstillingssteder i ind- og udland, men *Setting Sail in a Teardrop of Fear and Desire* er hans hidtil største maleri-udstilling i Danmark. Alle værker er nye og lavet specifikt til Kunsthall NORD, og så er det første gang i hans karriere, at han har malet direkte på væggene.

"Den grundlæggende idé er at vise en forskellighed i værkerne og at vise forskellige maleriske greb. Kunsthall NORDs særegne arkitektur betyder, at man bliver animeret til at skabe et anderledes rumligt forløb, end hvis det blot var en clean white cube galleriudstilling, hvor man oftest blot hænger de 10-12 bedste malerier op. Kunsthallen er nærmest som en labyrint, man skal kante sig igennem, og hvert rum her er så prægnant, og så fyldt med en række 'maleriske' detaljer, at det fortjener sin egen profil, sin egen værkgruppe", siger Adam Saks.

Den 41-årige kunstmaler, der til daglig bor og arbejder i Berlin, har således skræddersyet sin udstilling til kunsthallens lokaler. Det gælder særligt de store sort/hvide vægmalerier, kunstnerens hidtil største maleri og Monte Verità suite, der består af seks store malerier (190x190 cm) med samme grundmotiv, men forskelligt farvespektrum og monteret som en stor blok - nærmest som et stort kalejdoskop.

"Jeg har taget højde for de forskellige rumlige muligheder, så det er på mange måder blevet en virkelig stedspecifik og alsidig udstilling. Arealmæssigt, og hvis man mäter kvadratcentimeter op, er det min største maleriudstilling til dato, men stort gør det jo ikke alene. Det handler mere om præcision, i det man gør. Man kan male enormt stort på bagsiden af en tændstikæske, og man kan male kæmpe stort uden at sige noget med det", siger Adam Saks, der dog selv evner at male store billede med stor udtrykskraft.

Accelererer fladen

Til udstillingen har Adam Saks malet *We are the Night* – et stort stilleben maleri som mäter 2,40 x 5,40 meter, og hvis titel indikerer, at man bevæger sig ind i en nattezone og et åbent rum, hvor alt kan ske.

"Jeg har gennem tiden arbejdet meget med klassiske temae som Memento Mori og Vanitas motiver og er primært inspireret af hollandsk barok. Med en transparent baggrund, og et meget klart grafisk udtryk, adskiller *We are the Night* sig fra de tidligere stilleben ved at fremstå langt mere enkelt end de tidligere oliemalerier. Jeg har sat det tegnede element i højsædet og isoleret processen, og på den måde er det blevet et destillat af mine andre stilleben malerier".

Adam Saks har som maler altid haft en ambition om at forene umiddelbarheden fra tegningen og grafikken med det maleriske udtryk, så friskheden i oliefarven bevares, uden at billedet opleves som en skitse.

"Det er en udfordring, i hvert fald for mig, at få maleriet og tegningen til at mødes, og samtidig har det også været mit ønske at overføre akvarellens spontanitet og umiddelbarhed til malerierne", siger Adam Saks.

For et par år siden fandt han en metode, hvor han kunne arbejde mere flydende med oliemalingen, så den netop fik akvarellens lethed. Og det nye maleri *We are the Night* har netop soliditeten fra oliemaleriet samtidig med akvarellens lethed. Samme fusionering af de to forskellige elementer kan man også opleve i *Claw*, der er hans seneste maleri. I det hele taget er Adam Saks optaget af at eksperimentere og forene de forskellige metoder, som han har til rådighed.

"I nogle af malerierne har jeg brugt store linoleumssnit, i andre trækker jeg på akvarellens laserende baggrund, og andre steder igen har jeg sat en oliepastel i en boremaskine som tegningselement, som giver et helt andet forløb. Jeg er interesseret i at accelerere fladen på maleriet – noget er tyndt malet, noget er tykt malet, noget er trykt og noget er tegnet. Det gør sig også gældende i den måde, jeg søger mine motiver. De har det her collagepræg, det er forskellige motiver og elementer, som jeg sætter sammen", siger Adam Saks.

Dødningehoveder og opiumstårer

Adam Saks arbejder i det snævre spænd mellem figuration og abstraktion og oftest med en flertydig forståelsesramme. Han benytter en særlig form for motiv- og billedsampling, hvor han ved at løsrive billedelementer fra deres oprindelige kontekst og genindsætte dem i forskellige konstellationer, skaber en række nye fortællinger.

Tidligere har han hentet sine billedelementer fra både høj- og lavkulturen og har oftest været inspireret af menneskets overskridelse af mentale grænser - det være sig opiumshulens dæmoni eller den tatoverede krop, der med billeder under huden vidner om levet liv og eksistentielle grundvilkår. Især har han fundet inspiration i de tatoveringer, som har prydet de franske straffefangers og fremmedlegionærers kroppe og dermed har hans dramatiske og melankolske malerier været fyldt med billeder af sørmand, letlevende kvinder, voldsomme dyr, dødningehoveder og øde, disharmoniske landskaber.

Inspirationen til flere af de nye værker, som udstillingen er bygget op omkring, har Adam Saks dog hverken hentet i opiumstårer eller kropsbilleder, men i det utopiske Monte Veritá - Sandhedens Bjerg. Her startede en gruppe unge pionerer i begyndelsen af 1900-tallet verdens første alternative samfund, hvor man kæmpede for kooperative systemer, kvinders frigørelse, nye opdragelsesformer, fri kærlighed og ønsket om sammensmelting af sjæl, ånd og krop.

Lever videre

Som noget nyt i hans kunstneriske praksis har Adam Saks skabt et stort vægmaleri. Og det mener han ikke er så overraskende, men tværtimod i fin forlængelse af de teknikker han ellers anvender - først og fremmest træsnittet som han har arbejdet rigtig meget med.

"I tidligere malerier har jeg skabt både positive og negative rum, og vægmaleriet her, som strækker sig over et helt lokale, er jo i virkeligheden ét lille intimt træsnit, der er forstørret op. Og da jeg tidligere også har malet rene sort/hvide malerier, var springet ikke så stort. Det føjer sig ind i min praksis – også fordi det er et underligt anti-hierarkisk rum, når man går ind i det", mener Adam Saks.

Hvordan har du det med, at dit maleri skal males over, når udstillingen er slut?

"Det har jeg fint med. Destruktion er jo et begreb, som jeg arbejder en del med i mine malerier. Selvom det forsvinder, er det ligesom palimpsest – jeg har jo lavet værket og eftersom det bliver dokumenteret, lever det videre", siger han.

Hvad kan maleriet i dine øjne, siden du holder så fast i det som medie?

"Maleriet kan skabe nye billeddannelser. Og så kan jeg godt lide enkelheden og den direkte tilgang. Med fem hundrede kroner kan man komme i gang og skabe et helt nyt rum, som ikke er set før. Ligesom jeg kan lave en koldnålsradering på et nedløbsrør med et sør – Jeg behøver ingen computer eller anden teknisk indblanding for at skabe et udtryk. For mit vedkommende gælder det om at skabe en klangbund eller resonans i forhold til, hvordan man ser verden, og her er maleriet bedst for mig, pointerer Adam Saks.

Hvem er du inspireret af?

"Det er jo ikke sådan, man har en bog, man planker det hele af fra. Men malerisk set er en af mine inspirationskilder den svenske kunstner Carl Frederik Hill, der sidst i 1800-tallet tog til Paris for at prøve lykken og som på en eller

anden måde blev desillusioneret og skizofren og siden levede i sine forældres hus og lavede de her tegninger som sindssyg. Den her verden – skizofrenes kunst – har netop altid været en fascinationskilde, men det er ikke alene en art brut fascination, jeg har. En amerikansk kunstner, som jeg er meget begejstret for er Richard Prince. Han skaber det, man kalder for appropriations kunst, hvor han nærmest som Marcel Duchamp, tog ting, der allerede eksisterede i kunsten eller i populærkulturen for at give dem sit eget spin. Jeg beskæftiger mig til dels også med fundne billeder, som jeg giver en ny drejning", siger han.

Kunst kommer indefra

Adam Saks tager dog sjældent direkte fra samtiden for at bruge det i sine værker med det samme. Han kan godt lide, at der er et ekko eller en forsinkelse af de elementer, som han bruger i malerierne.

"Hvis man vil skabe noget, der har en anden og anderledes klang, tror jeg, at man som kunstner skal sætte sig udenfor og undgå at bruge noget fra den nære samtid. Det er umuligt at dechiffrere den kakofoni, som vi er en del af. Jeg er i hvert fald ikke ude på at illustrere noget som helst i forhold til vores samtid – kunst er en søgen efter noget nyt og kommer indefra. Billeder kommer indefra", siger han.

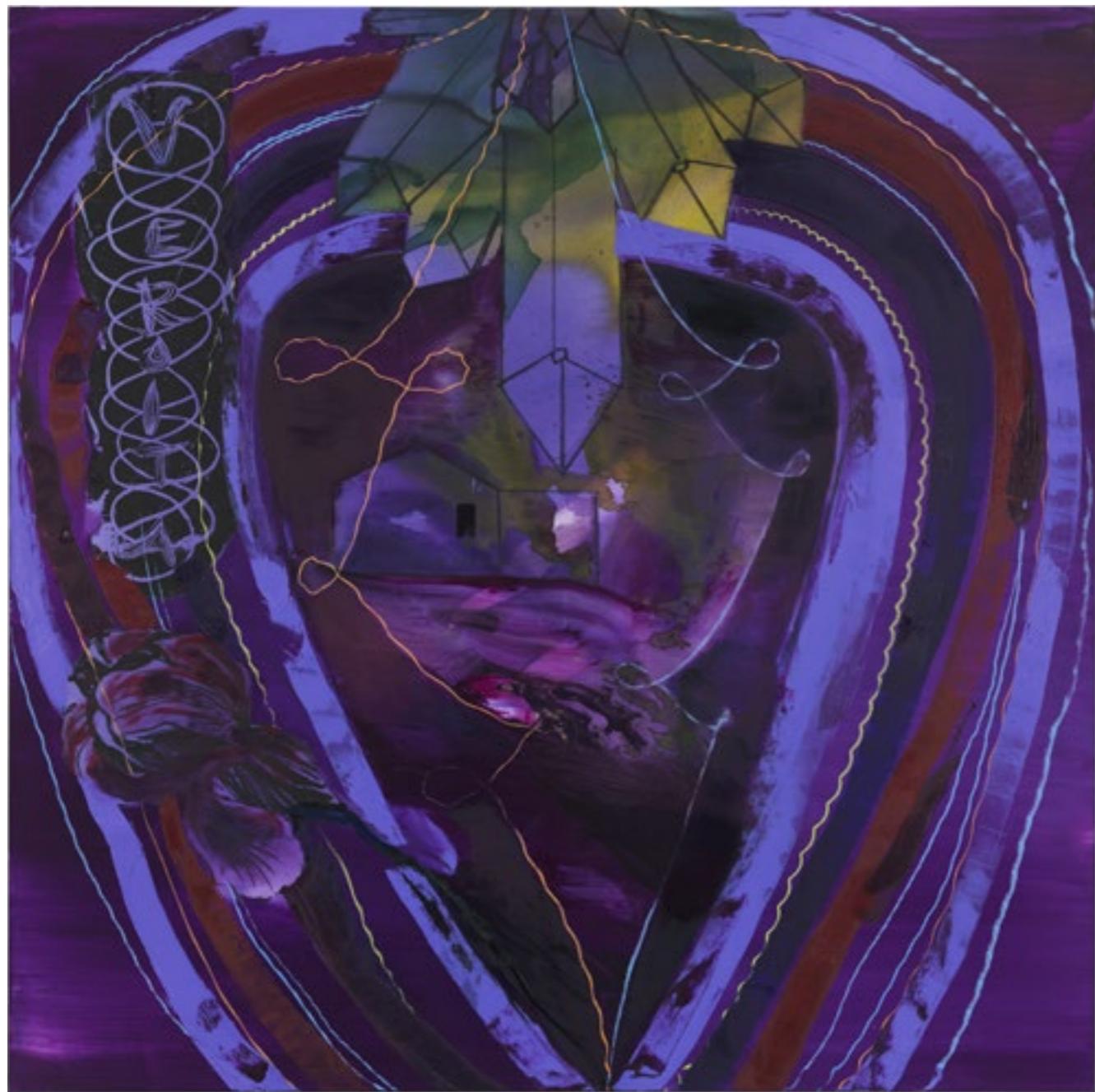
Når du benytter elementer og symboler fra folk i udsatte positioner eller fra forskellige subkulturer er dit engagement så genereret af en social bevidsthed?

"Det handler mere om fascinationen af det billedsprog, og de udtryk utsatte grupper eller subkulturer bærer med sig, når de ikke har været gennem en kunstnerisk skoling og fået en finpoleret æstetisk holdning – det er det, der fascinerer og så er det en måde at skabe en kunstnerisk ramme for de ting, man har at sige. Jeg har bekendte og venner i de her grupper, det er klart, men jeg er ikke ude i nogen social mission eller noget - det er jeg ikke", siger Adam Saks.



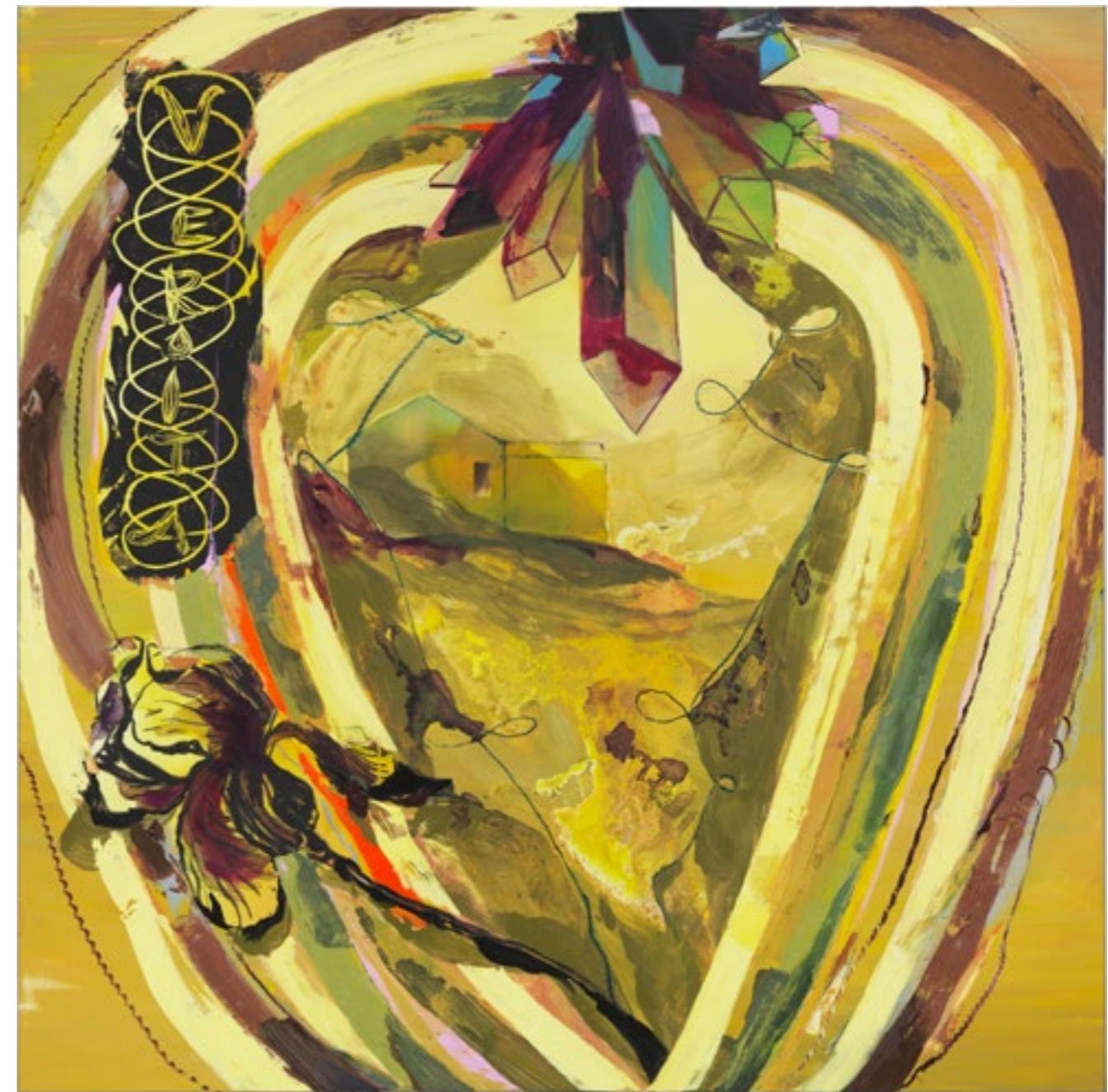
M.V. Red

2015, oil on canvas, 190 x 190 cm



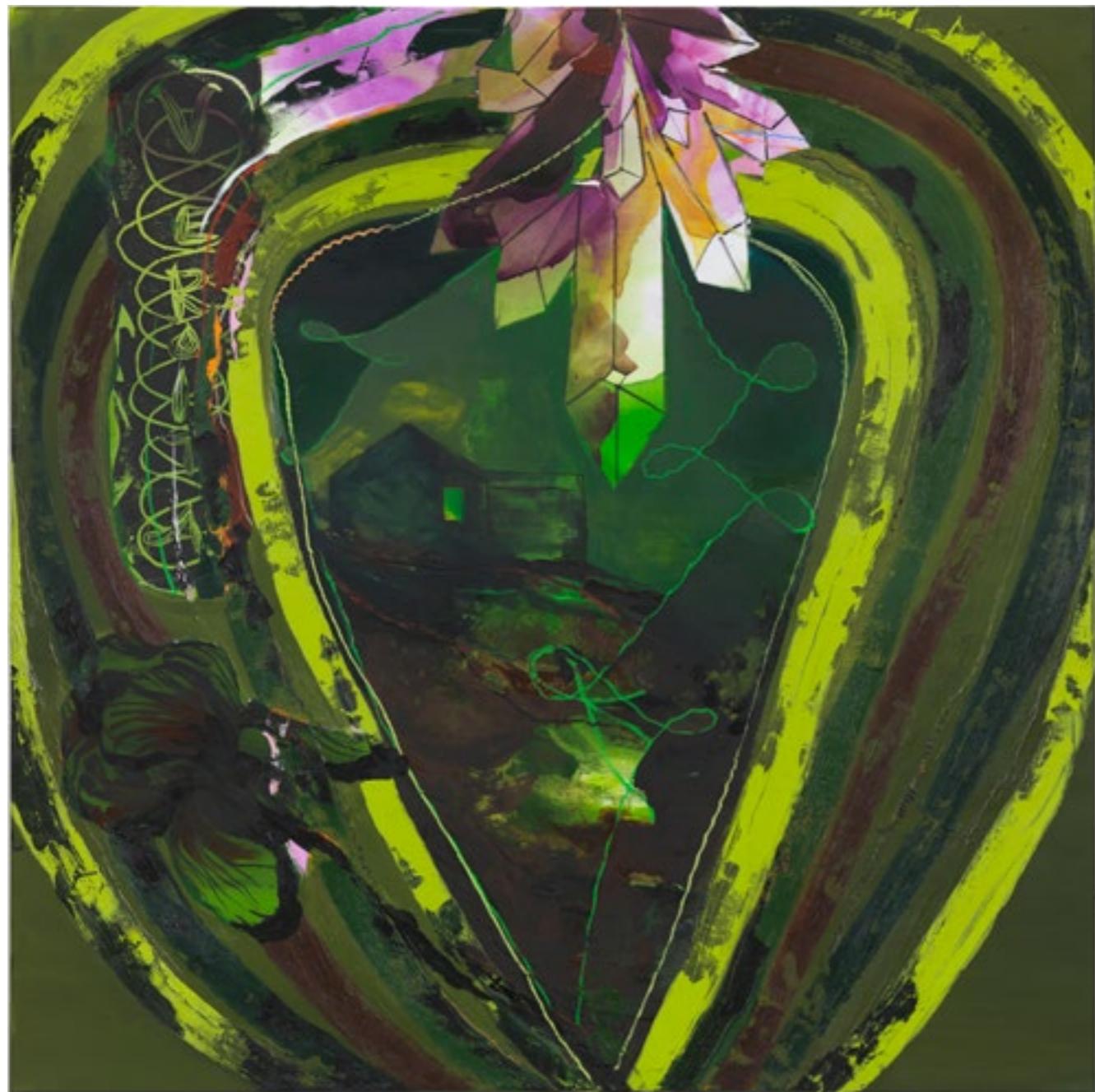
M.V. Violet
2015, oil on canvas, 190 x 190 cm

10



M.V. Yellow
2015, oil on canvas, 190 x 190 cm

11



M.V. Green
2015, oil on canvas, 190 x 190 cm

12



M.V. Grey
2015, oil on canvas, 190 x 190 cm

13



Equilibrium

2014/15, oil on canvas, 190 x 190 cm



Falconidae
2014, oil on canvas, 180 x 150 cm

16



Strange Fates Some Fruits are Given
2014, oil on canvas, 180 x 150 cm

17



PICTURES COME FROM WITHIN

"You can paint something huge on the back of a matchbox, and you can paint something huge without saying anything at all," says the 41-year-old painter, Adam Saks.

By Henrik Broch-Lips
art historian, journalist, and head of Kunsthall NORD

Adam Saks has transformed Kunsthall NORD into a pictorial total installation. This internationally acclaimed painter has previously had solo exhibitions in a number of prominent museums and exhibition venues both in Denmark and abroad, but *Setting Sail in a Teardrop of Fear and Desire* is the largest-ever exhibition of his paintings in Denmark. All the works are new and created specifically for Kunsthall NORD. It is also the first time in his career that he has painted directly on walls.

"The fundamental idea is to show a diversity in the works and to show a variety of artistic statements. The distinctive architecture of Kunsthall NORD prompts one to create a different spatial arrangement than in a mere clean, white cube gallery exhibition, where usually you only hang the 10-12 best paintings. The exhibition space is almost like a maze, which you have to edge your way through, and every room is so expressive and so full of all sorts of 'artistic' details that it deserves its own profile and its own group of works," says Adam Saks.

So the 41-year-old painter, who lives and works in Berlin, has tailored his exhibition especially for Kunsthall NORD's spaces. This applies particularly to the large black-and-white murals, the artist's largest painting to date and the *Monte Verità* suite, which comprises six large paintings (190x190 cm) with the same basic subject, but with a variety of colour spectra and installed like a large block or giant kaleidoscope.

"I have taken into account the various spatial options so, in many ways, it has really become a site-specific, multi-faceted exhibition. In terms of surface area, counting the total number of centimetres, this is my largest exhibition of paintings to date. But size is not everything. It's more about being precise in what one does. You can paint something huge on the back of a matchbox, and you can paint something huge without saying anything at all," says Adam Saks, who nonetheless manages to paint large paintings with great intensity.

Accelerating the surface

For the exhibition, Adam Saks has painted *We are the Night*, a huge still life, which measures 2.40 x 5.40 metres, and whose title indicates that you are moving into a nocturnal zone and an open space where anything can happen.

"Over the years I have worked a lot on classic themes such as *Memento Mori* and *Vanitas* motifs, mainly inspired by Dutch Baroque art. With a transparent background and a highly defined graphic expression, *We are the Night* stands out from the earlier still life works. It comes across as much simpler than the earlier oil paintings. I have given pride of place to the drawn element and isolated the process, making it a distillate of my other still life paintings."

As a painter, Adam Saks has always aimed to unite the immediacy of the drawing and the graphic with the pictorial expression, preserving the freshness in the oil paint, without the painting coming across as a sketch.

"It's a challenge, at least for me, to get the painting and the drawing to meet. I also wanted to transfer the spontaneity and immediacy of water colour to the paintings," says Adam Saks.

A few years ago he came up with a method, which allowed him to work in a more fluid way with oil paint, giving it the lightness of water colour. The new painting, *We are the Night* possesses the solidity of oil painting and the lightness of water colour. The same merging of the two different elements is also evident in *Claw*, his latest painting. On the whole, Adam Saks tends to experiment and unite the various methods, which he has at his disposal.

"In some of the paintings I have used large linoleum cuts. In others, I draw on a glazed water-colour background. Elsewhere I have put an oil pastel in a drill as a drawing element, which works in a completely different way. I am interested in accelerating the surface of the painting: part is thinly painted; part is thickly painted; part is printed; and part is drawn. This also applies to the way, in which I look for my subjects. The various motifs and elements I juxtapose lead to this collage quality," says Adam Saks.

Death's heads and opium haze

Adam Saks works in the narrow margin between figuration and abstraction, more often than not with an ambiguous realm of understanding. He uses a special kind of motif and image sampling. By detaching pictorial elements from their original context and reinstating them in a variety of constellations, he creates a series of new narratives.

In the past, he picked his pictorial elements from both high and low culture. Most frequently he was inspired by mankind's transgression of mental limits. This might be the demonic nature of the opium den or a tattooed body, which, with images under the skin, is a testament to living life and the basic condition of existence. He was particularly inspired by the tattoos that embellished the bodies of French convicts and Foreign Legionnaires and his dramatic, melancholy paintings abound with images of sailors, women of easy virtue, ferocious animals, death's heads and desolate, discordant landscapes.

But for several of the new works, around which the exhibition has been constructed, Adam Saks has not drawn inspiration from opium haze or body images, but from the utopian Monte Verità – the Mountain of Truth. This is where, in the early 20th century, a group of young pioneers started the first alternative society in the world. They fought on behalf of cooperative systems, the emancipation of women, new forms of education, free love and a desire for the fusion of soul, spirit and body.

Living on

Adam Saks has created a huge mural, something totally new in his artistic practice. He does not find this surprising. Instead, he considers it a subtle extension of the techniques he uses elsewhere: primarily the woodcut, with which he has worked a lot.

"In earlier paintings I have created both positive and negative spaces. This mural, which spans an entire room, is actually really one small, intimate woodcut, which has been magnified. I have painted black-and-white paintings before, so it wasn't such an enormous leap. It's all part of my practice. Also because it is a strange anti-hierarchical space, when you enter it," says Adam Saks.

What do you feel about your painting being painted over, when the exhibition closes?

"I have no problem about that. Destruction is a concept that I explore a lot in my paintings. Even though it will disappear, it's like a palimpsest. I have created the work and, once it's been documented, it will live on," he says.

What do you think painting is capable of, since you continue to work with it as a medium?

"Painting can create new imagery. I also like the simplicity and the direct approach. With DKK 500 you can get started and create a totally new space, which no one has seen before. I can also make a cold-needle etching on a drainpipe with a nail. I don't need a computer or any other technical intervention in order to express myself. As far as I'm concerned, it's about creating a sounding board or resonance in terms of how we view the world. Painting works best for me," says Adam Saks.

Who inspires you?

"It's not like I have a book that I pinch everything from. But, in terms of painting, one of my sources of inspiration is the Swedish artist, Carl Frederik Hill. In the late 19th century he moved to Paris to try his luck. Somehow or other, he became disillusioned and schizophrenic and went on to live in his parents' house, creating these drawings like a madman. This world – the art of schizophrenia – has always been a source of fascination, but Art Brut is not the only

thing that fascinates me. There's one particular American artist I find very exciting. Richard Prince. He created what is known as 'appropriation art'. He was a bit like Marcel Duchamp, taking things that already existed in art or popular culture and putting his own spin on them. I also work partly with found images, to which I give a new twist," he says.

Art comes from within

But Adam Saks rarely makes immediate use of the here and now in his works. He likes there to be an echo or a delay in the elements he uses in his paintings.

"If an artist sets out to create something, which has another, unusual resonance, I believe he has to sit outside and avoid using things that are totally of the minute. It is impossible to decipher the cacophony, of which we are a part. It certainly isn't my intention to illustrate just anything from our present age. Art is a search for something new and comes from within. Pictures come from within," he says.

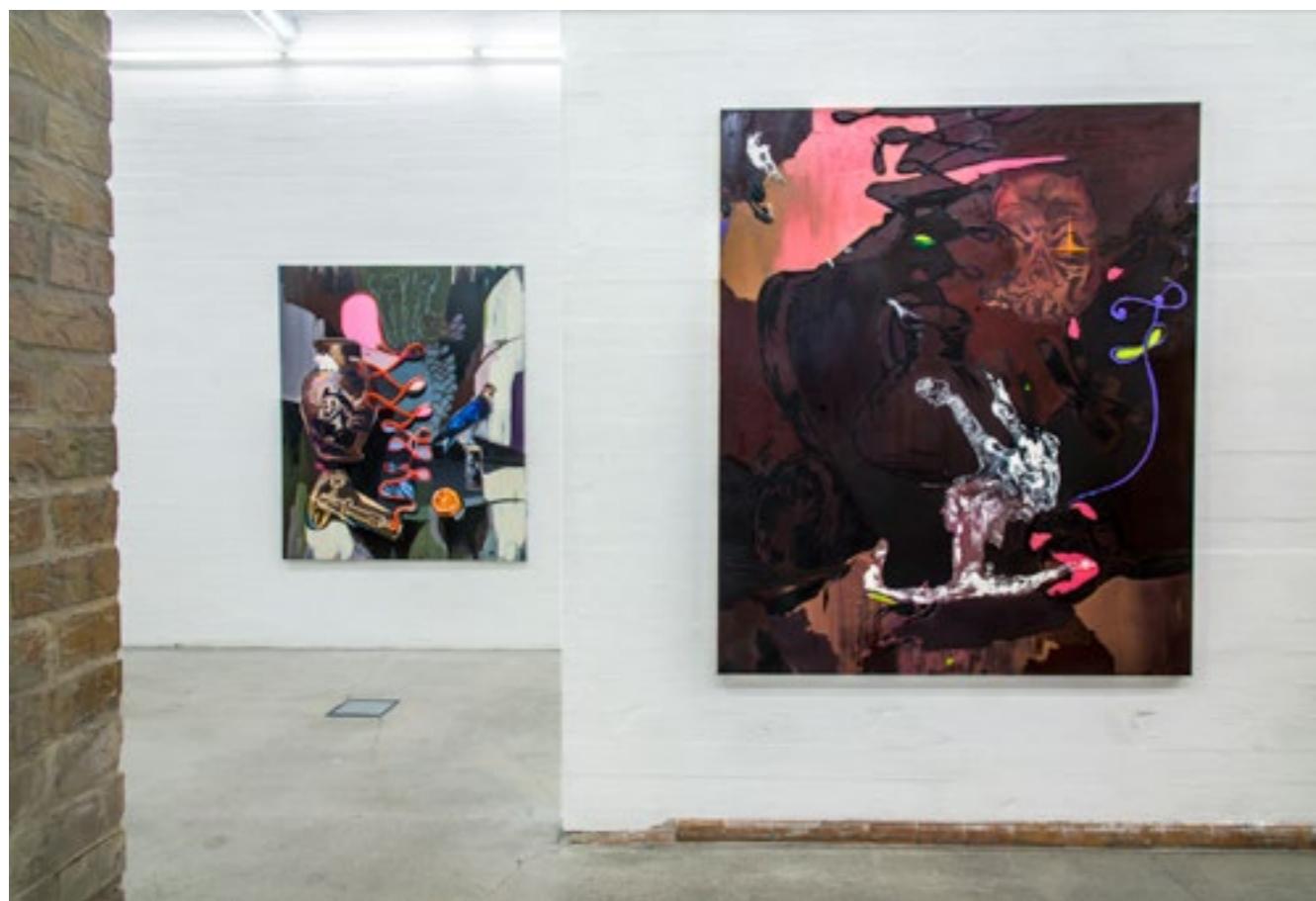
When you use elements and symbols from people in disadvantaged positions or from different subcultures, is your commitment generated by social consciousness?

"It's more about being fascinated by the imagery and the expression inherent in disadvantaged groups or subcultures, when they haven't had any artistic education or acquired a refined aesthetic point of view. That's what is fascinating. So it's a way of creating an artistic context for the things you have to say. Of course, some of my acquaintances and friends belong to these groups, but I am absolutely not some kind of social missionary," says Adam Saks.









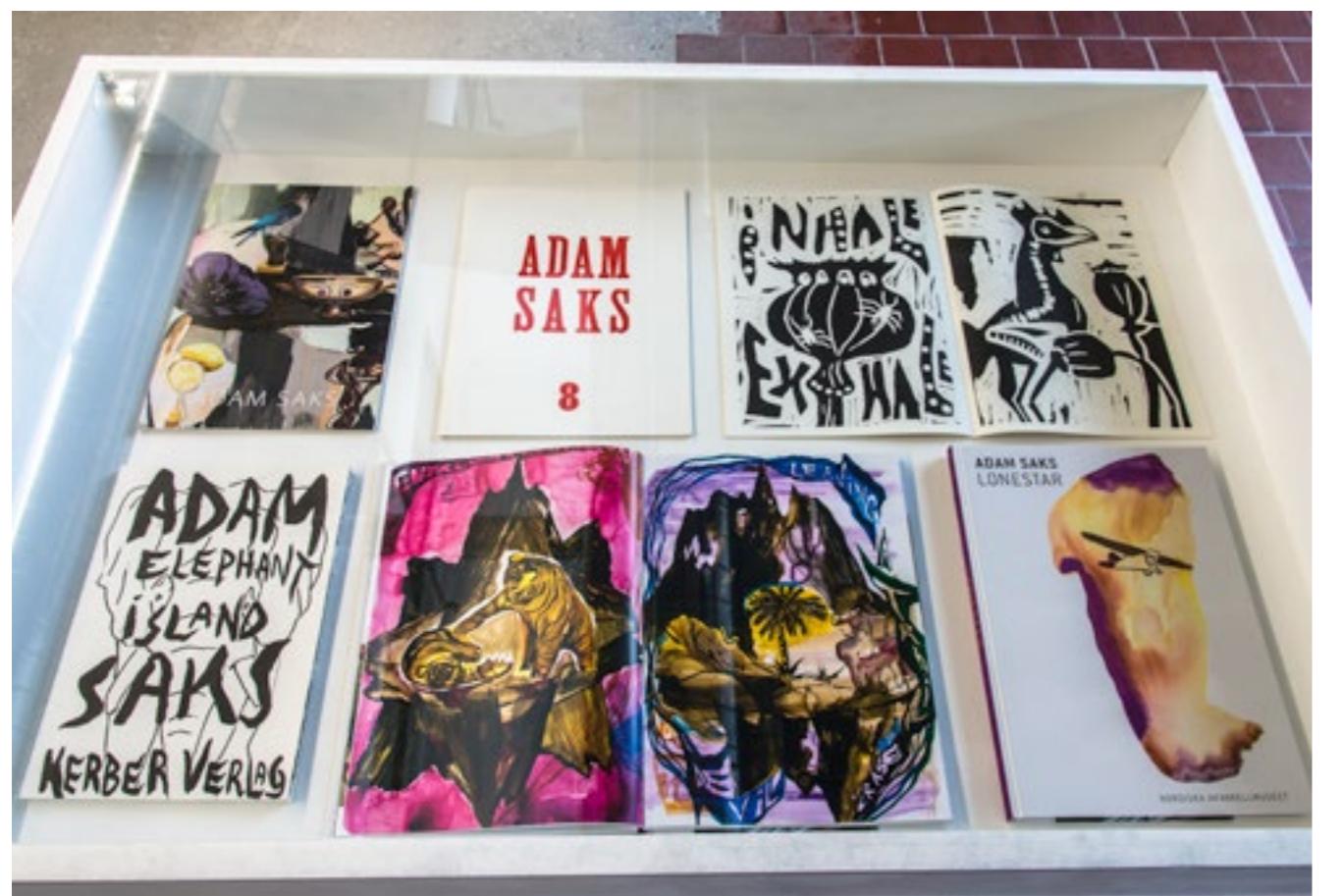
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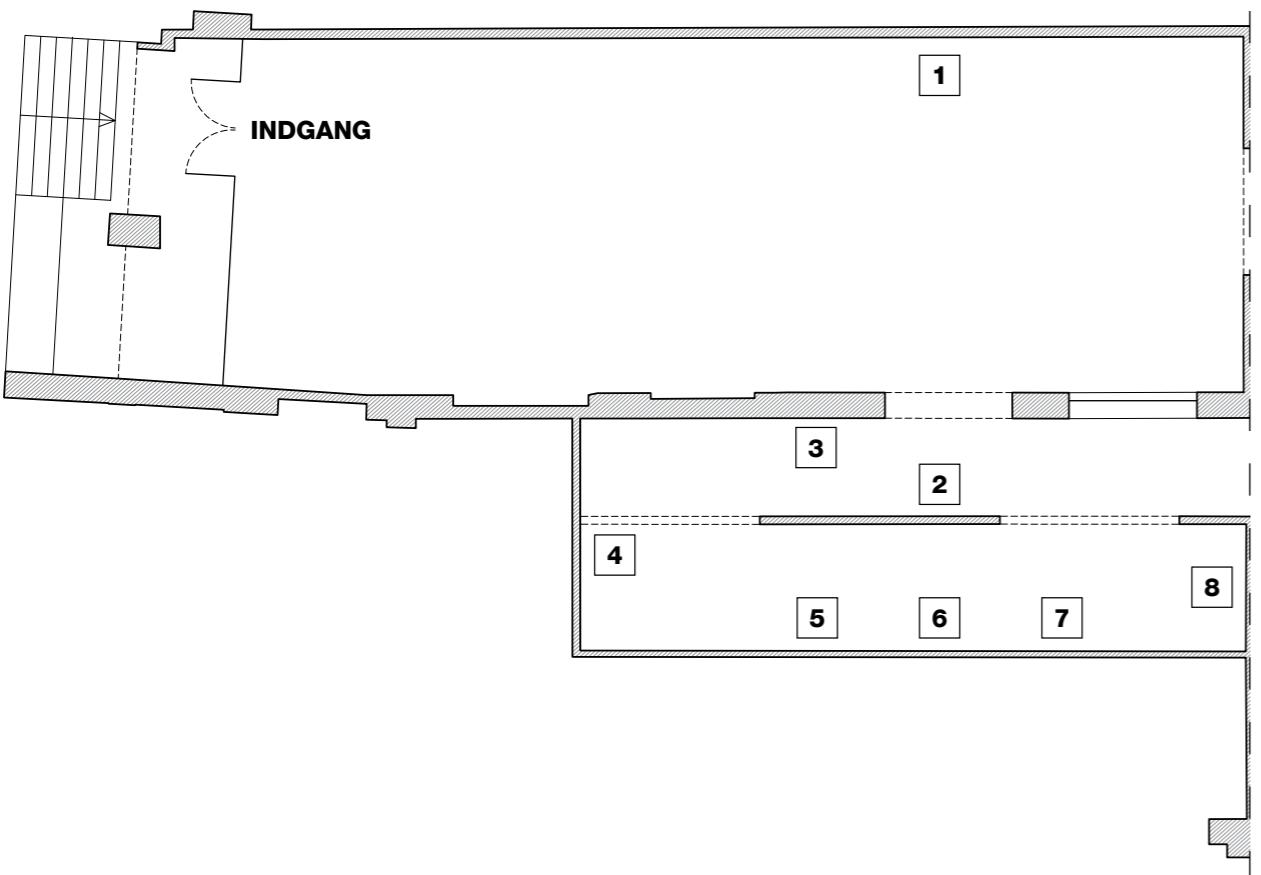




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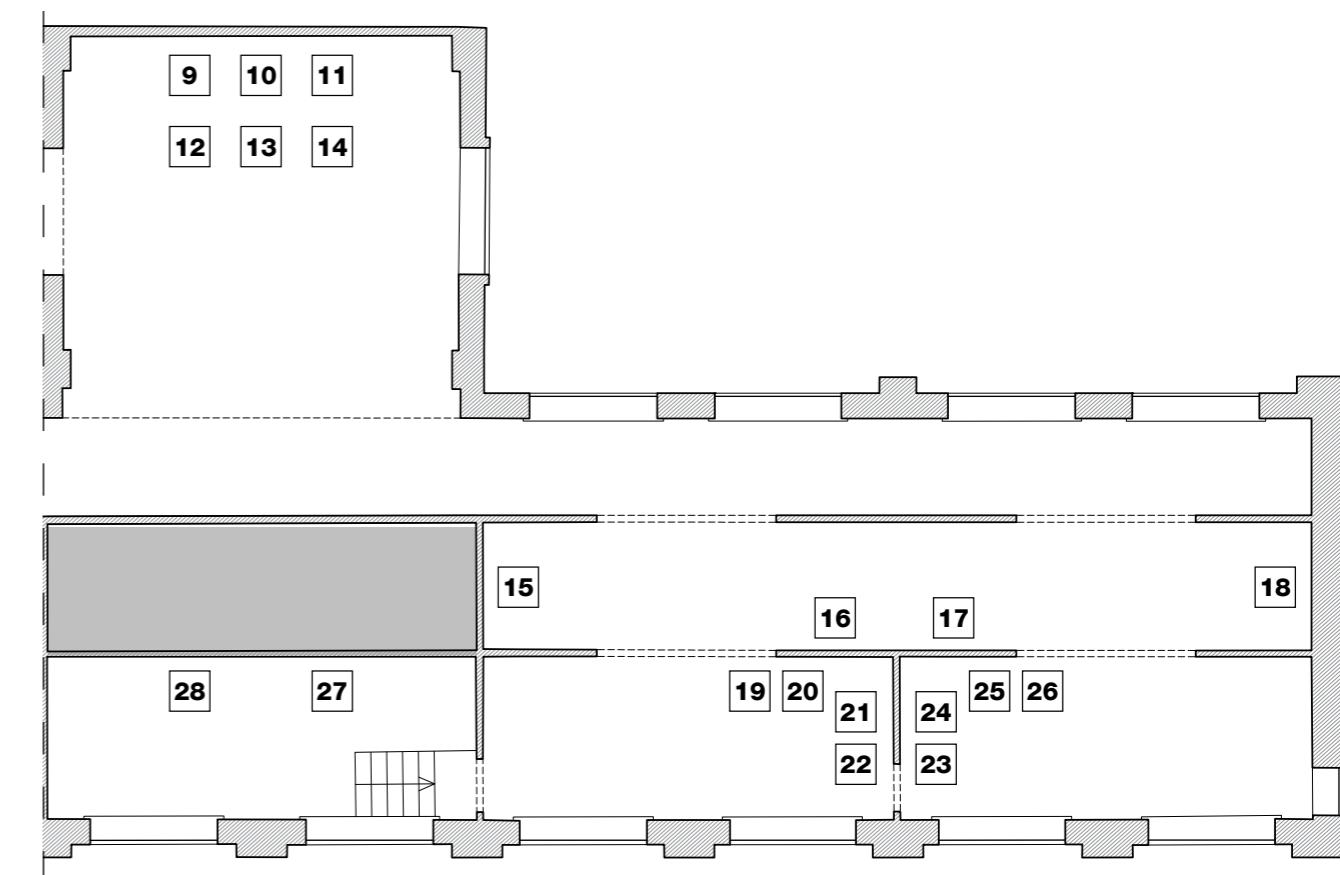






UDSTILLINGSPLAN

1. We are the Night
2015
oil on canvas
240 x 540 cm
2. Claw
2015
oil on canvas
180 x 180 cm
3. Meltdown
2014
oil on canvas
150 x 120 cm
4. Equilibrium
2014/15
oil on canvas
190 x 190 cm
5. Strange Fates Some Fruits are Given
2014
oil on canvas
180 x 150 cm
6. Strix Aluco
2014
oil on canvas
180 x 240 cm
7. Falconidae
2014
oil on canvas
180 x 240 cm
8. Blossom
2014
oil on canvas
180 x 240 cm
9. M.V. Red
2015
oil on canvas
190 x 190 cm
10. M.V. Black
2015
oil on canvas
190 x 190 cm
11. M.V. Green
2015
oil on canvas
190 x 190 cm
12. M.V. Violet
2015
oil on canvas
190 x 190 cm
13. M.V. Yellow
2015
oil on canvas
190 x 190 cm
14. M.V. Grey
2015
oil on canvas
190 x 190 cm
15. Peel
2015
oilstick and aerosol paint on paper
42 x 59,4 cm



EXHIBITION PLAN

16. Blow
2015
oilstick and aerosol paint on paper
42 x 59,4 cm
17. A Path to Follow
2015
oilstick and aerosol paint on paper
42 x 59,4 cm
18. Still
2015
oilstick and aerosol paint on paper
42 x 59,4 cm
19. Untitled
2013
water colour and oilstick on paper
29 x 23 cm
20. Untitled
2013
water colour and oilstick on paper
29 x 23 cm
21. Untitled
2013
water colour and oilstick on paper
29 x 23 cm
22. Untitled
2013
water colour and oilstick on paper
29 x 23 cm
23. Untitled
2013
water colour and oilstick on paper
29 x 23 cm
24. Untitled
2013
water colour and oilstick on paper
29 x 23 cm
25. Untitled
2013
water colour and oilstick on paper
29 x 23 cm
26. Untitled
2013
water colour and oilstick on paper
29 x 23 cm
27. Drifter
2013/14
oil on canvas
180 x 150 cm
28. 666
2014
oil on canvas
180 x 240 cm

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ADAM SAKS

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