

HENRIK OLESEN

FOOD CHAIN INCL. PREHISTORIC ANIMALS

Henrik Olesen's works have a distinctly plastic and material aspect, one that finds expression through brightly coloured crocodiles made of papier-mâché, plaster and cement, photographs of raw meat printed on plastic, milk cartons cast in epoxy resin, murky paintings on masonite and canvas, and collages featuring art historical depictions of homosexuality and punishment over the course of 500 years. At the same time, the works encompass a wealth of artistic, literary, political, philosophical and historical references that, through a queer perspective, challenge and undermine normative systems and binary divisions – such as those between human and animal, the body's interior and exterior, or prehistory and the present. This exhibition at Den Frie features various works from recent years as well as a range of all-new installations shown here for the first time. Together, they form an open and fragmented totality that takes an associative approach to exploring themes such as food chains, power systems, and other types of networks, investigating how they function and – possibly – collapse.

From one work to the next, a broad range of references and materials are digested, transformed into energy, or left behind as waste, only to be displaced into new forms. In the transition between new and older works and within the works themselves, ideas of linearity, evolution and continuity appear to dissolve, allowing another sense of reality to emerge – one rooted in restlessness, production and transformation. Through open juxtapositions and objects, Olesen introduces a kind of liminal state that cuts across bodies, images and materials, a state where insides and outsides, beginnings and endings are no longer clearly separated. The works activate our eyes, hands, stomachs and feet, engaging with the connections between body, gender and identity – how the body is constructed and how it can be reshaped.

Plasticity is a recurring theme in Olesen's exhibition. It describes our ability, both cognitively and sensorially, to change ourselves, to adapt to new surroundings, but also how external impressions can imprint themselves on us in the form of inertia or trauma. According to Catherine Malabou, plasticity can be understood as a structure for transformation and destruction alike. The plastic potential for existential improvisation in relation to an environment that is also undergoing a plastic transformation serves as a foundation for many of Olesen's works: as an inspiration for packing and unpacking, folding and unfolding phenomena in different ways across their conventional configurations, keeping them open to drives, desires and the unconscious. The new works appear hopefully constructive, despite the violence and power embedded within them. They are affirmative towards a future and towards other bodies interacting with the works, letting new and alternative combinations of materials generate new and alternative affects. The exhibition offers an opportunity to – in the positive sense of the term – lose ourselves and step outside of ourselves.

HENRIK OLESEN FOOD CHAIN



**INCL.
PREHISTORIC ANIMALS**

22.02. — 20.04.25

Oslo Plads 1, 2100
Copenhagen Ø

Den Frie

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Space 1

Inspired by the Crocodile Mummies, circa 2.500 years ago.

(Found at a tomb at Qubbat al-Hawa, Egypt, in 2019), 2024,

Crocodile: wood, metal, rabbit wire, papier maché (newspapers, glue), cardboard, acrylic paint, UV varnish, lacquer: 23 x 212 x 70 cm + Table (wood plate): 87 x 244 cm

The earliest Crocodylian, circa 95 million years ago, 2024,

Crocodile: plaster, wood, metal, rabbit wire, jute, acrylic paint: 22 x 227 x 82 cm + Table (wood plate): 122 x 244 cm *

American Alligator, circa 83.5 million years ago, 2025,

Alligator: plaster, wood, metal, rabbit wire, jute, acrylic paint, lacquer: 34 x 223 x 70 cm, Plinth: 21 x 250 x 125 cm

Untitled, 2025,

Crocodile: wood, metal, rabbit wire, papier maché (newspapers, glue), acrylic paint, UV varnish, lacquer: 21 x 222 x 80 cm, Table (wood plate): 87 x 244 cm

Crocodile, 2024, Crocodile: modelling mortar, wood, metal, rabbit wire, jute, acrylic paint: 88 x 110 x 38 cm, Plinth: 67 x 93 x 58 cm

**WHEN THIS TOOK PLACE
IT WAS THE RISE OF DAWN
AND EVERYTHING WAS
TRANSFIGURED**

Crocodiles first came into the world around 200 million years ago. When looking at the crocodile species that exist today, they bear a striking resemblance to their distant ancestors. Although they have evolved, they nonetheless serve as windows into the past and a world before humans arrived. Olesen's sculptures of crocodiles (2024-25) are made from various materials, some from plaster, others from papier-mâché or concrete, and have been given different surface treatments. They also reference crocodiles from different moments in the long evolutionary history of the species, going back to 95

million years ago, approximately 83.5 million years ago, and 2,000 years ago. The crocodiles appear at once naturalistic and artificial, bearing processual traces of their physical becoming, a state they can be said to still inhabit. Despite their status as models, they also retain a dormant wildness, characteristic of the archaic predators they are – simultaneously threatening and threatened. In the crocodiles, the movement from past to present is short-circuited, and another, slower temporal horizon is introduced, contrasting with the 24/7 non-time of today.

The earliest Crocodylian, circa 95 million years ago, 2024



Space 2

Produce 2, 2017,

#10-2 1/2 inch twin thread cabinet screws, #8-2 1/2 inch drywall screws, Barge All Purpose Cement, E6000 on primed canvas, 170 x 130 cm *

Produce 3, 2017,

#8-2 1/2 inch all-purpose dual torq drive skruer, #8-2 1/2 inch Phillips wood bullet screws, Barge All Purpose Cement, Masking Tape for Hard-to-Stick Surfaces on primed canvas, 162.5 x 136 cm

Produce 4, 2017,

#8-2 1/2 inch all-purpose dual torq drive screws, Barge All Purpose Cement, Masking Tape for Hard-to-Stick Surfaces, masking tape on primed canvas, 165 x 143 cm

Produce 5, 2017,

#8-2 1/2 inch all-purpose dual torq drive screws, Original Gorilla Glue, Masking Tape for Hard-to-Stick Surfaces on primed canvas, 179 x 141 cm

Produce 6, 2017,

#10-2 1/2 inch twin thread cabinet screws, #8-2 1/2 inch Phillips wood bullet screws, Barge All Purpose Cement, Titebond polyurethane liquid glue, Masking Tape for Hard-to-Stick Surfaces on primed canvas, 158 x 138.5 cm

Produce 7, 2017,

#8-2 1/2 inch Phillips wood bullet screws, Titebond polyurethane liquid glue, masking tape on primed canvas, 168.91 x 140.5 cm

Produce 8, 2017,

#8-2 1/2 inch Phillips wood bullet screws, E6000 on primed canvas, 165 x 133.5 cm

Milk 1, 2020, Epoxy resin, 23 x 7 x 7.5 cm

Milk 2, 2020, Epoxy resin, 23 x 7 x 7.5 cm

Milk 4, 2019, Epoxy resin, 23 x 7 x 7.5 cm

Milk 4, 2020, Epoxy resin, 23 x 7 x 7.5 cm

Milk 5, 2020, Epoxy resin, 23 x 7 x 7.5 cm

Milk 6, 2020, Epoxy resin, 23 x 7 x 7.5 cm

Milk 7, 2020, Epoxy resin, 23 x 7 x 7.5 cm

Milk 8, 2020, Epoxy resin, 23 x 7 x 7.5 cm

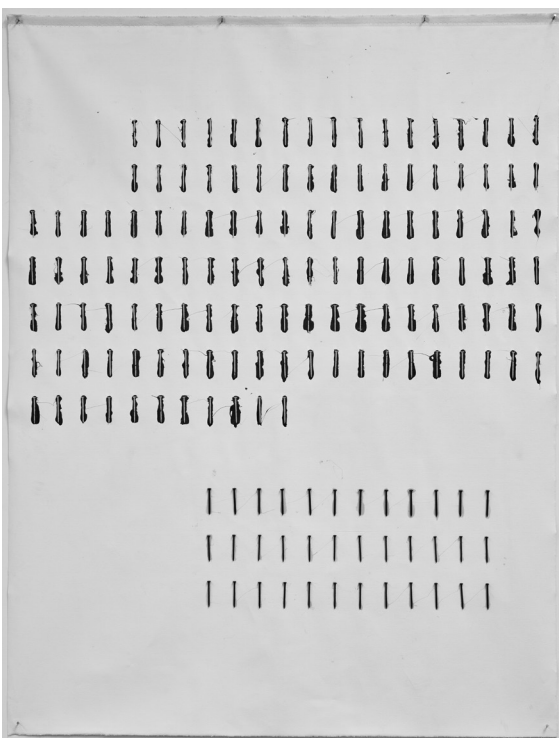
Milk 9, 2020, Epoxy resin, 23 x 7 x 7.5 cm

Milk 10, 2020, Epoxy resin, 23 x 7 x 7.5 cm

The *Produce* series (2017) depicts a kind of production or anti-production. The images, composed of screws arranged in systematic rows, seem based on reduction: an area pared back to its smallest components. They are on the verge of being almost nothing, yet are far from empty; they can also be seen to construct a system or visualise everyday events. Artist Josef Strau has described them as the unconsciousness of art production, emphasising their symbolic energy. The screws, placed in neat rows, resemble a form of language, evoking associations with both concrete poetry and scores for music. Each image has its own rhythm, its own performative way of 'counting' or 'marking' events outside of itself. Seeing them in relation to their immediate surroundings, such events and aspects might include the viewer's footsteps, distances between doors, windows and staircases, or the passing of time, of seconds and minutes. These works function simultaneously as open systems and performative events, directly

anchored in what physically holds the art space together – and their title is poised between different possible readings, signifying both process and result.

The *Milk* series (2019-20), consisting of milk cartons cast in coloured epoxy, similarly revolves around repetition and displacement; a kind of transfiguration or transport where nutrients and waste products – what enters (or is inside) the body and what exits – seem to overlap visually. Some objects bear traces of text (perhaps made by the physical cartons they were cast from), reminding us that milk cartons are not only containers but also carriers of information. Artist John Kelsey has pointed out that many of Olesen's works are based on a 'desire for art at the level of the body', on connections between art, desire and bodies. *Milk* abstractly points towards the body's status as a container and muses on how the container and its contents define each other.



Space 3

(self) DIGESTION

10 new paintings in progress (need info)

Digestive systems, 2022, Oil on canvas, Inkjet on transparent film, painting butter, papier maché, tape, 40 x 60 cm

(rotten sun), 2020, Oil on masonite, painting butter, tape, partly painted plug board, 32 x 41.5 x 2 cm, Plug board: 161 x 5 x 4.2 cm

Nervous Sun, Blue and green, 2020, Oil and mixed media on masonite, 40.5 x 50 cm

Body of Shit 2, 2020, Oil and acrylic on masonite, painting butter, tape, Edding marker, 30.8 x 46.7 x 2 cm

Heaven & Hell, 2020, Oil and acrylic on masonite, painting butter, 46.7 x 54.8 x 2 cm

Tongue, esophagus, stomach, 2022, Oil on masonite, painting butter, various acrylic gels, tape, 49.7 x 46.4 cm

organs, 2020, Oil on masonite, acrylic gel medium, tape, 30 x 40 x 2 cm, Plug board: 161 x 15 x 8 cm

Digestive System, 2022, Oil on masonite, inkjet on transparent film, paper, 52 x 74.6 cm

Digestion 1, 2022, Oil on canvas, painting butter, tape, various acrylic gels, 40 x 50 cm

Digestion 2, 2022, Oil and painting butter on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Stomach, 2022, Oil, Inkjet on transparent film, painting butter, papier maché, Edding Industry marker and tape on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Kidney, Liver, 2022, Oil, various acrylic gels, painting butter and Edding 750 marker on canvas, 30 x 40 cm

My Organs, 2022, Olie, painting butter, papier maché, Edding 750 marker and tape on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Smiley, 2022, Oil, Inkjet on transparent film, various acrylic gels and staples on masonite, 32.5 x 41.5 cm *

The so-called *organ paintings* (2020-) combine various images (signs) and their references, in Olesen's own words specifically these two:

1. *the organ (intestines/stomach): digestion, waste, excretion, shit!*
2. *the plug: Kreislauf, Kabelsalat, sex!*

These references to the inside and outside of the body – digestion and *Kreislauf* – point to the digestive system as a plastic process of ingestion, breakdown, transformation and excretion, one where images and signs are ground down and can either become new energy or end up as waste. Some of the paintings are combined with partially painted power plugs and sockets, evoking profane puns while emphasising the physicality of the works, their body. They have been

painted using continuous processes of application, scraping and layering, destabilising their finality and accentuating their status as artifacts immersed in and saturated by time. According to Olesen, the inspiration for the series was Jean Fautrier's work *L'Homme ouvert*; however, this reference has taken new directions in subsequent works. Their condition of being poised at the edge of language, categories and references, is further complicated by the titles and words embedded within the images. These fragmented textual elements reinforce the sense of the works as a kind of subjectivities in a state of becoming. They link digestion and consumption, ingestion and excretion, to the formation and destruction of the self, to form-making and formlessness.



Space 4

Meat

3, 2016, Inkjet print on paper and paint on plastic foil, 249 x 199 x 2 cm

4, 2016, Inkjet print on paper and paint on plastic foil, 237.5 x 269 x 2 cm

5, 2016, Inkjet print on paper and paint on plastic foil, 235 x 198 x 2 cm

6, 2016, Inkjet print on paper and paint on plastic foil, 254 x 198 x 2 cm

7, 2016, Inkjet print on paper and paint on 2 plastic foils, 241.5 x 199.5 x 2 cm and 228.5 x 197 x 2 cm

8, 2016, Inkjet print on paper and paint on plastic foil, 198 x 220 x 2 cm

Consisting of digital images of raw meat mounted on large transparent plastic sheets, this series of works (made in 2016) possesses a distinctive air of abattoirs and violence intermingled with a processual aesthetic that makes them seem entangled with the conditions under which they were created. The serial approach of the images echoes the industrial serial treatment of meat. As such the motif can be seen in the context of a long art historical tradition, extending from Rembrandt

to Soutine to Francis Bacon, where the animal's interior serves as raw images of something fundamentally human – or perhaps the very boundaries of what is human. The profane processing of meat is commonplace yet usually invisible. In the works' insistent visualisation of that process, a kind of exchange occurs between transparency and mystery, raising the question of what a body is, where it begins, and where it ends.



Space 5

*Monument after Anthony Caro, 2022, Metal, lacquer, 282 x 601 x 281 cm **

Homosexual Rights Around the World, 2000, A4 handouts (16 pages brochure)

Pre Post: speaking backwards / SEX (IN PUBLIC), 2006, from: Alexander Alberro & Sabeth Buchman, eds., Art After Conceptual Art (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006)

30 days of police operations and other forms of bashing, global view, (cruisingforsex.com), 2003, Inkjet prints on A4 paper, 95 pages, bound

R.R. (Companion Species Manifesto, 2014), 2023

FLYER DONNA HARAWAY

Social Organization and Frequency of Homosexual Behavior among some Species of Animals, Giraffes, 2000/2024, 3 different collages on milk cartons, 22 x 7.5 x 7.5 cm

AUFKLÄRUNG: § 209 ÖstGB: Strafrechtliche Normen gegen Homosexualität in Österreich, 2000, Inkjet print on yellow A4 paper

A4 Flyer to provide a better public information about gays and lesbians in primary schools, 1999, Inkjet print on yellow A4 paper

Art with information

Since the 1990s, Olesen has produced, shown and circulated text-based works that apply an explicitly queer perspective, addressing issues of gay and lesbian rights and legislation on homosexuality in various countries. Other works take a more scientific turn, as seen in collages inspired by Donna Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto* that present non-reproducible love between animal pairs, such as between a pig and a dog, while one of the texts investigate the vital connections between conceptual art and subculture. The social power struggle over what constitutes the 'right' kind of identity, gender and desire is problematised in various ways in these works, which also encourage disidentification with regulatory codes and norms.

The sculpture *Monument after Anthony Caro* (2022) closely resembles an actual modernist sculpture by Caro, *Early One Morning* from 1962, reconstructed in metal and painted red. Olesen's work was originally created for an exhibition at the Reena Spaulings gallery in 2016 in a slightly different version, in a referential dialogue with the legend of Saint George and the Dragon. The British artist Anthony Caro embodied a kind of abstraction that was self-assured, self-conscious and extrovert, that sought to be undetermined and autonomous. In Olesen's version the sculpture is reembodyed as a strange hybrid – a kind of Caro-machine-dragon - and also a graveyard, destabilising its own abstraction by figurative desire and anti-monumentality



Space 6

Festival of the Unconscious

2 collages, each consisting of 10 smaller cardboard panels, installed in 2 lines, each panel 100 x 70 cm, when installed 140 x 500 cm (need info)

Untitled (Box 1), 2025, (box incl. art history footage) (need info)

Untitled (Box 2), 2025, (box incl. art history footage) (need info)

Untitled (Box 3), 2025, (box incl. art history footage) (need info)

Untitled (Box 4), 2025, (box incl. art history footage) (need info)

Untitled (Box 5), 2025, (box incl. art history footage) (need info)

Undecided

Biology is straight, 2003/2025, new versions / new works different text (circa 2 m long) (need info)

Untitled (Big plastics), 2025, 1 black with formations + 3 whites (need info)

For the exhibition, Olesen has produced a series of new boxes: open, sculptural displays that revolve around themes such as art historical violence, commodity fetishism, or the collapse of prehistory into the present, such as the overlap between a pyramid and a computer keyboard. These sculptures continue an earlier series of boxes consisting of silkscreened image surfaces arranged around empty spaces and deconstructing time. In the new sculptures, picture planes are combined with three-dimensional art historical footage (clippings, books, etc.) placed inside the boxes. The sculptures are stomachs: on their insides and outsides alike, they digest art historical and other images and texts about sex, consumption and philosophy.

References to art historical components are also present in the large panels composed of depictions and portrayals of the punishment of homosociality in art history from the 1300s to the 1800s. The work was first created by the artist in a book from 2005-06 and has been recreated and further developed here. Olesen's intervention into the art historical visual tradition of affects and gestures through collage panels takes inspiration from the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld's educational charts and queer activism from the first half of the twentieth century.

Bagise - side 16

(folder skal gå op i 4 - 20 sider - 24 sider osv..)



AUGUSTINUS FONDEN

STATENS KUNSTFOND



DET
OBELSKE
FAMILIEFOND

15. Juni Fonden



AAGE OG JOHANNE
LOUIS-HANSENS
FOND

Dansk Tennis Fond

NY
CARLSBERG
FONDET
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GOETHE-INSTITUT