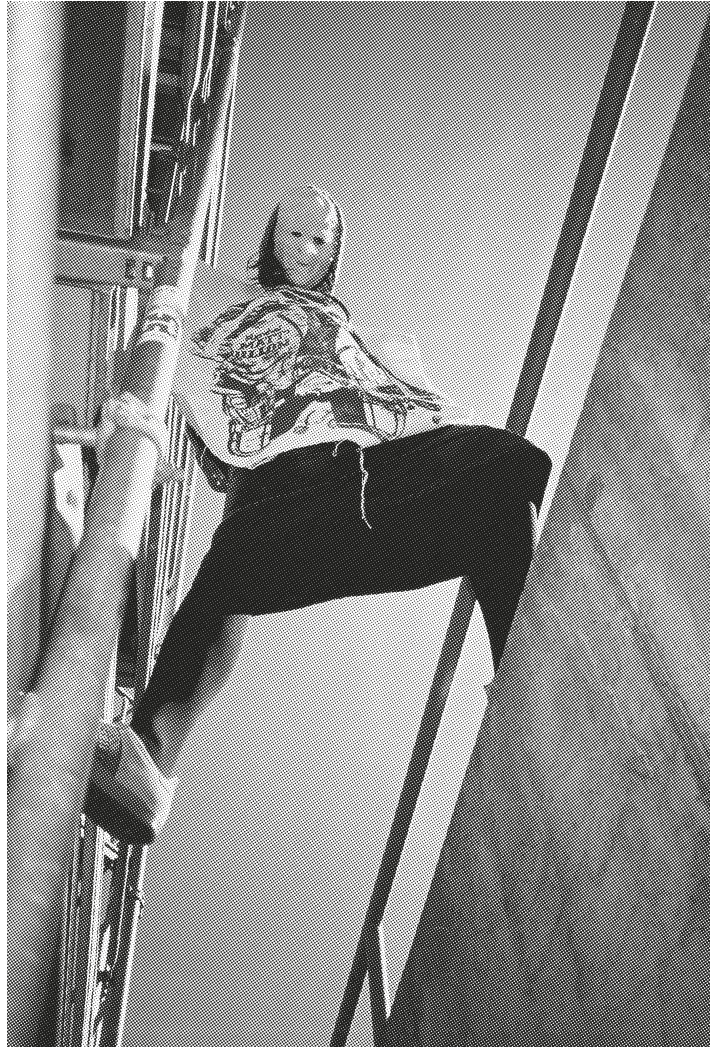


OSLO: Commissioned solo projects at Den Frie

This's and that's

Amy O'Neill
with Line Ebert &
Gianna Surangkanjanajai



07.02. — 04.05.25



This's and that's

This's and that's places the viewer in the reshaped architecture of the previous exhibition. A holding environment of quilt tops, garments, slides, and drawings of figures holding poses. The looks function as both wearable garments and backdrops for the other attires which are all kinds of props such as vestments, stoles, veils, belts, and masks. On top of these surfaces are mash-ups of (pop)cultural figures who include, among others, the TV-witch Witchipoo, a Frankensteinian Beethoven, Arthur Herbert Fonzarelli, and Goya's straw man. An analogue projector shows images that blend places and characters. The dramaturgical backdrop of *This's and that's* is the ancient game of snakes and ladders, offering an account of the intertwined contingencies of luck, decisions, and accountability. Much like other instances of Amy O'Neill's work, the subterranean staging at Den Frie has an indeterminate temporality, just as concerned with what is absent as with what is present in the space. The flatness of the garbs and the hollowed bodies of the silhouettes point to this situational a-historicity, which resonates uncannily in the current vertigo of topsy-turvy interregnums and global tipping points.

This's and that's has been produced in collaboration with artist Gianna Surangkanjanajai and curator Line Ebert. The collaboration is the first between all three and continues the curatorial practice of Den Frie where collective efforts and durational conversations are central. Surangkanjanajai and Ebert co-founded and ran the former exhibition space Red Tracy in Nørrebro, Copenhagen (2020-2022) and have collaborated and been in conversation since, while Surangkanjanajai and O'Neill met in New York where they both live and work.

On the opening night (February 6, 2025), a procession occurred that completed the project.

This pamphlet includes texts by Line Ebert and New York-based writer and cultural critic Jennifer Krasinski.

Figures in mysterious poses

Once the opening night is behind us, we are left in a passage of panels and screens. Not quite an abandoned film set or the remnants of a party, but set up to be a proper display of the vestments, complete with their accessories. The flesh and volume of the bodies have gone, but scarecrows are unnecessary. There is the mechanical sound of a projector going from one slide to the next: images of models showing off versions of these vestments in disparate settings. In a library, in a pool, in a tree house, on a broom in a Harry Potter store, emerging out from a subway station.

These scenes appear impromptu but also reveal their intentionality in how the models turn towards the camera, suggesting interaction between all involved. The odd candidness is perhaps due to the brightness of the cloth, its surface prone to overexposure, or the figures' relaxed demeanour. Even in their masked garb, remarkable as it is, they belong to their surroundings without any sense of alienation. The masks, wrought to be expressionless, have holes for eyes but show none; yet their gaze registers as frontal, towards the participating viewer. The voids do not render them anonymous or detached—as in ethically detached to-do-whatever—nor do they suggest androgyny, as there is no immediate psychosexual order that leads them there instead of here. The absence of features feels less like erasure and more like an opened gesture and it occurs to me that it is in the posture, the way their clothed bodies are held, that the signalling power takes over. Receiving: however liminal a posture may be, the other side of its threshold is the liminal figure itself, its own transience.

This is just a blink of an eye, a brief look at the posture as a specific kind of information transmission as it appears here. For this, I will make a slightly backward loop. Leaving the moving body as it comes in dance, in public, in group formations out for now, addressed here is the posture as a deliberate arrangement of the immobile body and how it has served to make abstract ideas tangible, at once an embodied and artificial expression. At times in the historical past, poses could even function as clear signs, more or less designed to be universally understood. The contrapposto pose of a sculpture aligned the human figure with the moral and intellectual of cosmic order, conveying ideals of balance and rationality through a seemingly effortless stance. Or in a lineage of painting, artists have been able to rely on gestural clarity to construct visual narratives, using poses to guide viewers through complex theological and mythological scenes.

These poses were of course never quite neutral, they coded power, reinforcing a visual language that assumed a universal subject and body. Modernity and its pluralistic posts shattered this nature-like clarity, leaving the cracks intact to reflect a world of incommensurables and a dialectical understanding of the psyche. Poses became fields of tension that yielded to interpretation-as-exchange. In this present place of *after*, in the basement of this and that, I would like to reconsider the posed figure as a sieve of meaning, as an orientation tool to understand the political consequences of a metamorphic world, where power systems appear without filter. It is one thing to dwell on what necessarily remains unresolved, and perhaps another to ask what the figure, in its distortions and in its relation to the others, shows with flickering clarity.

— Line Ebert

Sun in Scorpio, Snakes in the Grass

(for Amy O.)

The rules of the game:

No quotes. Cheap shots. Mere prostheses for your own thoughts

AND

*Honor those who came before you,
at least to acknowledge that you too one day will be buried in your turn
beneath future ruffraff and their
big ideas*

AND AT THE SAME TIME

Renounce repetition masquerading as augury.

AND . . .

GO.

What I am looking for in the who I am thinking of?

This is a question I have never been able to answer for myself, so I decide to take it to a professional.

Ssun in Sscorpio, the astrologer confirms.

His job is easy: to tell me what the stars have in store for me.

My job is hard: to hear what the stars have in store for me.

Relay your sstory in your own wordss, he says and I notice that his eyes are spinning like pinwheels.

I explain to the astrologer that since I was a young girl, I've had this unshakeable sensation that my heart is being squeezed, crushed.

Like there's an overripe fruit in the middle of my chest, I tell him, placing my hand over the scene of the crime. *But what makes it so unbearable is that I know that this sensation isn't mine.* It belongs to someone else.

The astrologer sighs loudly as though he's heard this one before, which is impossible because I haven't told this one before.

I'm receiving the sensations of someone else's body, I continue, *and I know this is true because these feelings have no other cause. They have no backstory, no event, no. . .*

He interrupts me, placing his finger on various points of the cosmic map that lay on the table between us and tracing the paths that connect them. *That iss your next life knocking at your core, sso to sspeak*, he says. *None of uss getss to live all the livess we're incarnated to live. Ssadly, it's usually the plodding, day-to-day life that oversshadowss all of them, with occassional ripss in the tedium—madnesss, belief, and lusst being the top three.* *Why would my future incarnation travel backward?* I ask. *Seems like a bad omen.* The astrologer licks his lips and seems to grow taller in his chair. *When a ssoul feelss ass though it hass no future*, he tells me, *it may decide to make hisstory insstead.*

I share this stunning insight with the guru I have followed for years, studying what he calls the art and craft (hear his emphasis on the latter) of *release*.

Guru always tells his students that this is a lifelong practice, not something we can expect to be possessed by quickly. *It takess time*, he assures us at the beginning of every session. *Releasse is a creeping condition. It desscendss only after one becomess unaware, or hass even forgotten, what one wass attached to in the firsst place.*

I often wonder if maybe another way is for the attached thing to release itself from us. (I have long suspected that clarity is a creeping condition too.)

I had first come to the guru because I'd wanted to throw a party but couldn't decide who to invite. I made lists upon lists of friends and family members and neighbors and acquaintances, trying to sort out who would get along and how and why and what I could say when I introduced them. The whole process tied me up, left me sleepless for months on end. I quit my job so I could focus more fully on the project. My lists would sometimes become overly long to include people I only knew by sight—"the woman in the purple leather coat who waits for her granddaughter at the bus stop every Friday" or "the man with the thick glasses who smells like mothballs and talks loudly about baseball to the guys at the newsstand." Other times, I'd decide to whittle the invitations down to a tight six, planning a dinner party that included only historical figures who I thought would make interesting company for me, and for each other: Gertrude Stein, Abbie Hoffman, the Bog Woman, Judas, and Buster Keaton.

What led me to study with guru is that I ended up keeping it small and inviting just the Historicals (as I call them)—and the dinner was a disaster. They all came on time, they all got along. But they *annoyed* me. Their appetites were long gone, their manners were strange. Bog Woman was so naive (as expected), but showed herself to have an insatiable shoe fetish (which was un-expected), so stayed crouched at my stilettos all evening. Stein was a sexpot (as expected) with a goofball sense of humor (also expected) but spent the evening raging at Judas saying something about “decisions decisions decisions!” Abbie drank too much, Buster mostly moped, but very kindly did the dishes as I pushed the others out the door and waved them goodnight.

I think what happened, as I told the guru, is that the Historicals aroused in me too many expectations, which then led to too many disappointments. I spent all that time cleaning, cooking, going to the market, choosing a menu, creating a centerpiece, and in the end it wasn't worth it. They didn't delight me enough. Guru stared into my eyes and gently began swaying side to side. No one should expect any other being to bring them delight. One must bring it to oneself. I want you to work with this mantra: I am the wellspring of my own joy. . .

I am the wellspring of my own joy. . .

That'ss the thing about wisse men, the comedian cracks.

They're always repeating themsselves!

I've heard this one before, but I keep that fact to myself.

The comedian and I are curled up in bed as we are every Friday night after his late set.

Practicing release, I formulate another mantra to work with:

Who cares what I think except for me?

Who cares what I think except for me?

The comedian wants an audience.

I want sleep.

This is our bedtime routine:

He: *Ssay, in what sstate were you born?*

Me: *Why in the nude, of course!*

Me: *You know buddy, you've got a head like a doorknob.*

He: *Yeah, any girl can turn it!*

Me: *I hear all geniuses are narcissists.*

He: *No, I'm not!*

He: *What did the cannibal ssay to the pressident?*

He: *What did the assasssin ssay to hiss mother?*

He: *What did the apocalypsse ssay to the children?*

The comedian needs no punchline to laugh—the setup is enough for him to lose it completely. When he sees that I'm not laughing with him, his forked tongue darts out of his mouth and tickles my cheek as a peace offering.

Tonight I can't hear the jokes in his jokes, only the pulping of my heart, this heart of my next life, which is saying something like:

Open or closed, I will be kicked down by the world if and when they need you.

— Jennifer Krasinski

Amy O'Neill

Amy O'Neill began exhibiting in the late 1990s and while drawing and film can be considered her primary mediums, recent works have frequently included tailored looks, prompting one to think more about socio-cultural and affective textures than the interiority of an art object. O'Neill works in New York and has had solo exhibitions at Paula Cooper Gallery, New York; MAMCO, Geneva; Swiss Institute, Paris and New York; SPECTA, Copenhagen; Le Consortium, Dijon.

Gianna Surangkanjanajai & Line Ebert

Gianna Surangkanjanajai and Line Ebert co-founded and ran the exhibition space Red Tracy in Copenhagen, along with artist Andreas Rønholt Schmidt, from 2020-2022. They have collaborated and been in conversation since then, mainly circling the formations of feminist attitudes and the moment at which these slip into public discourse.

The exhibition program: OSLO

This's and that's is the third exhibition in Den Frie's newly initiated OSLO-program, presenting commissioned solo projects by contemporary artists produced specifically for the sub-level exhibition space. The OSLO-program continues Den Frie's legacy as a space with a long history of experimenting formats, curating exhibitions collectively and realizing works of art in close collaboration with artists. The name OSLO is a reference to Den Frie's location on Oslo Plads and an anagram for solo. Admission to OSLO is always free.

Colophon

This's and that's: Amy O'Neill

Produced in collaboration with Gianna Surangkanjanajai & Line Ebert

Den Frie Udstillingsbygning

07.02. — 04.05.2025

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Laura Gerdes-Miranda, Line Ebert, & Jennifer Krasinski

Translation

René Lauritsen, Line Ebert, & Laura Gerdes-Miranda

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