

THINK OF ME AS A CAROL

PETER VOSS-KNUDE

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Ausstellung | 25.02. - 31.03.2018

Die Ausstellung *Think of me as a Carol* ist eine Fortsetzung von Peter Voss-Knudes langjährigen musikalischen Auseinandersetzung mit der Dänischen Armee sowie das Ergebnis seiner Künstlerresidenz im Grimmuseum im vergangenen Jahr. Der Titel der Ausstellung bezieht sich auf einen Song, den Voss-Knude zusammen mit Ekelund, dem Kapitän der Armee, geschrieben hat. Er handelt von der ambivalenten Rolle des Soldaten als Gebieter über Krieg und zugleich selbsternannter ‚Friedenschor‘. Das Video von Ekelunds herzerreißenden Studioperformance, parallel zu den großformatigen Kohlezeichnungen von Voss-Knude, spiegelt ihre Kollaboration – eine Zusammenarbeit zwischen ‚Schwuchtel‘ und Soldat, Künstler und Muse – und ihre Übersetzung in kulturelle Artefakte wider.

***Think of me as a Carol* is a continuation of Peter Voss-Knude's longstanding musical engagement with The Danish Defence, and the outcome of his residency at Grimmuseum. The show takes its title from the lyrics of a song that Voss-Knude wrote with army captain Simon Ekelund about the ambivalent role of the soldier as both arbiter of war and self-proclaimed "choir of peace". The video of Ekelund's heart-wrenching studio performance accompanied by Voss-Knude's immense charcoal drawings figure a consideration of their relationship – one between 'faggot' and soldier, artist and muse – and its translation into cultural artefacts.**

Peter Voss-Knude (*1987, Copenhagen DK) lives and works in Berlin and Copenhagen. He studied Fine Art at Goldsmiths University London. He has performed and exhibited at Last Tango, Zürich together with Fiona Banner (2017); the National Gallery of Denmark (2017), Overgaden Institute for Contemporary Art, Copenhagen (2017), Code Art Fair (2017); Royal Arsenal Museum of Denmark (2016) and Counter Space, Zürich (2015), amongst others. As *Peter & the Danish Defence*, he has written two pop music albums in collaboration with the Danish Armed Forces, available on Spotify and iTunes.

1
Captain Ekelund and The Wardrobe of Death recording in Sauna Studio
2017
4:40 min video loop

2
A soldier sends me selfie from Al-Asad Airbase in Iraq
2017
Charcoal on paper
150 x 270 cm

3
Scribbling on view
2018
Graphite and glue on glass
Dimensions variable

4
A study in peace
2018
Bronze cast of drawing mannequin hand
7 x 8 x 30 cm

5
Captain Ekelunds poem
2017
Nine graphite on paper drawings collaged on wall
70 x 100 cm

6
Soldiers that write #1 - 4
2017 - [ongoing series]
Color pencil on paper
62 x 80 x 4 cm

7
The Master
2017
Cut vinyl LP
32 x 32 cm

A side: *Can I Want Peace*,
composed by Peter Voss-Knude,
co-written by Captain Simon
Ekelund, recorded in the Sauna
Studios with *The Wardrobe of
Death 2 017*.

B side: *Captain Ekelund Playing
With Water and Making It Jump*

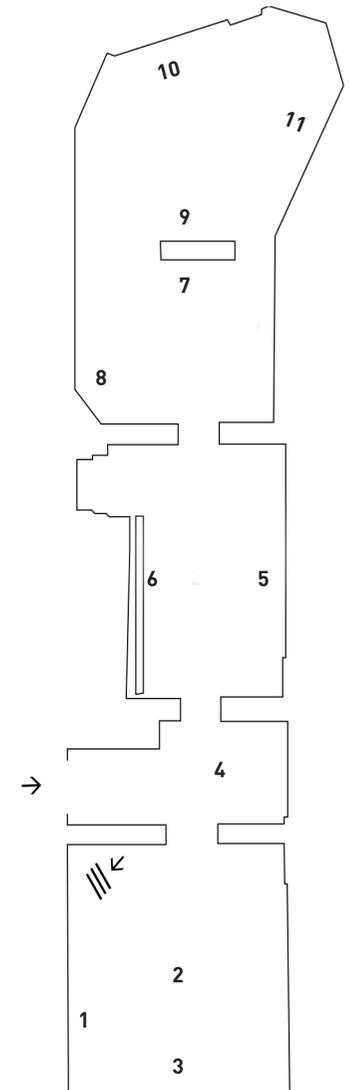
8
Tunefork
2016
Oil pastel on Mirri paper
65 x 92 cm

9
Hockney Heart
2018
Oil pastel on readymade canvas
30 x 31 cm

10
American swimmingpool in Al-Asad, Iraq
2017
Charcoal on paper
525 x 360 cm

11
Sauna
2017
Charcoal on paper
410 x 360 cm

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GRIMMUSEUM gUG
Fichtestrasse. 2, 10967 Berlin
www.grimmuseum.com
info@grimmuseum.com
Mi-Sa 14-18 Uhr

THINK OF ME AS A CAROL

Text by Kristian Vistrup Madsen

Peter Voss-Knude has spent the better part of four years infiltrating the army, picking the brains of young recruits in a unique collaboration between a civilian and an army. With his band *Peter and the Danish Defence*, he recorded two albums on which the testimonies of the soldier's resound in his own voice. Some stories were alien and high-octane: what does it feel like to kill someone? Or even just to walk through the desert freighted with twenty litres of water and a machine-gun? Others told of homosocial love and intimacy, far from unknown to Peter, a gay man, but conceived under radically different circumstances. For Peter, these points of difference and familiarity, one framing the other, have become a kind of methodology; a way of working, of making art.

“Can I want peace?”, the new track that forms the centrepiece of this exhibition, opens with church bells because it was originally commissioned as a Christmas carol for a jazz trio called *The Wardrobe of Death* (a name that belies their total harmlessness). This time Peter is silent, and, taking the collaboration with the soldiers a step further, stays behind the camera, and leaves the microphone to Captain Ekelund, who delivers the first line in a sombre whisper: “Think of me as a carol”. He is really the star of this show. The vein that protrudes from his neck as he sings his heart out is the star of this show. What he gives to this song, how he expends himself, his breathlessness, his own surprise, the star of this show.

A large charcoal drawing based on a selfie sent to the artist from the Al-Asad Airbase in Iraq shares the room with the video. Already Captain Ekelund is not only himself, but a different soldier too. In the next room, the portrait quadruples. A series of colour pencil drawings titled “Soldiers Writing” thematise the relaying of war-stories in writing. The efforts made by any

and every soldier to represent the life in battle with any accuracy are efforts made in vain: because are the horrors of war not, fundamentally, unrepresentable? This is also the price that the muse pays; no longer just himself, nor even a soldier, but an image, a musical score scribbled on a sheet of note paper. This slippage between reality and its representation is what produces the sad beauty of art, and, when you are working with real people, an ethical dilemma to boot.

For the soldier whose presence is determined by the continuation of war, the question “Can I want peace?” is a question of identity. For “Who am I then?”, as Ekelund sings, in times of peace? Nobody? Someone else? More things at once?

As the multiplication of soldiers deconstructs the “I” of the track, the bronze sculpture “A study in peace” breaks down its central notion. The V-sign, rendered in the style of a drawing mannequin, reminds us that “peace” began as “victory” – victory as a result of bombs, not cease-fire – before being taken over in protests against the Vietnam war in the 1960s. Made increasingly redundant through its refractions, a V-sign thrown palm facing inwards may be taken as a fuck you, while a V-sign on tourist's photograph by Brandenburger Tor translates to, I don't know... “hello”?

Meanwhile, the motif of the hand is the final test of the draughtsman training for perfect naturalist depiction. In this exhibition, everything after the video is the backstage; the process unfolded. Like taking a shot at drawing the hand again and again, with each attempt Peter asks: What is it that I want to say about these soldiers, about the military, about masculinity? How is it that I want to say it?

A scene from the recording studio (conspicuously named “Sauna”) depicts a couple of hands interlocking, like God and Adam in the Sistine Chapel, a meeting between differences. But perhaps also a question of surrender: truce? Years ago, Peter went into the army collaboration with the standard leftist measure of criti-

cism: no faith in the war in Iraq, nothing but contempt for the doomed brand of masculinity offered by the military – some intrigue, perhaps, and a certain desire to meet the eyes of the beast. But after everything kicksoff, bonds form, and the tone is set by the pitchfork, leaning against the other wall, these things don't really matter anymore: you shake hands, you move forward. Differences not only co-exist, they rub against each other, make energy.

An exercise pool in the American Al-Asad Airbase is the subject of the largest of Peter's drawings. The water is like that of the open sea, dark and perilous. Together with the mundanity of the selfie in the first room of the exhibition, it says something about the everyday fact of war: they built a goddamn swimming pool. They're moving in. The ominous gloom of this picture testifies to how far this world is from Peter's own – he has never visited Al-Asad – and how dangerous, too: in the military, he's been told, gay men, if they come out, often become vic-tims of sexual assault. This is just to say, in these unruly waters, you'll want to be careful.

“Hockney Heart”, a riff on a different kind of swimming pool, punctuates the wall opposite the army's. This small heart-shape is a sly homage to the unattainable homo-paradise of Hockney's California paintings, as well as to the eccentric strategies he employed to depict water on canvas. As we know from art history, Plato onwards, this quest for objective representation – like peace itself, like Iraq, like turning a captain into a carol – is a mission as doomed as it is corrupt. But what Plato got wrong is that art never aimed for descriptive realism, but emotional resonance; that is, not objective, but subjective representation. And as such, this work is also an insertion of self on the part of the artist; a pastel filter on military masculinity. Ekelund and his refractions may be the star of the show, but Peter continues to provide the backdrop on which it hangs: that little gay heart, a little gay punctum, at the end.