

Anna Sofie
Mathiasen



Folly

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RGA DEN

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O - OVERGADEN
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Det er en stor fornøjelse at introducere denne publikation, der udkommer i forbindelse med Anna Sofie Mathiasens soloudstilling, *Folly*, på O - Overgaden. Udstillingen er kulminationen på vores særlige INTRO-forløb - et etårigt postgraduate program, som O - Overgaden tilbyder to kunstnere. Med generøs støtte fra Aage og Johanne Louis-Hansens Fond skaber INTRO en unik mulighed for at udvikle og udvide vores samarbejde med kunstscenens nyeste stemmer igennem både en stor udstilling og denne ambitiøse publikation, hvis målsætning det er at udvide samtalerne omkring den kunstneriske praksis og åbne op for, at nyt materiale kan udspringe heraf. I dette tilfælde har vi været heldige at kunne inkludere bidrag fra kunstner Peter Wächtler, forfatter Sophie Strand samt kurator og direktør Milena Høgsberg i samtale med Mathiasen selv, og vi er meget taknemmelige for alles bidrag. Dertil skal der lyde en stor tak til O - Overgadens redaktør Anne Kølback Iversen og til det grafiske designteam på fanfare for deres altid store arbejde. Sidst, men ikke mindst, en særligt varm tak til kunstneren for at dele sit materiale - fra koncept til udvidede samtaler - med os alle sammen, både gennem udstillingen og denne publikation.

At omsætte spørgsmål om mental og miljømæssig sundhed til animation, tegning og skulptur er et centralt omdrejningspunkt i den unge danske kunstner Anna Sofie Mathiasens udstilling på O - Overgaden. Med løse referencer til *Cirkeline*, den schweiziske animationsserie *Pingu* og haveprogrammets pædagogiske fortællestil har Mathiasen skabt en serie på fire nye stop-motion film. De korte film på mellem et og fire minutter fortæller historien om en deprimeret pingvin, der ser haveprogrammet på sofaen, mens den forsøger at arbejde sig gennem depressionen ved at ty til bl.a. terapi, havearbejde og kompostering for til sidst at forsøge sig med at købe et stykke jord med sin ven, skildpadden. I arbejdet med udstillingen gør Mathiasen det samme som animationens hovedperson, der har fået sin stemme fra Kaya Wilkins (også kendt som Okay Kaya): hun anlægger nemlig en have.

Udstillingshaven, som Mathiasen har anlagt, omfatter i den ene ende en stensti, der går gennem en nyttehøve fuld af espalierer, tegnede jordskokker og hyldeblomster (som siges at uddrive onde ånder, hvis de placeres i hjørnerne) samt en animation af en kompost (der opsamler, komposterer og dermed genanvender citater om havearbejde og mental sundhed).

INTRODUKTION

I udstillingens anden ende blomstrer en prydhøve centreret om en pavillon eller et lysthus (på engelsk 'folly'), der låner sit navn til udstillingen: *Folly*. 'Folly' kan betyde både dårskab, tåbelighed, fejltrin og en havepavillon, der ikke har noget egentligt praktisk formål. I dette tilfælde er *follyen* baseret på en ægte pavillon, som i sin tid blev bygget af kunstnerens morfar til galleristparret Asbæk. Til udstillingen er den blevet gentegnet af kunstnerens mor og bygget af hendes far. Mathiasens havearbejde vender på den måde tilbage til sociale økosystemer bestående af venskaber og familie, samtidig med at det fremkalder barndoms minder og tanker om haven som et helbredende sted for fysisk og psykisk sygdom.

Udstillingen indeholder en lang række referencer til private og offentlige haver, bl.a. Mathiasens eget havearbejde, som har spillet en vigtig rolle i opretholdelsen af hendes personlige mentale helbred - og hvor hun (som et fejltrin, en folly) kastede jordskokker på komposten, hvilket betød, at de overtog hele hendes have. En anden reference er haven omkring det psykiatriske hospital Dikemark uden for Oslo, kunstnerens nuværende hjemby. Historien lyder, at en psykiater omkring år 1930 bragte pingviner til stedet for at underholde patienterne, men at fuglene hurtigt døde. Dette motiv - lige dele tåbeligt (en folly) og tragisk - inspirerede Mathiasen til hovedrollefiguren i hendes nye animation, pingvinen. Desuden fik det kunstneren til at genbesøge barndommens tidsfordriv med at skabe hjemmelavede pingviner i træ sammen med sin far. De færdige figurer befolker nu udstillingen sammen med forladte fuglere der og havespyd med prints af en høne og en kylling (baseret på barndomstegninger). Samlet set peger de forskellige elementer på havens mange, næsten absurde modsætninger, hvor både det ukontrollable vildnis og de velplejede bede rummer cykliske stier mod heling.

Rhea Dall,
Leder, december 2023

Anna Sofie Mathiasen (f. 1995, DK) er uddannet fra Kunstakademiet i Oslo i 2020. Hun har tidligere udstillet på blandt andet Galleri K, Kunsthall Oslo og Kunsternes Hus, alle i Oslo (NO); Sol i Nexø (DK); og Institut Valencià d'Art Modern i Valencia (ES). *Folly* er kunstnerens første store soloudstilling i Danmark. I 2024 rejser udstillingen videre til Nitja senter for samtidskunst i Lillestrøm og det kunstnerdrevne udstillingssted Pachinko i Oslo.

HAVEMULD TIL DEN KUNST- NERISKE PRAKSIS

EN SAMTALE MELLEM
MILENA HØGSBERG OG ANNA SOFIE MATHIASEN

Milena Høgsberg

Måske skal vi starte ved de her jordskokker, du har tegnet. Her i dit atelier er det dem, der lige springer i øjnene. De ligger og smiler nede i jorden, mens deres ranglede planter strækker sig over jorden. Hvordan kom de ind i billedet?

Anna Sofie Mathiasen

Mit første indtryk af jordskokkerne, udover at have spist dem, er som plante. Det var først, da jeg tænkte, at jordskokken kunne udfylde mange af mine behov på én gang, at jeg begyndte at arbejde med den kunstnerisk. For det første er jordskokken en stauede, så den kan komme igen hvert år. Jeg kan godt lide at knytte bånd. Jeg kan godt lide, når man kan have et længere forhold til en vækst end én sæson. Og så er den en plante, som både er spiselig og virkelig smuk, når den blomstrer. Det var først senere, at jeg fandt ud af, at jordskokkerne også er ekstremt hårdføre. De breder sig rigtig, rigtig meget. Så jeg fik også lidt et problem med dem, da de tog over i min have.

(MH)

Og det var i din nyttehave?

(ASM)

Ja, mest i min nyttehave, men også i haven ved mine forældres sommerhus. Jeg kom til at smide jordskokkerne på komposten, så alle de steder, jeg herefter spredte kompostjorden, er de bare vokset op. Så nu er der en hel skov af dem. Jeg og min kæreste blev ret påvirket af dem. Han syntes, deres vækst var spændende, men gik samtidigt rundt og prøvede at hive dem op i et forsøg på at kontrollere dem. Så nu er vores relation til dem både-og – hverken god eller dårlig. Nogle gange griner de af os, og nogle gange griner de med os, så det var lidt dér, den karakter, altså jordskokfiguren i mine animationsværker og tegninger, opstod.

(MH)

Kan man måske sige, at det her projekt i virkeligheden også handler om at finde sin *grounding*, sit ståsted i verden, samtidig med at man slipper kontrollen?

(ASM)

Ja, det er klart en del af det. Jeg forestiller mig lidt jordskokkerne som havenisse-agtige figurer, der både kan drille og hjælpe, men også som levende væsner, der har deres eget liv – og udfordrer mit kontrolbehov. Haven er det modsatte af et tomt sted. Haven er et meget *fuldt* sted, men der er stadig plads til en selv. Når jeg er i haven, tjekker jeg ind i et økosystem, og tiden føles anderledes. Jeg har ofte heller ikke et ur på. Haven har nok været den vigtigste scenografi for mange i deres barndoms lege og fantasiverdener, som vel også er en slags økosystemer. Jeg synes, det giver god mening, at de fleste af karaktererne i min udstilling er blevet skabt, eller måske bare fundet, i haven.

(MH)

Børn har i hvert fald ofte et andet og mere umiddelbart forhold til naturen og sanser den med fantasien på en anden måde end voksne.

Det virker på mig, som om dine værker forsøger at sanse verden på den måde. Her ved siden af de animerede og drillende jordskokker dukker hyldeblomsterne op. Hvilken rolle spiller de?

(ASM)

Jeg tror, de er en af mine yndlingsvækster. Jeg glæder mig hvert år til, at de skal blomstre. Både fordi jeg elsker hyldeblomstsft, og fordi jeg elsker selve træet og duften af det. Vi har flere forskellige sorter stående i sommerhushaven. Én af dem er en kæmpe, og den bliver fyldt med bladlus nogle gange. Men det er den ligegladd med. Den blomstrer ufortrødent, og er utrolig nem at lave stiklinger af. For mig er hyldeblomsterne beskyttere, og måske er de her i udstillingen havens forældre og beskyttere, dens 'Elders'.

(MH)

Jeg fornemmer, du er tiltrukket af planter, som har en markant resiliens. Planter, som overlever og insisterer på at være i livet, også selvom deres omstændigheder er svære.

(ASM)

Ja, altså, jeg synes også, det er det, man ret hurtigt finder ud af, når man laver havearbejde. At det handler om at skabe noget, der faktisk trives det sted, du planter det. Jeg kan føle mig helt skyldig, hvis jeg planter noget, der slet ikke har det godt – som om jeg bryder en slags samfundskontrakt, jeg har med haven. Jeg lægger virkelig mærke til, om en plante gerne vil være der, og også hvis den ikke vil.

(MH)

Hvordan spejler den her forståelse af vækst og trivsel i haven sig i din egen rejse mod større mental og fysisk sundhed og en mere balanceret måde at være i verden på, som også er et tema i udstillingen? Det virker, som om din tid i haven giver en masse tilbage, og der er jo også mange studier, der påviser, at daglig kontakt med naturen faktisk har en gavnlig effekt på vores mentale helbred. I haven er vi i kontakt med en masse mikrober, bakterier, dufte og sporer, som vi indånder og optager gennem huden, og som sender en strøm af impulser til nervesystemet med beskeder til kroppens forskellige celler.

(ASM)

Jeg ved ikke så meget om videnskaben om mikrober, men kan godt mærke, at jeg langt fra er alene, når jeg er i haven. For mig handler det om, at jeg mærker, at jeg trives på en helt anden måde. Jeg får en helt anden kontakt, også til mit eget arbejde.

(MH)

Så faktisk ændrer havearbejdet også måden, du tænker rammerne for din kunstneriske praksis?

(ASM)

Ja, det er blevet meget nemmere for mig at mærke, hvor jeg skal hen kunstnerisk, hvilke historier jeg vil fortælle, eller hvad jeg har lyst til at gøre. Og så oplever jeg også en anderledes træthed i kroppen, når jeg arbejder udendørs: ikke som en udmattelse, som jeg kun føler, når jeg for eksempel sidder på mit atelier med lysstofrør,

men mere som en klar fornemmelse af, at nu er jeg færdig for i dag. Før jeg fandt ud i haven, følte jeg måske, at min praksis på nogle måder faktisk var ved at vokse mig lidt over hovedet. Den var blevet min strenge arbejdsgiver på en måde. For mig som kunstner er det en kontinuerlig proces at prøve at komme tættere på min praksis på en anden måde.

(MH)

Jeg tror bestemt, det er noget, vi alle sammen konstant må øve os på. Når jeg går rundt med dig her i haven, tænker jeg på ordet 'jordforbindelse', som også er en forbindelse med den processuelle tid, der udfolder sig i en have. Det er ikke kun den tid, du *giver* haven eller 'lægger i den', men også havens egen cyklus.

(ASM)

Det minder mig om noget fint, min far sagde en dag, da jeg legede med nogle tanker om, hvilke ændringer jeg nu kunne gøre: "I må ikke fælde nogen af de store træer og buske, før jeg dør, for så kan jeg ikke nå at se det nye vokse sig stort." Det var ret konfronterende, følte jeg, da jeg desværre ikke er god til at tackle tanker og samtaler om døden. Det er ikke noget, jeg synes, jeg har lært at snakke om. Men jeg har fået nogle virkelig gode billeder og værktøjer at øve mig på, efter du introducerede mig til Sophie Strands tekster. De hjalp mig også i sommers, hvor jeg var i Sydengland og så på haver sammen med min mor. Her besøgte vi blandt andet kunstneren Derek Jarmans have Prospect Cottage i Dungeness. Dungeness ligger ved kysten i et hjørne af England og har et vildt klima, hvor salt og vind gør, at det er meget begrænset, hvad der kan vokse der. Alligevel er det nok den smukkeste have, jeg nogensinde har set. Med et underlag af de sten, som spreder sig over hele Dungeness, og får det hele til at ud som et kæmpe stenbed, vokser der blandt andet hunderoser, hyl, strandkål og cypresurt sammen med skulpturer lavet af gamle haveredskaber.

Derek Jarman lavede haven, mens han var døende af AIDS og mistede sine kære. Havens på én gang skrøbelige og robuste udtryk var virkelig rørende og konfronterende. Jeg vil rigtig gerne rejse tilbage og se den på en anden årstid engang. Det, der er med havearbejde, er jo, at man arbejder i cyklusser og oplever ting dø ud og gro op eller blive til jord.

(MH)

Måden du beskriver det på får mig virkelig til at forestille mig ham tage sig omsorgsfuldt af sin have, samtidigt med at han kunne mærke sygdommens effekt på sin egen krop. Og det giver mig lyst til at vandre tilbage til komposten, der spredte jordskokkerne over haven. I sin tekst "Confessions of a Compost Heap", genoptrykt her i publikationen [blandt de engelske tekster, red.], beskriver Sophie Strand dét at forestille sig selv og kroppen, der nedbrydes pga. sygdom, som muld i en komposteringsproces, hvorfra der kan spire nye mere-end-menneskelige historier. Hvad var det i denne specifikke tekst, der resonerede med dig?

(ASM)

Strands ord har åbnet en dør på klem i forhold til at udvikle en slags begyndende naturforståelse og en også kritisk forståelse af 'naturbegrebet'. Særligt "Confessions of a Compost Heap" gjorde indtryk på mig og inspirerede mig også til at lave en del af værkerne til denne udstilling. Da jeg læste hendes tekst, kunne jeg se, at jeg måske havde misforstået kompostbunken både teoretisk og praktisk, som det blev tydeligt med min fejl med jordskokkerne. Jeg synes, komposten er et meget konfronterende sted: Den varsler slutningen af sæsonen, hvor man går ud og lægger alt op; råddenskab og døden. Samtidig var det en lettelse at høre hendes tanker om komposten, som det sted, hvor alt ender – at alle ideer kan smides på komposten og blive til god jord for noget nyt. Disse tanker om kompostbunken hjalp med at tackle og nedbryde den præstationsangst, som er knyttet til at lave en soloudstilling. Jeg prøver at gentænke, hvad en udstilling skal være. Det har været mit havearbejde. Og nu står mine værker i en kort periode på O – Overgaden og blomstrer, og så bliver de til kompost og god jord bagefter, hvorfra der kan vokse noget nyt. Den tanke har gjort, at jeg har kunnet slippe helt af og arbejde meget mere intuitivt med udstillingen.

(MH)

Jeg er så glad for, at du har fordøjet Strands tænkning på denne måde, især fordi mulden i Strands tekst også, som jeg ser det, repræsenterer et mere ydmygt perspektiv på menneskelig eksistens og skaben. Strand har en sjælden genetisk sygdom, som gør, at døden er en nærværende mulighed, selvom hun er meget ung. I stedet for at hænge sig i lægernes dystre prognoser finder hun kreativ drivkraft i processen med at slippe fokus på sin egen sygdomshistorie og i stedet overgive sig til tanken om sig selv som dybt forbundet med en større økologi; som del af en kompost, der sammen med fungi, mikrober og bakterier kan blive til muld for fremtidige historier. Det, synes jeg, er en meget smuk og radikal tanke, som åbner op for nogle andre historier end dem, vi mennesker gerne vil fortælle om os selv. Og det cirkler tilbage til din far, der insisterer på, at de store vækster ikke skal fjernes, fordi han godt ved, at deres levetid spejler hans egen. Memento mori – husk, at du skal dø.

(ASM)

Ja, netop. Alt forgår...

(MH)

Og så er vi tilbage igen ved ordet 'trivsel', som jeg ved, du har det ambivalent med, fordi det hurtigt kommer til at styre og endda begrænse forståelsen af værkerne, og måske også pingvinerne, der optræder som en anden hovedfigur i din have.

(ASM)

Ja, jeg ønsker ikke, at værkerne kun skal ses gennem det ord. Jeg arbejder gravalvorligt med at skabe trivsel for mig selv, og samtidig er der også bare et sprog omkring den proces, som jeg har det ambivalent med. I udstillingen har jeg valgt at inkludere nogle tegninger inspireret af selvhjælps-plakater,

som spejler den store kommercielle industri omkring mental helse og naturens helende kraft, som nogle gange opererer på bekostning af naturen. Det er jo også her, jeg tænker, at kompostbunken igen kan blive relevant. Alle de gode råd bliver smidt på bunken, og måske bliver de gode råd først nyttige, når de er komposteret færdig.

(MH)

Ja, og er trukket op som næring...

(ASM)

Nogens trivsel kan betyde andres mistrivsel. Det er, som om omsorg og overgreb kan ligge på samme linje. Udstillingen refererer flere steder til en ret grotesk historie fra det nedlagte psykiatriske hospital Dikemark uden for Oslo, hvor en mandlig psykiater i 1930 hentede pingviner hjem fra Ishavet til hospitalshaven for at glæde patienterne. Selvom det på en eller anden måde er en kærlig tanke, kan man jo regne ud, at det gik rigtig dårligt. Det kan da godt være, at patienterne trivedes med pingvinerne, men det gjorde pingvinerne jo i hvert fald ikke, og de døde hurtigt. Der findes kun et foto af den ene, der overlevede længst. Og det billede har været udgangspunkt for de animationsfilm, jeg har lavet til udstillingen.

(MH)

Disse film er virkelig korte stop-motion animationer, og du benytter dig af en fortællerstemme, der på pædagogisk vis beretter om pingvinen, som ser haveprogrammer på TV og siden laver sin egen have, da den oplever, at medicinering ikke virker. Hvorfor er pingvinen så vigtig for dig?

(ASM)

Med pingvinen er der mange tilfældigheder, der væves sammen. Pingviner er fascinerende, både fordi pingvinen er en underlig fugl, der ikke kan flyve, og fordi de bor i et så andet økosystem end os et sted, hvor der ikke kan bo mennesker. Det gør dem nærmest mytiske, og jeg kan godt forstå, de har en nærmest universel appel. Jeg har længe været inspireret af universer fra børne-TV og animationer fra min barndom, bl.a. *Pingu*, en I-animation fra 1980'erne, som på humoristisk vis forestiller sig en pingvinfamilies liv (levet på menneskevis) med en charmerende ballademager af en barnepingvin.

I min barndom byggede min far hus, og så begyndte vi at lave træpingviner sammen, som vi dengang byggede af de overskydende byggematerialer. Efter jeg faldt over den her groteske historie om pingvinerne på Dikemark i Oslo sidste år, begyndte min far og jeg igen at bygge pingviner. De blev hurtigt en del af hjemmet, og nogle flyttede tilbage med mine forældre til byen, og nu bor de så en tid på O – Overgaden. De har alle sammen fået kælenavne, og jeg bemærkede, at min far også er gået og har flyttet rundt på dem, når jeg ikke har været i sommerhuset, og tilmed har portrætteret dem i små malerier.

(MH)

Jeg finder det familiære, udvidet til de planter, dyr og frugttræer, der lever i dit univers, meget rørende. Du har også lavet en såkaldt 'folly' – et lysthus – som din far har bygget, og som vil blive placeret midt i udstillingen, der også har titlen *Folly*.

(ASM)

Ja, den folly, der står i udstillingen refererer til en pavillon, som min afdøde morfar, der var murermester, murede for gallerierne Jacob & Patricia Asbæk. Han viste mig fotografier af den for en del år siden, da jeg lavede et projekt om de danske mureres fagforenings historie. Til udstillingen har min mor redesignet pavillonen, og min far har bygget den oppe i vores sommerhus. Det har været et kæmpe arbejde, som jeg er meget rørt og taknemmelig over, at de har taget på sig. Jeg kan godt lide, at min mor genfortolker en pavillon, hendes far har bygget, og at min far har bygget den til mig. Det er et meget personligt værk for mig og også en slags passage, hvorfra min morfar måske kan se udstillingen. Jeg har i hvert fald hængt hans gamle kikkert derinde. I udstillingen bliver min familie, personer, væsner, fortællinger og referencer, jeg har kær, samlet i et lille økosystem – min familie og mine venner har jo også været en stor del af selve produktionen af udstillingen ved at bygge, tegne, lave stemmer, lyd, musik, klippe film, lægge grussti osv.

Oikos, som er et begreb, der betyder hus og hushold og er en byggesten for begreberne økologi og økosystem, fungerer som noget, fortællingerne i udstillingen kan samle sig om. Det går tilbage til noget, jeg hørte Sophie Strand sige på en video på YouTube i sommers, om at vi skal huske at nære vores eget lokale økosystem, det kan være ens have, familie, venner eller lokalmiljø.

FOLLY

Peter Wächtler

Denne tekst er en fortsættelse af en samtale mellem forfatteren og kunstneren, der har fundet sted over de seneste måneder, samt mellem forfatteren og de værker, der vises på udstillingen. Teksten udfolder dens karakterer, motiver og temaer – dens tåbeligheder.

Og på det tredje skilt står der: Der er de ting, du gerne vil lære, dem du skal lære, og dem du ikke vil lære.

Lad os sige, at du gerne vil lære at kommunikere med mennesker, så du kan udtrykke dig på en måde, der får dem til at forstå dig, følge din tankegang og ikke sære dig eller løbe skrigende, grinende eller grædende væk. Eller du har for eksempel lyst til at lære, hvordan tingene blev gjort for 'din tid' for at forstå, hvordan tingene gøres nu. Dette vil hjælpe dig til at få en bedre fornemmelse for vores igangværende tidslinje (menneskehedens historie), den kulturelle læringskurve, i tider hvor det er dybt nødvendigt at revurdere din nuværende position.

Efter 'vil gerne lære'-sektionen, kommer så 'skal lære'-sektionen. Grundlæggende er det den samme som sektionen for 'vil gerne lære', men ældet, dybt ældet, som noget, der dingle fra et røgfylt loft eller er begravet i jorden som en grinende jordskok, og vi skal alle spise det, dag ud, dag ind, i skivevis. Det er hverken forsvundet eller helt tilstede. Det kan være ude af stil, manipuleret, ændret eller dukke op igen som et moralsystem, som værdier eller overbevisninger. Det serveres med dark ale og andet beroligende tilbehør, som at beskæftige sig med universiteter, at klæde sig beskedent, ensomhed, lederskab og manglen på det.

Den tredje sektion, 'vil ikke lære'-sektionen, betragtes som umoden, regressiv og afvigende. Du nægter at acceptere bestik, vigepligt, ægteskab, terapi og andre anvisninger for god opførsel til fordel for en barnlig, Forrest Gump-agtig livsstil, ude af trit med nogen kulturel tidslinje og som følger lidt eller intet til den. Karaktererne i dette segment er drømmerne og de (u)fordærvede, alle sammen sparringspartnere til fjolser, visionære og det store intet. Valutaen i denne sektion består af (meget) sjældne øjeblikke af naiv glæde og umiddelbarhed – som en suppe, der deles med en skildpadde.

Kæmpe modsigelse: På den anden side er det helt OK, hvis du ikke vil lære at lave dit eget brød eller din egen katalysator eller foretage hjernekirurgi, fordi det anses for modent at acceptere grænserne for dine færdigheder, dit fokus i livet og organiseringen af arbejde og klasse i dit samfund.

DIY kommer ind i dette som en sentimentalt ladet, officiel gråzone, hvor en tandlæge kan have det godt med at reparere stormskaden på sin carport.

Men som regel betyder *ikke at ville lære* enten at operere tæt på dumhed eller dens modsætning: at være i overensstemmelse med fragmentering og tingenes orden og opdelingen af helheden i mange, mange sektioner.

Pingvinen i Anna Sofie Mathiasens animationer ser ud til at have travlt med fremtidige projekter og søger en helhed, der vil kunne gøre op med denne fragmentering. Igangsat af depression, mangel på vitaminer og probiotika samt en overdosis af beroligende haveprogrammer på TV med den charmerende Monty Don – der gør gummistøvler åndeligt attraktive for alle, der er bare lidt trætte og fortabte – sætter pingvinen ud for at finde sig selv en have i stedet for en terapeut. Ligesom de udnyttede daglejere George og Lennie i Steinbecks kortroman *Mus og mænd* (1937), smeder pingvinen, der nedstammer fra en lang række fremmedgjorte skabninger, og skildpadden, der engang var kæledyr for de rige og de excentriske, planer om at "leve fedt af jorden" og bygge et hyggeligt stenhus med en ydmyg have og en gryde til at lave suppe på.

Desværre er jorden forurenede af fortidens onde jordskokker, som underminerer projektet, forvirrer skildpadden og skubber pingvinen ud i depressive, frygtsomme anfald. I sidste ende må alt i jorden rådne og opløses for at befrugte en fremtid, hvor de finder af-dyrket ro i sindet. Indtil da gør jordskok-koret enhver tanke om forbedring latterlig og tåbelig; deres hån er fyldt med råd, fordømmelse og gruppepres fra andre gartnere. Selvom de til sidst er kogt til tavshed, står animationens lykkelige slutning med opløsning, forrådnelse og nedbrydning af moralske standarder formelt i kontrast til ethvert element i Mathiasens udstilling. Her kommer det personlige til udtryk i et diagram eller via en grafisk indretning, og Mathiasens tegninger præsenterer sig selv som ryddelige, frisksorterede fra hvad der kunne have været præ-symbolsk og overvældende dynger af kaos. Den oprensede have med emoji-frugter, der omorganiserer et stift hængt stamtræ, pingvinerne, der symmetrisk placerer sig mellem designede planter og lag på lag af et nøje struktureret hav, hortensibusken som et mønster af kronblade – alt dette fladt som en pandekage. Det eneste let ekspressive element er den metalliske udskæring af en kylling på en stålpind: en børnetegning forvandlet til vejrbestandig udendørs dekoration. Elementet af råd og opløsning – 'vil ikke lære'-elementet – synes helt fraværende i denne grafiske opstilling, der er tættere på skiltning end tegning. Dybden trækkes også fra de animerede karakterer, der bevæger deres papirled og munde uden nogen dimensioner eller illusion af dybde. De (søde) formidlingsmaskotter, der ofte bruges på museer, skoler og i tegneserier, bliver fladet ud og taler med en monoton stemme blot for 'edutainment'ens skingre toner.

Ligesom emojierne på træet præsenterer udstillingen sig selv som et system, i en aktuel, men alligevel underligt frossen tilstand.

I midten er der en rekonstruktion af noget, der aldrig har været virkeligt, lysthuset (*follyen*)¹, i sin 'originale' version bygget af Mathiasens murer-morfar, bestilt af rige gallerister. Hvad skal man gøre med denne rekvirit? Fører lysthuset os tilbage til illusionen om historisk, kulturel værdi – de falske forbindelser til de tanker og ting, der gik forud? Er denne illusion udført af mureren, som ikke havde noget at skulle have sagt i udformningen af disse udtryksfulde visioner, men som står parat til at udføre dem, når der akkumuleres tilstrækkelig kapital? Hvad er opdelt her og hvorfor? Hvordan defineres sektionerne og fragmenterne: socialt, kunstnerisk, kulturelt? Er det meningen, at nogle skal føle og give efter for deres længsler og fantasier, mens andre er beregnet til at udføre vanviddet og visionerne – som pingvinerne, der skulle opmuntre de psykiatriske patienter (min empati er bestemt med pingvinerne), som til gengæld kastede sten efter dem? Eller som Morfar Murer, der skulle lære at lægge mursten oven på hinanden for at bygge en ubrugelig fantasihytte? Er kulturelt overskud og kulturarv et bedrag, en dårskab? Hvad betyder det for kunsten og dens selvpositionering? Eller er lysthuset et sikkert sted af en slags: et tilflugtssted for Pingvin og Skildpadde?

Mathiasen bruger sin nyttehave i den kulturelle sfære til at indføre disse spørgsmål via sine mange karakterer, søde som mottoet på en 'hold ud'-plakat eller et citat af en berømt om livet, som man henvender sig til i tvivlens og fortvivlelsens stund. Monty Don, for eksempel: "Hvis du kan drømme hver kvadratcentimeter af en have, hver dag i dets år og hver smag i dens sæson, så kan du lave det", eller: "At indtage en sund mængde snavs opbygger dit immunsystem." Virkelig? Er dette, i en udstilling, gengivet på denne raffinerede måde, faktisk grænseoverskridende materiale, på samme måde som det plejede at være et par drastiske generationer tidligere at rulle rundt i knust glas, helt smurt ind i blod? Med integrationen af dette feel-good-stof benægter Mathiasen (gennem sin dybt pædagogiske praksis) den fragmenterede vision om kunst og dens udpegede plads uden for samfundet, hvor uopnåelige idealer og deres tåbeligheder opholder sig.

På trods af kompostbunken, haven, blomsterne og de søde væsner som motiv, ser udstillingens hovedtema ud til at være at holde tingene adskilt – til dels gennem en enorm indsats. Dette, øhm, vender motivet om opløsning og forfald, alias døden, på hovedet; den findes ikke længere i tingenes forrådnelse, men i deres systematiske orden og i bestræbelserne på at opretholde den. Komposten, den ensomme forrådnelse, bliver til gengæld et symbol på organisk fornyelse, muligvis uden for ens kontrol eller vilje.

Det er takket være den sparsomme, men effektive poesi i Mathiasens tekster, at udstillingens strukturelle design ikke bliver den dominerende faktor, men at det,

1. Det er vigtigt at bemærke, at forfatteren her spiller på den dobbelte betydning af 'folly', der på engelsk kan betyde både lysthus og dårskab.

der i stedet står i centrum, er øjeblikke af indlevelse, enkelhed og ærlighed, formet og specificeret i en tilsyneladende naiv eller analytisk form for professionel gør-det-selv.

I *Mus og mænd* bliver hovedpersonen, ude af stand til at lære noget, skudt af sin bedste ven, der vil spare ham for at blive mishandlet af pøbelen, der er i hælene på dem. Drømmen om at eje et stykke jord og dyrke deres egen mad er mislykket, og en hjerteskerende, beskyttende venskabshandling afslutter denne vision. Dårskaben her var tanken om, at to udskiptelige tabere ville kunne eje deres egen jord, med gulerødder og kaniner og en vindmølle, hvor de ville have arbejdet for sig selv og ville kunne tage en pause, når de havde lyst. En dårskab for ydmyg til at være sand.

O – OVERGADEN
Overgaden Neden Vandet 17, 1414 København K,
overgaden.org

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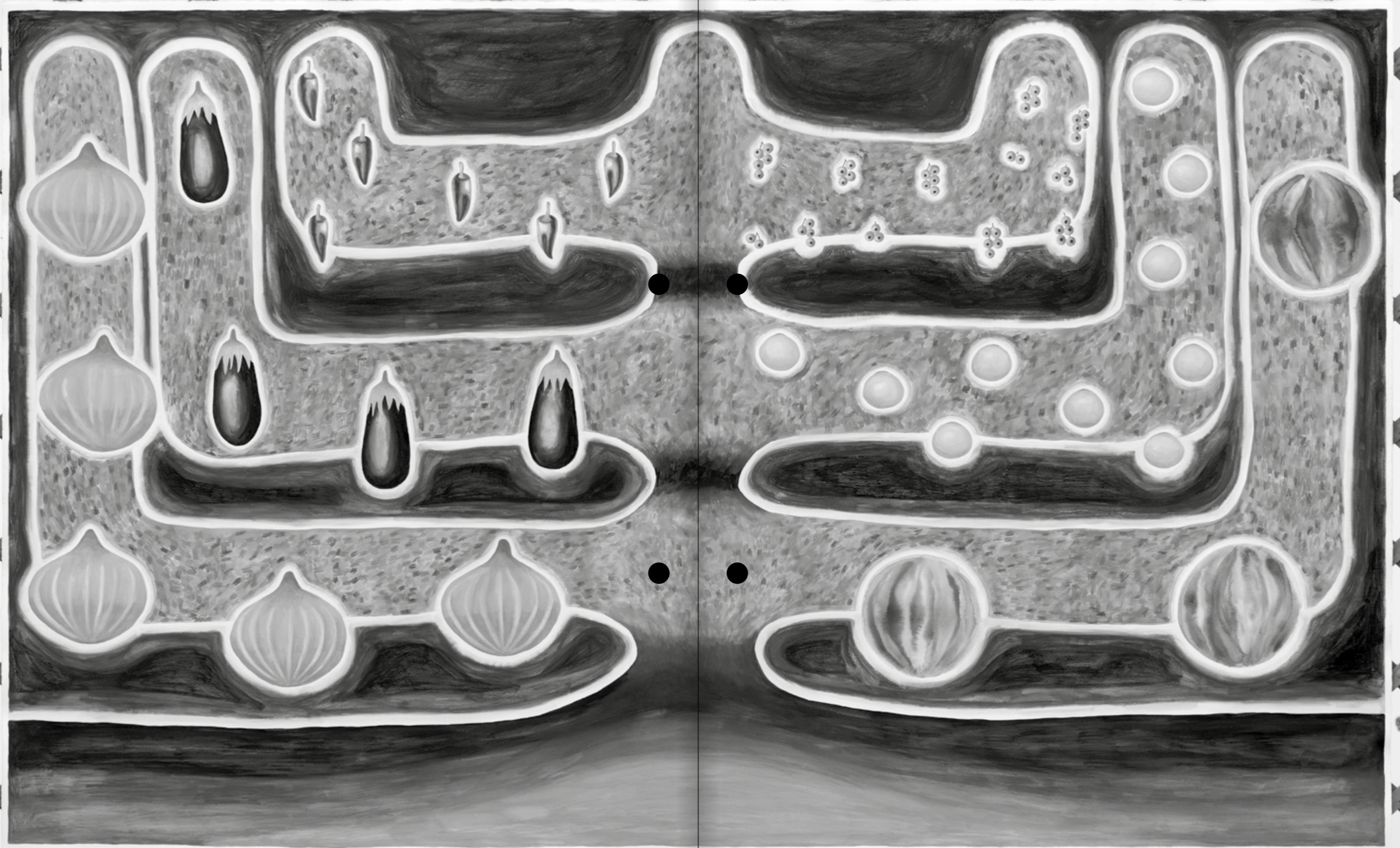
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FOLLY

FOLLY

FOLLY

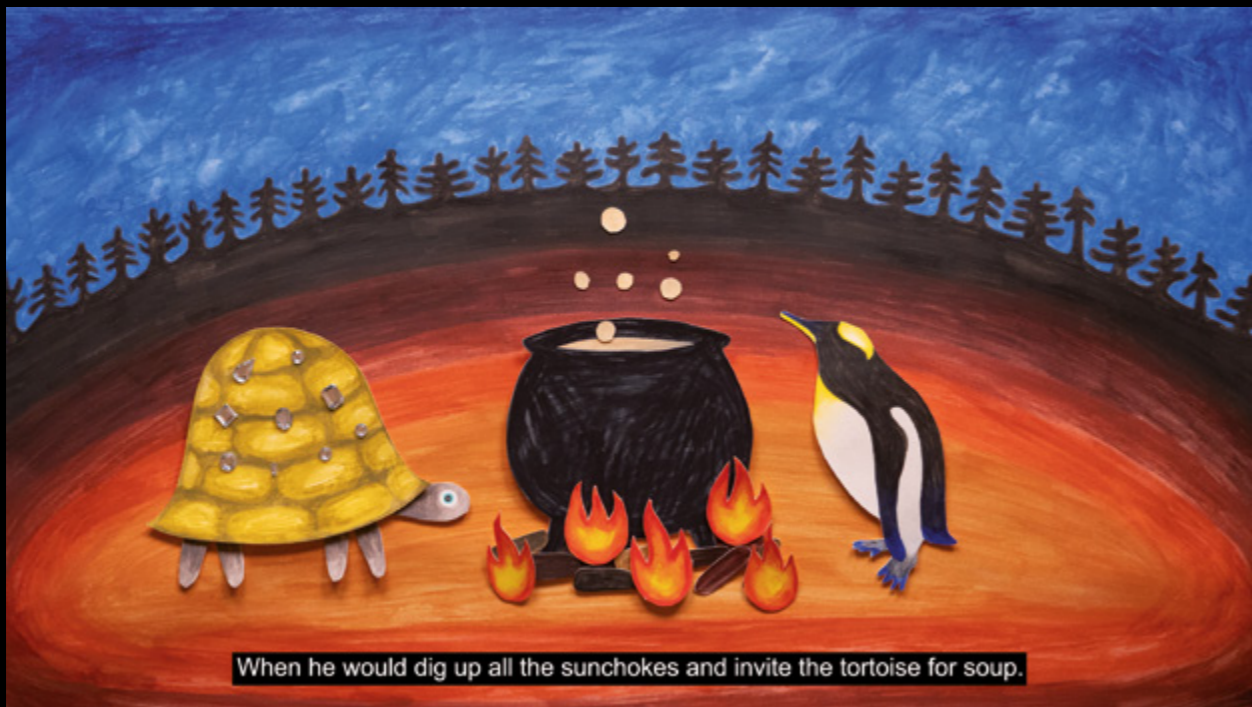
FOLLY



The laughter of the small sturdy tubers grew louder and louder.



antidepressants, probiotics, vitamins.



When he would dig up all the sunchokes and invite the tortoise for soup.





CONFESSIONS OF A COMPOST HEAP¹

Sophie Strand

"And so from hour to hour we ripe and ripe, and then from hour to hour we rot and rot; and thereby hangs a tale," laments the melancholy Jaques in Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It*, hinting at something the playwright understood intimately: disorder and decay are just as crucial to a narrative as order and fecundity. The story does not exist in a single pole of experience, but is articulated between ripeness and rot. The tragic play flows from fertility into rot, while the comedy reverses the causality, sprouting ripeness from initial decay.

This question was looping in my head in the doctor's office. She was the main expert of my genetic condition, and without much grace she was explaining to me the predictable course of my body's disintegration. "Okay, you need a surgeon to look at your neck because your skull is essentially collapsing into your spine. Not that the surgeries are very effective. And with your lung function being what it is, we can expect your heart to begin to feel the effects so we need to get you back to the cardiologist."

I could feel myself start to disassociate. My hands were tingling. I felt my being condense into a nucleus of intensity between my eyes. The doctor's voice was glitching, moving up in pitch until it was too high for me to even hear. "And then from hour to hour we rot and rot," I thought, starting down at the pronounced veins in my hands that the doctor had informed me were a "typical expression of connective tissue disease". My skin was too soft. My bones didn't want to stay in a solid shape. My heart was growing lazy. I was melting. I was breaking down.

I imagined myself amorphous as a compost heap. And instead of talking, the doctor was circling me, pouring in water, tossing in a handful of lemon rinds, pulling out a worm and inspecting it with pleasure, every once in a while taking a trowel and flipping some of my moist soil. "You're moving along well," I imagined her congratulating me. "You're past the thermophilic phase and now fully maturing. I'm seeing a lot of earthworms, a lot of millipedes. This is really good news."

Evidence of intentional composting goes back as far as 12,000 years ago in Scotland, when fields filled with manure and human excrement were used to grow crops. There are examples of recycled organic waste being used for agricultural purposes in ancient India, China, and across the Middle East. The first written tract about composting can be found in a set of clay tablets dating back to King Sargon's reign during the Akkadian Empire (c. 2320 BCE). In Egypt, composting was so esteemed that Cleopatra declared the compost heap's hero, the worm, sacred. In 160 BCE, the retired Roman General Cato the Elder wrote instructions on best practices for composting in his agricultural tract *De Agri Cultura*.

Composting is the process whereby plant and food waste decompose into a rich, nutritious soil filled with fungi, bacteria, and organisms.

1. This essay will be published in Sophie Strand, *The Body is a Doorway: Healing Beyond Hope, Healing Beyond the Human*, forthcoming from Running Press in 2025, and has been reprinted here with the author's permission.

The soil produced from composting creates a nutritious and vibrant matrix for agricultural planting with the added benefit of producing compounds that kill off and suppress pathogens that could harm crops. "Greens" and "browns" are the main ingredients of a good compost heap. Greens are characterized as being rich in nitrogen: moldy leaves, mown grass, table scraps. Browns are richer in carbon: stalks, woody material, paper. The process is easy enough: add water; put outside; let the heat, the moisture, the spores and pollen diffused through the air do their jobs. Of course, you can be more precise about it: shred matter to increase surface area and "aerate" the pile. But decay is a process that winks playfully at human control. Even the attempt to create an "ingredient" list is a modern innovation as demonstrated by the anarchic "shit fields" of the ancient Scors. Human and animal excrement combined with discarded food and plant waste provided an alchemical mix that needed little organization.

The most important work is done by a decidedly inhuman force, or perhaps it's very human given that our bodies are composed of more bacterial cells than human cells: bacteria, fungi, and insects. These decomposers turn a compost heap into a web of appetites, chewing through waste, excreting nutrients and soil, producing heat that further encourages the decay process. A heap of inert matter is soon a pulsing, humming, sweating community of creation.

What then is decay? Watching a compost heap transform into fertile soil it can seem like decay is genesis. Decay is the first scene in a comedy of mycelial threads and millipedes and sprouting wildflowers. Seeds invisibly deposited by a bird flying overhead. Sometimes I think about death as being the transition from a solitary aliveness to an anarchic polyphony of aliveness. Years ago, a deer, hit by a car, managed to struggle into the woods at the periphery of my parents' property, where it died. It was high summer, trying-pan hot, the peeling birch bark almost crisping into I would visit the carcass and watch as one life melted into a riot of lives. Worms. Ants. Maggots. Beetles. Mushrooms. Death was almost the moment when life overflowed its cup. Death wasn't an end of life. It was the end of the singular. The deer decayed out of its shape into explosive, generative plurality. One narrative diverged into 400 narratives.

Somedays I ask myself, tenderly, curiously. What is happening to me? What is happening to this self? This body? I never returned to that doctor, despite her prestige. I felt her prognosis was a bad story; a story I didn't want to hear and didn't want to tell. I know that words are spells. And every day I wake up and tell a different story about what health and vitality and miracles are available to me. But it is also important to honor what often, bodily, intimately, feels like a slow decay. When old diets, herbs, physical therapy routines no longer work, it can feel like I'm melting.

When a holiday passes and I'm reminded to look back at myself, I can suddenly see, for a moment, how much has changed physically. Am I decaying? Well, yes. But decay is always a day, a microbe, a rootlet away from sprouting. Maybe I'm losing touch with a self and melting into a more-than-human mind. I look at Shakespeare's catalogue of plays. Every comedy begins with strife and breakdown. Every tragedy begins with health and well-being. If you played any narrative out longer, it would tip into its opposite. As Shakespeare's Jaques notes, it is between the ripe and the rot that "thereby hangs a tale". If I feel myself, like the compost heap, beginning to melt, it means that I am also melting into another story. A bigger story. A wider cast of characters. Let me dance between ripe and rot. I don't know which act in the play comes next. But I know what my prayer is. Make me bigger than an "I". Make me good soil.

—OVERGADEN
Overgaden Neden Vandet 17, 1414 København K, overgaden.org

Anna Sofie Mathiasen
Folly

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FOLLY

Peter Wächter

This text is a continuation of a conversation between the author and the artist that has taken place over the past months, as well as between the author and the works shown in the exhibition, unfolding its characters, motifs, and themes—its follies.

And on the third sign it says: There are the things you *want* to learn, those you *should* learn, and those you *don't want* to learn.

Let's say you *want* to learn how to communicate

with people so that you can express yourself in a way that makes them understand you, follow your lines of thought, and not hurt you or run away screaming, laughing, or crying. Or, for example, you *want* to learn about how things were done before "your time" in order to understand how things are done now. This would help you gain a better feel for that ongoing timeline of ours (the history of humanity), that cultural learning curve, in times when reassessing your current position is deeply needed.

After that "*want* to learn" section, there then comes the "*should* learn" section. Basically, it's the same as the "*want* to learn" section, but aged, profoundly aged, like something dangling from a smoky ceiling or buried in the ground like a grinning sunchoke, and we all have to eat it, day in, day out, by the slice. It's neither gone, nor fully there. It can be out of style, manipulated, altered, or pop up again as a system of moral standards, values, or beliefs. It is served with dark ale and other mind-numbing sides, like dealing with universities, dressing yourself modestly, loneliness, leadership, and the lack of it.

The third section, the "*don't want* to learn" section, is regarded as immature, regressive, and deviant. You refuse to accept cutlery, rights of way, marriage, therapy, and other options of personal conduct in favor of a childish, Forrest Gump-ish way of life that does not keep up with any cultural timeline and adds little-to-nothing to it. Characters of that segment are dreamers and the (un)spoiled, all of them sparing partners to fools, visionaries, and the big nothingness. The current in that section consists of (very) rare moments of naive joy and immediacy—like a soup shared with a tortoise.

Massive contradiction: On the other hand, it is totally OK, if you *do not want* to learn how to fix your own bread or catalytic converter or do brain surgery, because it is regarded as mature to accept the limits of your skills, your focus in life, and the organization of labor and class in your society. DIY comes into this as a sentimentally charged, official grey zone in which a dentist can feel good about repairing the storm damage on his carport. But, as a rule, *not wanting* to learn either means operating close to stupidity or its opposite: being *discouraged* with fragmentation and the order of things, the breakdown of the whole into many, many sections.

The penguin in Anne Sofie Mathiasen's animation seems to be busy with future projects, seeking wholeness that would leave this fragmentation behind. Initiated by depression, lack of vitamins and probiotics, and an overdose of soothing TV gardening shows with charming Monty Don—who makes rubber boots spiritually attractive to anyone just slightly weary and lost—the penguin sets out to find himself a garden instead of a therapist. Like the exploited farmhands George and Lennie in Steinbeck's novella *Of Mice and Men* (1937),

the penguin, descended from a long line of alienated creatures, and the tortoise, once pet to the rich and the eccentric forge plans to "live offa the fatta the lan'" and build a cozy stone house with a humble garden and a pot for making soup.

Unfortunately, the soil is contaminated by evil sunchoke of the past, undermining the project, confusing the tortoise, and pushing the penguin into depressive, fearful fits. In the end, everything in the ground has to rot and dissolve in order to fertilize a future in which they find de-conditioned peace of mind. Until then, the choir of sunchoke makes every thought of improvement laughable and foolish; their sneer is filled with advice, judgment, and peer pressure from other gardeners. Even if, eventually, they are boiled to silence, the animation's moral standards formally opposes every element of Mathiasen's show. Here, personal expression comes in a diagram or via graphical decor and Mathiasen's drawings present themselves as decluttered, freshly sorted from what might have been pre-symbolic and overwhelming heaps of chaos. The cleaned-up garden with emoji fruits reorganizing a stiffly hung family tree, the penguins that symmetrically position themselves between designed plants and layers of a strictly structured sea, as a tablecloth. The only slightly expressive element is the metallic cutout of a chicken on a steel stick: a kid's drawing, turned into weatherproof outdoor decoration.

The rotting, dissolving element—that "*not wanting* to learn" element—seems entirely absent in this graphical line-up that is closer to signage than drawing. Depth is also subtracted from the animated characters who move their paper joints and mouths without any dimension or illusion of depth. The (cute) mascots of education often used in museums, schools, and cartoons find themselves flattened out, speaking in a monotone voice bare of the shrill tones of education.

Like the emojis on the tree, the show presents itself as a system, in a current, yet strangely frozen, state. At its middle, there is a remake of something that never has been real, the folly, in its "original" version built by Mathiasen's mason grandfather, commissioned by rich gallerists. What to do with this prop? Does the folly bring us back to the illusion of historical, cultural value—the fake connections to the thoughts and things that went before? Is this illusion carried out by the mason, who had no say in shaping these expressive visions, but stands ready to execute them, whenever enough capital accumulates? What is split up here and why? How are the sections and fragments defined: socially, artistically, culturally? Are some meant to feel and give in to their longings and fantasies, while others are meant to carry out the craziness and visions—like the penguins who were meant to distract the psychiatric patients (my empathy is definitely with the Grandfather Mason who had to learn how to lay bricks on top of each other to build a useless fantasy hut? Is cultural surplus and heritage a trick, a folly?)

Or is the folly a safe space of some sorts: a refuge for Penguin and Tortoise?

Mathiasen uses her allotment in the cultural sphere to insert these questions via her many characters, cute as the motto on a "hang in there" poster or a quote of someone famous about life, that one turns to in hours of doubt and despair. Monty Don, for example: "If you can dream every square inch of a garden, every day of its year and every flavour of its season, then you can make it", or: "Absorbing a healthy amount of dirt builds your immune system." Really? Is this, in an exhibition, rendered in this refined way, actually transgressive material, in the way that rolling around in broken glass, all blood smeared, used to be a few drastic generations earlier? With the integration of this feel-good stuff, Mathiasen denies (through her profoundly educational practice) the fragmented vision of art and its designated place outside society, where unreachable ideals and their follies hang around.

Despite the motif of the compost heap, the garden, the flowers, and the cute creatures, the show's main theme seems to be about keeping things apart—partly through immense effort. This, ähm, inverts the motif of disintegration and decay, aka death; it is no longer found in the rotting of things but in their systemic order and in the effort to maintain it. The compost, that lonely rotter, becomes in response a symbol of organic renewal, possibly beyond control or will. It is thanks to the sparse but effective poetry in Mathiasen's writing that the structural layout of the show does not become the dominant factor, but that instead what takes center stage are the moments of empathy, simplicity, and honesty, shaped and specified in a seemingly naïve or analytical mode of professional DIY.

In *Of Mice and Men* the protagonist, unable to learn anything, is shot by his best friend in order to spare him maltreatment by the mob on their heels. The dream to own a piece of land and grow their own food failed, and a heartbreaking, protective act of friendship ends that vision. The folly here was the idea that two exchangeable losers would own their own land, with carrots and rabbits and a windmill, where they would have worked for themselves and would take a break whenever they felt like it. A folly too humble to be real.

What does this mean for art and its self-positioning? Or is the folly a safe space of some sorts: a refuge for Penguin and Tortoise?

Mathiasen uses her allotment in the cultural sphere to insert these questions via her many characters, cute as the motto on a "hang in there" poster or a quote of someone famous about life, that one turns to in hours of doubt and despair. Monty Don, for example: "If you can dream every square inch of a garden, every day of its year and every flavour of its season, then you can make it", or: "Absorbing a healthy amount of dirt builds your immune system." Really? Is this, in an exhibition, rendered in this refined way, actually transgressive material, in the way that rolling around in broken glass, all blood smeared, used to be a few drastic generations earlier? With the integration of this feel-good stuff, Mathiasen denies (through her profoundly educational practice) the fragmented vision of art and its designated place outside society, where unreachable ideals and their follies hang around.

I could see that perhaps I had misunderstood the

compost pile both theoretically and practically, as was

evident in my mistake with the sunshakes. I think the

compost is a very confronting place: It heralds the end

of the season, when you go out and pile everything on

it. Decay and death. At the same time, it was a relief

to hear Strand's thoughts about compost as the place

where everything ends—that all ideas can be thrown on

the compost and become good soil for something new.

These compost pile thoughts helped me in tackling

and breaking down the performance anxiety relating

to doing a solo exhibition. I am trying to rethink what

an exhibition should be. That has been my gardening.

And now my works are blooming for a short period of

time at Øvergården, and then they become compost

and good soil afterwards, from which something new

can grow. This thought has made it possible for me to

relax completely and work much more intuitively with

the exhibition.

(MH)

I'm so happy to hear that you've been metabolizing

Strand's thinking in this way, especially since the

mulch in her text, to me, represents a more humble

perspective on human existence and making. Strand

has a rare genetic disease that makes death a present

possibility, even though she is very young. Instead of

becoming resigned to the doctors' gloomy prognoses,

she finds creative impetus in the process of letting

go of the focus on her medical diagnosis and history,

and instead surrenders to the idea of herself as deeply

connected to a larger ecology; as part of a compost

that, together with fungi, microbes and bacteria, can

become soil for future stories. I find this both a very

beautiful and radical thought, which opens up for other

growth stories that we humans often want to

tell about ourselves. And it circles back to your father

insisting that the large trees are not to be removed

because he knows their life span is a mirror of his own.

Memento mori—remember you must die.

(ASM)

Yes, exactly. Everything passes.

(MH)

And then we are back again at the word "well-being."

As it relates to mental and physical health, which I know

you feel ambivalent about, because it quickly directs and

even limits the reading of the artworks, and perhaps also

the penguins, who appear as another main figure in

your garden.

(ASM)

Yes, I don't want the works to be seen only through

that word. I work very seriously with self-care and at

the same time there is a language around the process

that I feel ambivalent about. In the exhibition I have

chosen to include some drawings inspired by self-help

posters, which mirror the large commercial industry

around mental health and the healing power of nature,

which I feel sometimes operates at the expense of

nature. This is also where I think the compost pile is

again relevant. All the good advice gets thrown on the

pile, and maybe it only really becomes useful advice

when it has finished composting.

Yes, when it's been absorbed as nutrients.

(MH)

Someone's well-being can mean someone else's

unhappiness. It is as if care and abuse can be on the

same line. The exhibition refers in several places

to a rather grotesque story from the abandoned

psychiatric hospital Dikemark outside Oslo, where

in 1950 a male psychiatrist brought penguins home

from the Arctic Ocean to the hospital garden to amuse

the patients. Even if it is somehow a well-intended

thought, as you can guess it ended up really badly.

It may well be that the patients enjoyed living with

the penguins, but the penguins certainly did not enjoy

living outside their natural habitat, and soon died.

There is only one photo of the one penguin

that starting point for the animation films I've made for

the exhibition.

(MH)

These films are really short stop-motion animations,

and you employ a narrator's voice, which in a

pedagogical tone tells stories, about the penguin, who

watches gardening programs on TV and then makes its

own garden as it finds that medication does not work.

Why is the penguin so important to you?

(ASM)

With the penguin, there are many coincidences that

are woven together. Penguins are fascinating, both

because they are strange birds that cannot fly, and

because they live in such a different ecosystem from

us, in a place where humans cannot live. This makes

them almost mythical, and I can understand that they

have almost universal appeal. For a long time, I've been

inspired by imagined universes from children's TV

and animations from my childhood, like *Pingu*, a clay

animation from the 1980s, which humorously imagines

a penguin family's life (as if human) with a charming

troublemaker of a child penguin.

My father built our house when I was a child, and

the first wooden penguins we made were constructed

from surplus building materials. After I came across

this grotesque story about the penguins at Dikemark

in Oslo last year, my father and I started building

penguins again. They quickly became part of the

home, and some of them moved back with us to the

city, and now for a while they live at Øvergården.

They have all been given nicknames, and I noticed

that my father has also moved them around when

I was not at the summer house and even portrayed

them in small paintings.

(MH)

I find it very endearing, all the familial connections that

extend to the plants, animals, and trees that exist in

the garden universe you've created. You've also made

a so-called folly: a gazebo that your father built, which

will be placed in the middle of the exhibition—which,

of course, is also titled *Folly*.

(ASM)

Yes, the folly in the exhibition refers to a pavilion

built for the gallery owners Jacob and Patricia Asbak,

He showed me photographs of it several years ago

when I was doing a project on the history of the

Danish masons' union. For this exhibition, my mother

redesigned the pavilion and my father built it on the

grounds of our summer house. It has been a huge job,

which I am very touched and grateful that they've

taken on. I like how my mother has reinterpreted a

pavilion, which her father built, and how my father

has built it for me. It is a very personal work for me,

and also a kind of passage from which my grandfather

might be able to see the exhibition. At least, I hung

his old binoculars in there. In the exhibition, my

family, people, creatures, stories, and references that

I hold dear are brought together in a small ecosystem—

after all, my family and friends have also been a large

part of the actual production of the exhibition by

building, drawing, doing voiceovers, sound, music,

film editing, laying a gravel path, etc. *Otkos*—which

is a term that means "house" and "household," and

"ecosystems"—functions as something around which

the stories in the exhibition can gather. It goes back

to something I heard Sophie Strand say on a YouTube

video this summer, that we must remember to nurture

our own local ecosystem, be it one's garden, family,

friends, or local environment.

GARDEN MULCH FOR THE ARTISTIC PRACTICE

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN
MILENA HØGSBERG AND ANNA SOFIE MATHIASSEN

Milena Høgsberg
Perhaps we should start with these sunchokes, also known as Jerusalem artichokes, that you've drawn. They really catch your eye, here in your studio, lying smiling in the ground, while their spindly stems stretch above the ground. How did they enter into the picture?

Anna Sofie Mathiasen
My first impression of the sunchokes, apart from eating them, was as a plant. It was only when I realized they would fulfill many of my needs at once that I started to work with them artistically. First, it is a perennial plant, meaning that it comes back every year. I like to bond. I like when you can have a longer relationship with a plant than just one season. It is also a plant that is both edible and really beautiful when it blooms. It was only later that I found out they are also extremely hardy. And they spread a lot. So, I also had a bit of a problem with them when they took over the garden.

(MH)
And this happened in your utility garden?

(ASM)
Yes, mostly in the utility garden, but also in the garden of my parents' summer house. I ended up throwing the sunchokes on the compost, so they started to grow everywhere I spread the soil. Now there is a whole forest of them. My boyfriend and I were quite affected by them. He found their growth exciting but at the same time walked around trying to pull them out of the ground in an attempt to control them. Now our relationship with them is "both-and"—neither good nor bad. Sometimes they laugh at us and sometimes they laugh with us, so that's kind of where that character came from.

(MH)
Could you perhaps say that this project is, in fact,

(ASM)
Yeah, that's definitely part of it. I kind of imagine the sunchokes being garden gnome-like characters, who can both tease and help. But also as living creatures that have their own lives and challenge my need for control. The garden is the opposite of an empty place; the garden is a very full place, but there is still room. When I'm in the garden, I'm checking into an ecosystem, and time feels different. I often don't wear a watch either. The garden has probably been the most important scenery for many in their childhood games and fantasy worlds, which are also a kind of ecosystem. I think it makes good sense that most of the characters in the exhibition were created, or simply found, in the garden.

(MH)
Children certainly often have a different and more

intimate relationship with nature, and perceive it with their imagination in a different way than adults. It seems to me that your works try to sense the world in that way. Here, next to the animated and teasing sunchokes, the elderflowers appear. What role do they play?

(ASM)
I think they are one of my favorite plants. I look forward to them blooming every year. Both because I love elderflower cordial and because I love the tree itself and the smell of it. We have several different varieties growing in the summer house garden.

One of them is a giant and it gets filled with aphids sometimes. But it doesn't care. It blooms relentlessly and is incredibly easy to make cuttings from. For me, the elderflowers are protectors, and perhaps they take the part in the exhibition of the garden's parents and protectors—its "elders."

(MH)
I sense that you are attracted to plants that have

a pronounced resilience. Plants that survive and insist on being alive, even if their circumstances are difficult.

(ASM)
Yes, well, I also think that's what you find out pretty

quickly when you do gardening: that it's about creating something that actually thrives where you plant it. I can feel totally guilty if I plant something that doesn't do well at all—it's like I'm breaking some kind of social contract with the garden. I really notice if a plant wants to be there and also if it doesn't.

(MH)
How does this understanding of growth and well-being

("trivsel") in the garden reflect your own journey toward mental and physical well-being and of being in the world in a more balanced way, which is also a theme in the exhibition? It seems to me that your time in the garden offers a lot in return, and of course the benefits of daily contact with nature on our mental health are well documented. In the garden, we are in contact with a lot of microbes, bacteria, scents and spores, which we inhale and absorb through the skin, and which send a stream of impulses to the nervous system with messages to the body's various cells.

(ASM)
I don't know much about the science of microbes,

but I can tell that I'm far from alone when I'm in the garden. For me, it's about the fact that I feel that I thrive in a completely different way. I get a completely different kind of contact, including with my own work.

(MH)
So gardening is in fact also changing the way you think

about the framework of your artistic practice?

(ASM)
Yes, it has become much easier for me to feel where

I want to go artistically—what stories I want to tell or what I want to do. And then I also experience a different kind of exhaustion in my body when I work outdoors: not like the tiredness, which I feel when I'm sitting in my studio with fluorescent lights, for example, but more like a clear feeling that "now I'm done for today." Before I began learning about the garden, I also perhaps felt that my practice was growing into something unwieldy making me feel I was in over my head.

It had become my strict employer in a way. For me, closer to my practice in a different way.

(MH)
I think that is definitely something we all have to

continuously practice. As I am walking around in the garden with you, I think of the word "grounding," which is also a connection to the processual time that unfolds in a garden. It is not only the time you give the garden or "put into it," but also the garden's own cycle.

(ASM)
That reminds me of something my father said one day

when I was toying with ideas on changes I could make in the garden: "Please don't cut down any of the big trees and bushes before I die, because I won't get to see the new ones grow big." It was quite confronting, I felt, as unfortunately I am not good at dealing with thoughts and conversations about death. It's not something I think I've learned to talk about. But I got some really good images and tools for practicing that, after you introduced me to Sophie Strand's texts. They also helped me this summer when I was in the south of England looking at gardens with my mother. On this

trip we visited, among other things, Derek Jarman's garden at Prospect Cottage in Dungeness. Dungeness is on the coast in a corner of England and has a wild climate where salt and wind limit what can grow there. Still, it's probably the most beautiful garden I've ever seen. On a substrate of stones—which spread all over Dungeness and make the whole place look like a huge stone bed—grow dog roses, elder, beach cabbage and cypresses, along with sculptures made from old garden tools. Jarman made the garden while dying of AIDS and also losing loved ones to the disease. The

gardens at once fragile and robust expression was truly touching and confronting. I would really like to travel back and see it in a different season sometime. The thing about gardening is that you work in cycles and experience things die and grow back or become soil.

(MH)
From the way you describe it I can really imagine

him tending caringly to his garden while feeling the effects of illness on his own body. And it makes me want to wander back to the compost that spread the sunchokes all over your garden. In her text "Confessions of a Compost Heap", reprinted in this publication, Sophie Strand describes imagining the self and the body, breaking down due to illness, as soil in a composting process, from which new more-than-human stories can sprout. What in this particular text resonated with you?

(ASM)
Strand's words have opened a door in terms of

developing a kind of nascent understanding of nature and also a critical understanding of the concept of nature. "Confessions of a Compost Heap", in particular, made an impression on me and also inspired the process of making works for this exhibition. As I read her text,

INTRODUCTION

and thus recycling quotations on gardening and mental health). At the exhibition's other end blossoms an ornamental garden centered on a pavilion or *folly*—lending its name to the show: *Folly*.

“Folly” means foolishness or wrongdoing, as well as a decorative pavilion with no practical purpose. In this case, the *folly* is based on a real-life pavilion built by the artist's grandfather for the Danish galleryist couple, the Asbæks. For the exhibition, it was redrawn by the artist's mother and rebuilt by her father. Mathiasen's gardening thus returns to the social ecosystems of friendships and family, while recalling childhood memories and tropes of the garden as a healing place for physical and mental illness.

Alongside references to private and public gardens, she managed her mental health—and (in *folly*) threw sunshokes in the compost, only to have them take over her whole garden—the exhibition is also a nod to the gardens of the psychiatric ward Dikemark outside Oslo, the artist's current home city. As the story goes, around 1950, a psychiatrist brought penguins to amuse the patients, but the animals soon died. This motif—both silly (a folly) and tragic—inspired the starring role of Mathiasen's animation. Moreover, it prompted the artist to revisit a childhood pastime of building DIY wooden penguins with her dad. The resulting figures now populate the show's garden alongside abandoned birds' nests and decorative chicken garden stakes based on childhood drawings. Collectively the plural elements encapsulate the absurdist contradictions of the garden where both the uncontrollable wildness and the well-groomed beds contain cyclical paths of healing.

Rhea Dall
Director, December 2023

Anna Sofie Mathiasen (b. 1995, DK) graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Oslo in 2020. She has previously exhibited at venues including Galleri K, Kunstnernes Hus, and Kunsthall Oslo, all in Oslo (NO); Sol in Nexø (DK); and Valencian Institute of Modern Art (ES). *Folly* is the artist's first large-scale solo exhibition in Denmark. In 2024 the show travels to Nifa Center for Contemporary Art in Lillestrøm and the artist-run exhibition space Pachinko in Oslo.

It is a great pleasure to introduce this publication, published on the occasion of Anna Sofie Mathiasen's solo exhibition, *Folly*, at O—Overgaden.

The exhibition is the culmination of our INTRÖ program, a one-year postgraduate program offered to two artists. With the generous support of Aage and Johanne Louis-Hansens Foundation, INTRÖ creates a unique opportunity to develop and expand our collaboration with the newest voices in the Danish art scene through a major exhibition and ambitious publication, through which we aim to extend the conversations around the artistic practice and open up space for new material to emerge. In this case we have been lucky to include contributions by artist Peter Wächter, writer Sophie Strand, alongside curator and director Milena Høgsberg in conversation with Mathiasen herself, and we are very grateful for all their contributions. A big thank you to O—Overgaden's editor, Anne Kølbeæk Iversen, and to the graphic designers at fanfare for their consistently excellent work. Last, but not least, we are grateful to the artist for sharing her material—from concept to extended conversations—with all of us, through the exhibition and in this publication.

The quest to translate questions of mental and environmental health into animation, drawing, and sculpture sits at the core of the young Danish artist Anna Sofie Mathiasen's exhibition at O—Overgaden. Loosely referencing *Cirque* or the Swiss animation *Pingu* and the “pedagogical” narration of gardening TV programs, Mathiasen has created a series of four new stop-motion films. Each between one and four minutes long, the shorts tell the story of a depressed penguin who watches gardening shows on the couch, attempting to work through the depression by, among other things, buying a piece of land with its tortoise friend. Just like the animation's main character, voiced by Kaya Wilkins (also known as Okay Kaya), Mathiasen does the same with this exhibition: she constructs a garden.

The show garden Mathiasen has created includes a stone path through a utility garden at one end of the exhibition, full of espaliers or trellises, drawn sunshokes and elderflowers (said to repel evil spirits when placed in corners) alongside an animation of a compost heap (collecting, composting,

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Anna Sofie Mathiasen
Folly
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