



Morten Knudsen

• *STICKY EYES*  
(*paintings,  
collages,  
drawings, and  
monuments*)



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*STICKY EYES (paintings,  
collages, drawings, and monuments)*

O—OVERGADEN  
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# INTRODUCTION

It is a great pleasure to introduce this publication accompanying Morten Knudsen's solo exhibition *STICKY EYES* (paintings, collages, drawings, and monuments) at O—Overgaden. Since 2021 O—Overgaden has, with generous support of the Augustinus Foundation, published a monographic series in conjunction with our solo exhibitions.

In this instance, the writers and curators Nanna Friis and Kristian Vistrup Madsen have each contributed a close reading of Morten Knudsen's practice and visual language, and I would like to extend my warmest thanks to both of them. Also a heartfelt thank you to the graphic design team at fanfare for their always dedicated work. Last, but not least, my sincere thanks to Morten for sharing his material—from initial concept to extended conversations—with all of us, both through the exhibition and through the pages of this publication.

The tides of loss and their onerous repetition—daily, weekly, annually—flow through Morten Knudsen's equally conceptual and material painterly practice.

In the series *E is for Everything*, E—the first letter of his son's name, and also the name of the antibody that ended up taking the son's life—recurs throughout. Somehow scoring and rationalizing both the life and the unbearable, the black-and-white series of serene, minimal letters roughly cut out from blackout curtains (collages) or carefully pencilled on canvas (drawings) works as mantra or meditation, giving shape to the formation and loss of meaning. Repeating the E, the most frequently used letter in the alphabet and a cornerstone of daily communication, in what feels like a recognizable, modernist sans-serif font, the series points to how shared language is both as omnipresent and empty as "Everything." The letters—shown in part via their absence, as voids—reflect how the artist has been "running out of titles," and "giving up on language," as Knudsen stated to Kristian Vistrup Madsen while preparing the text for this publication.

In the exhibition's larger space, we encounter Knudsen's floral landscape paintings whose thick impasto surfaces, deep-hued colours, and hints of fin de siècle might at first read as romantic, nostalgic. Yet they quickly reveal themselves as rampant viruses: dirty, troublesome, uncontrollable, and invasive. Much like the repeated use of foamboards and plastics, their synthetic palette—in part iridescently unnatural pink, magenta, and red—as well as their top-heavy forms, drizzling away towards the bottom, creates an antidote to the paintings' historic impressionist or pointillist origins. In a grey-and-black work, attention is focused exclusively on the works' omnipresent spots, imprinting the constant pounding of the fingers or brush into the canvas. Two other grey-and-black works, made from blackout curtain fabric, focus on a cut-out motif that merges a horizon and a cross, as if seeking to alter Christian symbolism and, in particular, its promises.

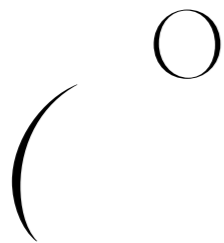
Knudsen typically leaves an area of his canvas untouched or sparsely occupied. The painterly composition and empty spaces thus become motifs in themselves, evoking his son's life and the aftermath—the paralysis and exhaustion of grief. Knudsen reworks this condition in his ongoing spiral series, *Six Days and Six Nights*, ritually reiterating the coiling symbol. A new, grey piece picks up on O—Overgaden's floor colour, repeating the circular motif within these processual works, which Knudsen also refers to as *monuments*.

The transient, evolving process, which is an overall marker of Knudsen's works, conducts both the desperation of ruin and the counted or symmetrical structures—six instances of the letter E in the show, twelve paintings, and so on—that we tend to hold on to when things fall apart.

Rhea Dall,  
Director and Chief Curator at O—Overgaden,  
June 2026

# AFTER E

Nanna Friis



E is for Everything. A heavy sky and the earth below it, the darkness and the flowers, the nature which is poisonous and healing and open like a wound, the faith and the sign and the picture and the color, nights and days in motion and standstill. The beginning and the end of a life where life itself plays out in between, is reproduced and repeated, alternately gray, rosy, morning colored, an infected matte black.

E is for Everything. It is also a title. Morten Knudsen gave this title to one of his pictures, and since then many others. E can be for everything visible in these pictures and it is also all the invisible, the absence, the incessant lack. E can be for Ernst, a son who lived for six days and six nights before he lost his life and disappeared from the physical world and remained in things that usually exist longer than human beings: the thought, the sign, the picture, the color.

E and Ernst are everywhere in Morten Knudsen's pictures. The letter almost sparkles of memorial, but the person is not to be seen at first or second glance. E can be everything, as can rosy and something that blooms—and not least abstraction. Morten Knudsen's pictures neither look like history nor biography, and they're also much more than that. Doubtless, many of them are beautiful, like light and gardens and quiet symmetry, and they don't appear uninterested in beauty. A minutely wax-like surface, persistent drops of the sugariest pink, deep darknesses beneath something flourishing or contagious. But in front of what's beautiful—and really is very beautiful, on those poignant spectrums where visuality falls short anyway—the pictures look like a method, too. If you may: a method of living.

If E can be anything, it might also be the case that everything started lacking or fading when E disappeared. E must be called forth and insisted upon in these pictures, just as living itself must be insisted upon. The method is a monotony because it is needed for upholding a somewhat upright state through a time

of dissolution. Pictures full of E; so many of them during the six years that has passed since Ernst ceased and E began. They accumulate in Morten Knudsen's life and studio; they accumulate in exhibitions, amass in a scattered monument over a son and the absence of a son. As a motif, too, E is conspicuous by its absence, its almost invisible contours. E has been cut out of the black surfaces of Morten Knudsen's black pictures, not painted on top of them. The sign shines and appears as emptiness. Or E is a white contour, a suggestion of something chiseling its way further into the gaze, perhaps also the heart, because it's harder to see. When E became a memory, it probably was so for a time, that the real and remaining world was narrowed down to white, black, gray, repetitions.

E E  
E E  
E  
E

There are six E's in Morten Knudsen's exhibition; Ernst lived for six days and six nights; there are 12 pictures in Morten Knudsen's exhibition. A sustained, persistent need for logic and system through the most dire loss of meaning. A number of simple principles as canes through a trembling time. These signs like an alphabet through a condition where language doesn't suffice. E, spiral, flower, some kind of cross, some kind of horizon? And all of that which doesn't look like anything but subtly creased surfaces, the kind of creased surfaces that can be nonchalant carelessness or the beginning of a breakdown. Morten Knudsen's pictures don't feel like figuration, but are not fully abstract either. Rather, they're saturated by something that is recognizable, though it doesn't really exist in real life. The flowers are infected or are they cells; they're also gushing and rather joyful in ways that pink and red are, after all. The rain is black or is it tears; the sky falls down or is that indeed what blooms while the earth is empty. Eternity is gray as a floor and almost impossible to see. And then there is E E E E E E, steep and white as days and nights towering up.

The day and the night, skies and bottoms, black, white, the floor and the afterlife, E and E, the sprouting and the dead, a consistent absence and glimpses of presence, or is it the other way around. Morten Knudsen's pictures are almost constantly rooted in some immense dualisms. A kind of paramount dualizing, even though the exhibition appears quite idiosyncratic in its brightly colored, rain gray, ink black, fragile, and edifying whole. But in almost all of the pictures couples prevail, and their connection is established within the compositions, palettes, motifs, while they're also externally organized in couples. Two and two, that's how they mostly hang, an expression of what could both be understood as a search for symmetry and a recognition of meaninglessness. Perhaps these dualities, couples, opposites, perhaps they capsize when catastrophe arrives. Or are they sharpened? What is the difference between a day and a night when you're mourning a lost son, what difference



is there between agony and a blooming spring, is bright red distinguishable from sick yellow or an all-devouring brownish, when most of your inner and outer world is anyway steeped in a one-dimensional gray?

E is black and white, at first a wonder of light, since then a long darkness, what appears to be a flowery meadow could as well be a graveyard, and beneath the flowers and the loss, there is also gray. Most of Morten Knudsen's pictures start with being gray, just as most days do before the sun is strong enough to color our surroundings. In that sense you could also say: gray is a color of beginning.

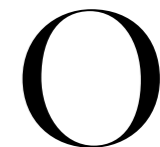
Unbearable as well as delighted days begin somewhere, begin they must. And pictures of the impossible set off from a place similar to pictures that could be mistaken for romance, optimism, or perhaps even glimpses of something carefree. This neutral, numb grayness in some of Morten Knudsen's pictures is neither devoid of intention nor significance, nor a kind of own beauty—but it still is some kind of empty place. And so, the emptiness can be an insurmountable main character, within a mental state and within an image, or it can be the naked ground from where something new can grow.

E grows. There are more and more because Morten Knudsen is living and working and maintaining E. Remembers and creates E. You could say: More and more of Everything by way of the lives that are still living and handling the days, though the days will probably always possess a more ferociously gray bottom. The pictures grow, they both increase and repeat themselves. It is probably so: living is repeating. Days, life patterns, relations, seasons, longings, behaviors. Predictability is an indisputable joy for those who really lack it—you need to hold on to something if what we can foresee is acutely threatened. And when a new life ceases, it is one of the most irreconcilable violations of predictability, and when a new life ceases it is excluded from partaking in the cyclical fate of repetition. That remains for the living to take on. Picture after picture, day after day, upholding the colors still available to a foggy gaze, perhaps such colors are the most hotheaded. Continue the spiral, perceive nature, also just completely prosaic without turning it into sentimental landscape. Stretching your canvases, paint your preferred skies, make your faint or loud imprints on the gray beginnings.

E is for all kinds of things. The more E's there exist, the wider the sign probably becomes. The more and the longer E exists in a shape that isn't a human shape. It is not nearly a replacement of the human, humans and pictures are incomparable, but the movement through Morten Knudsen's pictures feels like an insistence that E was alive and bright and defined and that time is turning E into something almost limitless. The sign of a happiness and a heart, which now lives in all kinds of other things. Everything? It is the destiny of monuments to be placeholders for something missed, perhaps to both soothe and underline loss.

It is said that grief doesn't change, but scale does. Perhaps a broken interior shrinks accordingly to the monument growing, perhaps a broken exterior becomes easier to endure, when a still sprouting bloom makes its way through gray, and when a light eternity is augured alongside all the painted darkness. Morten Knudsen's squares grows and shrinks.

And the alphabet extends after E.



# RUNNING OUT OF TITLES

ON THE WORK OF MORTEN KNUDSEN

Kristian Vistrup Madsen

## PART I: BIOGRAPHY

The first time I encountered the series of works included in Morten Knudsen's exhibition *STICKY EYES* (paintings, collages, drawings, and monuments) was at Sweetwater in Berlin in 2025. *E is for Everything*, as the exhibition was titled in Berlin, consisted of four large canvases. You might see in them commas, musical notes, seeds of flowers as they take off in the wind, or bacteria detected through a microscope. More than anything, though, the canvases are carriers of material; oil paint, wax, and glue so richly textured as to evoke something more abject and undecidable: soil and grime, the field after plowing, the forest floor after rain, the slow rotting of compost. The colors are those of ash, bruises, and mud. Knudsen captures time here as the painter Frank Auerbach does in his portraits, through the accumulation of matter; but where Auerbach finds a subject for time to attach itself to, in Knudsen's work, the world appears to give way to touch, and time disperses into a dark void.

The exhibition also contained three smaller works. Two of these were visible from the center of the room as you entered it. Both picture the outline of the letter E in fine pencil on a white, primed canvas, the font a slim sans serif. On the back side of a pillar was the third: the same E, this time penciled in, and obsessively so, the graphite dust smudging the white. Still, a perfect modernist E inside a perfect modernist square. The exhibition text was short enough to quote in full:

- A.  
It feels like I am running out of titles, or maybe I'm just beginning to give up on language.
- B.  
Of all things in this world, E's are the motif I love the most. Landscapes and flowers and O's and S's and H's and N's are all things I love too.<sup>1</sup>

1. Morten Knudsen, *E is for Everything* (11 January – 22 February 2025), exhibition webpage, Sweetwater, Berlin, [sweetwater.ltd/exhibitions/e-is-for-everything](https://sweetwater.ltd/exhibitions/e-is-for-everything), accessed 20 May 2026.

Below, at the bottom of the A4, in customary fashion, was the artist's bio. Except in place of "recent exhibitions include" was a far more intimate, more cutting biographical item: The artist had a son named Ernst who lived for six days and six nights. Here, then, is not an artist, but a human summed up by an instance of loss. In that moment, for that time, defined in such a way. The press release's compulsory Curriculum Vitae—course of life—interpolated by death.

In an extraordinary text on how, what, and why one writes, the writer Annie Dillard proclaims: "The writer studies literature, not the world. She lives in the world; she cannot miss it. If she has ever bought a hamburger, or taken a commercial airplane flight, she spares her readers a report of her experience."<sup>2</sup>

Dillard's text is an argument against the encroachment of life upon art; of the reality of the self upon the work. It is titled "Write Till You Drop", perhaps in reference to certain religious practices in which dance or repetitive movement are used to achieve a form of ecstasy, an emptying out of the self. The body is exhausted and the self-reduced, though not as in autobiographical fictions, to a more coherent narrative, but to the ultimate unknown: to flesh. And it is this hard, impersonal bodiliness that makes it possible for the individual to transcend the time-space in which their self is locked, and for their creation to enter the realm of art.

I was fairly shocked by Knudsen's byline that day, which seemed irrevocably and with a single sentence to transform the art. I did not want to feel so much, in that moment, about these paintings. And the grief is there on the canvases anyway, if you look hard enough. Did I need confirmation that it was real? It seemed like a lapse in the sober modernism referred to by the E's, the abstract canvases; a besmirching of its white cube. But time passes, and the art continues to work on you long after you've left the room. Death is not a commercial airplane flight. It is as impersonal as the weather, and though it might come suddenly, it is not, fundamentally, shocking. What I see now in those E's is a form of stoicism; tremendous effort in the way of moving life along its path. In "Write Till You Drop", Dillard also asks, somewhat mercilessly, that you: "Write as if you were dying. At the same time, assume you write for an audience consisting solely of terminal patients. That is, after all, the case. What would you begin writing if you knew you would die soon? What could you say to a dying person that would not enrage by its triviality?"<sup>3</sup>

It is a high bar. As high as modernism's. A form of editing, which aims to weed out mediocre realism from truth. Without fluff, without vanity, without beating around the bush, to not enrage by triviality.

2. Annie Dillard, "Write Till You Drop", *The New York Times Book Review*, 28 May 1989.  
3. Ibid.

In her book *Illness as Metaphor*, the writer and critic Susan Sontag divided the world into two kingdoms: that of the sick and that of the healthy. Dillard operates only with the one in which every audience consists solely of mortals, "as is, after all, the case". Something has been emptied into Knudsen's pencil E. It is not a lie when he says that E is for everything. For better and for worse, E is the truth he answers to.

Frank Auerbach comes to mind also here because he is an artist whose work has been associated with personal tragedy. He appears, though barely disguised, in W.G. Sebald's celebrated novel *The Emigrants* (1992) as a painter whose life "down to the tiniest detail, was ordained... by the deportation of my parents" and whose trauma "fills all my work with the tragic horror of the Shoah".<sup>4</sup> In every brushstroke Sebald saw the ashes from the crematorium and the smoke from its chimneys—Auerbach was furious. As the art historian Danièle Cohn argues, his work is not stuck in a looping revisitation upon the past, but actively engaged in capturing "a continuous present." She writes: "The temporality into which Auerbach relentlessly projected himself with each new beginning is the future."<sup>5</sup>

The handout in Knudsen's exhibition seems to reconcile these two positions. On the one hand, here is an artist whose biography is summed up by loss. On the other, E is for Everything, and the artist is "running out of titles", "giving up on language". That is to say, he realizes that language is an empty container and, as an artist, as a human being, you have no choice but to fill it with whatever is at hand. I am reminded of a definition I heard many years ago of the term "queer", not as a matter of sex or gender, but as a cipher for loss: of certain options, certain futures. This kind of loss brings with it an awareness that signification is not stable, and that, whichever way you end up penciling in the E, it could always have been otherwise. It is not that you become entirely identified with a specific loss, but that an absence of self-evidence will continue to organize your perception of reality. Such a notion of queerness speaks to Dillard's audience of the dying: the single kingdom of the people who will never stop seeing the world, to some extent, from outside.

As Cohn also stresses in the case of Auerbach, who erased his canvases in the evening to start again the next day, it is important to note that Knudsen's works—whether of E's, or flowers, or commas—are not repetitions or returns so much as vehicles. Repetition produces difference; meaning travels, develops, moves. At some point, what we see may have very little to do with where it originally came from. Flowers on a grave rot and disintegrate, turn into bacteria, just as E's are, at a certain point, not filled in but, as in a later iteration of the series, cut out. Life offers you structure and material, and you lean into it; you use it to build a language.

4. Quoted in Danièle Cohn, "His Work, His Life" in *Frank Auerbach*, exhibition catalogue, Galerie Michael Werner, Berlin, 2025.  
5. Ibid.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke writes about this mode of transformation in "Requiem for a Friend", his poem about the death of the painter Paula Modersohn-Becker.

And at last you saw yourself as a fruit,  
you stepped out of your clothes and brought your  
naked body before the mirror, and you let  
yourself inside,  
down to your gaze, which remained strong, and  
didn't say: This is me, instead: This is.<sup>6</sup>

Paula transformed herself into paint in a way that did not render her work in any way "autobiographical" but rather allowed her to transcend herself altogether. Rilke's radical interpretation is that even when she painted her own image, she did so "as a fruit"—as anything at all. This is the same movement that we witness in Knudsen's work as E transforms from Ernst into Everything, not as an expression of boundless grief, but of an artistic language, expanding. Not "This is me, instead: This is."

## PART II: PAINTING

Knudsen's painting distinguishes itself from much new painting of his generation by maintaining elements of the self-reflexivity that has characterized the medium since the 1980s. We know that Knudsen's paintings know that they are paintings because of the stark difference between an E and a spiral and the thick layers of oil and wax, these dense, clotted abstractions. The juxtaposition of different modalities of image-making points to the nature of the image itself, to the structures that support it: both literally, in the form of the canvas and the stretcher-bar, and in the expanded sense of painting's history and what remains of its authority.

An authority which has long been under pressure. In a letter to the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, Marcel Duchamp wrote that he "would like to see [photography] make people despise painting until something else will make photography unbearable."<sup>7</sup> Modernism, in this view, would be a program of exhausting media, one after the other. In 1980, the art historian Douglas Crimp saw Daniel Buren's stripe works as another harbinger of this longed-for endpoint: "[Buren] knows only too well that when his stripes are seen as paintings, painting will be understood as the 'pure idiocy' that it is. At the moment when Buren's work becomes visible, the code of painting will have been abolished and Buren's repetitions can stop: the end of painting will have been finally announced."<sup>8</sup> Here repetition is not a vehicle but a way of hollowing out; a count-down.

6. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. Stephen Mitchell, Random House, London, 1984.

7. Quoted in Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting" [1980] in *On the Museum's Ruins*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993, p.92.

8. Ibid., p.105.

During the same time, the painter and art critic Thomas Lawson delivered an opaque defense of painting in *Artforum*, arguing that, since painting is “the last refuge of the mythology of individuality”, it is with painting as our tool that we might “deconstruct the illusions of the present”. He praised the work of the painter David Salle as “inert representations of the impossibility of passion in a culture that has institutionalized self-expression. [His paintings] take the most compelling sign for personal authenticity that our culture can provide [i.e. painting] and attempt to stop it, to reveal its falseness. The paintings look real, but they are fake.”<sup>9</sup>

As in Crimp, the ire of his language is striking. Is passion impossible? Is authenticity? The implication, of course, is that, as art’s ultimate commodity, painting is bourgeois and oppressive, and undermining it is a way of protesting capitalism’s influence upon art. This is one way of accounting for the post-conceptual paradigm of the last forty years. Another is as an experiment precisely in developing ever-new avenues for commodification, showing us how even the most ephemeral artefacts—relationality, attitude, identity, and even institutional critique itself—can be sold on the market. I think both are true. And still painting has yet to meet its end.

In conversation with Knudsen, we discussed how influential essays like Raphael Rubinstein’s “Provisional Painting” and David Joselit’s “Painting Beside Itself” might map onto his work, or not. Published in *Art in America and October*, respectively, both are from 2009 and both continue to operate on the premise that painting is primarily relevant to the extent that it is able to deconstruct itself. What Rubinstein terms provisional painting privileges the apparently unfinished, mistaken, and minor. It is an expression of “belatedness” founded on the “conviction that an earlier generation of artist has left only a few scraps to be cleaned up”, as well as the product of a historical moment when “nothing could seem more presumptuous or inappropriate—maybe even obscene—than to set out to create a masterpiece”.<sup>10</sup> He includes under this umbrella a list of artists as irreconcilably diverse as Albert Oehlen, Michael Krebber, Mary Heilmann, and Raoul De Keyser. In his more cerebral and political approach, Joselit champions the quality of “transitivity” in the work of Jutta Koether as a way out of “the critical dead end” of reification that simultaneously manages to avoid the “modernist trap of negation” (in which we mind find Buren).<sup>11</sup> By folding painting into the realm of performance and installation art, Koether has managed to counter the tendency of commodity capitalism to fix the meaning and impact of an object, and instead imbue her work with a sense of flux: ensuring that it could never merely be one thing, but would always be

9. Thomas Lawson, “Last Exit: Painting”, *Artforum*, October 1981.  
10. Raphael Rubinstein, “Provisional Painting”, *Art in America*, May 2009.  
11. David Joselit, “Painting Beside Itself”, *October*, no.130, Fall 2009.

read as contingent, always defined by its place in an ever-shifting network of relations.

What Joselit calls “beside-ness” is close to what I describe as the self-conscious knowingness of Knudsen’s work. We are not meant to lose ourselves in the painting’s fictive universe, but are made aware of it as a specific mode of image-making. One difference might just be, however, that Knudsen’s E’s do not accompany his abstract canvases as critical injunctions but as parallel efforts in developing his language. As all language items, then, the transitive quality of neither E’s nor oil paintings can be stifled by their status as commodities, but belongs to them ontologically. Where, for Joselit, transitivity is about signaling awareness of the “art world’s networks of distribution”, in Knudsen’s work, it emerges rather as intimate affective links between the works, the space, and the viewer.

Perhaps, from our point in time, we can read Joselit’s idea of transitivity as less about warding off reification than admitting that painting’s famous autonomy—its removal from the integrated, ritual contexts of churches and other ceremonial interiors—is as fraught, possibly even empty, as our own much-touted freedom. Paintings need context and purpose, as we do too; their chances of life depend on the sensitivity with which we place them. At Sweetwater, the E that is penciled in was hidden behind the column as a way of staging its material gravity. Philosopher and writer Walther Benjamin regarded such staging with suspicion, as part of the “parasitical” logic of aura.<sup>12</sup> But in *E is for Everything* I believe the assessment was correct that viewers needed a pause before being able to take it in. I saw in the smudges of pencil not a gesture of “personal authenticity” but the time and flesh of humans as such, at once particular and universal.

Rubinstein argues that provisional painting is “major painting masquerading as minor painting” because major painting, along with the notion of the masterpiece, has become “presumptuous and inappropriate”.<sup>13</sup> He is not wrong. But I would rather tweak Rubinstein’s statement by another reference to Dillard and her appeal not to “enrage by triviality”. For even worse than setting out to make a masterpiece, at this point in time, surely, would be to make something that does not care to matter? A mattering that does not come back to topicality, but to the seriousness and integrity with which the work has been delivered into the world.

Krebber’s rushed brushstrokes, like the “hurried coupling of a prostitute”, that seem to say “painting is what I do but let’s not get sentimental about it”, are underpinned by a specific type of melancholy.<sup>14</sup>

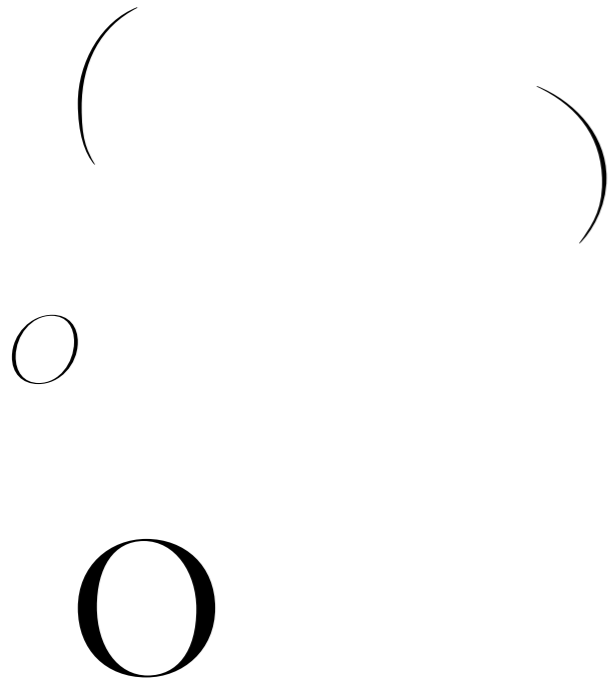
12. See Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, in *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, New York, 1969, pp.217–51.  
13. Rubinstein, 2009.  
14. Ibid.

It is the melancholy of the end of history, of the sense that reality has been so hollowed out that we are no longer entitled to such prestigious modes of expression as painting. But our present is, to my senses, so rich with extremity that the overarching sense of post-ness evident in Krebber and Rubinstein no longer quite resonates. Knudsen’s works are not treading water, and they are not making “last moves”. Rather, they set time into motion as a plain matter of necessity. They exist within a paradigm where art matters because materials are scarce and the presence of mind required to make it even scarcer. Because we are all, in the most self-evident way, dying. The question of art’s significance is actually not—or suddenly not anymore—a very difficult one to answer.

It is also in this aspect that Raoul De Keyser really does not belong in the company of Oehlen’s two-string guitar and Krebber’s “rushed coupling”. Far from provisional, De Keyser’s is an art of absolute care and deliberation. If a smooth surface is broken by the presence of an all but invisible brushstroke underneath, it is not masquerade nonchalance, but a crucial building block within the architecture of the picture. Upon his death in 2012, the painter Rebecca Morris wrote in *Artforum* about visiting him during his last years at his house in Belgium. What she saw, she said, was “time itself”: “you cannot fake the process of your own arrival as an artist... you cannot will it into being”.<sup>15</sup> Instead, De Keyser had worked every day to take small, incremental steps, making fundamental and yet nearly imperceptible advances within his painterly language. There is something there, which is both major and minor because it understands that the major event of arrival will happen only through humility and practice in the minor mode: seriousness applied to the task, humor with regards to one’s self.

Knudsen is arriving as an artist through the portal of great loss, and with the humility with which such a loss must inevitably be borne. His primary vehicle is repetition, as a way of emptying out, as I have said, by penciling in his E’s, but also because repetition is a mode that can move a motif, or even a practice, with every iteration away from itself, into a new place. The most interesting recent painting, to my mind, is characterized by this methodical disavowal of self. It is provisional in the sense that it is naturally contingent, always-already “transitive”, and the opposite of provisional in the sense that it always was, and always will be just that.

15. Rebecca Morris, “Rebecca Morris on Raoul De Keyser”, *Artforum*, March 2013.



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Morten Knudsen

*STICKY EYES (paintings, collages,  
drawings, and monuments)*

Exhibition period: 23.05.2026 – 02.08.2026

Morten Knudsen (b. 1985, DK) is a visual artist who lives and works in Copenhagen. Knudsen graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (2018) and Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg (2017) and has previously exhibited at venues including Sweetwater, Berlin (2025); Gauli Zitter, Brussels (2024); Den Frie, Copenhagen (2023); Huset for Kunst og Design, Holstebro (2022); and C.C.C. Projects, Copenhagen (2019). Knudsen has received several awards, including the Niels Wessel Bagge Art Foundation Honorary Grant (2018) and the 15 June Foundation's Honorary Award (2018).

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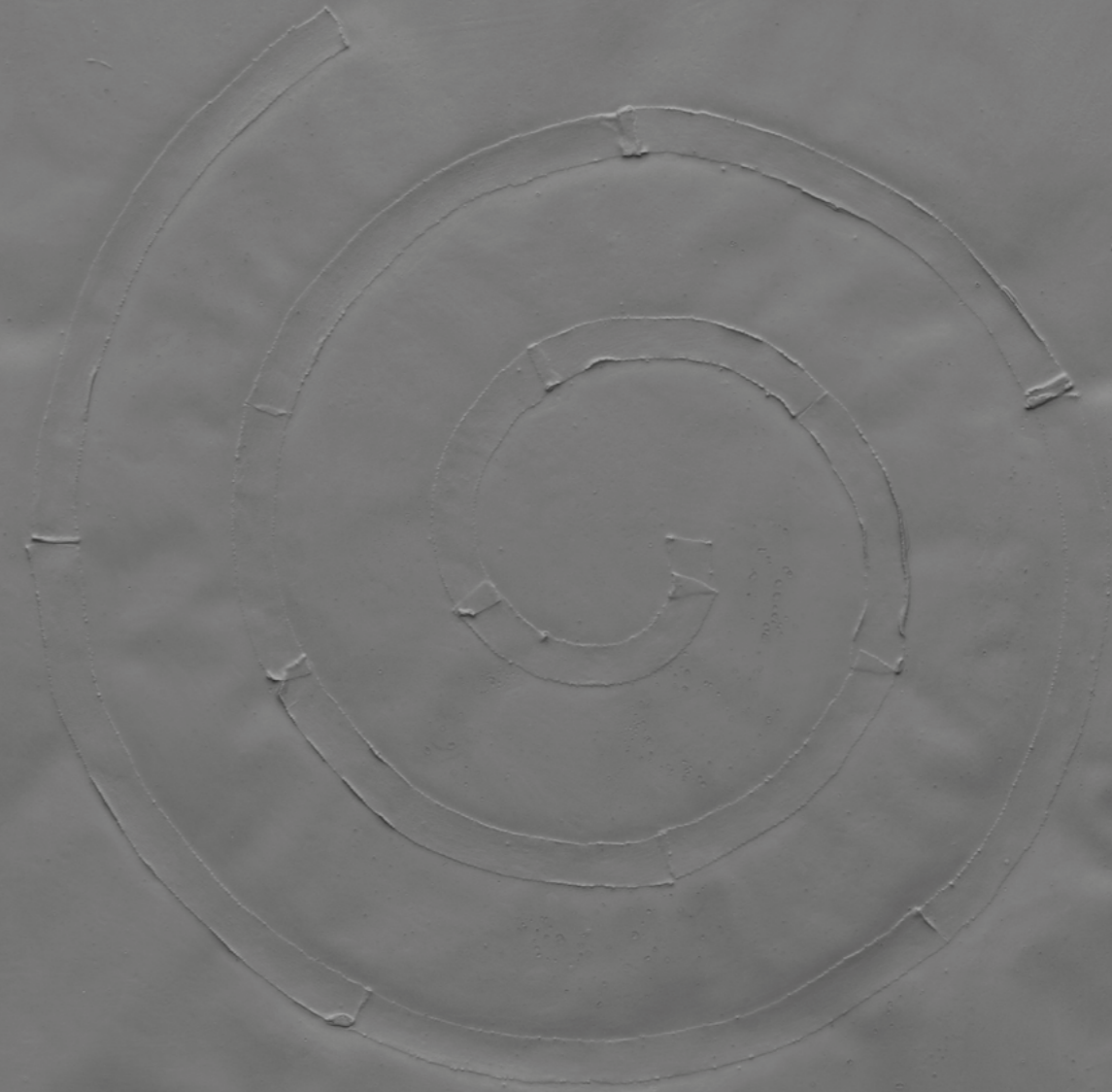
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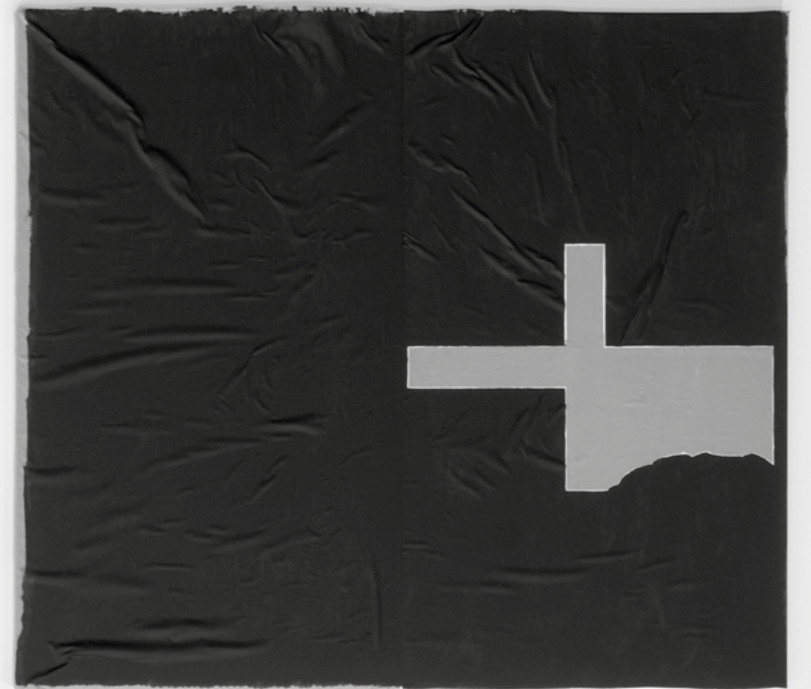
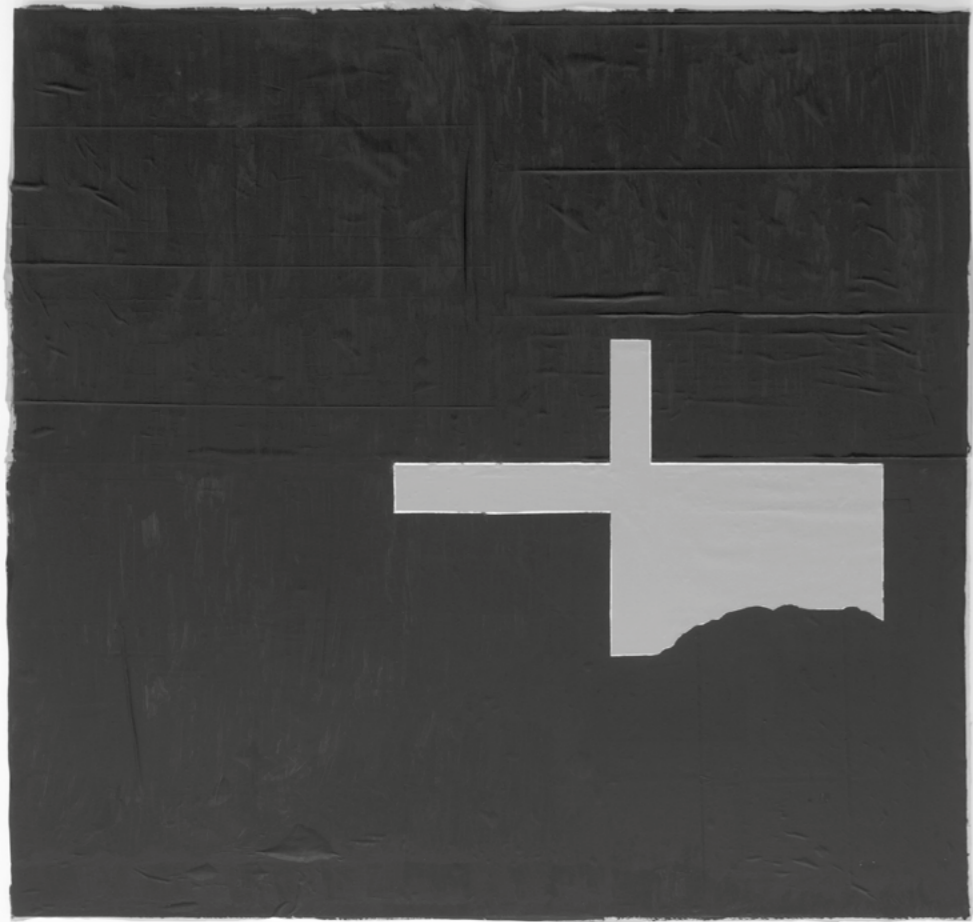
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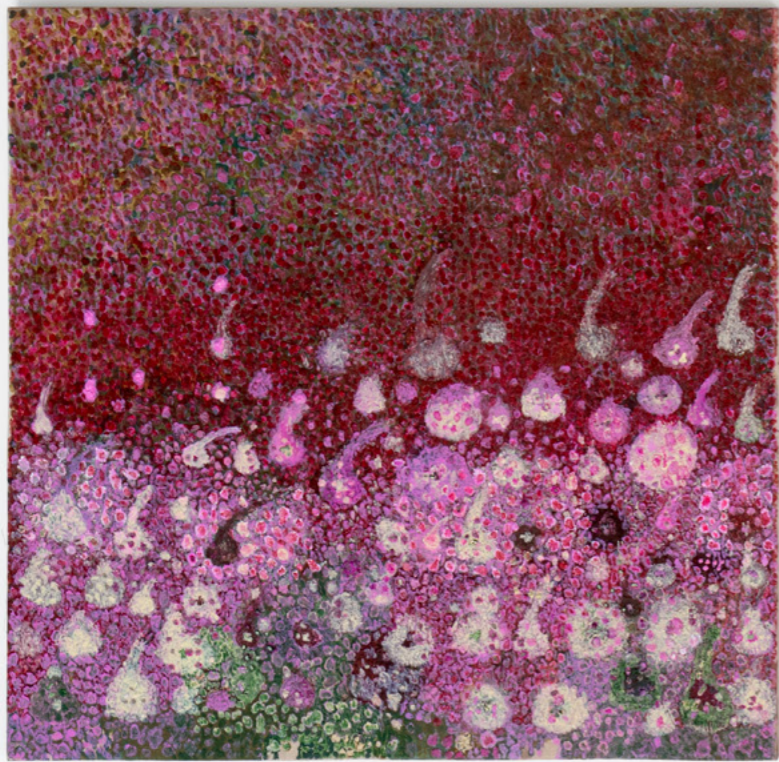
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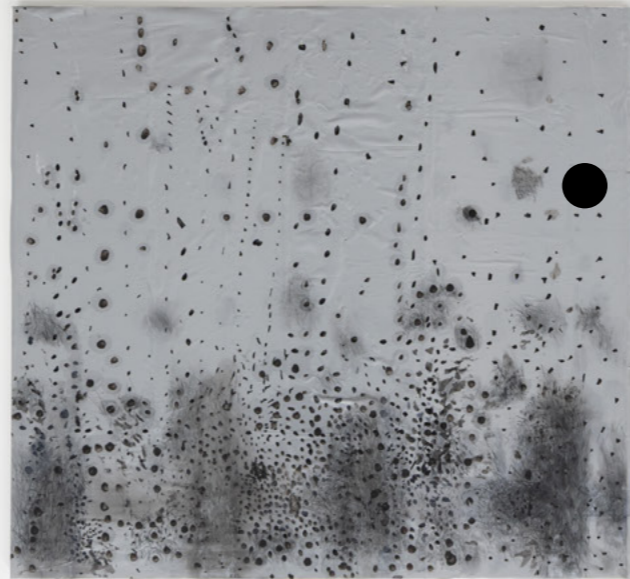


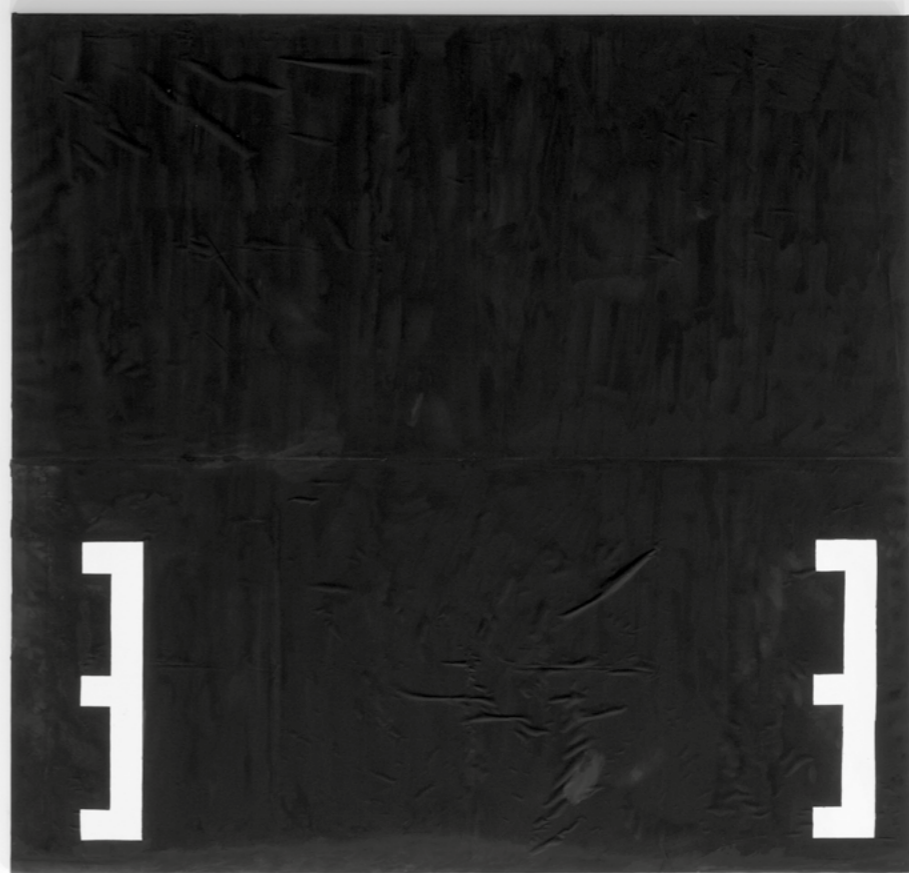
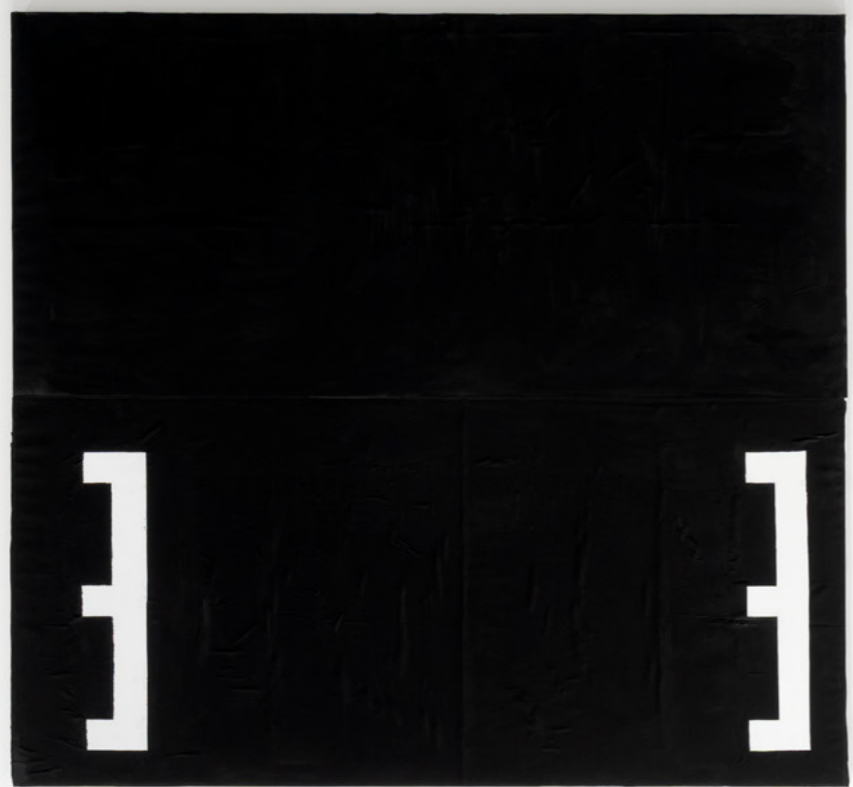
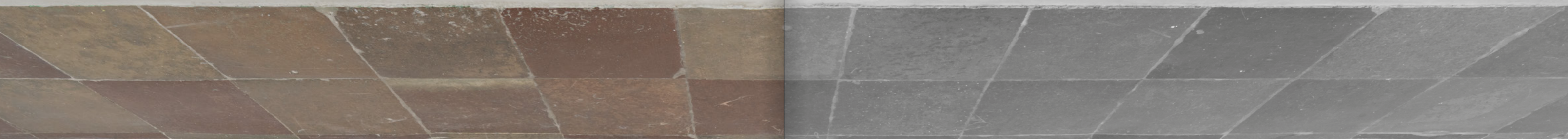


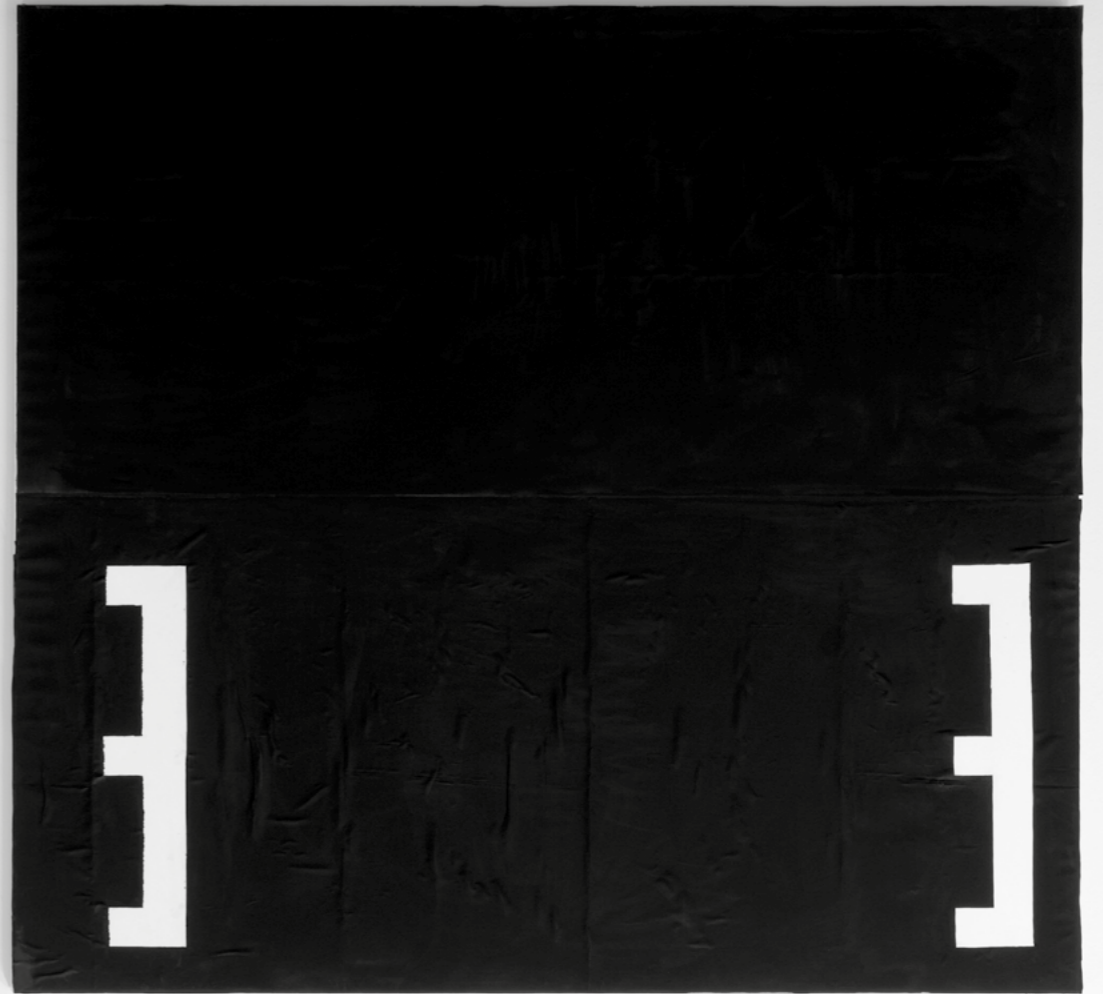
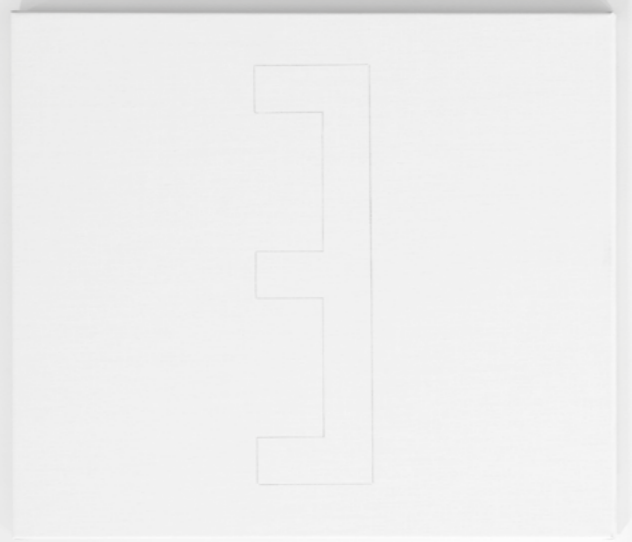












O - OVERGADEN  
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Morten Knudsen  
*STICKY EYES (paintings, collages,  
drawings, and monuments)*  
Udstillingsperiode: 23.05.2026 – 02.08.2026

Morten Knudsen (f. 1985, DK) er billedkunstner uddannet fra Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi (2018) og Hochschule Für Bildende Künste Hamburg (2017). Knudsen bor og arbejder i København og har tidligere udstillet på bl.a. Sweitwater, Berlin (2025); Gault Zitter, Bruxelles (2024); Den Frie, København (2023); Huset for Kunst og Design, Holstebro (2022) og C.C.C. Projects, København (2019). Knudsen har modtaget flere priser, herunder Niels Wessel Bages Kunstfonds Hæderslegat (2018) og 15. Juni Fondens Hæderspris (2018).

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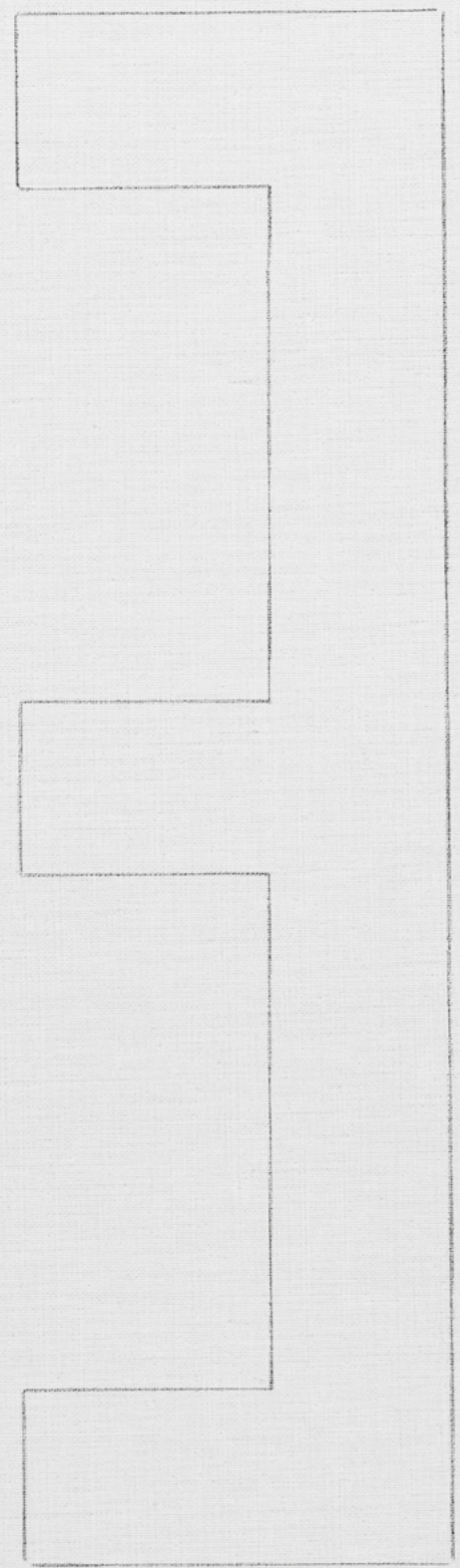
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Kunstmeneren vil gerne takke Nina Errboe, Hanne Knudsen, Olga Knudsen Errboe, Hanne Knudsen

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Trykt i 150 eksemplarer



og samtidig uansetlig fremstridt inden for sit maleriske spørgsmål. Der er noget i det, som på en gang er stort og småt, fordi det forstår, at den store begivenhed, der er at ankomme som kunstner, kun kan opnås gennem dybmyghed og praksis i et meget mindre register: alvor, hvad angår opgaven, humor, hvad angår en selv.

Knudsen ankommer som kunstner gennem et stort tab, og med dybmygheden, hvormed sådan et tab nødvendigtvis må bæres. Hans primære fartøj er gøntagelse, ikke kun som en måde at udtømme på – heller udfordrer Rubinstens tesc med endnu en henvisning til Dillard's appel om "ikke at vække vrede ved rivalitet". For på nuværende tidspunkt er en ting, der er værre end at sætte sig for at skabe en mesterværk, vel at sige noget, der ikke anser sig selv som betydningfuld? Og med det mener jeg en form for betydning, der ikke afhænger af tematik, men af den alvor og integritet, hvormed værket er kommet til verden.

Krebsers hastige penselsstrøg, der som "en prostituerets fortalte samlet" synes at sige "ja, jeg laver malerier, men lad os ikke blive føltesladede omkring det",

udspringer af en særlig form for melankoli.<sup>14</sup> Det er en melankoli forbundet med "historiens endelig" og med en følelse af, at virkeligheden er blevet så udhulet, at vi ikke længere har krav på så prestigefyldte udtryksformer som malerier. Men vores samtid er, for mig at se, så fuld af ekstremer, at den gennemgribende stemning, der kommer fra Krebs og Rubinsten, af at befinde sig i kølvandet af alting, ikke længere rigtigt resonerer. Knudsen arbejder træder ikke vande, og de er ikke engagerede i en form for slutspl. Jeg vil snarere sige, at de sætter tiden i bevægelse af en umiddelbar form for nødvendighed. De eksisterer inden for et paradigme, hvor kunsten betyder noget, fordi materialer er knappe, og det ændelige nærvær, der er nødvendigt for at skabe den, endnu knapper. Fordi vi alle sammen, på den mest selvfulgellige måde, er døende. Spørgsmålet om kunstens betydning er faktisk ikke – eller pludselig ikke længere – særlig svært at svare på.

Det er i forlængelse af dette aspekt, at Raoul de Keyser virkelig ikke hører hjemme i selskab med Oehlsens tostrengede guitar og Krebsers fortravlede samlet. Langftra provisorisk er de Keyser's en kunstpræget af den største omhu og overflathed. Hvis en eller anden overflade er brudt af et næsten usynligt penselstrøg nedenunder, er det ikke en forklædt form for nonchalance, men en afgørende del af billedets arkitektur. Efter hans død i 2012 skrev maleren Rebecca Morris i *Artforum* om engang få år forinden, hvor hun besøgte de Keyser i hans hus i Belgien. Der, hun så det, skriver hun, var "tiden selv": "Det er ikke muligt at fortælle sine egen ankomst som kunstner ... viljens kraft er ikke nok."<sup>15</sup> I stedet arbejdede de Keyser i små, gradvise ryk for at skabe grundlæggende

13. Rubinsten, "Provisional Painting".

14. Ibid.

15. Rebecca Morris, "Rebecca Morris on Raoul De Keyser", *Artforum*, marts 2013.

dekonstruere sig selv. Det, som Rubinsten kalder provisorisk maleri, privilegerer det tilsynsladende ufrædige, fejlslagne og forsåede. Det er udtryk for noget "forsinker", baseret på den overbevisning, "at en tidligere generation af kunstnere kun har efterladt nogle sølle rester" at arbejde med, og kan forstås som udfaldet af en tid, hvor "intet kunne synes mere overmodigt og upassende – måske ligefrem uansænsndigt – end at sætte sig for at skabe et mesterværk"<sup>10</sup>

Under denne rubrik inkluderer han så vidt forskellige kunstnere som Albert Oehlen, Michael Krebs, Mary Heilmann og Raoul de Keyser. Med sin mere akademiske og politiske tilgang fremhæver Joselit det "transitive" aspekt af Jutta Koethers arbejde som en vej ud af den "kritiske blindgyde", som spørgsmålet om værgørelsen udgør ift. malerier, der samtidigt formår at undgå den "modernistiske negationsfælde" (i hvilken vi måske kunne finde Buren). Fordi Koether har integreret maleriet i en performan- og installationskonkret, er det lykkes hende at modsæ kapitalismens tendens til at fastlase betydningen af et objekt, og i stedet garantere en mere dynamisk tilstand for sit værk, hvor det altid må aflæses i et netværk af foranderlige relationer.<sup>11</sup>

Det, Joselit kalder maleriet "ved siden af sig selv", ligger tæt op ad det, jeg beskrev som selvbevisthed i Knudsen's værker. Det er ikke meningen, at vi skal miste os selv i maleriet's fikive univers, men at vi gøres bevidste om det som en specifik form for billedproduktion. En vigtig forskel er dog, at Knudsen's ikke ladsager de abstrakte billeder som kritiske imperativer, men som parallelle led i udviklingen af hans

spørg. Og ligesom sproglige elementer altid defineres oliemalerier heller ikke hæmmes af deres status som dynamisk, kan det transitive aspekt i hverken E'er eller varer, men tilhører dem ontologisk. Hvor transitive for Joselit handler om at signalere bevidsthed om "kunstverdens distribueringsnetværk", opstår det i Knudsen's værk som nære affektive forbindelser mellem værkene, rummet og beskueren.

Måske Joselit's transitivebehold i dag er mindre relevant som et værn mod værgørelsen end som en indrømmelse af, at maleriet's berømte autonomi –

10. Raphael Rubinsten, "Provisional Painting", *Art in America* 97, maj 2009.

11. David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", *OCTOBER* 150, efterår 2009, s. 125-134.

12. Se Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", i *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1969, s. 217-251.

både helt konkret i form af lærredet og blændrammen, og i den udvidede forstand af maleriet's historie, og hvad der er tilbage af dets autoritet.

En autoritet, der altså længe har været under pres. I et bryt til den amerikanske fotograf Alfred Stieglitz skrev Marcel Duchamp, at han gerne så, "at fotografi fik folk til at afsky maleri, indtil at noget andet så ville gøre fotografi uudholdeligt".<sup>7</sup> I den optik ville modernismen programmatisk arbejde for at udtømme kunstformerne, en efter en. Kunstshistorikeren Douglas Crimp så i 1980 Daniel Burens stribede overflader som endnu et varsel om dette længe ventede udfald: "Buren ved kun alt for godt, at når hans striber bliver opfattet som malerier, vil maleriet blive forstøet som den 'rene idiot', der også er. I det øjeblik, hvor Burens arbejde bliver synligt, vil maleriet's kode være øb, hvorefter Burens gentagelse også kan høre op: maleriet's endeligt vil langt om længe være bekendtligt."<sup>8</sup> Her bruges gentagelse ikke som fartøj, men som en måde at udhule på; en slags nedtælling.

I samme periode formulerede maleren og kunstkritikeren Thomas Lawson et noget bagvendt forvar for maleriet i *Artforum*. Her argumenterede han for, at eftersom maleriet er "det sidste tillugssted for myten om individet", er det netop med maleriet som redskab, at vi kan "dekonstruere nutidens illusioner". Han fremhævede maleren David Sallies værker som:

"Livløse illustrationer af umuligheden af hidenskab i en kultur, som har institutionaliseret det enkelte menneskes mulighed for at udtrykke sig. [Hans malerier] gør brug af vor kultur's mest overbevisende udttryk for personlig autenticitet [dvs. maleriet] alene for at sabotere det, for at afsløre dets falskhed. Malerierne ser ægte ud, men de er forfalskninger."<sup>9</sup>

Som hos Crimp er spydigheden i Lawsons tone slående. Et hidenskab umuligt? Er autenticitet? Underforstået er selvfølgelig, at maleriet – kunstens ultimative vare – bortførligt og autoritært, og altså derfor må undermineres i protest. Og det er da også en måde at forstå de sidste fyrré års post-konceptuelle paradigme på. En anden er som et eksperiment i at udvikle stadig nye former for netop værgørelse, der har vist os, hvordan selv de mest flygtige fænomener – relationalt, identitet og institutionskritik – også kan sælges på markedet. Begge er vel sande. Og ikke desto mindre males der endnu.

Under arbejdet med udstillingen har Knudsen og jeg diskuteret, om indflydelsesrige tekster som Raphael Rubinstens "Provisional Painting" og David Joselit's "Painting Beside Itself" kan appliceres på hans arbejde eller ej. Teksterne er begge udgivet i 2009 – i hv. *Art in America* og *October* – og begge udgår stadigvæk, som Crimp tredive år forinden, fra den præmis, at maleriet primært er relevant i det omfang, at det kan

7. Citert i Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting" (1980).

8. Ibid., s. 105.

9. Thomas Lawson, "Last Exit: Painting", *Artforum*, oktober 1981.

# LØBER TØR FOR TITLER

OM MORTEN KNUDSENS ARBEJDER

Kristian Vistrup Madsen

Nedst på A4-siden stod på sædvanlig vis kunstnerens biografi. Men i stedet for en liste over de seneste udstillinger var der en langt mere skærende biografisk detalje: Kunstneren havde en søn, der hed Ernst, som levede i seks dage og seks nætter. Her er det altså ikke kunstneren, der er i fokus, men mennesket, der har lidt et tab. I det øjeblik, i den periode, defineret på den måde. Pressmeddelensens obligatoriske Curriculum Vitae – livsbanen – interpoletter af døden.

I en ekstraordinær tekst om, hvordan, hvad og hvorfor man skriver, erklærer den amerikanske forfatter Annie Dillard, at en forfatter baseret sit værk på litteraturen, ikke på livet som sådan. "Verden

hvis hun nogensinde har købt en burger eller taget et charterfly, gør hun bedst i at spare sine læsere for en

afrapportering af oplevelsen."<sup>2</sup> Dillard argumenterer imod livets indtog i kunsten og selvets aftryk på værket. Teksten hedder "Write Till You Drop", en

referencen til de religiøse praksisser, der benytter dans

eller bevægelse til at opnå en form for ekstase, en

opløsning af selvet. Kroppen er udmattet og selvet

reduceret, men ikke som i autofiktionen til mere

sammenhængende fortællinger, men nærmere til det

ulterioriske ukendte: kødet. Det er netop med denne

hårde, upersonlige kropslighed som medic, at det

bliver muligt for individet at transcenderer selvet

– og måske endda også for deres værker at opnå

status som kunst.

Jeg blev lettere chokeret over Knudsens biografi den

dag, mæden, den forkom mig at forandre kunsten

på, uafslædt, med en enkelt sætning. Jeg havde

ikke lyst til at føle så meget, i det øjeblik, omkring

de malerier. Og kunne sorgen ikke siges at være der

uanset hvad, hvis man så ordentligt efter? Behøvede

Jeg at få bekræftet, at den kom fra et virkeligt sted?

Det slog mig som et brud med den sobre modernisme,

som Erlene og de abstrakte lærredet gækkalder; en

kompromittering af modernismens *white cube*.

Men tiden går, og kunsten fortsætter med at påvirke

en, længe efter at man har forladt udstillingen. Døden

er jo ikke et charterfly. Den er lige så upersonlig som

vejr, og selvom den kan komme pludseligt, er den

ikke grundlæggende chokerende. Hvad jeg efterhånden

har lært at se i Erlene, er en form for stoicism; en

enorm indsats investeret i at få livet til at gå videre.

I "Write Till You Drop" tilsknyder Dillard yderligere

til, at man skriver, som om man var døende.

"Og på samme tid at antage, at man skriver for et

publikum, der består udelukkende af terminale

patienter – hvilket jo faktisk også er tilfældet. Hvad

ville du begynde at skrive, hvis du vidste, at du snart

skulle dø? Hvad kunne du sige til en døende person,

som ikke ville vække vrede ved sin trivialitet?"<sup>3</sup>

1. Morten Knudsen, *E is for Everything*, Sweetwater, II.

2. Annie Dillard, "Write Till You Drop", *The New York Times*

3. Ibid.

*Book Review*, 28. maj 1989.

4. Citat fra Daniele Cohn, "His Work, His Life", i *Frank*

*Auerbach*, Berlin: Galerie Michael Werner, 2025.

5. Ibid.

6. Min oversættelse fra tysk original: *Denn Das verstandst du*

die vollen Früchte. / Die legst du auf Schalen vor dich hin / und wogst

mit Farben ihre Schwere auf. / Und so wie Früchte sahst du auch die

ihres Dasens. / Und sahst dich selbst zuletzt wie eine Frucht. / nahmst

Fraun / und sahst die Kinder so, von innen her / getrieben in die Formen

and N's are all things I love too.

Landscapes and flowers and O's and S's and H's

the most.

Of all things in this world, E's are the motif I love

or maybe I'm just beginning to give up on language.

It feels like I am running out of titles,

everything?um\_source=chagpr.com.

Her sætter Dillard en standard, der er lige så høj som

modernismens. Hun beskriver en form for redigering,

der har til hensigt at adskille middelaldrig realisme

fra sandhed. Uden omsvøb og forfængelighed, uden

vægen, uden at vække vrede ved trivialitet. I *Illness*

as *Metaphor* opdeler den amerikanske forfatter og

kritiker Susan Sontag verden i to kongeriger: de

syges og de raskes. Dillard opererer alene med det,

der udelukkende består af dødelige. Noget er blevet

udtømt i Knudsens blyants-E. Det er ikke løgn, når

han siger, at *E is for Everything*. Om han vil det eller ej,

er E den sandhed, han lever med.

Når jeg nævner Frank Auerbach i denne sammenhæng,

er det også, fordi han er en kunstner, som er blevet

forbundet med personlig tragedie. Han portrætteres,

slet skjult, i den tyske forfatter W.G. Sebalds roman

*Emigrants* som en maler, hvis hele liv, ned til

mindste detalje, var bestemt af hans forældres død i de

tyrke koncentrationslejr; et traume, der fylder alt hans

arbejde med Shoahens tragiske rædsel.<sup>4</sup> I hvert eneste

penselsrøg så Sebald asken fra krematorierne og

rogen fra deres skorstene – der gjorde virkelighedens

Auerbach rasende. I kunsthistorikeren Daniele Cohns

udlægning er Auerbachs arbejde ikke bestandsigt

hjem søgt af fortiden, men aktivt engageret i at indfange

i ringen, hvad angår sproget. Det vil sige, han forstår,

er ved at løbe tør for titler, ved at kaste håndklædet

her en kunstner, hvis biografi opsummeres i et tab.

På den anden side står *E for everything*, og kunstneren

baseret på tab: af visse muligheder, visse udlægninger

af fremtiden. Det er en type af tab, som medfører en

bevidsthed om, at sprogets betydningskæder ikke er

stabile, og om, at uanset hvordan du end ender med

at udfylde E'er, kunne det lige så godt have været

anderledes. Det er ikke sådan, at et specifikt tab

fuldstændigt overtager, hvem du er, men at et fravær

oplevelse af virkeligheden. Et sådant quæter-begreb

taler til Dillards publikum af døende: et kongerige

befolker af dem, der altid, i et eller andet omfang,

vil se verden ud fra.

Som Cohn også understrøger i Auerbachs tilfælde

– Auerbach, der maled sine lærredet over hver dag,

for så at begynde på ny den næste – er det vigtige

5. Ibid.

6. Min oversættelse fra tysk original: *Denn Das verstandst du*

die vollen Früchte. / Die legst du auf Schalen vor dich hin / und wogst

mit Farben ihre Schwere auf. / Und so wie Früchte sahst du auch die

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everything?um\_source=chagpr.com.

Den tyske digter Rainer Maria Rilke skriver om denne

her type af forvandling i *Requiem für eine Freundin* (1908),

sit digt om maleren Paula Modersohn-Beckers død.

For det forstod du: de fuldmodne frugter.

Dem lagde du på fæde foran dig

og deres tyngde vejdede du op med farver.

Og sådan som du så frugterne, så du også

kvinderne,

og sådan så du børnene, ind fra

drejet frem i deres værens former.

Og til sidst så du dig selv som en frugt,

du tog dig ud at dit løj, bar

dig frem foran spjlet, lod dig selv træde ind

helt ind til dit blik, der blev stående stort foran

og ikke sagde: det er mig; nej: dette er.

Modersohn-Becker forvandlede sig selv til maling

på en måde, der overhovedet ikke gjorde hendes

arbejde autobiografisk, men i stedet tillod hende at

transcenderer selvet helt. Rilke insisterer på, at selv

da Modersohn-Becker malede sit eget portræt, gjorde

han det "som frugt" – som hvad som helst. Det er den

samme bevægelse, vi er vidne til i Knudsens arbejde,

når E skifter form fra Ernst til *Everything*, ikke som

et udtryk for grænseløs sorg, men for et kunstnerisk

sprog, der vokser. Ikke "det er mig; nej: dette er."

DEL II: MALERI

\* DEL II: MALERI

Når så forskellige billedsprog stilles i relation til

voks, der udgør hans fortædte, stofflige abstraktioner.

mellem et E og en spiral og de tykke lag af olie og

ved billedets natur og den struktur, det er baseret på:

hinsiden 1980'erne. Vi ved, at Knudsens malerier ved, at

af den selvbevidsthed, der har karakteriseret mediet

maleri fra hans generation ved at bibeholde elementer

Knudsens maleri udmærker sig blandt meget nyt

ved billedets natur og den struktur, det er baseret på:

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# EFTER E

Nanna Friis

E må fremmanes og insisteres på i billeder, ligesom selve tilværelsen må, metoden er en monotoni, fordi den skal opretholde en nogenlunde opretstående tilstand gennem en periode i opløsning. Helt billeder fulde af E, og rigtig mange af dem i løbet af de seks år, der er gået, siden Ernst ophørte, og E begyndte. De hober sig op i Morten Knudsens liv og atelier. De hober sig op i udstillingen, samler sig til et spaltet monument over en søn og fraværet af en søn. Også som motiv glimrer E ved sit fravær, sine så godt som usynlige konturer. E er skåret ud af Morten Knudsens sorte billeder sorte overflader, ikke malet oven på dem, tegnet lysere og kommer til syne som en tomhed. Eller E er et hvidt omrids, sådan en antydning af noget, der majsler sig længere ind i blikket, måske også hjertet, fordi det er sværere at få øje på. Da E blev til et mind, var det givetvis sådan, at den virkelige og tilbageværende verden for en tid blev snævert ind til hvidt, sort, gråt, gentagelser.

E E E E E

Der er seks E'er i Morten Knudsens udstilling. Ernst levede i seks dage og seks nætter, der er 12 billeder i Morten Knudsens udstilling. Et vedvarende, vedholdende behov for logik og system gennem det mest akutte meningsstab. En række enkle principper, som støkke gennem en tid, der vælter. Tegnene som et alfabet gennem en tilstand, hvor sproget ikke rækker. E, spiral, blomst, en slags kors, en slags horisont? Og alt det, der ikke ligner noget andet end subtilt krøllete flader, den slags folder i overfladen, der kan være nonchalant ligegyldighed eller starten på facadekarakterering. Morten Knudsens billeder føles ikke som figuraton, men er heller ikke fuldbyrdet abstrakte. Snarere er de mættede af noget, som kan genkendes, selvom det ikke rigtig findes i virkeligheden. Blomsterne er iniferede, eller er de celler, de er også sprudlende og lidt lykkelige, som pink og rød nu engang er. Regnen er sort, eller er det tårer, himlen falder ned, eller er det i virkeligheden den, der blomstrer, mens jorden er tom. Evgigheden er grå som et gulv og næsten ikke til at ane. Og så er der E E E E E, støjle og hvide som dage og nætter, der tårner sig op.



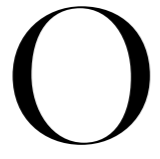
Dagen og natten, himle og bunde, sort, hvid, gulvet og efterlivet, E og E, det spirende og det døde, et vedvarende fravær og en glimtvist tilstedeværelse, eller omvendt. Morten Knudsens billeder er næsten uafbrudt rodfæstet i nogle ret mægtige dualismer. En slags altoverskyggende pardannelse, selvom den farvestrålende, regngrå, tuschsorte, skråbøjelige og opbyggelige helhed, som udstillingen er, måske umiddelbart tager sig ganske idiosynkratisk ud. Men i stort set alle billeder er der tale om par, hvis forbindelse etableres inde i kompositionerne, paletterne, motiverne, og der findes også ret konsekvente parløb billederne imellem. To og to, sådan hænger de ofte, et udtryk for, hvad der både kunne være en søgen efter symmetri og en erkendelse af meningsstab.

Måske kærter dualiteten, partene, modsætningerne, som man kender dem, når krisen ankommer. Eller skærpes det? Hvad er forskellen på en dag og en nat, når man søger over en mistet søn, hvilken forskel er der på smerten og et blomstrende forår, er klar rød til at skelne fra sygdomsgul eller altopslugende brunlighed, når det meste af ens indre og ydre verden er bunnlig, når det meste af ens indre og ydre verden alligevel er badet i endimensionel grå?

E er sort og hvidt, først et underværk af lys og siden et langt mørke, det, der ligner en blomstrende eng, kunne godt være en kirkegård, og under blomsterne og tabet er der også gråt. De fleste af Morten Knudsens billeder starter med at være gråt, ligesom mange dage gør, inden solen er stærk nok til at farve omgivelserne. På den måde kan man også sige: Grå er en begyndelsesfarve. Både ulidlige og henrykte dage starter et sted, starte skal de. Og billeder af det umulige tager deres begyndelse samme sted som billeder af noget, der til foreksling kunne ligne romantik, optimisme, eller måske endda et sorgløse glimt. Den her neurale, følelsesløse gråhede i visse af Morten Knudsens billeder, den er hverken blotet for intention eller signifikans, sådan set heller ikke en egen skønhed – men den er stadig en slags tomt sted. Så kan tomheden være en uoversigtlig hovedrolle, i en sindstilstand og i et billede, eller den kan være det nøgne stadi, hvorfra noget kommende kan gro.

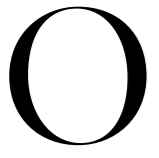
E groer. Der findes flere og flere, fordi Morten Knudsen lever og arbejder og holder E ved lig. Mindes E og skaber E. Man kunne sige: Mere og mere af Everything gennem de liv, der stadig er i gang og klarer dagen, selvom dagene nok altid vil have en mere glubsk grålig bund. Billederne groer, de både vokser og genter sig. Det er nok sådan her: At leve er at genter sig. Hverdag, livsbaner, relationer, årstider, længsler, adfærdsmønstre. Fordugsigtighed er velsagten en lykkelig for dem, der virkelig ikke har den – noget, man må klamre sig til, hvis den akut er truet. Og når et helt nyt liv ophører, er det et af de mest uforsønlige brud på forudsigelighed, og når et helt nyt liv ophører, bliver det udelukket fra at tage del i genteragelsens cykliske skæbne. Den må de levende tage på sig. Billede efter billede, dag efter dag, værne om de farver, der stadig viser sig for et taget blik, måske er det de hidsigste. Forsættede spiraler, registrere naturen, også bare helt nøgternt uden at gøre den til sentimentalt landskab. Spændte lærterder op, male sine foretrukne himle, sætte sine svage eller højlydte artryk på de grå begyndelser.

E står for alt muligt, jo flere der findes, jo bredere bliver tegnet vel. Jo mere og jo længere eksisterer E i en form, der ikke er menneskets form. Det er ikke tilværelsesvist en erstatning af mennesket, mennesker og billeder er usammenlignelige, men bevægelsen gennem Morten Knudsens billeder føltes som en insisteren på, at E var levende og klar og defineret, og at tiden gør E til noget så godt som grænseløst. Tegen på en lykkelig og et hjerte, der nu findes i alt muligt andet. Everything? Det er monumentets lod at være stedfortræder for noget savnet, måske både lindre og understrege tabet.



Og alfabetet udvides efter E.

Sorg ændrer sig ikke, men skala gør, siges det. Måske skrumper det knuste indre, i takt med at monumentet vokser, måske bliver det knuste ydre lettere at udholde, når et stadigt spirende flor baner sig vej gennem gråt, og en lys uendelighed varsles langs med alt det malede mørke. Morten Knudsens firkanter vokser og skrumper.



# OVERGADEN



Udstillingsperiode: 23.05.2026 – 02.08.2026

ISBN: 978-87-94311-36-6

EAN: 9788794311366

Morten Knudsen

*STICKY EYES (paintings,*

*collages, drawings, and monuments)*

O – OVERGADEN

Overgaden nedenu Vandet 17, 1414 København K,

overgaden.org

Det er en stor fornøjelse at introducere denne publikation, der udkommer i forbindelse med Morten Knudsens udstilling *STICKY EYES* (paintings, collages, drawings, and monuments) på O – Overgaden. Siden 2021 har O – Overgaden med generøs støtte fra Augustinus Fonden produceret en publikationsrække, der udgives i forbindelse med kunsthallens soloudstillinger. I dette tilfælde har de to skribenter og kuratorer Nanna Frits og Kristian Vistrup Madsen bidraget med hver sin nærlæsning af Morten Knudsens praksis og billedsprog – og begge skal have en varm tak. Derudover vil jeg gerne takke fanfare, vores grafiske designere, for deres dedikerede arbejde med denne publikation. Sidst, men ikke mindst, en særlig tak til Morten for at dele sit materiale – fra koncept til udvalgte samlinger – med os alle sammen, både gennem udstillingen og denne publikation.

Tabetsølger og byrdefulde genkomst – dagligt, ugentligt, årligt – strømmer gennem Morten Knudsens lige dele konceptuelle og materielle maleriske praksis. I værkserien *Es for Everyhing* gentages bogstavet E – det første bogstav i hans søns navn og også navnet på det antistof, der endte med at tage sønnens liv. Som en slags udmåling eller rationalisering af livet og det ubærlige består de sort-hvide værker af nøgterne, minimale bogstaver, der er groft udskåret af mørklægningsgardiner (*collager*) eller skrevet med tynd blyantstreg (*legninger*) som et meditative mantra, der giver form til både meningsdannelse og meningsopløsning. Gentagelsen af bogstavet E, det hyppigst anvendte bogstav i alfabetet, i en forholdsvis genkendelig, modernistisk sans serif-skrifttype peger samtidig på vores fælles sprog både som allsejdsnærstående og som et tomt 'altning' ('Everything'). Bogstaverne – der i værkerne til dels kun vises via deres fravær, som 'huller' – afspejler, hvordan kunstneren er 'løbet tør for titler' eller "har givet op på sproget", som Knudsen har udtalt til Kristian Vistrup Madsen under arbejdet med hans tekst til nærværende publikation.

I udstillingens store rum hænger Knudsens blomstrede, landskabslignende *malerier*, der med deres tykke, pastøse overflader, dybe farvetoner og et glimt af fin de siècle ved første øjekast kan læses som romantiske, næsten nostalgiske. Men de afslører sig hurtigt som vildtvoksende virusser: beskidte, besværlige, ukontrollerbare og invasive. Ligesom brugen af syntetisk skumpap og plexiglasrammer står malerernes palet – de næsten selvløsende, unaturlige rosa, lilla og røde nuancer – i kontrast til deres impressionistiske eller pointillistiske rødder. I et gråt og sort værk fokuseres udelukkende på værkerenes allsejdsnærstående pletter, der stammer fra fingrens eller penslens aggressive hamren på lærredet. To andre grå og sorte værker lavet af lærredet. To andre grå og sorte værker lavet af mørklægningsgardin er fokuseret på et udskåret motiv, der smelter en horisont og et kors sammen, som havde man forsøgt at rekalibrere den kristne symbolik og, måske særligt, dens løfter.

Knudsen lader typisk et område af lærredet stå ubørt eller kun sparsomt bearbejdet. Den maleriske komposition og dens tomtum bliver således i sig selv et motiv, der vækker tanker om hans søns seks dage korte liv og dets efterspil – lammelsen og udmattelsen af sorgen. En erfaring, kunstneren gennemarbejder *Days and Six Nights*, der rituelt gentager det cirkulære symbol. I et nyt, gråt værk bruges farvetonen fra gulvet på O – Overgaden til at skabe det seneste spiralmotiv i denne voksende, processuelle værkserie, som Knudsen også betegner som *monument*.

Den konstante, omend flygtige proces, der præger Knudsens værker som helhed, peger både på desperationens ruin og på tallenes og opmålingens symmetriske struktur – der er seks forekomster af bogstaver E i udstillingen, tolv malerier, og så videre – en struktur, som vi kan have en tendens til at holde fast i, når ting falder fra hinanden.

Rhea Dall  
Leder og chefkurator på O – Overgaden,

juni 2026

# INTRODUKTION

