



# sleek

FASHION NOW - ART F



CASEY LEGLER THE GIRLFRIEND LOOK FRANCESCO CLEMENTE

JOHN BALDESSARI WALTER PEREYER

INCLUDING:

## MAN & BOY ON MULTILATERAL MASCULINITY

PLUS  
BJARNE MELGAARD'S  
IGNORANT TRANSPARENCIES





**MISTER**

**IP**

**PINK**

**BEYOND THE PANTHER, THERE'S DOMESTICITY,  
DELIGHT AND DECLINE. HOW BJARNE MELGAARD'S  
EXTRAORDINARY INSTALLATIONS DESCRIBE THE  
AGES AND STATES OF A MAN AND HIS LIFE**

**TEXT — Francesca Gavin**

**BJARNE MELGAARD  
Untitled, 2013**

Oil and automotive enamel on cast fibreglass  
over steel armature, wire, and polyfil batting  
366 x 173 x 340 cm  
Courtesy Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York  
Photos: Thomas Müller  
VG Bild Kunst, Bonn 2013







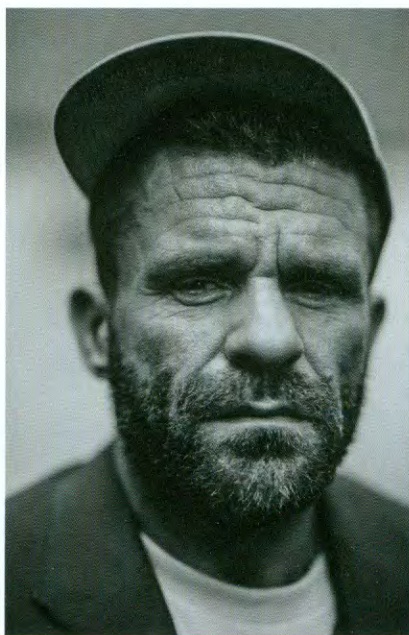




Left

## Untitled, 2013

Panther: Hand-sewn fabric over wire armature, glue, PVC pipe, cotton batting, faux fur, feathers, steel bolts, cast resin, latex and polyfoam  
 Bottle: Closed cell foam over aluminium and wood frame, acrylic, black velvet fabric. With stop-motion animated film (color, sound) 6:23 min. Produced and directed by Gabe Bartalos/Atlantic West Effects  
 Panther: 107 x 107 x 132 cm  
 Bottle: 104.1 x 254 x 116.8 cm  
 All images courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise  
 Copyright the artist



Bjarne Melgaard. Photo: Bjørn Opsah

The music came first. For children who grew up in the Seventies and Eighties it was unforgettable: that suspicious saxophone swagger that felt a little too burlesque and adult for kids' TV. The Pink Panther character first appeared in the animated film titles for Blake Edwards' slapstick film series in the Sixties which starred Peter Sellers. A decade later a whole series was devoted to the pink, sly cat crossing between the surreal and comedic. The Pink Panther is a character that we assume to be male but his gender has a sense of instability to it, a masculinity informed by duplicity. All is never as it seems, this slender, spy-like figure hinted. And then there was the pink. The colour of queerness, and the antithesis of traditional masculinity.

This faded yet powerful pink pop icon is the central protagonist for Bjarne Melgaard's recent "Ignorant Transparencies" show at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York. It is one of Melgaard's most important and memorable exhibitions to date. The Norwegian-raised and NYC-based artist has a reputation as one of the biggest bad boys in contemporary art, and his past work has included installations, paintings, collages and novels which have touched on a bloody, violent and visceral personal language which references everything from hardcore gay porn to heavy metal to steroid use. Yet in recent

Below  
Ignorant Transparencies, 2013

Installation view  
 Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York  
 (September – November 2013)

years there has been a shift, and one that culminates in this show.

Visitors entering the space were initially met by a super-sized Pink Panther – covered in psychedelic daubs of paint, wearing a big hat and smoking a meth pipe. The sculptural figure

stood surrounded by walls printed with a shark fin graphic print and billboard-sized stills from Michael Haneke's sorrowful "Amour" film.

In the room beyond, walls were covered in portraits of pink panthers in makeshift wooden frames, smoking pipes and staring nonchalantly at the viewer. Here also stood a giant gothic-style doll's house – 17 rooms filled with miniature Pink Panther characters, exposing a narrative of what could be taking place in the

exhibition. The house stood on a giant pink rug that resembled a rumpled sombrero. Next to it was a much less structured hobo-like living space, a dead tree laden with odd objects and rubbish. On the other side of this makeshift shelter was a further cluster

of five Pink Panther figures. They sat around the space draped in layers of clothes and textiles, like some drugged-up tribe. One sat astride a giant pink pill bottle. A screen was placed within its opening, showing a strange clay-mation animation of the Pink Panther. In the final room were large collage-like paintings with attached square smileys, while hanging from the centre were two large banner images

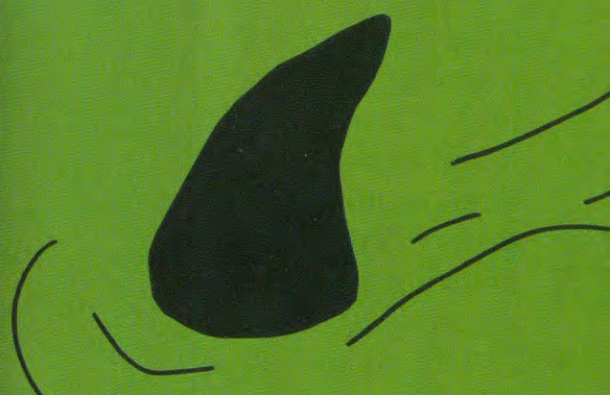


Untitled, 2013

Oil on canvas and mixed media with garments by Eckhaus Latta, with oil on canvas painting 200 x 300 x 5 cm.









of naked male porn stars, including Arpad Miklos, who committed suicide earlier in 2013. Throughout the show there was a feeling of dysfunction and excess, of narcosis and confusion.

Melgaard presents a near-broken masculinity torn between the psychedelic strangeness of childhood (the cartoon cat and doll house), through the excess and violence of youth (drugs and suicide) to the horrors of old age (Haneke's "Amour"). The three stages of the life of man in turmoil. "It is a confused male fractured identity," he says. "People not knowing anymore where they stand in life or are so messed up that they can't make any determination about where they are going. I'm interested in that thing that we know so little about people, we know so little about ourselves."

The masculinity in "Ignorant Transparencies" is far from a straightforward one – it is queer, hedonistic, mentally unstable and hysteric rather than dude-like, arrogant or posturing. In fact, Melgaard sees the work as feminised, and the pinkness that permeates everything is telling. "It's one of my favourite colours, but also because it's so poisonous. It's so sweet but at the same time it's not very appetising. It can so easily tip over into something really abject," the artist considers.

Most centrally, Melgaard's work reflects the strong relationship between the abject and the young male body. The discomfort of

youth, the hallucinogenic strangeness of children's cartoons, the dark side of the home: man perpetually caught in the layers and veils of boyhood, or what Donald Campbell referred to as "the prevailing atmosphere of disgust which provides duplicate images for the adolescent's disgust with the changes in his or her own emerging body."

If the teenage body has long been a key agent in abject and gothic narratives – from the "Mystery of Udolpho" to "The Lost Boys" to "Twilight" – then the dark edge in Melgaard's exhibition is closer to the discomfort and strangeness of Bret Easton Ellis' twisted and autobiographically inspired novel "Lunar Park". In the novel his home becomes the space of terror, an atmosphere of violence, unsafe.

Melgaard's entire show, meanwhile, seems to take place in a similarly uneasy, domestic space

where the intimacy of the interior has become warped. "There is this idea to represent the domestic in several layers," he says. "You could experience several layers at the same time: you have the panther in the room and you have the panther in the doll's house that is as small as your finger. The idea of scale is really shifted and you're not really sure anymore what scale you are really looking at. It's more disturbing and frightening, this sense

of scale." The innocence of those childhood cartoons – and by extension childhood itself – disintegrates in this excess.



Untitled, 2013

Hand-sewn fabric over wire and steel armature, glue, PVC pipe, cotton batting, faux fur, feathers, steel bolts, cast resin, latex and polyfoam, clothing and accessories  
203 x 86 x 147 cm



“I think everybody has this fear of your house being invaded or being attacked or broken into or being somehow abused,” Melgaard goes on. “In this show this domesticated space is being abused and at the same time integrated with these new layers of things that are somehow imitating other things.”

The domestic excess is partly expressed through pattern and texture. Textiles and material cover the whole exhibition that could be a messy teenage boy’s bedroom or a crack den. The seats and sofas are made from odd textiles and knitted plastics. The spaces are full of animal prints, African prints, turbans of towels and sweat-shirts. Is there an element of camp here? “I’m interested in the different qualities and the different feels to the fabrics. I’m interested in what’s the readymade and what’s not the readymade. Some of the fabrics are blankets that I’ve been designing myself. I work with this company called Røros Tweed in Norway. I’m interested in the transparency of fabric, that you have something behind the fabric. It sort of evolves what you see, extends what you see.”

Melgaard’s domestic interests were something he pushed in his last collaborative architectural show at the ICA London. Yet this is more a lion’s den than a tidy Scandinavian home. Animal references also ran through the show, with the panther itself is a psychedelic, camp avatar of these references. “It becomes a

representation of all kinds of things – like a tiger roaming, a tiger as a symbol of power, a tiger as a symbol of something dying, of something extinct, of something we have lost, something that can attack you.”

That hint of violence is reinforced by the subtext of suicide or death. “The three wall paintings in the show from Michael Haneke film ‘Amour’, which show the idea of ageing as some kind of nightmare,” Melgaard says. “The sort of horror of seeing someone deteriorating without being able to do anything about it. I think the banners represent another side of that process much earlier. I thought they were attractive and super-gay stereotypes so I mixed them together with the cut-outs in metal with black panthers. They were meant to be hanging like a stage set, like stage curtains in front of some of the paintings and in front of objects, so they serve as a kind of veil.”

And what, in the end, is behind that veil? A very complex, post-pop representation of a cracked, drugged, male identity in pain and crisis – an engaging and, strangely enough, entertaining one. In Bjarne Melgaard is an artist expressing the fears of ageing while drawing on the psychedelia of a generation’s lost childhood. The shark fin water-wallpaper that surrounds the entire show hints at that danger, and the inevitability of the end.



Untitled, 2013

Figure: Hand-sewn fabric over wire and steel armature, glue, PVC pipe, cotton batting, bismuth crystals, faux fur, feathers, steel bolts, cast resin, latex and polyfoam, clothing and accessories  
Mound: Wood, wire, fibreglass, cast resin, Pepto-Bismol® packaging, Pepto-Bismol® Chewable Tablets, polymer clay, fabric, and strobe light  
183 x 97 x 152 cm

BJARNE MELGAARD'S WORK CAN BE VIEWED AT THE 12TH BIENNALE DE LYON: "MEANWHILE... SUDDENLY, AND THEN", UNTIL JANUARY 5, 2014. WWW.BIENNALEDELYON.COM AND AT "9 ARTISTS" AT WALKER ART CENTER, MINNEAPOLIS, UNTIL FEBRUARY 16, 2014. WWW.WALKERART.ORG