

Bjarne Melgaard on introspection, Instagram and escaping the New York art scene

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Installation view of Bjarne Melgaard's 'Bodyparty (Substance Paintings)' at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London

No stranger to controversy, Bjarne Melgaard has 'no clue' how London audiences will react to his latest exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac – and he's both 'excited and nervous' about it. 'Of course I care about the reception to the work – particularly because these 14 paintings are some of my most introspective yet,' he says. 'The works are about personal archetypes. Oh, and the embrace of male sexuality, of course.' That much assaults the senses on entering the gallery. Covered in phallic references, and scrawlings akin to poetry, the works feel like a glorious, homoerotic outcry.

If that wasn't enough, they also comment, philosophically, quietly, 'on the passing of time'. He first started painting the large, 80 x 180 cm canvases while in New York a year ago. He had lived there for a decade, and had become disillusioned with what he calls an 'inward-looking, self-reflective art scene'. It was time to see 'what else was out there', so he moved back home to Oslo, where the scene is 'smaller, quieter and less tiring'.



Untitled, 2017-18, by Bjarne Melgaard. Courtesy of Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac

The paintings went with him. He finished them in another time zone, six months later, layering paint upon paint; writing upon figure; meaning upon meaning. The result is weirdly, wonderfully Melgaard. Think penises erupting from foreheads, giant purple crying eyes, stick figures engaging in fellatio orgies, rendered in two stylistically different (yet both uncompromisingly 'Melgaard') hands.

The strangeness doesn't stop there – for more, look to Ropac's Instagram. In an innovative digital project pioneered by the gallery's senior global director Julia Peyton-Jones – called 'Life Killed my Chihuahua' – Melgaard has taken over the gallery's Instagram account for the duration of the exhibition. The feed promises to grant us a unique insight into Melgaard's artistic practice and the loneliness of being an artist, chronicling Oslo's contemporary counterculture. Prominent creatives from the city's thriving underground scene will be showcased, including Admir Batlak, Victoria Duffee, and Silicone Works.

The two sections of the exhibition (though separated by the virtual and physical realms) are connected by their 'approach to time', says Melgaard. 'The Instagram takeover is a little like a time capsule, documenting art. The paintings work similarly. They incorporate of a change in stylistic approach that embodies both the effects and results of time passing.'

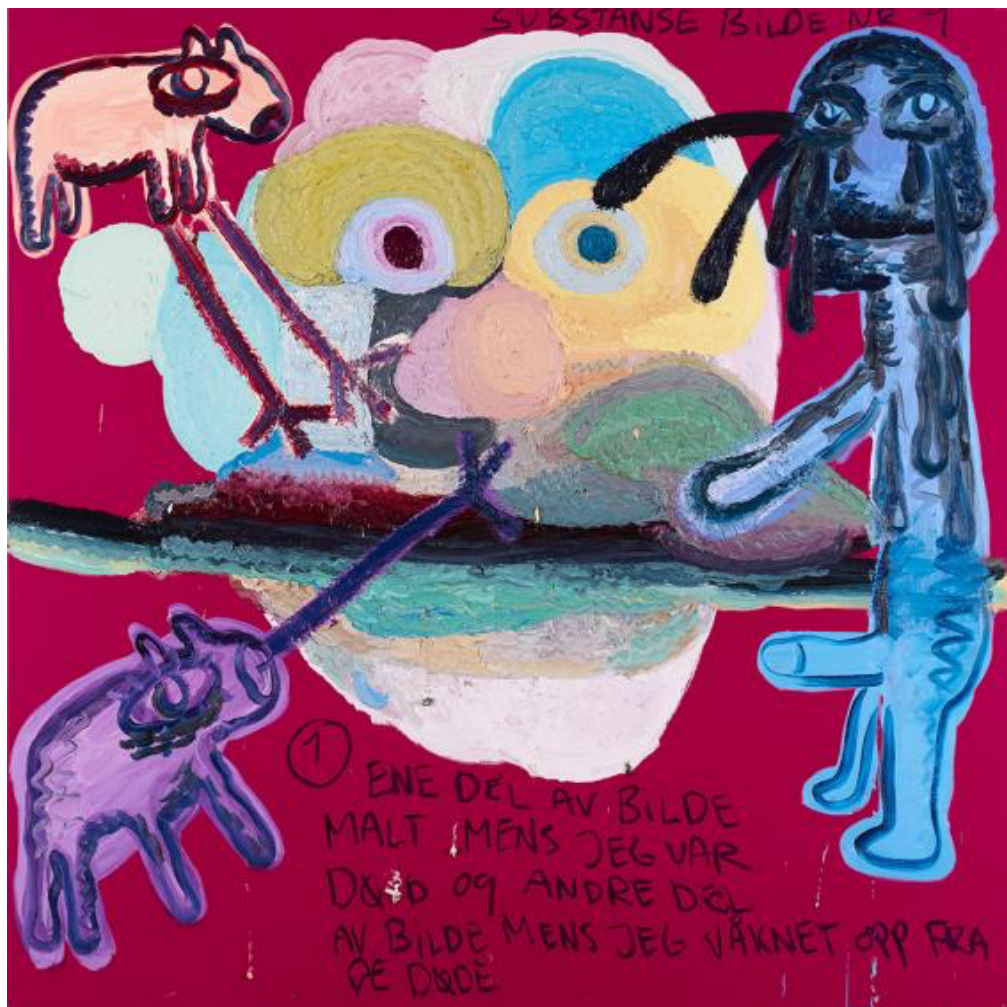
Some of the works feel joyful, others oppressive. All of them are a unique documentation of the artist's highly original creative process, and we look forward to seeing how the world of Instagram reacts.



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