

Est. 1902

home • artnews

His Struggle: Norwegian Mischief-Maker Bjarne Melgaard Meets Edvard Munch in Oslo



BY **MAIKA POLLACK**



February 3, 2015
3:34pm

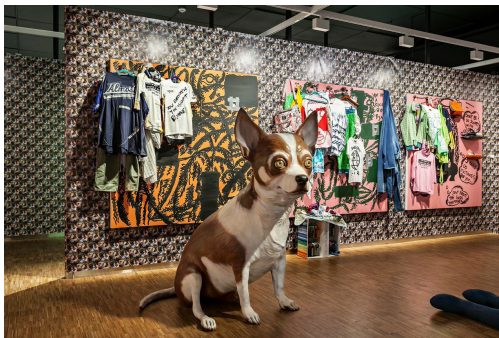


Installation view of 'Melgaard + Munch: The End of It All Has Already Happened' at the **Munch Museum** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/munch-museum/>) in Oslo. COURTESY THE MUNCH MUSEUM (4)

“He’s a very crazy man,” my Norwegian taxi

driver, Viktor, told me on the way to the Munch Museum in Oslo. “Makes a lot of scandals.” He was speaking of **Bjarne Melgaard** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/bjarne-melgaard/>), who is Norway’s most infamous living artist, like the notorious **Edvard Munch** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/edvard-munch/>) before him. Following a glut of recent shows in Manhattan (intravenous-drug-use-orgy-themed dollhouses at Luxembourg & Dayan, a sprawling display of unprotected gay sex at Gavin Brown’s, the live white tiger at Ramekin Crucible gallery), Melgaard has returned to his native land to take part in a two-person show at the Munch Museum, curated by Lars Toft-Eriksen.

The show, titled “**The End of It Has Already**



An installation view with work by Melgaard.

Happened,” (<http://munchmuseet.no/en/exhibitions/melgaard-munch>) brings together two artists—one historical, one contemporary—who can easily be compared by their provocative bios and subject matter. But it also makes a good case for the role contemporary curatorial practice can play in bringing verve

to that often mausoleum-like of institutions, the monographic museum. Known for its collection of tens of thousands of Munchs and a high-profile 2004 theft of two paintings, the museum is presenting the show as the first in a series of curatorial pairings aimed at bringing new audiences—local and international—through its doors.



An installation view with work by Melgaard and Munch.

While explicit sex and glamorous nihilism may link the two artists on a superficial level, the

curator and Melgaard push the comparisons with a hang which literally layers Munchs on Melgaards or, in a few cases, obscures Munchs by Melgarads. In one room there are seven Munch paintings on a Melgaard wallpaper backdrop. Yet it's never difficult to tell one from the other. Munch looks great in his paintings and woodcuts—he's a beautiful painter, with swirling colors and deft strokes capturing the pattern of a dress, or the Nordic ocean. Melgaard pushes politics harder, with a video interview with Leo Bersani on gay rights. His sculptures, life-size scarecrow-like dolls in fright wigs, read Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*; his paintings are more the skeiny, scribbly abstraction of Asger Jorn than the haunted landscapes of Munch.

While
heavy-
handed

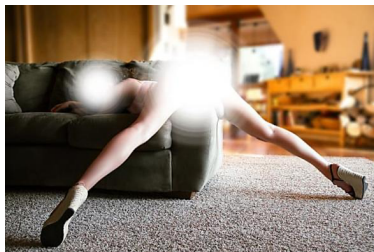
An installation view with work by
Melgaard and Munch.

anachronistic curatorial gestures can certainly backfire, this show worked. It's not just that, as the stronger artist, Munch has no trouble dealing with an influx of proximate Melgaards. Munch's painting, in fact, looked great, and was represented both plentifully and lovingly. It was also that the show seemed to stage a confrontation between larger issues: history and the present, the dead and the living, art history and contemporary art. In the show's final room, the curator placed the museum's 1910 version of Munch's most famous painting, *The Scream*, in a double-thick frame behind a Melgaard. The photo visible in the frame is a Melgaard still of the grimacing mien of a man dying of autoerotic asphyxiation. People clustered around. It's Melgaard's *Erased De Kooning*, a magnificent act of symbolic Oedipal patricide, and the symbolic heart of the exhibition.

Which is not to say the show is perfect. There's a dumb entry gag in which the curator has put a rubber hose from the museum's archives on display on a plinth in a Curating 101 ("What *is* a work of art?") gesture. A room full of studio-fresh

Melgaards unmixed with Munch, the fright-wig dolls now affixed to paintings (“I hate people,” reads one) felt like a mere advertisement for his upcoming show at Thaddaeus Ropac in Paris. But overall, the exhibition, with its collision of the 19th- and 21st centuries, is largely both smart and subversive. Upcoming pairings feature Jasper Johns, Asger Jorn, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Vincent van Gogh, among others. At the opening, New York dealer Gavin Brown wandered, seemingly nonplussed, among the paintings on view. “Are they any good?” he asked of the Melgaards, which seemed like a fair question, but not one anyone else was asking that night.

More From ARTnews



artists

3 Million People Follow Artist Leah Schrager’s Cam-Girl Instagram Project. In a New Interview, She Explains Why...

Leah Schrager on her Instagram Persona, Ona; censorship; and more. The artist is currently in a show at the Museum of Sex.

BY ANA FINEL HONIGMAN



artists

The ARTnews Accord: Painters Peter Saul and Jamian Juliano-Villani Talk Humor in Art, Life in the Studio, and...

For "The ARTnews Accord," painters Peter Saul and Jamian Juliano-Villani talk humor in art, life in the studio, and more.

BY ANDY BATTAGLIA

BY ANDY D'AGLIA



artists

Mike Cloud Invents a New Kind of Portrait Painting

With his new paintings, artist Mike Cloud tries to envision a form of portraiture that isn't exploitative.

BY ANNE DORAN



artists

Artist Chemi Rosado-Seijo Was Asked to Help Create a MoMA Audio Guide. He Let the Security Workers Do the Talking.

In a new series of audio guides for the Museum of Modern Art, artist Chemi Rosado-Seijo lets the guards do the talking.

BY ALEX GREENBERGER



artists

Dan Attoe's Show Was Closed by the Coronavirus. He's Using Art as a Way to Cope.

After his show at the Hole in New York was closed because of the coronavirus, Dan Attoe started using his art as a coping mechanism.

BY ANA FINEL HONIGMAN



Copyright © 2020 Penske Business Media, LLC. All Rights reserved.
Powered by WordPress.com VIP