

MUSAC brings artist pair Elmgreen & Dragset to Spain with *Trying to Remember What We Once Wanted to Forget*, their largest show to date



Title: *Trying to Remember What We Once Wanted to Forget*

Artists: Elmgreen & Dragset

Michael Elmgreen (Copenhagen, 1961) and Ingar Dragset (Trondheim, 1969)

Curator: Agustín Pérez Rubio

Coordinator: Eneas Bernal

Venue: MUSAC, Halls 1, 4, 5, 6 and Hall 1 courtyard

Dates: 31 January – 21 June 2009

Celebrated Scandinavian artists Elmgreen & Dragset are to open their latest exhibition on 31 January 2009 at MUSAC. In an extensive site-specific project made up of twelve striking large-format installations, six of which they have developed specifically for MUSAC, the artist pair shall take over a total floor space in excess of 2,500 m², making their forthcoming show a milestone in their career, if only in terms of its sheer size. Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, working with their curator, have developed a project that tackles the fine line between the *personal* and the *collective*, exploring the problems we face when our voracious *public* sphere encroaches on the *private*. *Trying to remember...* plunges viewers into a domestic environment, where they are confronted with the idea of community and with the ambivalence between nostalgia and desire.

ELMGREEN & DRAGSET

Michael Elmgreen (Copenhagen, Denmark, 1961) and Ingar Dragset (Trondheim, Norway, 1969) started earning themselves a name as artistic partners in the early 1990s with their socially and politically engaged action art and installations. Amongst their most renowned pieces are their *Powerless Structures*, a series of works developed over time where the artists examine the concept of space and its multiple possibilities in terms of meaning and function. By inverting these terms, in the sense defined by Foucault, they put forth a compelling critique of art systems as seen through architecture, revealing a number of gender issues related to gay identity and aspects of youth and art-world subcultures. The issue of constructing meanings both in the private and public or institutional spheres, and their sexual connotations therefore stand as a key theme in Elmgreen & Dragset's work. By transferring a given space into a new context that redefines its meaning and simultaneously applying calculated interventions to the way that very meaning operates, Elmgreen & Dragset manage to strip spaces of their conventional significance and open up new possibilities in terms of perception and appreciation. Their work thus provides a compelling demonstration of the alterability of established structures.

Their acclaimed shows at Tate Modern (London), Bonen Foundation (New York), Serpentine Gallery (London), Marfa (L.A.), and their contributions to a number of biennials, including Sao Paulo, Venice, Sydney, Yokohama, Berlin, Istanbul or Skulptur Projekte Munster 08 have earned them leading awards including the Berlin Hamburger Bahnhof's *Preis der Nationalgalerie für Junge Kunst*, solidly establishing their presence on the international art scene. Based in Berlin, they are currently working as artists/ curators for the Danish and Norwegian pavilions at the forthcoming Venice Biennale, where for the first time in history two countries will put forth a joint project.

TRYING TO REMEMBER WHAT WE ONCE WANTED TO FORGET. THE EXHIBITION.

Elmgreen & Dragset, in close cooperation with their curator, have developed a project for MUSAC that tackles the fine line between the *personal* and the *collective*, exploring the problems we face when our voracious *public* sphere encroaches on the *private*. *Trying to remember...* attempts to involve the viewers, confronting them with the ambivalence between nostalgia and desire and forcing them to peer into a private or domestic environment from their standpoint in a public space.

Alongside their critical perspective on the system adopted from a position of otherness, the artists add a certain exercise in “looking back”. *Trying to Remember...* builds on the discourse that underpinned *This is the first day of my life* at the Malmo Kunsthalle (2007), still pragmatically compromising, yet now bolstered by a degree of self-revisionism. The pair engages in a close examination of their lives so far, in order to construct an ongoing present, which they achieve by inquiring into the domesticated private space we all have in common. This backward gaze draws less on irony and humour than their previous work, being more openly driven by existential angst. The artists focus on our most intimate doubts, including miscommunication, loneliness, isolation, the morning after, the trials and tribulations we face in constructing our identities, or our dashed hopes and fears. These are the themes that the artists are concerned with in their artistic maturity, certainly present in their previous work but now brought to the fore as the very core of their show. *Trying to Remember...* is haunted by a more cautious, reflexive approach to life, still touched by their trademark *joie de vivre* but more acutely aware of the hangover that living leaves us with – an enlightened gaze on how these individualistic times affect each individuals.

From the very first moment, *Trying to Remember...* sets out to destabilise the viewer. The point of entry forces the public to choose their own route through the show, deciding whether or not to step into the domestic spaces created specifically for the show that house each installation. The artists have created a collective transition space that confronts aspects of intimacy (the small domestic structures that hold each installation) with the collective idea of private space, where architecture and domestic space become the guiding vector from one episode to the next, combining microhistories that define the way we see ourselves within the community. This is an idea that runs through the entire exhibition, made up of twelve installations, many of which were conceived and produced specifically for the show, alongside previous works, displayed in line with the artists and curator’s overall approach to the project. Stepping into the exhibition space is to plunge into a succession of situations where a set of architectural and sensorial factors generate a confrontation between the public and the private. Hotel corridors with vestiges of an event; a courtyard where a party really did take place as part of the exhibition project, with the leftovers becoming a part of the artwork itself; domestic interiors where we become entangled in the owners’ intimate relationships; children gripped by a fear of the unknown; rooms haunted by solitary beings whose sense of loneliness is not soothed by digital communication overkill; dreams and desires that make the trappings of our daily lives fade away in our yearning for the other; chambers where a given time is the same in different places; labyrinths crammed with hundreds of images of our past, where we become engulfed in a surge of information and lose our sense of past and present; or two lovers suspended in the vacuum in an endless search for the “other” – all force us to question our experience of who we are, what has happened and where we stand.

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