

Leading up to an exhibition the artist engages in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

The conversation aims to get an insight on how the initial ideas for the project develop, to paint a picture of the otherwise untraceable choices in the artist's process, practice and the making of this exhibition.

Rasmus Myrup
in conversation
with

Evan Moffitt

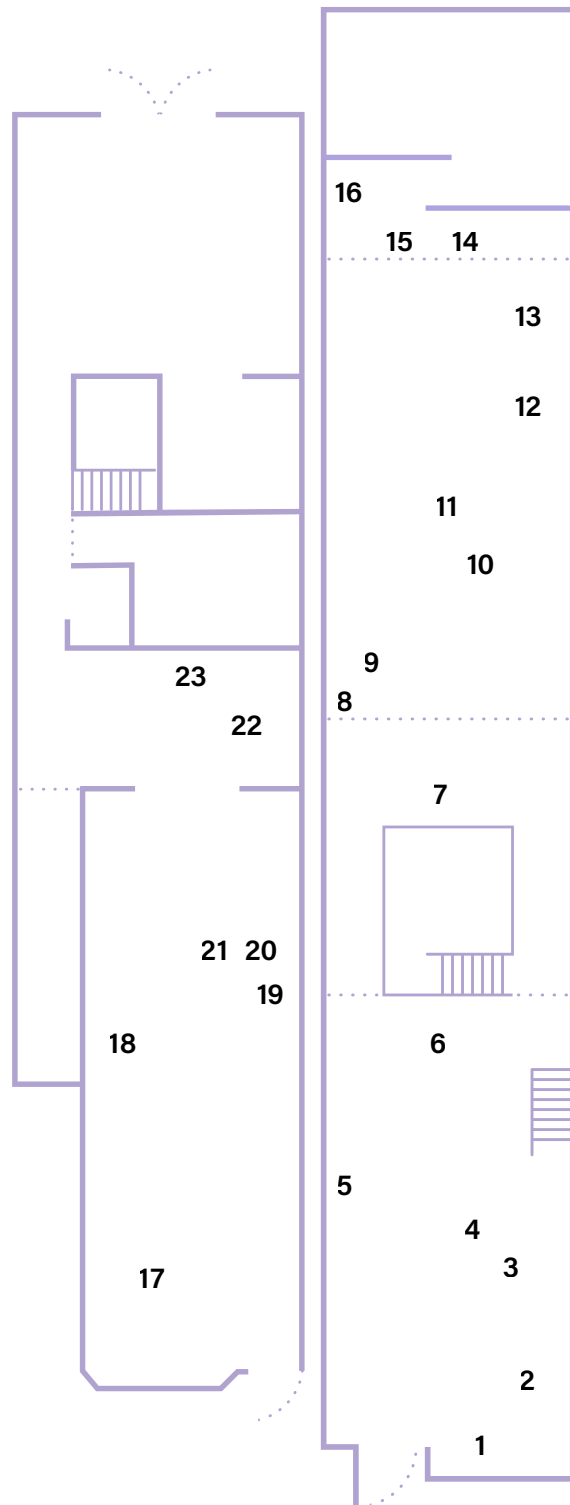
As part of the
exhibition

**SALON DES
REFUSÉS**

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1. **The Nix** [*Näcken*]
made of reeds
2. **Elli** [*Elle*]
made of lichen
3. **Saggy Tits** [*Slattenpatten*]
made of driftwood
4. **Oat Sissy** [*Havreskvattet*]
made of oat
5. **Queen Omma** [*Drottning Omma*]
made of ferns and rowan
wood from Omsberg
6. **Forest Bussy** [*Skogsbusen*]
made of wood
7. **That Bitch** [*Kællingen*]
made of sand and rocks
from the Faroe Islands
8. **Lake maid** [*Sjöfrun*]
made of water from Lake Aspen
9. **Leaferess** [*Lövjerska*]
made of leaves
10. **Hervard**
made of bones
11. **Shoe-Ella** [*Sko-Ella*]
made of razor clams
12. **Forest Executive** [*Skogsrå*]
made of birch
13. **Giant** [*Jätte*]
made of moss
14. **The Milk Hare** [*Bjära/Mjölkhara*]
made of milk cartons
15. **Yule Goat** [*Julbock*]
made of grass
16. **Syn**
made of glass
17. **Lindworm** [*Lindorm*]
made of linden
18. **Queen Hoe** [*Drottning Hacka*]
made of fieldstones from Säve
19. **Gefion**
made of soil from Vänern
20. **Nisse** [*Tomte*]
made of nuts
21. **Idun**
made of apples
22. **Lantern Lad** [*Lyktgubbe*]
made of lights
23. **Merthem** [*Sjöjunghen*]
made of eelgrass



Rasmus Myrup in conversation with **Evan Moffitt** As part of the exhibition **SALON DES REFUSÉS**

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Rasmus Myrup

Rasmus Myrup (Born 1991, Copenhagen) is a Danish artist, whose work seeks to explore how the experience of being human is malleable – and how susceptible it is; at its worst to manipulation and at its best to change. With roots in our belonging to the natural realm, Myrup investigates the big narratives of humanity's existence, evolution and history through the lens of small, personal and intimate emotions. Through his sculptures, installations and drawings, he seeks to understand other times, species and worlds – and in that way, everything from Neanderthals to trees or folklore can provide new perspectives on our understanding of death, sex and power. His recent solo exhibitions include *Precoming at O – Overgaden (DK)*, *Vertreibzeit at Kunstverein Göttingen (DE)* and *Slut [The End] at Jack Barrett (US)*.

Evan Moffitt

Evan Moffitt is a writer, critic, and investigative journalist whose work has been featured in publications such as *The New York Times*, *T Magazine*, *Financial Times*, *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Art Review*, *Aperture*, *4 Columns* and *Frieze*, where he was formerly Senior Editor. He has co-authored books on numerous artists, including Hélio Oiticica, Jack Pierson, and Salman Toor. He is currently an MA candidate in Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths University. He lives in London.

21 December 2023

Dear Rasmus,

Greetings from gloomy Amsterdam, where I've come for a quick pre-Christmas work trip. It's a far cry from that sunny patch of forest in Fire Island where we met several years ago (how many was it, five? Six? Covid was such a distorter of time.) How are you?

I was excited to hear about your show at 1646, which isn't so far from here, in The Hague. When I heard the title *Salon des Refusés*, I thought of course of that notorious 1863 exhibition in Paris that featured the artists rejected from the prestigious main Salon, among them Manet, Courbet, and Whistler. A lofty historical reference, but also a little self-effacing. Are you making your own pile of castoffs – or castaways? What can we expect to find in your "bin"?

Of course, rejection frees us to live life on our own terms. As Groucho Marx put it, "I wouldn't want to belong to any club that would have me as a member..."

Love,
Evan

3 January 2024

Dearest Evan,

Doomy, gloomy greetings to you too, from a snowstorm-riddled Copenhagen. The year is off to a good start... Oh, gosh - I think it was 2019 that we met in the warm, moist summer forest? I'm doing well, I'd say – things are congealing and amalgamating, so all according to the synthesis-plan hehe.

Yes, the title is, as you say, an art historical reference, for those who are into that, but it is also very much a logical structure; one in which a pseudo-group is formed by not being in a group. A negative (structural) definition, which is used here as a positive (vibe) one. The sculptures I'm presenting in the exhibition are all based on Norse mythology, South Scandi folklore and Nordic history. They are all figures and folk who were seen as being "outside" of civilization, culture and/or human-ness. Whoever lived outside the flicker of the bonfires, hearths or candles lit back then... Importantly, though, I imagine that they – much like us – have not remained frozen in time, but continued to live alongside us. They just gave up on even dealing with us humans. In my mind, one of the characters formed a physical location called *Salon des Refusés*, which is a sort of shape-shifting communal space for clubbing, hanging out, therapy and... everything that a collectively marginalised, hurt and traumatised conglomeration of folk could need. They, as a group, are *Salon des Refusés*. Just now, they live outside the glow of the flickering LED candle, instead.

Most of the figures have not only been ousted, but have even been forgotten. They are not immediately familiar to every person from southern Scandinavia, but more so from the proverbial "bin" as you mention. Side-gags from epic sagas, or off-hand mentions in folkloric footnotes – all with rich back-stories, though, that can be uncovered or inferred. Figures we forgot that we remember. Outsiders in many ways. And... speaking of "outsiders"; most, if not all of them literally consist of "the outside". The different elements and biomes which they represent and embody, is, again, tied

to their “contrast” to the civilised, that which can be ordered... In this vain, it is also interesting to point out that most of the figures would identify as female, since a lot of these tales directly link women to “the dangerous, untamable”, which is sadly a later misinterpretation of the fact the power that emanated from animistic traditions as far back as before the European bronze age was distinctly linked to womanhood. As a Danish proto-religious writer once put it “the skirt-regime of prehistory.” There are clear examples of how misogynistic structures, such as the medieval catholic church, have actively put their “spin” on tales of natural female empowerment. But also cases where the untouchable grandeur of the figures shine though, against all odds. Many of the same things can be said for the queer figures, too... of which there are MANY!

Ay, as you can see, I can go on and on about these stories, they are so fascinating to me as a prism of our world today, and the way things are. Ironically, as per the quote above, “I wouldn’t want to belong to be in any club that would have me as a member...”, this exhibition will leave all us humans outside the door of a literal club, in which we cannot go... They, the outcasts, are able to go in, and we, the boring humans that treated them like shit for centuries, are rejected at the door. When I was little, I would sometimes stand in the forest and think; are there any elves around? Are they waiting for me to leave, so they can go about with their day? Am I interrupting? And in some ways, I think I just felt so far removed from the rest of the beautifully linked forest around me... I was the outsider. And maybe that was okay... the forest was better off without me... right?

I hope 2024 is treating you with all the love that it should.

I for one, am sending you lots from here.

All the best,

Rasmus Myrup

5 January 2024

Dear Rasmus,

Happy New Year! I’m reading your message in Marseille, where I came – somewhat in vain – to catch a few rays. This morning I went down to the beach, hoping to wash myself of the past year, but the tide was high, the water cold, the shore too rocky. I suppose we can’t rely on nature to do our work for us.

Your email reminds me of Silvia Federici’s classic *Caliban and the Witch*, in which she writes of the “world of female subjects that capitalism had to destroy” – such as the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, etc – in order to control women’s bodies as a means of “primitive accumulation.” Those who didn’t obey the pater familias, the law of patriarchy and reproduction, were seen as a threat to the continuation of labor force.

A “salon” (at least in the sense I first read it) invokes a space of bourgeois leisure that we might assume feudal women couldn’t access, as if there weren’t fields or forests where they could gather and roam free. Medieval witch hunts often made accusations about such gatherings, for what took place outside the domicile also fell beyond the bounds of patriarchal control. I like this idea of a convening in the

wild... A gathering for outsiders of all types seeking liberation from oppressive systems that hang weightily overhead. To take it back to Manet, a *salon sur l’herbe*...

Have you read Arthur Evans’s *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*? It’s a favorite of mine, though contested as a work of academic history on the order of Federici’s. My copy is somewhere in storage in Brooklyn, so I can’t quote it directly, but Evans writes at length of the many goddesses in Bronze Age Europe, and the female forest spirits that remained sacred to communities long after the rise of the Catholic Church, as a fundamentally queer force that undermined the power of patriarchy and, ultimately, of capitalism. Joan of Arc was born near a copse sacred to the Druids, where she often liked to play, and was burned on a pyre of the very same wood. She was fanatically Christian, but we would also probably consider her queer or transgender today. I don’t know what to draw from that except that her inquisitors, who represented not only a patriarchal but a colonial regime, saw the supposed link between her subversive behavior and the natural landscape from which she came as a very real existential threat. Centuries later, there’s still undeniable power to be drawn from that intersection. So, who are some of the figures you’re gathering there? Any favorites?

I can understand your feeling that the forest would be better off without us... It often seems that way. But now, I fear humankind and nature are too inextricably intertwined. We have no choice but to live together, even though it’s we who must change...

xo Evan

8 January 2024

Dear Evan,

HNY! Or... Happy Winter Solstice, as once was the holiday of this time of year here in the north... The time where the elusive sun, as you mention it, was furthest away... Truly that point in the year where you think: It can only get better from here... Well – we can count on nature to do the big stuff - planetary movements and Milankovitch cycles. Day-to-day, or year-to-year variations are a little more fickle heheh. I hope you washed off some other way...

The Federici book you mention is in that same way a macro-look at a nebulous issue, consisting of many an individual node – and the sculptures that I am presenting are more so embodiments of individual instances of this awful oppression. Each of them have been wronged by the hand of hegemony. Take for instance “*Saggy Tits*”, originally from the old Danish [Slattenpatten]...

She is described in a slew of stories as a naked female with elongated... Attributes, running down the beach. Harsher versions have her “draping” her breasts over her shoulders to run faster... We soon discover that she is in fact fleeing from a knight that is chasing her, whom we of course are supposed to side with, as the the epitome of male chivalric warrior ideals. As he rides by, looking for *Saggy Tits*, he asks a young man from the coastal village if he has seen her. “Helpfully” pointing the knight in the right direction, the young man later sees the knight return with *Saggy Tits* bound and draped over the back of the horse. Here, the disgusting obviousness of a

masculine figure in pristine armor atop a horse as a potent power ruling the naked, restricted, governed body of the "unruly heretic" of *Saggy Tits* becomes clear. As a "prize" for helping out the knight, the young man is rewarded the immense privilege of drinking from the breast of *Saggy Tits*, and through her milk, he gains super-human strength....

This is where another aspect steps forward. The story betrays that even though there is no narrative sympathy with *Saggy Tits*, as a result of this being a consciously malignant retelling of a story that involved her in a positive capacity, there is still a reverence for her innate, undeniable power, as you also mention. She is powerless in the realm of armored warriors, but super powerful in the realm of magic and primordial maternal breastfeeding. This is where it becomes clear, as I see it, that this is a male-washing of a Terra Mater kind of figure...

The large-breasted female figure was and has been represented in many cultures as a symbol of fertility and prosperity (just think Venus of Willendorf, for one...), and breastfeeding as a near magical act of supplying life is even engrained in Christian imagery. Many a gold trinket and figurine from the early Iron Age have been found in Southern Scandinavia, representing an omnipresent female deity with voluminous attributes, and even with the emergence of the more formalized Norse religion, she remained potent and revered. It wasn't until the arrival of Christianity that both she and her breasts were "deflated" and "defamed" to the point of even her name being reformed. One of the more emblematic renditions of *Saggy Tits* is actually carved into the front of a pulpit in a rural Danish church...

...In my rendition of her, however, she is made from driftwood, from the beaches that she is always linked to in the stories. A material that itself feels like a magical apparition, with its sanded edges and holes, and an old Norse symbol of primordial life... Her face is stitched with shiny, silvery yarn that gives her an enigmatic facial expression, that one can project onto. Her outfit, I wanted to express her attitude towards her current fate. She has reappropriated her moniker and is living as "*Saggy Tits*": I made her a silvery, "soft armor" denim dress, with a bust area that continues into a tubular padded section, that drapes over her shoulder - leaving us guessing if that is in fact her breasts, draped over her shoulders, as in the story. Leaving us to deal with the ambiguousness, she is just living in her own power, resting in the fact that SHE knows who she is....

...She knows that she is more of a result of people's projections and need for hubristic narratives of a once gleaming, glowing Iron Age celebrity, defamed and fallen from the peak, into the palpable power of the papal paparazzi. Think a Y2K star gone tabloid front page fodder. Her life continued outside the public eye, as a professor of philosophy, where she is especially interested in the mad axeman critique of Kantian Moral philosophy, having lived through a similar experience... She is aiming to marry quantum physics and moral philosophy to explain how there is no TRUE good, only the good of an action performed and observed. That guy on the beach should not have told her stalker where she was heading when she fled the topless beach that day... thank the gods she got out of there in time... Those gods being her friends, the literal goddesses, her fellow Salon des Refusés folk...

But... I digress... this is just a peek at the personality of one of these figures - all of which is not at all necessary to know when meeting her irl. Just like any person you meet in your daily life, you can't know all about them, but only see who they are, right here, right now - and extrapolate from that. This is why I'm so intrigued by clothing and its potential for silent, impressionistic storytelling...

The problem is, in my opinion, not that we have become too intertwined, but that we never perceived ourselves as detangled from Nature at all. I think I was experiencing a kind of separation anxiety back then in the forest. Lusting to be part of the whole I knew to be myself...

Kisses,

Rasmus

10 January 2024

Rasmus,

I hadn't heard of Slattenpatte before, but already I feel I've known her all my life. The representation of her you mention, on the front of the lectern at the church in Vejlø, depicts her with a dog's face and tail, but she holds a blooming flower in her lap - perhaps the lusciously suggestive Danish rose. There's a Latin transcription above her, too, "Vult Prostertere Daemon", like a call to exorcise the wildness and sensuality within ourselves. Humans too often delegitimize their desires with expressions of repulsion or shame. Slattenpatte, I imagine, has no time for such nonsense... If she runs still, it's because she has somewhere more important to be.

The other day, my boyfriend told me a story about visiting a witch doctor in rural Bulgaria about his sleep paralysis, which he had been suffering from for years. He was staying with a friend's family who live on a farm there, a poor district where there isn't much access to medical care - not that his doctors in the UK had been able to do anything for him anyway. He described her as a kind of Slattenpatte figure with a mischievous and knowing air. She dipped a ladle in a bucket of molten lead and moved it in circles around his head before dumping it in another bucket filled with ice water, where it made shapes that she said represented the toxins leaving his body. Imagine the hot lead completing its orbit before his eyes like a glowing planet, and the sudden hiss of steam when it solidified... He said he never had sleep paralysis again. It's called molybdomancy, apparently, and it's common in certain parts of central and eastern Europe, as well as Finland.

You mention the Milankovitch cycles; one, the Earth's orbit, is known as "eccentricity". I love this term. There's an essential strangeness, a kind of magic, to the most routine processes of the cosmos. You don't have to disavow science to believe that it doesn't explain this quality away. String theory and dark matter are ways of grasping at this ineffable mystery, where the more we learn, the more is left unanswered... Kant called this "transcendence." I feel it whenever I encounter a great work of art. Time stops. The Earth slows on its axis. It seems like the greatest thing we can hope to touch, or achieve...

xo Evan

15 January 2024

Dear Evan,

I actually meant another wooden representation of her in a pulpit in Næstved, which is apparently not online, but the beastly version you mention is also wild. And yes - totally, the only thing that gets her running now is a subway that's about to leave... In many ways, just like I imagine the other figures, she has tried to "reclaim" something about herself. *The Milk Hare* (or as she is known in Swedish, Mjölkhara or Bjära) is constantly living in the shadows of a teen impulse she had... Just like... If your friend Susan broke her arm in high school and your mom still remembers her as Broken Arm Susan... People, however, thought that in a fit of jealousy, they could conjure *The Milk Hare* from a sacrifice of silver, a drop of blood and a bit of your soul - and that the "evil" spirit hare hop on over to your well to do neighbor, suck all the milk from their cows and hop on back to you and vomit it into your milk jugs. All this, however, rests one mistake *The Milk Hare* made to drink milk straight from the udder when she was going back from a drunken night out... She has tried to escape her little faux pas by studying abroad in Paris, and she is now milking that any chance she gets. The second someone says "croissant" or even tangentially refers to France, she has to let everyone know that she "used to live there"... even if it was just two semesters... I think she is desperate to escape the bonds of who she used to be, and rebrand herself. Reclaim her own identity, somehow...

In the exhibition, you will see *The Milk Hare* wearing a t-shirt that can subtly

start conversations about Paris, but she sort of forgot that she might get cold, so she ended up borrowing a jacket from *The Forest Bussy*, who was more than happy to lend him his rhinestoned distressed denim trench-coat, since it really goes with his outfit, and made sense for his "entrance", but at this point, he was more bothered by the fact that it covered his greatest asset: his ass. *The Forest Bussy* (or, as he is known in Swedish, Skogbusen, or Skogsknarren) is a folkloric figure that is the embodiment of an adversarial trickster forest. People used to be creeped out by him, and scared by the creaking sound it makes when trees blowing in the wind would rub together and stretch, which they would call "his giggle". In my understanding of him, however, he is just a cute faggot with a difficult yet infectious laugh. The kind you can hear from the other side of the room. He's a busy bussy and walks at superspeed (especially when he's carrying an iced latte), so the distress on his denim is both an aesthetic choice and a result of his formidable legs rapidly rubbing together... He is also the owner of a formidable bussy, as his name suggests - which has been appreciated by a fair few through the years. There are many stories of men who got "lost in the woods" after they "sat on a wooden stump" in the forest... It was said that he could turn into any kind of wood, and that they would get "confused" when they interacted with his magical branches and cavities in the trunks. They said he tricked them... One man was once found naked in the woods, straddling a stump, and he said that *The Forest Bussy* had tricked him into thinking he was at home in bed with his wife, so he had undressed... That stump was *The Forest Bussy's* face... but I digress...

As you can see, I can go on and on - and I actually will at a performance in conjunction with the exhibition where I'll be telling all these stories...

Oh, wow - molten lead! It's sort of similar to the NYE tradition in Austria... It sounds like a truly magical experience... And truly like something that would be under the banner of the "transcendence" you mention. A Socratic notion, almost. I think, for me, the beauty of exploring and working with the folklore and mythology of the deep past is exactly a "letting go" of sense and logic, but at the same time, keeping a tie to our reality. I guess a good notion to round off our conversation could be that of Euhemerism. A way of thinking about or interpreting mythology and folklore as being derived from actual history, that was then blown out of proportion or misinterpreted... The goal for some Euhemerists could be to uncover the "true" people that originated the myths, but I find it even more intriguing to use the mechanism to find "something human" in the figures. Ask how it would truly feel to have been here since the world began... Probably makes you pretty blasé about the small stuff, right? Or ask if it isn't uncomfortable to be a giant in a small world...

Thank you so much for your time, Evan, and I send you all the very, very best from a frostbitten Denmark.

Rasmus