

KNUT ÅSDAM SHORT ON WORKS

Knut Åsdam has been active with exhibitions, publications and broadcast on the international art-scene for more than 10 years. He has exhibited widely at Tate Britain, London, Venice Biennial, Kunsthalle Bern, Istanbul Biennial, Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo, Manifesta7, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, P.S.1 MoMa, NYC, and Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, among others. Feature articles on his work have been published in *Artforum*, *Grey Room*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Untitled Magazine* and many more.

In a strongly visual and spatial manner with emphasis on the experience of the viewer, Åsdam utilizes sound, film, video, photography and architecture to investigate the politics of space and the boundaries of subjectivity. These concerns are often related to themes of dissidence and to analysis of space in terms of desire, usage and history.

Four categories are essential to Åsdam's work; 'Speech', 'Living', 'Sexualities' and 'Struggle'.

Speech: Throughout Knut Åsdam's video-, film- and radio-work he has been interested in how subjectivity is formed through speech acts — either through actual speech or through other forms of self-articulation like clothing, gestures and routines. Many of his works express an interest for the performative aspects of speech and for how meaning is temporarily stabilized through repetition, inscription and reinscription. In many of his works, we find a struggle of balance between affirmative speech, the kind of speech that seeks to affirm a subject, and the depressed speech that seeks to dissolve the subject.

Living: Åsdam is interested in architecture, place and social dynamics, not as formal exercises but rather as aspects of our everyday lives. As when dealing with questions of speech, Åsdam's works on living and identity implicates a similar understanding for the performative aspects of meaning; how a word or a thing's meaning is determined through our use of it, and how this implicates possibilities for change and disturbance. In Åsdam's work there is a strong interest for the interplay of fantasy and narration in lived experience, and for the relation between everyday life and the economic and political environment.

Sexualities: The plurality of sexual and gendered experience is fundamental for Åsdam's construction of characters. The subjects of his work are always gendered and sexualized subjects. He is involved in the everyday contestations of sexuality and gender, as this relates to the body and to urban spaces. At the same time he looks at the desiring subject as a base for creating open public spaces, as well as enclosed or suppressed spaces in society.

Struggle: The concept of struggle is important to Åsdam's work, not only in a political sense, but also as a way of understanding how 'speech' (subject formation), 'living' (the meaning of the everyday) and 'sexualities' (the meaning of our bodies) are affirmed or contested in our everyday, involving both psychological and social processes.

In the 21 min award-winning film *Filter City* (2003), Knut Åsdam relates the interconnectedness and relationship between two women and the urban spaces they inhabit and use. Through a series of carefully poised and visually striking scenes moving in a slow deep pace, the relationship between the women develops through placement and through their different use of language. They seem to be talking to each other, yet they are also talking past each other. The urban spaces that they inhabit are "theirs" to use, but also out of their

economic and social control. In relation to their surroundings and to each other, one character attempts – but ultimately fails – in adopting a searching and affirmative use of language, while the other mainly uses depressed speech to control the relationship between herself and the other.

The 12 min film *Blissed* (2005), follows four people in interaction within an urban environment. The film was motivated by two tropes: one is that of friendship manifested through language, the other is economy as manifested through speech, environment, and architecture. In the film, the dialogues and the environment might seem oblivious to each other, but they are in fact closely intertwined. *Blissed* is rhythmically constructed in a series of actions, pauses, breaks and transitions.

The 18 minute film *Finally* (2006), deals with questions of history, place and violence. Shot within a historic setting in Salzburg, Austria, *Finally* researches the area in between narrative film and the filmic analysis of space within contemporary art. The three main characters in *Finally* fight violently and repeatedly in the film, but there is not much in the narrative that seems to trigger it. Rather, it seems to be a consequence of the temporal and spatial environment within which the characters act. The film is not organized as a linear story, but as a dynamic interplay between the protagonists through speech, movement and gestures.

The 13 min. film, *Oblique* (2008), is an articulation of identity in transition. The entire film was shot on a train moving through a continuous mass built from cities and their adjoining regions. The characters are traveling in the suspended generic space of the train through regions composite of old and new economies and old and new social realities: Newly built outer areas around the cities, construction sites, institutional and office buildings, transitory places, between growth and collapse, marked by quasi-contradictory processes of economic progress and development of slums. On the train coach itself, a targeted but sometimes absurd narrative plays itself out as a linguistic reaction to the time and place.

The installation, *Oblique (installation)* (2008) is a hybrid environment blurring the border between the film *Oblique* (2008), and an architectural environment. The installation consists of two spaces. The outer one is a transparent chain-link room with one opening for entrance/exit and long walls blocking off large parts of the exhibition space. The inner space is a double layer chain-link room with a roof and a layer of climbing plants in its walls, giving the inside a darkened but slightly translucent feel. The installation creates a space that is at the same time a marker of borders and ideas of urban property as well as a space to disappear to see the film.

In a series of installations, *The Care of the Self* (1999 – 2007), Åsdam creates nighttime parks with a dark lush interior in an architecture of trees, plants, grass and flowers. Here Åsdam blurs the psychological and physical boundaries between the viewer and the nighttime park of the city; the temporary space for teenage hangouts, drug trafficking and sexual cruising. At the same time as representing a temporary space of release, the nighttime park is also a part of the very mythology and narrative of the city.

In the printed photographic series *Psychasthenia 10*, (2000-2001), and the slides installation *Psychasthenia 10 series 2* (2001), we are confronted with nighttime photographs of apartment buildings in different western cities. As the low level of light blend the colors of the images, background and foreground intermixes in the viewer's perception. The modern buildings in the photographs, all from between 1959 and 1992, do not clearly indicate the

economic or class status of their inhabitants, but are offered to us for subjective interpretation through our personal fantasies, prejudices and personal experiences of the city.

Knut Åsdam is also known for his single channel video works such as *Untitled: Pissing* (1995), and *Come To Your Own* (1993), and radio-plays (audio narratives), graffiti and installation works.