

KNUT ÅSDAM SHORT

Knut Åsdam has been active internationally more than 10 years with exhibitions, publications and broadcast. He has exhibited widely at amongst others, Tate Britain, Venice Biennial, Kunsthalle Bern, Istanbul Biennial, Museum of Contemporary Art, Moderna Museet, PS1 and Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. 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 work with the politics of space and the boundaries of subjectivity. Often these concerns are related to themes of dissidence and an 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 clothes, behavior and routines. Viewing speech as performative, he has particularly been interested in how things have to be repeated, inscribed or reinscribed with meaning to appear stable: whether that is your body or your street. In many of his works, there is a struggle of balance between the affirmative speech — that seeks to affirm a subject, and 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 that relates to an everyday — in which life takes place. As with the issue of 'speech', Åsdam is here also interested in the performative — the degree to which something's meaning has to be repeated also opens for possibilities for change or disturbance. In Åsdam's work there is a strong interest for the interplay of fantasy and narrative to that of lived experience and economic and political.

'Sexualities': The plurality of sexual and gendered experience is at the root of the way Åsdam construct characters. The subjects in his work are always assumed as gendered and sexualized subjects. On the one hand, he is involved in the every day contestations of sexuality or gender — as it might relate to your body or to urban spaces. On the other hand, he looks at how a desiring subject is at the base of creating both the open public spaces and the enclosed or suppressed spaces in society.

'Struggle': Perhaps the glue that binds the other categories together, 'struggle' is important to Åsdam 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 things we have to affirm or contest in our everyday life and that it involves both psychological and social processes.

In the 21 min award-winning film, *Filter City*, Knut Åsdam relates the interconnectedness and relationship between two women and the urban spaces that they inhabit and use. Through a series of carefully poised and visually striking scenes that move in a slow deep pace, the relationship between the women develops through placement and through their different use of language — where in fact they are talking to, yet past each other. The urban spaces that they use are both “theirs” to use, but also out of their economic and social control. In relation to their surrounding and in relation to each other, one character attempts but fails in adopting a searching and affirmative use of language, while the other mainly uses a depressed speech as a social medium to control her relationship.

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, and another is economy as manifested through the environment, architecture and through manners of speaking. 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 or affects of history and violence, and explores the boundaries between narrative film and the discussion of place and history. Shot within a historic setting in Salzburg, Austria, *Finally* is oriented around questions of history and violence. It researches the area between narrative film and the 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. It seems rather to be the reaction to, or even demand of, a place in manners that are both historic and contemporary. The film works in a play between spatial and architectural placement and *manner* of language at use between the protagonists, rather than linear story.

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, with only minimal light. Here Åsdam blurs the psychological and physical boundaries of the viewer's relation to the narrative of the night time park of the city, the temporary space for teenage hangouts, drug trafficking, sexual cruising — a space that as much as it represents a temporary space of release, is also part of the very mythology and narrative of the city.

In the slides installation, *Psychasthenia 10 series 2*, 2000-2001, we are confronted with night time photographs of apartment buildings in different western cities. The low light levels and colours intermix the background and the foreground in the images. The buildings — all from between 1959 and 1992 do not have clear indicators of their economic or class relations but we are left to interpret them in this context from our own projections of experience, fantasy or prejudice 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 installations works.