

Nour Fog
Body Objects

15.06 – 25.08 2019

CV

Nour Fog (b.1981) graduated from the Jutland Art Academy in 2016 and has shown at the Sydhavn Station, Galleri Image and participated in numerous Danish and international group shows. Concurrently with this, he runs the experimenting musical project Duo Demona with Maj Kjærsgig.

EVENTS

Wednesday 26 June 5.30-7pm

SYMPOSIUM: THE RETURN OF THE CERAMICS

Is ceramic art experiencing a revival in contemporary art today, and how does artists link the analogue handcraft with new digital technologies? Join us for the symposium when our panel of experts discuss themes such as the sensuous qualities in ceramics, digital and 3D-created sculptures versus tradition and handcraft, kitsch, and the status and popularity of ceramics today. Participants: Karen Harsbo, Nour Fog, Maj Kjærsgig, Louise Hindsgavl, and Ida Kvetny. Moderator: Merete Jankowski.

Thursday 21 August 6-8pm

PERFORMANCES WITH DUO DEMONA + RANDI PONTOPPIDAN

This evening, Nour Fog's interdisciplinary and sensous body of work culminates in a performance with his musical side project Duo Demona with Maj Kjærsgig. Crystal glasses, theramin and ceramic instruments will mix the wineglasses' high resonances with electrical noise and heavy bass beats creating a disturbing soundscape, not unlike the sound of a short wave radio combined with a serious attempt to establish electronic contact with the outer space. The same evening you can experience singer and sound eccentric Randi Pontoppidan in her hunt for new soundscapes that she creates through improvisations with her voice and an almost animalistic singing language, loop pedals, and other electronical equipment. Extraordinary for this evening, the artists have created a sound passage between their two performances.

THANK YOU

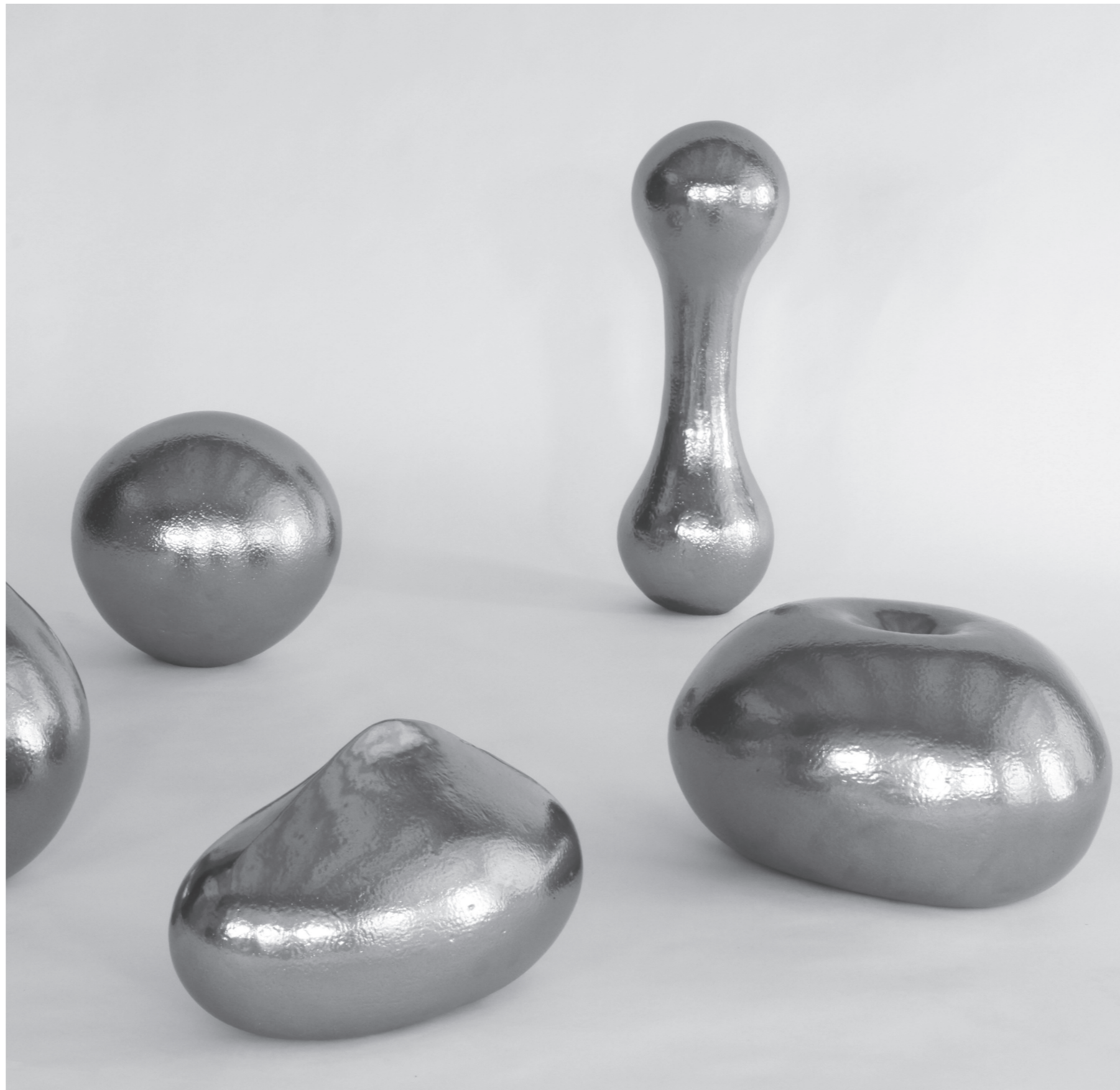
Danish Art Workshops, Julie Clifforth, Maj Kjærsgig, and Else-Marie Storgaard Fog.

Image credit: Nour Fog

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Dissonance of Objects

By Lotte Løvholm

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the brave protagonist Odysseus sails past the Island of the Sirens. The Sirens' alluring and seductive song should on no account disorient his crew, so Odysseus orders his men to put beeswax in their ears. He himself chanced listening to the song of the Sirens, but took the precautionary measures of asking crew members to tie him to the ship's mast.

In this ancient *Bildungsroman*, the Sirens represent the muses of the underworld *Hades*. They are seductive demons of death and encountering them can have fatal consequences. From a queer-political perspective, they have a destabilising potential, representing a state between order and chaos. An encounter the archetypical man, Odysseus, will have to approach with great caution.

THE SONG OF THE SIRENS

Nour Fog reactualises this ancient myth in the soundtrack of his solo show 'Body Objects' with the sculpture *Sirenen (The Siren)*: an almost four metre-long cocoon-shaped horn, from which bursts an ear-piercing din recorded by Fog. The sound is reminiscent of the warning siren sounded every year in Denmark around midday on 1 May when the Danish Emergency Management Agency's warning systems are tested.

In the article 'Cryptic Meditations: the Noise of Meaning', the artist and scientist David Gauthier describes how music underlies language and meaning and how noise underlies music. According to Gauthier, the song of the Sirens constitutes a corridor between noise and music. It transcends chaos and harmony:

'Language needs music – though music doesn't need language. Yet this music covers something else also. It covers the chaos that precedes it. Music needs noise. Noise is music's essential condition. While music may know harmony and its discords, noise doesn't know such things. Noise is all that vibrates, be it harmonious, discordant, or otherwise. Noise makes music undifferentiated. It no longer carries any specific meaning; it carries all, or none. While music transcends noise, noise dins from the depth of matter. The transcendental dimension of music is nested in noise — its physical condition.'¹

Sirens operate between music and noise, between tonality and chaos. Listening to them is perturbing. The purpose of sirens – mythological ones as well as those of the Danish Emergency Management Agency – is to disturb and attract attention. Police sirens operate with two notes in a tritone interval in the Western twelve-tone scale, which was prohibited in the Christian Church

and described as the Devil's interval. In Fog's siren song, noise and musicality come together and there is, in this transition, an element of longing and seduction. It is a flirting, melancholic game of hide-and-seek introducing familiar categories and forms only to reject them. Fog's siren acts as a wake-up call, disturbing us, severing us from conformity, reminding us of the prepossessing in the pluralism and potential of chaos.

DISORIENTING SCI-FI

Formerly a drag performer, Fog uses body sensibility as material in his work with noise, stoneware, and paper. The body is a malleable material, a tool, an imprint. His body is, at one and the same time, present and not present. His voice is alluring but becomes a backdrop. His hands, laboriously giving shape to each individual sculpture, become an imprint. The body is there and then again it is not. He breaks with what the French philosopher Jacques Derrida would term *the metaphysics of presence*.² The thirsting of the Western world for dividing everything into hierarchical opposites where what we value the most is presence and, through this, object fetishism.

Performance studies mention death and disappearance in a cultural history context that, for the past four hundred years, has emphasised objects in preference to oral story-telling. Fog's drag-performing background enables him to sustain uncertainty through the inability to trust the position of objects in relation to the body.

'Body Objects' is structured like ordered chaos. The sculptures refer to handicraft, dropping the 'handi' part. Buxom Venus from Willendorf inspired vase bodies become phallic arteries pumping out smoke. The two basic shapes of art history, the vase and the obelisk, femininity and masculinity, are disrupted and the neck of a vase turned into a phallus, an anus, or a butt plug.

They are alien bodies. They do not conform to gender. *Sirenen (The Siren)* resembles a prehistoric fossil or perhaps a vessel from outer space that has carried the other creatures to our world. Fog sets the scene with familiar players, but the dramaturgy is bewildering.

In *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, the science fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin discusses the classic heroic narrative or *killer story* on which Western culture is based. Rather than the *killer story*, Le Guin lends weight to the *carrier bag*. She points out the importance of stressing and developing the story about 'gathering grain to fill your carrier bag'. This story places different demands on the storyteller than does the story about the 'hunter who killed the mammoth':

'The trouble is, we've all let ourselves become part of the killer story and so we may get finished along with it. Hence it is with a certain feeling or urgency that I seek nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.'³

The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction is a caring manifest about science fiction as a genre and a taking stock of the future direction for Western civilisation.

CARRIER BAGS, SPEARS, AND DISSONANCE

The science fiction genre is useful for redefining social models. An emancipatory escape capable of accentuating narratives defining minorities and anti-capitalocene perspectives. Where carrier bags and life stories are typically associated with femininity, and spears and killer stories with masculinity, such binary relations are blurred in 'Body Objects'. Fog insists on a wholly different fiction.

He adopted his first name Nour precisely for its non-binary quality. He refuses to be decoded as a specific gender. He was formerly referred to as 'he' and then as 'she'. For want of anything better, he wants to be referred to as 'he'. Moreover, his sculptures suggest spears and carrier bags and recognise the hero-fetishism of Western cultural history while repudiating this heritage. They present what the gender and racism expert Sara Ahmed would term disorientation. In her book *Queer Phenomenology* she details how a rejection of past heritage is the only survival strategy available in a queer-political context:

'We look back, in other words, as a refusal to inherit, as a refusal that is a condition for the arrival of queer. To inherit the past in this world for queers would be to inherit one's own disappearance.'⁴

Bodies take shape as they progress through the world and turn to, or away from, objects and others. Ahmed outlines orientation and disorientation in relation to queer culture and how being 'oriented' means having specific objects within reach. Disorientation, on the other hand, occurs when objects drift apart and become estranged. Queer life is to place other objects within reach: those that are invisible and those that, at a first glance, appear warped.⁵ Queer equals dissonance.

NAUSEA AND OBJECTS

In relation to disorientation, Ahmet offers a fresh queer perspective on the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's first published novel *Nausea* (1938) as it addresses the protagonist's sudden alienation from objects. Rather than being toolkits for human agency,

the objects become disruptive elements causing nausea. The nausea is not inside the protagonist, the protagonist is inside the nausea.⁶ In an etymological sense, the English term *nausea* relates to seasickness. Seasickness, nausea, and disorientation all give one a feeling of losing touch with reality, losing oneself and one's existential linkage.

The American artist Paul Thek (1933–1988) describes, in a conversation with the American art critic Gene Swenson, the encounter between the materials wax and glass in his work series *Technological Reliquaries* or *meat pieces* (1964–1966) with reference to the Vietnam War.⁷ Thek unfolds the work comprising cut-off beeswax body parts and hair in glass showcases, referencing Sartre's *Nausea*. By addressing hair as a material, Thek views the human body from the outside. Man as a not particularly attractive, but nevertheless a strangely compelling, creature.

In 'Body Objects', the material references to the human body as a creature are less clear than in Thek. They are mere hints. This is where ceramics, smoke, and noise come together in a conference on bodies. Hearts pump out smoke and, whether it is an intended criticism of twenty-first-century biopolitical health regimes remains unclear, since, like the smoke throwing a veil of mist across the exhibition, the din upends any hope of clarity. It prophesises and compels. This is not a linear narrative as is that of Thek, for, in the words borrowed from David Gauthier's text on the Sirens, the works 'no longer carry a specific meaning; they carry all or none'.

This is the reason for nausea. But not in an unpleasant sense of the word. Rather as a clarified human condition. Like a devotion to 'seeing the body'. The demons of death are not dangerous, they are just part of existence.

1 David Gauthier: 'Cryptic Meditations: the Noise of Meaning', www.gauthier.info/cryptic-meditations (2018).

2 Jacques Derrida: 'Signature événement contexte' in: *Marges de la Philosophie*, pp. 392-393 (1972).

3 Ursula Kroeber Le Guin: *The Carrier Bag Theory on Fiction*, p. 10 (1986). Translated by Karsten Sand Iversen, 2018.

4 Sara Ahmed: 'Disorientation and Queer Objects' in: *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 178 (2006).

5 Ahmed: pp. 165-166.

6 Ahmed: pp. 162-163.

7 Paul Thek: 'Beneath the Skin: In Conversation with Gene Swenson' (1966) in Petra Lange-Berndt (ed.): 'Bodies that Matter', *Materiality*, pp. 122-123 (2015).