



**ash**





## An introduction

Stories and everyday events are an important element in the art of Victor Ash. A cow from his childhood in Portugal is recreated in green foil in 2002, as part of a series entitled *The Farm*. And an encounter in his youth with the call girls of Berlin is transformed in 2004 into the installation *Scharlachrot*. Elements combine in organic forms that evolve into stylistic, mechanistic figures flowing over the canvas or the walls of the gallery.

Various anecdotes are at hand in Victor's "tool-box", where they are available on the day and at the moment when they become integrated into one of his works. In this way the past melds with the present – and all the while, at every turn, the future can be glimpsed. The works often revolve around the contrast between country and city, nature and culture. Many of these anecdotes become layered, one upon the other – like the sound track of a piece of music. And ultimately, this is where it all begins.

### The early years

As a teenager Victor listened to electro funk and hip hop music. Record covers were decorated with the vividly coloured underground graffiti of the period. This inspiration – from the USA – made a lasting impression, and Victor began to paint graffiti himself. Together with JayOne and Skki, fellow members of the artists collective BadBC, he has been characterised as one of the pioneers of European graffiti.

Victor works with *pieces* – in other words, masonry that depicts both words and figures. His style is characterised by the use of simple colours, geometric forms and iconographic elements.

### From street to gallery

Victor carried his discipline and training in colour and form into his work as an artist. In 1991 he was invited to exhibit in Galerie du Jour by French fashion designer and art collector, Agnès B.

This exhibition marked a turning point. Victor Ash moved away from the aesthetic of American subway graffiti. His later works are evolved from the same formula, but there is now a greater focus on content – in particular on stories involving identity. In subsequent years he travelled throughout Europe. Berlin, Milan and London provided inspiration for his works, prior to his arrival in Copenhagen in 1994.

### Reconciliation

When Victor as a child moved from a farm in Portugal to one of the concrete suburbs of Paris, the contrast he observed was to have a strong influence on his artistic development. This disparity and the physical change nurtured his interest in the urban environment. In the same way, his relocation to Denmark stimulated new forms of expression.

In a sense, Denmark brings together both polarities – nature and culture – insofar as Copenhagen is representative of both elements. Inspiration here can be found in Scandinavian architecture and aesthetics. The Scandinavian ethos that seeks to harmonise the relationship between man and the city is precisely reflected in Victor's work where the organic object exists in conjunction with the stylised. In his more recent works nature is thus reconciled with culture.

Karen Ormstrup Søndergaard, 21-02-05



**E-mail interview conducted between Victor Ash, Karen Søndergaard, and Anne Kielgast.**

AK: Describe the typical process of your work...

VA: In my life, I have moved through various environments where I lived through many different experiences. Like most people I see and feel the world around me and it generates emotions, which affect my senses. I feel the necessity to analyze these emotions and I try to understand how they are processed within me. I channel that process and it materializes in my artistic production in various ways through my personal aesthetics. This process has been a kind of obsession since my childhood.

AK: Could you describe one particular work or project? You suggest an autobiographical connection bound to personal experiences. Is that typical?

VA: For the installation *The Farm* in 2003 I made four large collages out of reflecting shiny foil, each piece representing the shape of one typical farm animal. I chose a cow, a horse, a sheep, and a pig.

I dismembered each animal into several puzzle-like elements and then I cut them (the various puzzle elements) so that the collage looked like a mechanical graphic shape. Afterwards I just glued it on the wall.

The goal in developing such a work was to create an interaction between my pieces and the public just as I interacted with a specific environment at a specific time in my life. Most of my creations are based on that process.

AK: What public (is it a specific group of people) do you have in mind? Does your work aim at a specific group of people. And is *The Farm* autobiographical. Did you think of a certain favourite cow...?

KOS: Good question. Could you expand on your interest in the public and the wish to interact with your audience?

VA: Well, when I say public I mean any person, anyone passing by. If they notice my work, they will certainly make an analysis of what is in front of them. The interaction is the interpretation and response.

I started my artistic activities as a teenager in busy neighbourhoods of Paris where many people could see my work. During the making of these pieces I would get all kinds of reactions and remarks from pedestrians, which was very interesting, as I probably would have never spoken to these people otherwise. If I can catch their attention and get an interpretation and reaction, then my interaction process succeeds.

*The Farm* is based on several personal events - living in the countryside, witnessing as a young child the slaughtering of farm animals, moving to a busy urban area.

AK: There is currently a lot of talk about the artist as DJ in contemporary art. Are you the typical "artist-DJ" – reusing, reworking and sampling images, objects, design etc. that is already there, and thereby working with pre-existing expressions that pick up on contemporary urban life? Also could you tell us a little about how music influences your work?

VA: "Artist DJ", yes, hmm... probably. I "sample" elements from my experiences and "remix" them; I use fundamentals from modern society because it's important that the work reflects aesthetics from the present time. They have to be included in the creative process and in the finished work. Urban lifestyle and part of the rural environment form the base elements where I sample the preexisting expressions for my "remixes". I filter and recycle it, so that my procedure is similar to the way of creating electronic music where you add layers of beats, sampled sound or voices. I choose the preexisting elements depending on their level of impact on myself.



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It is not only modern forms of music that inspire me in the way that I create a work. Actually, listening to music is a big part of my life, it brings me contentment and gives me energy, it's like some kind of food that I eat every day. But aesthetically, I think that the time when music had the strongest impact directly on my work was approximately 12 years ago when I lived in Paris. Back then, I was painting mostly inside in a studio with loudspeakers turned on playing electronic music, and the aesthetics of the work were directly linked to the sounds coming out of the speakers, a way for me to re-encounter myself in a specific world that was created in me when I used to hang out at rave parties situated in abandoned factories and industrial areas. Listening to that music give me the possibility to recreate the imaginary world it represented, inside the studio. In the same way I use music today to remind me of emotions that I encountered at some point in the past.

**AK:** You suggest that your current work is influenced by your early years as a graffiti painter - for instance the interaction with the passers-by and the musical scene. Does the formal expression of graffiti also have an influence on what you do today?

**VA:** Back in my teen years, graffiti was the only way for me to satisfy my desire to make myself noticeable, and it created ways of reaching the public that I still probably use unconsciously. These methods can be very imposing, because they were based on competitiveness and they kind of forced you to achieve your goal; otherwise you lose the game.

However, nowadays, I try to imbue my work with my visions and observations from a certain world in the past, present, or future, and try to create a channel of communication for the viewer who is willing to venture deep into this world. But like the graffiti that I used to make outside, one can look at it and attempt to understand or pass by without paying much attention.

**AK:** What are your main inspirations – in art history and elsewhere. Your style is very graphic – often very clear cut. You seem to have left graffiti as such behind, however the clear colours etc. are still there.

**VA:** Science and communication, technologies not yet invented and imaginary futuristic worlds, nature and the way it inspires technologies made and used by humans. These are the key concepts of my work.

Until the age of five, I grew up in the countryside and then moved suddenly to Paris. Before my "graffiti days" I used to watch a lot of television when I was free from school. I spent most of my time in front of the TV, and when I was watching I drew the world that I used to see in those cheap Japanese cartoons. Another of my favourite activities was to tear apart any of my toys containing electronic elements and reuse them to make machines with small lights and buttons mimicking some kind of control panel.

Later on, I loved to be in motion in the brutal urban environment. I would spend hours travelling the subway lines, walking the streets, visiting old gigantic vacant industrial buildings trying to find new places where I could paint. Sometimes on weekends I used to hang out at night at rave parties that took place illegally in unused subway tunnels, old Parisian mushroom caves, and suburban abandoned factories. This world "à la" Blade Runner was ideal for me back then, and I didn't want to go back to the countryside where I used to live in my younger years. In fact I hated to be back in the countryside. I could not handle the quietness and tranquillity of that environment any more.

In the beginning of the nineties I started to paint "inside" in a studio in Paris, and I soon realized that the aesthetics of traditional New York subway graffiti, that I used as a teenager, no longer gave me the same possibilities to express myself. It was bound too much by certain rules and too impersonal from my point of view.

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At that time I looked at the work of other artists - like Marcel Duchamp, Jean Dubuffet, Robert Rauschenberg, Jeff Koons, and others, and then I challenged myself to develop aesthetics based on my own experiences. I worked towards a direction that forced me to develop a style based on my own path, a style based on the aesthetics that surrounded me in my everyday life, just like I used to integrate my graffiti pieces in the architecture where I used to go wandering.

Now I define my style by integrating the aesthetics not only from architecture but also from design, modern graphics, logotypes, icons, photographs and video imagery that I find in my everyday observations. I have to be a sort of chameleon; I reflect the place and time where I am located.

**KOS:** Somewhat ahead of the ordinary teenager... While you were being cool in Paris, I think Anne and I were playing handball in a provincial Danish town...

Anyways, now we talked about where your art came from. I want to know what you think you are moving towards. Are you happy with your style, working in Denmark etc.?

**VA:** I can't predict the future and this is good because it prevents me from taking sides on what is going to be. I am satisfied with the task of asking questions about where we are all moving towards. In other words, if I pay attention to something specific in the experiences of my life, I ask the question by creating a work and I don't expect an answer. The fact of receiving the answer would eliminate the idea of asking the question and eliminate the need for my work to exist.

So the most real certainty is that I will keep asking questions in directions like those in the installation *The Farm*. In my creative process, I don't need to take sides, to be critical – nor do I need to adopt a political standpoint. To be open is most important – if you claim to have all the answers, all of understanding, you are a closed system and will wither away. My creativity depends on my openness – if I was not able to be open, then I would wither as an artist.

I always feel satisfied with what I do at the moment that I do it, otherwise I stop working on it and begin something else. But when I am finished I look at it just a little, and then I don't want to see it, it should disappear, at least for a time, it can be for years. And then, I like to discover it again and I like to look at it very much. Only in that way do I appreciate my work.

Recently I have been looking at some works that I made in Paris in the beginning of the nineties. I compare it to my recent works done here in Copenhagen, and I prefer the old ones. I like the fact that I can't create those kinds of works any more, that's what makes me appreciate it. It will probably be the same way with the works that I am currently creating here in Denmark, 5 or 10 years from now. For that reason alone, I would like to be living in a very different place in 10 years and compare what I am doing then to my works here in Denmark. However, currently I am satisfied living here, I have calmness to work and the ease of choosing to travel often to places where I can experience even more

Karen Ormstrup Søndergaard, b. 1971. M.A. in French and Art History. Communications officer at ARKEN Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen since 2000. Publications include articles on Surrealism, Mona Hatoum and street art.

Anne Kielgast, b. 1975. M.A. in Art History. Associate lecturer at Copenhagen University. Art critic, author and copywriter. Editor of Dansk magazine.

**Mural art work - 1997**

The Svanemølleværket power station, Copenhagen, Denmark

Mural 8000 x 400 cm



**Resist (details) - 2001**

Mixed media, 600 x 400 x 250 cm

Installation, Badbc; Galerie du Jour, Paris France.



Space - 2004

Installation. Foil, 350 x 350 cm

Gallery The leisure club Mogadishni, Copenhagen, Denmark



Luxurious - 2002

Installation. Mixed media, 600 x 400 x 200 cm

Senko studio, Viborg Denmark



**The Farm - 2003**

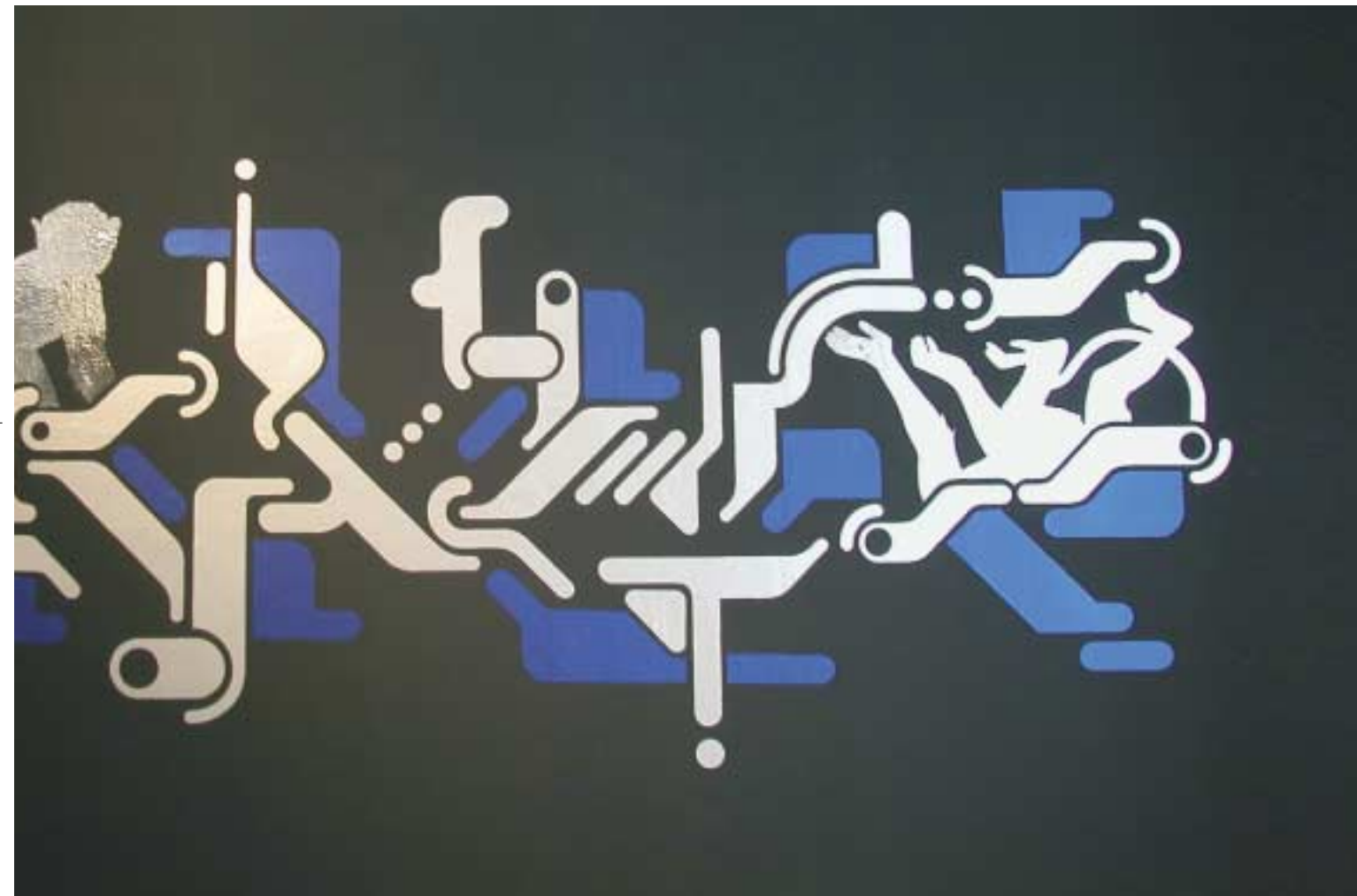
Installation. Foil, Horse 300 x 150 cm, Cow 250 x 150 CM, Pig 200 x 150 cm  
Gallery The leisure club Mogadishni, Copenhagen Denmark



**Monkey in the city - 2003**

Installation. Foil, 600 x 250 cm  
Kunstraum Kreuzberg Bethanien, Berlin Germany



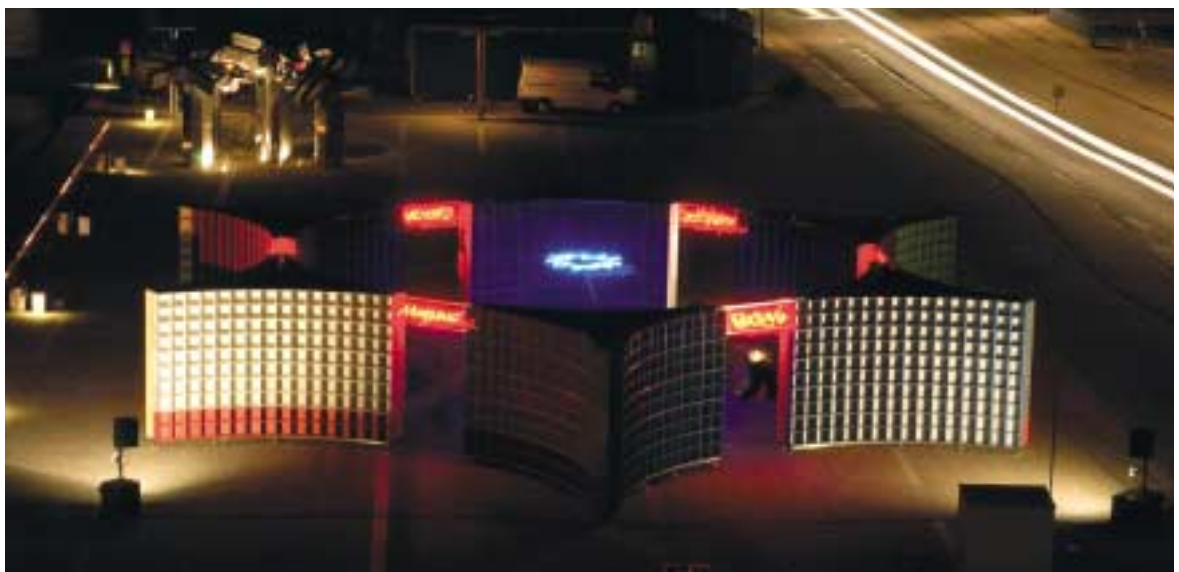


**Objective Subjective - 2003**

Installation. Mixed media, 2200 x 2200 x 400 cm

"Kultur nat" event, Badbc in collaboration with Montana møbler, Copenhagen Denmark.





The Runner - 2003

Installation. Mixed media

Spazio Disponibile and OIO restaurant, Florence Italy.





**Scharlachrot - 2004**

Installation. Foil, 600 x 400 x 200 cm

Senko studio, Viborg Denmark



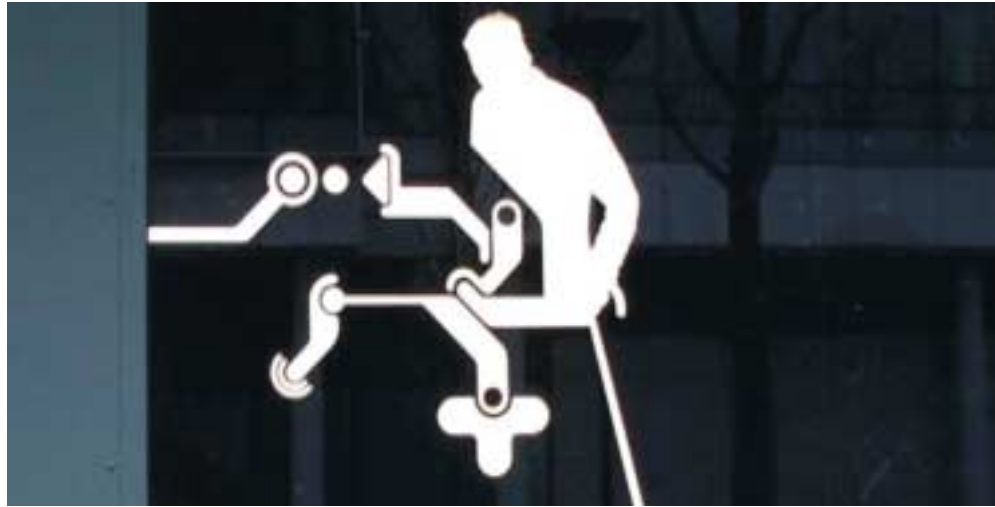


**Moments - 2004**

Installation. Foil, 800x 200 cm

Gallery Magda Danysz, Paris, France

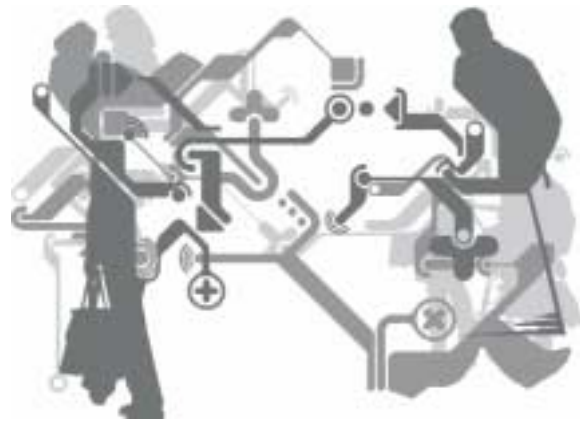


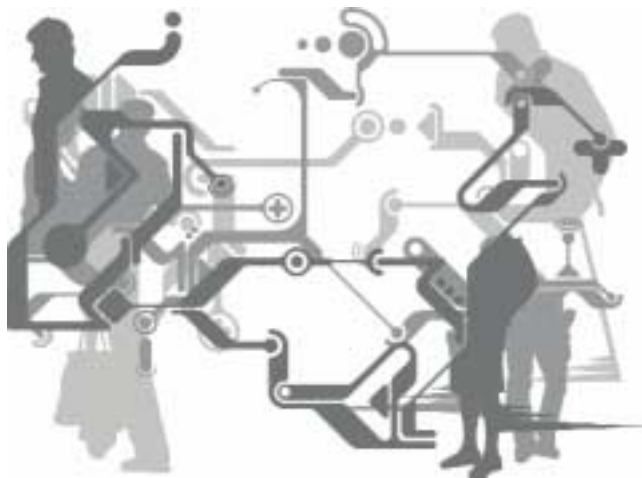
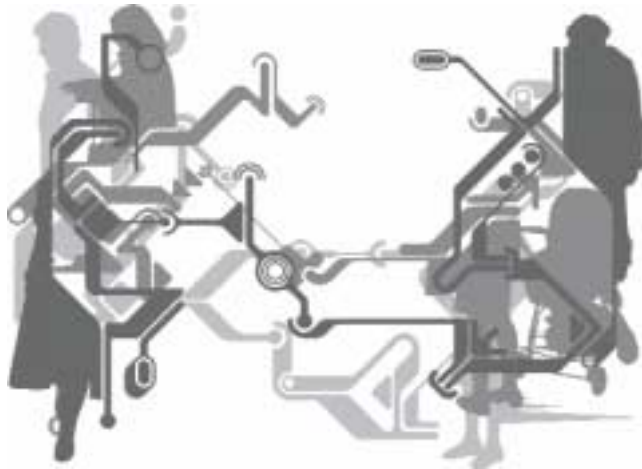


Mixed Moments - 2004

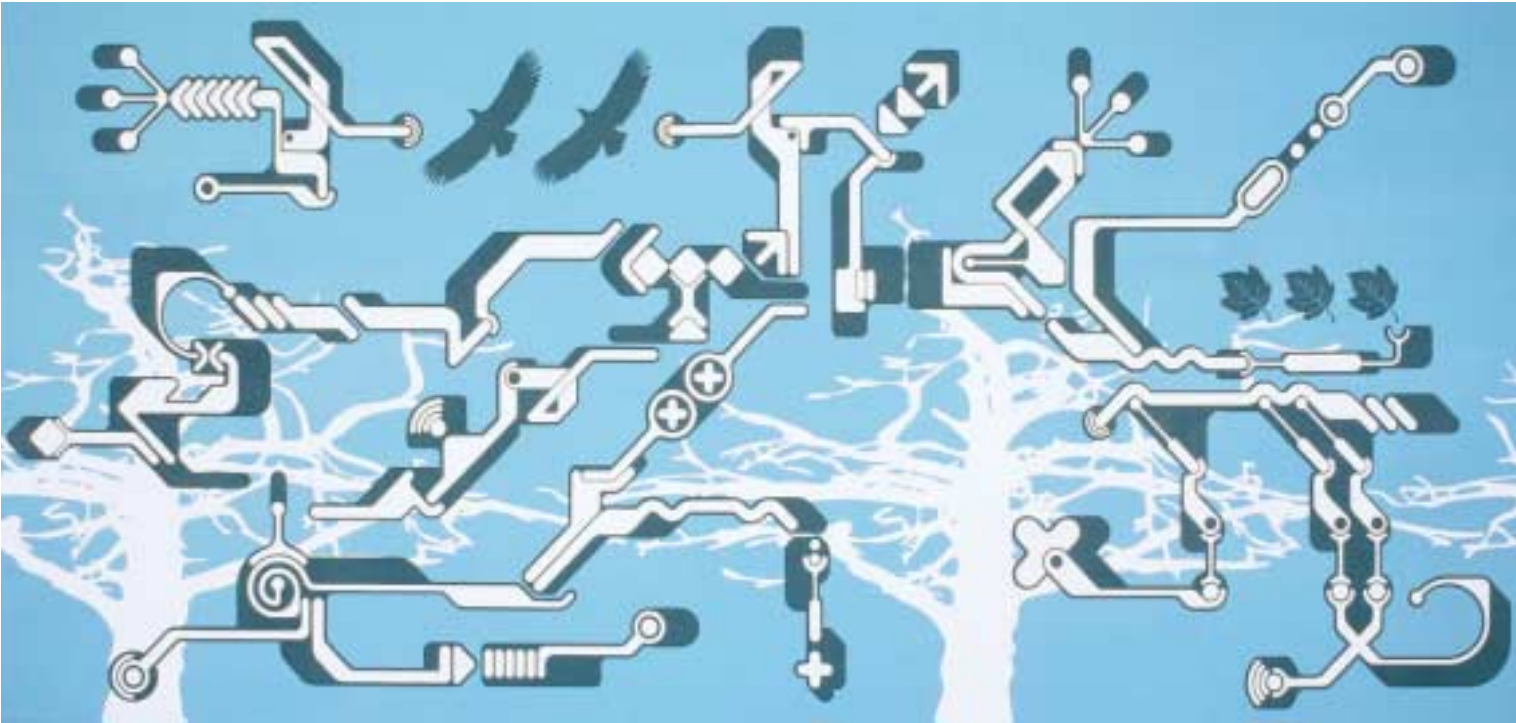
10 serigraphs on paper, 30 x 40 cm

Original limited edition: 5 each





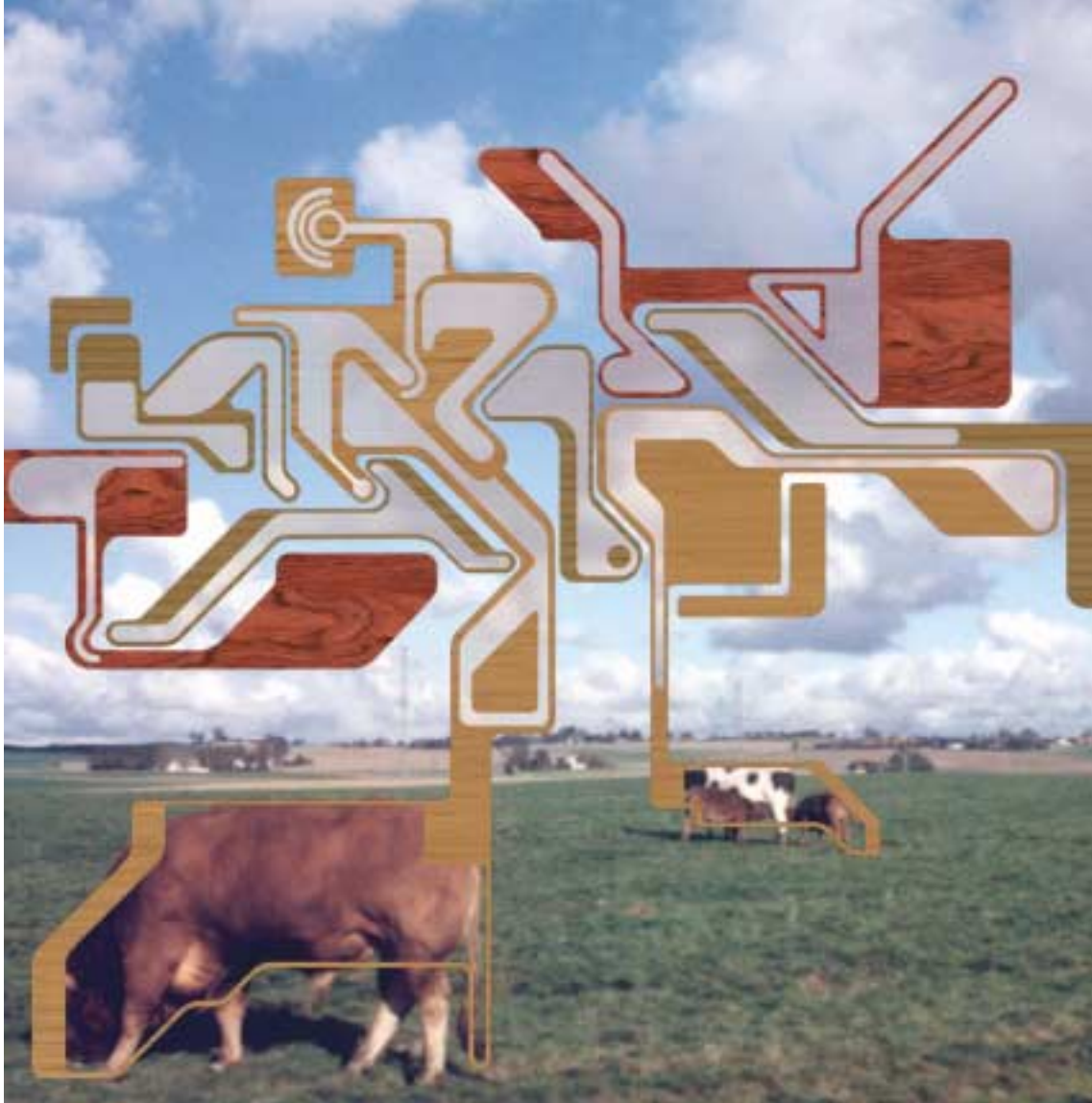
Trees, leaves and birds - 2004  
Acrylic paint on canvas, 200 x 120 cm



Running woman - 2004  
Acrylic paint on canvas, 200 x 120 cm



**Anti-matter** - 2002  
Digital print, 19.5 x 20.5 cm  
Original limited edition: 10



Tree - 2003  
Digital print, 20 x 27 cm  
Original limited edition: 10



Selected solo exhibitions

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| 2004 | Scharlachrot, Senko studio, Viborg, Denmark                | 2002 | "I woke up and made a simulation of the patented prosperity" |
|      | Gallery Magda Danysz, Paris, France                        |      | Space "Transition" & Backjumps magazine, Berlin Germany.     |
| 2003 | The Farm, The leisure club Mogadishni, Copenhagen, Denmark | 1997 | Taastrup Kulturcenter, Taastrup, Denmark.                    |
| 2002 | Luxurious, Senko studio, Viborg, Denmark                   | 1993 | Gallery Magda Danysz, Paris, France.                         |
|      |  | 1991 | Today's topics, Gallery Exhibit, Berlin, Germany             |
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Selected group exhibitions

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| 2004 | The Leisure Club Mogadishni, Copenhagen, Denmark                                | 1993 | Chapelle des Tanneurs Muséum, Nemours, France.  |
| 2003 | The Petting Zoo Art Basel Miami Beach 2003, Miami, USA.                         | 1992 | Gallery Magda Danysz, Paris, France.  |
|      | Objective Subjective, Kultur nat event Copenhagen, Denmark.                     |      | The Blue Point gallery, Berlin, Germany.  |
|      | Backjumps - The Live Issue, Kunstraum Kreuzberg Bethanien., Berlin, Germany.    | 1991 | Artistes américains et français, 1981-1991, Musée national des monuments Français, Palais de chaillot, Paris, France. |
|      | Chiso Yusen history mix, Øksenhallen, Copenhagen, Denmark.                      |      | A step beyond, Schering Kunstverein and Lebendiges Museum, Berlin, Germany.   |
| 2002 | Chiso Yusen history mix, Spiral Garden, Tokyo, Japan.                           |      | Today's topics, Gallery Exhibit, Berlin, Germany.   |
|      | Chiso Yusen history mix, MU Eindhoven, Eindhoven, Nederland.                    | 1990 | Inside Graphitism, Galerie Gleditsch 45, Berlin   |
| 2001 | Nervous System, A Life for your Life, New York, USA.                            |      | Les peintres de la ville, Galerie du Jour Agnès B, Paris, France.   |
|      | Graffs, Galleriedu Jour, Paris France.  |      |   |
|      | Badbc "Resist" Exrealm Space in collaboration with Takéo Kikuchi, Tokyo, Japan. |      | -----   |
| 1998 | Herning Kunstmuseum in collaboration with Montana Møbler a/s, Herning, Denmark. |      | Born 1968 in Portugal,  |
| 1996 | Politiken house, Copenhagen, Denmark.   |      | Lived in Paris from 1972 until 1995   |
| 1994 | Moving Painting, Le Monde de l'art, Paris, France.                              |      | Lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark.   |
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