



Stranded Ship

MIE OLISE KJAERGAARD

Interview by
VIOLET SHURAKA

Name? Mie Olise Kjaergaard

Year of birth? 09. 09 1974

Portfolio website? www.olise.dk

You were born in Denmark? Yes.

In the city or in the country? I grew up by the seaside at the island of Mors in North West Denmark. I lived at the police station and at a sawmill. I had a Doberman dog called Roger, which was as cool as having a dad with a chainsaw, and a moterbike (which I also had, so my childhood was very happy!) I wore my pyjamas on my bike and sometimes to school.

Do you still visit there often? Yes, I go back a lot, it was a great playground and I am a terribly romantic about it. I snap into the feeling immediately – it's a very creative atmosphere for me.

And you are now residing in London? Yes.

Which part of London? North East London, my studio is in East London.

How long have you been living there? I have been living here for a little more than 2 years over 2 times, first time I lived here was in 1999, where I went to the Bartlett School of Architecture at UCL.

What do you like most about living there? The vibrant Art scene, the Trees in the City, and anonymity.

Least? The pollution and traffic hours.

You said you were moving to New York in April... Yes, I am going because I have a project to finish and an exhibition in the states at Barbara Davis Gallery in Houston Texas, a solo show during the summer. I have always longed to stay there for a while, get under the skin of what happens there. And I am crazy about the idea of going to Texas as well;-)

Are you moving here because of the opportunities in the art world?

I am quite fond of the American people. Europeans are more silent and introverted – I sometimes feel like I am too loud, and feel very good when I am in the states – there is a high ceiling. There are so many crazy people;-) I will be staying for a while.

You just finished your MFA degree... at The Byam Shaw School of Art at Central Saint Martins. I almost went to graduate school for photography at CSM but at the last moment I decided to go to Goldsmiths instead. I lived in London during parts of 1999 and 2000 but was not able to stay and finish my degree because the cost of living was too expensive! I had to come back to the US, graduate-degree-less... Do you feel that it is difficult to stay in London because it is such an expensive city? (I think it is the 3rd most expensive city in the world to live in!) Does the cost of living effect your art-making process?

I see a lot of people struggling, and in a way I feel like London is one of the toughest cities in the spoiled western world. I got a scholarship from The London University of The Arts to pay the School Fee – And I do sell my art. So I am very fortunate – in many ways. I am living quite cheap and reinvest all the money I get in new projects;-) Traveling and seeking new places.

You will be happy to know that New York is much less expensive than London! Certainly not cheap but a lot more affordable!

Cool, and the dollar is low;-)

Do you feel that there is any competition between graduates from the different art schools (CSM, Goldsmiths, The Royal College of Art, The Slade School) in London?

I have heard about it, but I see it more like, so many people are graduating every year, all have something different to say, in their own way – as an artist you are standing there behind your work - hoping that somebody notices you. Everybody says that Goldsmiths and Slade were good 10 years ago, and there are all these old stories about who went where, and which school is the best. Truth is that a school, is never better than their last graduates, and each team of graduates are making their own level. We all do get really good tutoring, it's up to the students to get the best out of it. The world has changed, My Space, You Tube and the Internet in general: – nobody is sitting on the key to anything anymore. You can just go in and upload your own song or film or piece of art,, If "the big ones" are not noticing you, you can make a crowd of friends and conquer the world together – possibilities are unlimited. There are so many ways, and all the old do's and don'ts do not work anymore. I find that



Staircase Place

funny and liberating, cause I have been on such a curled road myself, and ... its just important to dare to do the wrong things sometimes.

What made you choose Central Saint Martins over the other London art schools?

I didn't apply for any other. All other deadlines had passed. So I just saw which one I could still apply for. I liked the programme – Fine Art (not painting or sculpture), it sounded like a really nice and friendly environment, like people would be treating you with respect. I need that;-) And I am so happy that I went. It was a coincidence, but boy I wouldn't have gone anywhere else.

Do you feel that there is a lot of interesting work being created in London right now? Yes, I go see a lot every week. But I also miss out on so much because there is so much going on! I mostly go the the East End, but I really like to go to Serpentine Gallery and The Hayward, and I am looking forward to the Saatchi Gallery opening again. I like shows with a lot going on, where people dare and do, you know... and are able! I want both my brain and my body to be challenged. Some very conceptual art is only in the brain – and is in that way afraid of the body. That's not daring enough – I think. I just went to National Gallery, and looked at old stuff for a whole day – I really think there were some really cool guys in the 1600s!!

I used to live in Bethnal Green when I was attending Goldsmiths. I just went back in April, after not visiting since 2001, and there seemed to be a lot more galleries in this area. Have you shown at any of the galleries on Vyner St.? Anywhere else in the East End?

I have shown at Celeste Art Prize, 4 New Sensations and Rod Barton, they were all around the Brick Lane area. I have different things coming up in the east, fx at Standpoint Gallery, and at Alexia Goethe in Mayfair next year.

Which artists inspire you?

I am inspired by everything and everybody, things I like and sometimes especially things I don't like. I like architects like Rem Koolhaas, Corbusier, Palladio, Frank Lloyd Wright, Lois Kahn, Ando, Hadid and am more inspired by selfbuilt carpenters than other artists. The artists I am most inspired by are Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Mike Nelson, Emin, Lucas, Whiteread, Sophie Calle, Janet Cardiff, Richter, Kiefer, Baselitz, Egon Schiele, Freud, Munch, Picasso, Rembrandt. And I appreciate good contemporary painters like Havekost, Saville, Doig, Dumas, Liu Xiaodong, Cecily Brown, Chantal Joffe, Weischer, Tal R - a good painting can make me very ecstatic .

Has anyone that you have studied (or worked) with influenced you?

Yes, I believe that you constantly navigate as a student, finding your place in relation to the people you work around. Developing and making – you do that very much in relation to others.

Are there contemporary artists whom you know that you tend to show with?

I am talking with people regarding 2 shared shows during 2008, so I guess I will know more next month;-)

Can you describe your art philosophy in one sentence? (Art is a visual language) If you can explain it all in words, no need to do the Art.

You create works in many different mediums; painting, sculpture/installation, video/photography. And I know that you also have a background in architecture. Is there one medium that you are particularly drawn to / that you prefer to work in?

My first language is painting, my second language is sculpture/architectural construction, my third language is fooling around. I am making sound for my next exhibition. I just do what I like to do, but I think I can set up that hierarchy.

Do you like the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher? It seems to me that there are similarities between what they did and what you are doing, conceptually. They first collaborated on photographing and documenting the disappearing German industrial architecture in 1959 and continued to document the architecture (the "ghosts of industrialization") they believed would eventually disappear from the landscape and from the memory of modern people. I find their lifelong project somewhat similar to your work, especially your project **Future of Place, imagining what will happen to a certain structure in 25 years and painting the different scenarios. I really enjoy their studies and work. I can look at them for ages. As a painter I am working very differently. My places don't really exist, they are made up by me. Possibly inspired by somewhere or some bad photograph I have found.**

Have you begun this project yet?

Yes, I did it in the summer for the 4 New Sensations Show, a student competition arranged by Saatchi Gallery and Channel 4.

What place will you be documneting?

Gower Street Institute for Cultural Inheritance.

Could you tell me a little more about the project?

I am working with space and construction, and suddenly stood with a theme almost opposite the way I normally work. It was quite fun. In order to make 5 scenarios of the same place, something had to be the same from painting to painting,,, some surroundings. I normally cut my subject to the bone in that way, that I don't do surroundings. And in a way here the context was as important as the object itself.

The subjects of your artwork are often dilapidated, decaying buildings, abandoned towns, ships, structures for which there is no longer a use. I am often drawn to such subject matter as well. I have been photographing abandoned buildings in towns that time has forgotten for many years now. Do you seek these places out or do you stumble across them by acci-

dent and then decide to make an artwork based on them? Both... I mostly make them up, of different places I find or discover moving around. The paintings refer to something else than the specific spaces and constructions, its a memory. It's a condition of life, and it's a romantic longing and a brutal ending. Facing the cruel with the romantic, a survival strategy. I guess,,,, I can't really explain it, but I can show it. The paintings are more abstract, the constructions more specific. More conceptual. Easier to talk about.

Are you inspired by the architecture in London?

I take plenty of photos every day, I bring a camera along, just going to get my afternoon coffee, down the street from my studio. London is very inspiring – everywhere is very inspiring;-)

Or do you feel like you need to leave the city often for inspiration? I remember being fascinated walking around the East End because there were so many decaying, forgotten structures. But perhaps all of these structures have now been turned into luxury condominiums/apartments, which is happening in New York, especially the area I live in, Greenpoint/Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Are there still gritty areas where you can go to be inspired?

I really like the construction sites when they open up the ground transforming the city. If it's good contemporary architecture I also like that. I don't really go to the very old decaying buildings, it's too aesthetic, too romantic. I like the contradictions. But if a place doesn't have that, then I just make them up, and in that way a place with a problem for me is much more interesting than a perfect place, I don't like perfect places. Because I am not capturing, it's mostly about painting.

I am very intrigued by your Svalbard Odyssey: Chased by Polar Bears project. I would love to go to an abandoned city/ghost town like this. How did you know Svalbard, Norway existed?

I sat at an artist book fair and sold my little folder, and I shared the table with this guy, Morten, who told me about it. When I came home, I googled it and realized, that the *Taubane Central* painting I did a couple of months earlier was actually from that place. I got all ecstatic, and went 2 months after. And I am going back in April. Apropos what I just said before,,, it was not aesthetic but in a way perfect, no need to paint it, just record it, and work with it.

Could you describe what it is like being all alone in a place like this?

The light was BANGING down day and night (north light summertime), and there was so silent, you could hear the ice and the sea. I felt really small and really powerful at the same time. It was so great, to be there in that clean air, and feel all alone on top of the world. I guess, I didn't really think I would actually go, until I was sleeping on a cardboard box in Oslo airport, and was on my way.

Did you actually go to this place by yourself?

Yes,,, sometimes I had to bring a guide with a rifle, because of the Polar Bears. People do live there, there is a city – so it's when you go out on your own, you are really alone. I went by boat 4 hours to go to The Pyramid City.

Was it a frightening experience to be so alone amongst nature and man-made ruins?

It's the craziest experience, just being there. I am glad I had something to do. Filming and working makes the place become more familiar, you have a purpose and a connection with the place. You communicate, and that's is great.

What was the outcome of this journey? Did you create paintings based upon your experiences and what you found in Svalbard? Or was this more of a video and photo-based work?

No, the thing about Svalbard is that it is there! The fantastic abandoned Russian City, The Pyramid. So it became this video I showed at The Triangle Project's part of The Istanbul Biennale this year. Goodipal, a great Danish experimental composer, created a piece of sound, distorted music, and I built a shed, with the moving image and sound inside it. It was kind of comical, because the music and the image of this amazing place almost became too romantic, and then so devastating, that you didn't know what to do with yourself. I liked that.

Is there somewhere online that I can see the resulting piece?

I am updating my webpage next week.

Describe that moment when you knew for sure that art was something you wanted to pursue seriously.

There were all the art books in the library and when I was 15, I went to summer art school with "adults", having to seek permission because I was too young. Coming home from that, I just knew, it couldn't be any different, and I set up my first studio.

Was art encouraged or practiced by your family?

Crafts, building wooden ships, houses etc, music, piano, opera, drawing, fashion, "if you can't have it, just make it." Failing is not a "fiasco" in my family. Nobody ever expected my to finish high school or all my other studies.

What was the first piece of art that really mattered to you? Yours?

My first painting was 2x1,5 m I did it when I was 15, and it's hanging over the sofa at my parents. It looks like a witch running through a green forest.

Others?

Anselm Kiefers huge painting of a tunnel in black. I saw it in a book. There was something about it that made me go back and look at the library again and again, I was 13.

What images keep you company in the space where you work?

Other peoples drawings, a MESS of collected items, wood, that I have an idea I will use one day, collected samples of places around the world.

What could you imagine doing, if you didn't create art?

I would built my own wooden house and have a pension where people could bring their puppies when they went on vacation. I love puppies. Actually maybe I want to that instead;-)



New Jersey Bridge



No Floor