

Stian, here a quick reaction, a few things that needs looking at. I'll do it all in English, so Lauren can read through and correct as well. I like the title, but the word porno does not sit with me at all. and I think you should ad BATH in front of all the tubs so it becomes bathtub, I prefer that.(sorry) also, I would like you to add that my Mother owns a Lexus, is that ok?)

A PORNOGRAPHER'S paranoid bathTUB
by Stian Gabrielsen

I answer my phone, it's Victor. I will pick you up soon he says. Are you ready? It's important that you come along, you need to witness it from the inside, as it unfolds. The process, that's where my interest lies, he insists. I'm less concerned about the exhibition. That's just a vulgar and painful necessity. Entertainment, is what he called doing shows, last we had coffee. I agreed. It's ridiculous that artists have to do shows, we should just be allowed to do work that never materialises. Objects are evil things, they clog our lives. Our tiny apartments (which are all we can afford) are already brimming with crap, especially Victor's. Though, judging from his practice, there is a hint of contradiction between Victor's criticism of the material aspect of art and how he goes about being an artist: he exhibits his work rather frequently. Maybe what he harbours is not so much a hostility towards the displayed object as a suspicion of the status that the exhibition bestows on it. What are the mechanisms that keep these pointless objects afloat inside the institution and in the market place, he asks me. Hypocrisy, he answers. Victor peddles his little books whenever he has a chance but his art works aren't built to go anywhere: they sink like stones, or fall apart like shipwrecks. Or he sends them to me in the mail in large padded envelopes. Victor's work doesn't attract capital, it repels it. This isn't Gagosian, he noted – ruefully – as we stood and inspected a show he was putting up once.

And I need your help, he adds. We have to carry some furniture. We're driving in his mother's car on our way to her house, where Victor lives when he's in town. She is moving out. It's hard for her Victor tells me. They argue – she is reluctant about throwing out her things. A lifetime of collecting china and porcelain figurines. But it has to go. A painful business, all of it. Victor is tired. He doesn't sleep well, he tells me. He is also in the process of moving, leaving Paris for Liverpool, his apartment got too small in the end. They were suffocated by all the art-materials Victor hoards and that occupy every surface of the apartment. When the family have dinner they just throw a red and white chequered tablecloth over a table heaped with stuff. Setting the table is impossible, their glasses of water keep tipping over, their plates slide to the floor. Food everywhere. His wife, Lauren, is tending to the logistics of the relocation. Finally, he will have some space. Victor is drunk on the prospect of space, but less convinced that it's a sane move to resettle so close to Lauren's childhood home. *Afraid she will strike up old acquaintances, get infected with their lifestyle and start using one of those hands-free earpieces for her phone that she can talk in while she is driving a Range Rover. Victor shudders. He can not allow such a transformation to take place. If this happens he and Lauren “will have to have an unpleasant talk”, is how he phrases it. NOT sure about this passage, obviously I have a control issue, but, you see, Liverpool is a project, and not a home of such. This is also a private matter, I do not want to become part of the Liverpoolian infrastructure, but rather orbiting around it, snapping up what I need, call it superior if you like. (This is what suffocated me in Paris) We can talk about this over the phone. Also, my mother is not moving out, she is dealing with her inheritance, and a light dispute with her brother. She will live on it the house, but find the changes very life changing and difficult. She's not really a collector of figurines rather Norwegian porcelain like Egersund, Porsgrunn etc. Nora Gulbrandsen, Kitty Kielland etc.*

Victor is in Norway with their two daughters, on a vacation of sorts, working on his upcoming exhibition at Fotogalleriet, which he wants me to write an essay for. They just returned from visiting his brother's family. Victor complains about their diet. Victor GAVE HIM (I gave him an old weber, and it got rusty, that is why he threw it away) GRILL? is it not a BARBECUE bought him a coal grill the other year, but his brother threw it out. He prefers his gas-grill. Victor gives a detailed account of the food that his brother prepares on this gas-powered monster. (They dont eat only cheap stuff, and not at all every day, no) Cheap frozen hamburgers brought from Sweden. He places their grey, flaccid corpses in rows so close they almost overlap, then he cranks up the flames and closes the lid and lets them broil in their own smog until they're black. Christ all mighty, As you can understand I don't want to harm my brother with my opinionated eating habits, when I told you this I was fed up with my life situation of not having a home and I never thought it would end up in your essay, maybe we should look at this? Also, this Norwegian syndrome of freezing Swedish food is of great interest. The freezer is a problem that the people, the norwegian people can identify with, Synnøve's images and what I am trying to do only reach a handful of people. This is why I stole my Mums freezer for the Kunstneres Hus installation, to highlight meat hoarding with art hoarding, I see it as the same thing, the same decease if you like.

At his mother's I notice how every time I stop by the house it's a little emptier. Every time I visit another room has been cleared out. A new piece of antique furniture is sitting in the garage waiting to be picked up by someone who has responded to an advert on finn.no. It's July, warm. Victor gives me a tour of the basement where his mother's many collected items used to sit on the shelves. All gone now. The piece of furniture Victor wants me to carry is not his mother's. It's an old chest of drawers that used to belong to the Norwegian artist Synnøve Anker Aurdal. A treasure Victor calls it. Some cynical opportunists are dying with envy.

, they wish it was theirs. They are trying to sneak their greedy fingers into the drawers. They are conspiring against him, against Aurdal's daughter. Wanting to usurp Aurdal's estate to further their own gains. But Victor is onto their schemes, they'll be allowed nowhere near his precious bureau as long as he can help it. Though it's not really his. He has only borrowed it to use it in his exhibition. What we could lean towards is writing/entering ownership and the use of other people. Like discovering someone, an artist for your own benefit, limelight-hypocrisy etc. It also feels like fragments from something overheard, you know, bitching about someone you don't even know, an that evil envy that comes across. (I also think that I understand or even know the root of it all, I tell you over the phone.)

What will happen to it after the exhibition? Victor wonders. The bureaucrats is what will happen. The bureaucrats will dismantle it and bury it in some vault. The beautifully innocuous, light brown bureau thrown in a dumpster and the contents filed away in large archival cabinets never to be seen in public again. That's how we Norwegians treat our national heritage, Victor laments. Victor's show will offer a rare opportunity for an encounter with the contents of Aurdal's bureau. Victor's shows often function as stopovers for things that are disappearing. He rails about the indecency of this disappearance. There isn't room for it all, he realises that, but that doesn't mean you should waive an opportunity to shake your fist against the organizing forces of society, whether it's the logic of bureaucracy as in the case of absence of proper care for our cultural heritage (for Aurdal's holiday photos) or the logic of capital that tramples everything and turns it into grey hamburgers. I feel a nervous sweat break out as I realise that I have unwittingly become Victor's henchman in this paranoid crusade.

I don't know what this is, what it's worth, he admits a moment later as we rummage through the drawers' contents: stacks on stacks of old photographs of Aurdal and her friends and family as well as old documentation of her work, a few newspaper-clippings, old fan letters and postcards. Nonetheless he's been trying to get the National Museum interested, with no luck. They've failed to live up to their responsibility. As expected, a hopeless, derelict institution, he complains. There are pictures of Aurdal and the Norwegian painter (ARTIST might be a better description of) Ludvig Eikaas, her second husband. There's also an envelope with pictures of Eikaas on a trip to Iceland with his friend Jan Otto Johansen. Victor flicks through it and holds up a picture of Ludvig Eikaas standing in what I take to be a geyser with water up to his big belly playing the violin, Jan Otto Johansen's smiling, ruddy face is bobbing in the water next to him. I suspect the photo will enjoy a central seat in Victor's display. You could mention the bear hunt images, but we should focus on Synnøve's images though. Also, this chest of drawers has been gone trough by Siri, so the content is also leftovers. What was overlooked or not loved, even better not needed.

Here, narcissism is good, but I did say or mean self-obsessed, same thing I guess, but I prefer self obsessed. Also the control she had, I can recognise that. She was in control of her life / career, also her great, big signatures, we should do something on that.

Many of the photos show Aurdal, ageing, posing in front of her tapestries. The narcissism! Victor exclaims. He is also a narcissist he admits there's a connection there. Maybe that's what resonates he ponders. There's even documentation of her work here that Victor himself has taken. Back in the nineties when he was a photographer, before he decided to be a contemporary artist instead.

He was making way too much money as a photographer, then all of a sudden nothing. If he wasn't making any money he might just as well call himself an artist, and try to pass his commercial ineptness off as intentional. This is not correct, but I do like it. I like the thought that someone will think that I have been rich, and that what you write is the truth. I think we should look at this. not sure it is needed anyway.

Victor tells me about some old milk-crates he stole once, before he was rich (and then became poor again), so he would have something to store his photo-equipment in. They will be part of the show, the empty crates. I note that Victor's intentions as usual seem wavering. On the one hand, he's overly invested in the material contained in his treasure chest, enthusiastic even. On the other hand he's dissuasive as to its potential or value. He is a hoarder and social pornographer toying with the idea that the material he is drawn to is somehow more than a means to satisfy his curiosity, looking for ways to extract this surplus, then occasionally struck by the futility of the effort he lapses back into a kind of complacent formalist fascination with emptied out containers. Before we leave he retreats to the kitchen and quickly draws four, lines with a wide, blue felt tip marker on one of his mother's old MUSSELEMALET EGERSTUND china plates. He hands it to me – a gift.

(Strå mønster)

It's the first day of installation and Victor has invited me to come by and have a look. The show is in process, and this process needs to be observed. The essay I'm supposed to write will have to detail the process, Victor insists, that is where the work is invested, it's what he cares about. That and the empty bureau. A few large mdf boards resting horizontally on a forest of saw-bucks occupy most of the gallery space. Leading to the office area, where Victor, his assistant, technicians and gallerists are all seated around a big table having lunch, is only a narrow passage along one of the walls.

Victor gets up and greets me heartily. Gives me a hug. Hand the man a slice of bread! he commands. And coffee! He needs coffee, he is a writer! I sit down and soon everyone is busy again. Victor oversees the plastering of a series of posters that depict Synnøve Anker Aurdal's bathtub. Superimposed on the tubs is a picture of Victor multiplied to make it look like he is marching in lockstep with himself. A hilarious faux-austere army of clones. This is so stupid, he says ponderously, looking up at the freshly glued posters. It's important to recognise that we are stupid, that I'm stupid. That's why I put them up there, Victor confides. I agree. Art needs to admit its inanity, wear it on its sleeve. Why should we pretend anymore? Along the lower edge of the row of posters Victor staples old receipts and lottery tickets, the printout of a cheeky email sent to him by a journalist, a picture of a man who has a hole in his face in place of a nose. The border tells a flimsy, scattershot narrative of petty cash, dice rolls and private grievances, the story of a poor, embittered fool, flaunting his lacks while waiting to be struck rich by dumb luck, stirred up in sad little fragments, like the intimate filth you have clinging to your skin and that float to the surface once you sink back in the tub. The tub would be a fitting metaphor for Victor's mode of art making, his interest in what resides closest to the person. What sits beneath their image, clings to their skin, kept out of sight so as not to march onto the battlefield of representation. Victor traffics in the unmanageable, embarrassing and desperately quotidian assemblages that we all lug around. He is an enemy of the oeuvre. The oeuvre is the negation of a story told from the point of view of the bathtub. It's the abominable (wo)man-as-portfolio. The oeuvre never mentions the bathtub. It disentangles the art from everything else, puts it on show and into circulation.

Two days before the opening I stop by Fotogalleriet again to see how things are coming together. I strike up a conversation with one of the girls who runs the place. I don't notice at first but as we talk a [piercing](#), high pitched sound, gradually makes itself known. I ask the gallerist what it is. It's Victor's work, she says. His work? Yes, she says, his work. She seems annoyed, but tries to mask her irritation with a smile. He insisted, she adds, cocking her head and letting her lips tighten. It's not the only example I know of where Victor has created unpleasant working conditions for his gallerists. In his last show in Paris he removed all the windows of the gallery in January. I look around and try to spot the speakers. The sound comes from the adjoining room, the girl informs me. Turns out the tortuous sound hails from a malfunctioning slide-projector in the small room adjacent to the main exhibition space. The room houses a chorus of slide projectors noisily eating their way through a series of slides from a now discontinued set of art historical narratives that gave an overview of art from the reformation to today. On the wall are printouts from a press release of a show Victor did in Paris with the same slides. Here he complains about the discontinuation of the series and how it is now impossible to obtain reasonably priced copies. Another chance to rail not missed. But this slide-sideshow also acts alongside his display of Aurdal's photos as a means to underscore what his display of Aurdal is not. [The word piercing. I thought for a moment that you talked about a pierced ear. Maybe - high pitched, piercing sound?? the connection with the Paris show is well observed, and I really like that.](#)

Regarding *Setting a few things straight*, looking at this know, black on white I come to understand that only I can set things straight, the things that I think needs setting straight. Also, it is very ambitious of me to ask you to do this. So what you have written is very good, makes me think about what I say or demand, I like that. sharp.

Victor tells me that when I write the essay for his show I should take the opportunity to set a few things straight, but he isn't specific about what exactly should be set straight. I take it he wants me to say something critical about how Aurdal's estate is being handled, but I'm reluctant to join his ranks on this mission, not even sure what the crimes are that we are out to punish. Victor also wants me to dwell on the materiality of the show, to capture and detain these objects through observation. To slow down the disappearance to which they are bound, now that the National museum has ignored his requests. He mumbles something about bureaucrats again and refers to Aurdal's tapestry of the same name, a work depicting robot-like men in suit and tie. Documentation of this particular work feature prominently among the photos spread out across Victor's gigantic table. As I stare out over the vista created from the contents of Aurdal's bureau, I feel only a vague sense of resignation. Someone's holiday pictures, a woman I've never met. I recognise some of the people, or rather, Victor points them out to me and tells me their names and I recognise the names. Norwegian artists from a previous generation. Victor's display has nothing to do with the artists, though – but it has everything to do with the process of art. Not the process of its creation but the process where its value is created, which takes place once the works leave the production site and enters the site of representation, the gallery, the museum, the market. The artist posing awkwardly in front of her own work on many of the photos echoes Victor's march across the picture of her bathtub in his posters. This superimposition speaks to how art's value is performative rather than intrinsic, I take it. In *Privat. Offentlig. Transit. Arv.*, by symbolically trying to put indisputably private and inartistic images from Aurdal's estate into circulation alongside the ongoing effort to recognise (perform) the value of her artwork proper, material that in no way belong within any sane version of an artist's oeuvre, Victor simply insists on basking a few more minutes in the bathtub before it's Aurdal's turn to be chewed apart inside the wheel of a slide projector. Ultimately I think the display, with its flashing of private pictures and correspondence, insists on conceiving value as tied to an elusive relational context that does not survive mediation (or, in the case of the artist, *oeuvrefication*).

Stian, I like the essay, you're cheeky and you truly enter my private sphere. My pretentious needs, those you have neglected, and I can only thank you for that. Thank you Mr G. I also feel that the essay is not complete, not finished, that the public art crit Stian G is just about to appear towards the end of your writing. And I think the essay works because of that, the show is also a steppingstone. Like Tor Hoff said; *if you paint a painting, that painting should give birth to at least one other, if not two.* Any roads, I'll call you later and we can go through it all. I hope it can go up on to the wall today or tomorrow. let me know when I can call you. xx. V

Stian Gabrielsen
22 August 2014 12:42
To: victor boulet
Re: Vår nye bil.

Ny tittel, lim inn

WELCOME TO THE BATHTUB