

WHY DON'T YOU SHUT IT?

Solo exhibition Adam Christensen

May 31 – July 6, 2024

In memory of Lene, mare liberum

Of the very many lies we learn as children, that we haven't got wings is one of the first. It is a lie that pulls us away from the visionary state childhood shares with the numinous angel—that time-warping light-bearing emissary of divine hermaphroditic unity—and pushes us towards adulthood, where the desire to fly meets a refusal to do so.

The artist, in the 'truest' sense (of messenger) somehow retains access to this original liminal space of play, and delivers something from it. They sit at the sill as the angel, or as Janus (the two-faced latchkey Roman God of transitions), not necessarily seeing both East and West at once—both beginning and end—but feeling both profoundly: the latibule's stove's caress, and time's gradual knead and knobble of wet salt wind outside. Genius is accessed (but never possessed) by the true artist in their ability to balance and communicate these dualities, to say something of what we all know, and will come to know, which cannot be spoken.

Adam Christensen's fabrics are embroidered and fall at this threshold. Keep the draught out. They can be seen from both sides. You, reader, are of course a visitor at palace enterprise, and witness stillness in the fabric hanging between bleached gallery walls, but I dare say you feel its swaying: courted by the moon and the ocean, a portière cut in memory's ferruginous palette for the bardo-boudoir at envy's maiden's tower top. Smoke from the chimney of the crossing boat below teases that secret room, wherein Adam and his mother, Lene, sit with a deck of cards and a record player (and a stack of her old favourite twelve-inches).

Mother and son look out through the sheer veil he's stitched her image into and out of, and onto the dividing line of the Baltic Sea meeting, but never mixing, with the North Sea, at Grenen, the tides unknowing in a never-ending state of kiss.

Lost in the presentation of the real world, Lene finds herself again in the far outer reaches of The Beatles' catalogue. Tomorrow Never Knows. 'Or play the game "Existence" to the end, of the beginning,' she sings along with John. She may not always remember Adam, but she always loves him. Into her mouth goes the Queen of Spades in an attempted game of Solitaire. 'Moder, no.' But this subversion is also to seer: another game (of fortune) says that this card represents endings, but new beginnings too; the divine feminine, the matriarch.

Shut it . . . for it is obviously bullshit to talk about new beginnings when you've lost or you are losing a loved one. A mother, no less. But worlds have ended and are ending often. Adam's most recent moving image work paid devastating tribute to the passing of his other mom, Lise, in 2020. Born in Aylesbury in 1979 (his father, largely absent, died in mysterious circumstances in Hong Kong, also in 2020), Adam lived in Vejen ('The Way') with his two mothers from the age of 3 to 20. Lene's family had resided there for generations, but she left for a more central city location with Lise gone. Throughout her life, she suffered from a neurological disorder significantly increasing the chances of developing dementia. Adam and his sister have the same condition. It is thought to be less a matter of if than when.

What was first believed to be the onset of dementia in Lene was found to be cancer of the brain metastasised from the stomach. The work on show here was conceived and created in the room occupied by Adam and Lene, which she left on 18 May 2024. In sharing this I do not parrot the shameful tendency of present time kultur to cite trauma or grief as narrative devices to ascribe market value. I won't do it. I don't need to. Adam's art sings, no matter the forensics of his suffering or his joy. I reference it to highlight the specific intensity underpinning a mother and a son's shared experience of a savage and dazzling world, and how much responsibility Lene's care—her consistency, her steadiness, her occasional smashing of all of her favourite plates—must have borne and continue to bear on Adam's vantage point; his artistic flair. What you see in this exhibition is a consequence of harvesting his memory, confronted by the sudden absence of hers.

The fall Adam describes is less ornate than that of the angel-child. He was expelled by Lene from the ladies' sauna for 'going yank-yank' on the nipples of strangers, condemned then to the men's room (and the rest, as the saying goes, is history). He remembers his first jealousies in the royal dress of a little girl at a music festival, and the magnificent threat of sex in the stench of an attending biker and his topless moll. If this child was ever lied to, it occurs to me that he was lied to less, and I know that one of his many virtues—you bear witness to it in this show—is his inability to lie to us. Wings? I ask him, to which he exhales, as though to say a sultry 'maybe' with eyes that add: but what use for this Princess, what use for this son?

By Stanley Schtinter