

INTERVIEW

Steffen Jørgensen gets frank about his methods in painting and animation, and he touches base on conspiracy theory, the art world, cooking – and is cornered in a discussion about pigs. Jørgensen's collaborative partner Will Benedict, with whom he created the digital animation *The Restaurant*, joins the fray with several absurd questions.

The interview was conducted as an email conversation during the summer of 2021.

Thanks to: Steffen Jørgensen and Will Benedict
Design: Alexis Mark
Translation: Glen Garner
Managing editor: Stine Nørgaard Lykkebo
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The Interview series is based on conversations with artists who have been residents at Art Hub Copenhagen. Together with an interviewer and guests, the artists present their work in words and images: not just one work or one show, but their current processes, thoughts, and daily challenges.



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STEFFEN JØRGENSEN

Art Hub Copenhagen

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PROLOGUE

JACOB FABRICIUS:

In this prologue, I'd like to turn everything upside down and start by asking what you think we should talk about. Where do we begin?

STEFFEN JØRGENSEN:



Steffen Jørgensen, *PIG*, digital photograph, 2021

INTERVIEW

JF:

I love pigs, for many reasons, but why did *you* choose a picture of a pig to kick off this conversation? Why do you love pigs?

SJ:

I don't know if I'm particularly fond of pigs. I like a lot of different animals. I went with a picture because I thought it would be easier to begin the chat with something specific. This picture is being used as a press image for Liste with my name underneath.

JF:

That's funny. Liste is a commercial art fair, where artists usually try to tart themselves up and sell themselves as a good and safe investments. But you chose to present yourself as a pig that paints. What have the reactions been like?

SJ:

There was a bit of a counter-reaction, I guess. Being a pig or a swine means being out of control. Being out of control, I recently realized, is something I often use in my work. Either there's an element of a work that invites accident, meaning that I wasn't in control of it, or the work grows so big and extensive that I can't make head or tail of it. It's important to me that what I do isn't too controlled or defined, or maybe never will be.

JF:

You showed paintings at Liste in Basel. Can you talk about the new series of paintings you worked on during your residency at Art Hub?

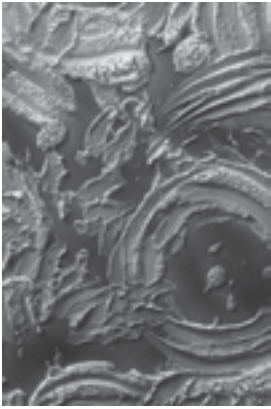
SJ:

I was working on a series of paintings of different foods that were presented as if they were painted by different animals: a pig, dog, horse, etc. Apart from purporting to be painted by animals, the paintwork produced an optical illusion of bulging out from the surface, a *trompe l'oeil* effect. The idea of using animal paws or feet comes from a series I did just before, where I worked with my own hands. I wanted to take myself out of the work but still have a sense of tactility in the pictures. While that was going on, I discovered a book, *Being a Beast*, by Charles Foster, a British writer, veterinarian, taxidermist and philosopher, which chronicles a series of experiments he did. Foster tried living as different animals, such as a badger and a bird. His project is more altruistic than what I had in mind, but elements of his work are still interesting in relation to mine, in particular regarding the human limitation when it comes to truly understanding and immersing oneself in another creature's way of thinking and living.

I probably know more now about the intention of those works and where they are going than when they were in the making. Often, the content is pretty foggy to start out and only clears up long after the work is finished. I now think they play around a lot with the idea of fooling people, tricking someone into believing something that isn't real. The pictures initially appear to have depth because of how the paint seems to bulge. But when you

take a closer look, you realize that's not the case, that the painting is actually completely flat. In some cases, the abstract shape isn't immediately discernible, but after a while you realize that it's not actually abstract but a picture of a muffin. Then you discover that it purports to be painted by a dog, not a person.

I've recently been very interested in – actually, forced to be interested in – conspiracy theories, because I've friends who are caught up in that kind of thing and I'd like to get them out of the rabbit hole. I understand why people get caught up in such theories, because they are pretty fantastical and thrilling. Dark yet thrilling. And they give you a feeling of knowing something other people don't. Kind of like a teen growing up in a small town and being the only one who checks the Aphex Twin CD or Nietzsche out of the school library. It's all very *au courant*, fake news and all that. What interests me is how people who produce material for conspiracy theories manipulate and construct a truth. Also, it's interesting to me how hard it's to resurface from, because everything around you is coloured by the conspiracy. It doesn't matter how many facts you unearth to contradict their views or prove that their theory is built on a lie. Conspiracy theorists even believe mutually exclusive theories. In turn I began looking at such images and my own role as an artist in an art world that I still don't completely understand. For Liste, I also wrote a couple of texts I started a long time ago and wanted to finish. The texts are all stories with a first-person narrator who has a completely different view of reality or maybe just fails as a person. I'm not sure how good they are, but I had to write them.



Steffen Jørgensen, *PIG CHEESE* (Detail),
glue, acrylics, spray paint on MDF, 2021

I also found a painting from around 1510 by Quentin Massys, *An Allegory of Folly*, which visually speaks to some of the same themes I was exploring. I thought that was pretty interesting. Not that I want to say that artists are the new court jesters. That's not very original, but still.



Quentin Massys, *An Allegory of Folly*,
oil on panel, c. 1510. J. Held Collection, New York

JF:

How do you think about pigs otherwise?

SJ:

Right now, there are a lot of animals in my work. Maybe sending you a picture specifically of a pig was random. I personally think pigs are interesting because they have a likeness to white people.

JF:

What does a pig symbolize to you?

SJ:

In this context, the pig symbolizes the white male artist. At the same time, a pig in its prepared state, with an apple in its mouth, is bound up with abundance and celebration and what, for me, is an undertone of cannibalism, recalling the Margaret Atwood character of the "pigoon".

JF:

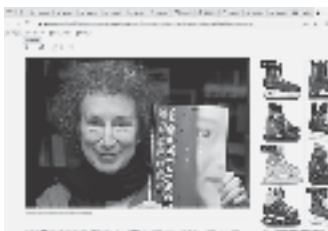
Good reference. That's a dystopian tale. Can you describe the plot of *Oryx and Crake* a little bit and how Atwood uses pigs in her "pigoon project"?

SJ:

In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood writes, "The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host – organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejections."¹

1 Grady, Constance (2016): "It's Margaret Atwood's dystopian future, and we're just living in it". Af Constance Grady, 8. juni, 2016 <https://www.vox.com/2016/6/8/11885596/>

In the *Oryx and Crake* series (I still need to read the third volume), a breed of pig is produced with more hearts, livers and kidneys than ordinary pigs in order to supply rich people with organs. The animals are exploited and destroyed once they have served their purpose. But revenge is sweet. After a leak of biological or chemical weapons, the pigs take power and hunt down the surviving humans. Later, we learn that certain human traits were accidentally transferred to the pigeons in the breeding process. The pigeons, it turns out, are quite intelligent, which is why they rise up against the humans. At least that's how I remember it.



Margaret Atwood with *Oryx and Crake*, vox.com, screenshot, 2021

JF:

The first picture you sent me is a close-up of a pig's face with yellow, red and purple Jackson Pollock-like splotches, but there appears to be a skylight in the background. A classic dream studio?

SJ:

I guess. I don't know if it's my dream. I could work in a mud hole, if that's all I had. But maybe it makes sense for the pig. Those aren't skylights, actually, but a bedroom. The image is rotated, so the perspective doesn't match. An unrealistic perspective.

JF:

Why did you pose as a painting pig?

SJ:

Personally, I've a hard time – maybe I'm even afraid of – seeing myself as a fine-arts painter, even if I've actually made quite a lot of pictures by now. I don't know if I want to be a painter and add to the history of art in that way. Plus, these are paintings (I don't even want to call them paintings, even though a lot of paint is involved) done as if they were painted by different animals. That is, I didn't make them. Nor is it me in the picture. I think I'm trying to write myself off as author. Perhaps because I'm used to working with others. Maybe the animals are pretend collaborators, like invisible friends. It's not me and not my fault that the picture is the way it's. It's the pig's fault.

JF:

How would you describe the pig's facial expression?

SJ:

It has just finished a work and is both sceptical and satisfied at once.

JF:

Pigs have been used a lot in comic books (like Robert Crumb's *Fritz the Cat*, 1965), satirical cartoons and in numerous ways in language. You can be a pig. You can even be a capitalist pig. "Pigs" as a term for the police has been used in England since the 1800s and was

revived by the counterculture in the 1960s and '70s. Is your painter pig also a comment on the economic system that's an intrinsic part of our lives and very much a feature of an art fair?

SJ:

Yes, it's part of that. Before the series of animal paws, I did a series of pictures of ice-cream cones, collectively titled *Dirty Hands*. "Dirty Hands" is used in politics and other contexts to denote that someone has done something they shouldn't have. Also, the pictures were finger-painted, and an ice-cream cone is a treat that often gives you sticky fingers. It's the same with this pig, which both provides critical commentary and purports to have painted a couple of the pictures, making *it* the artist.

JF:

Right away, it made me think of Paul McCarthy's *Painter* (1995), where McCarthy performs as an artist painting abstract paintings in his studio, making a mess with paint, slinging it left and right, sniffing the art collector's ass (to ascertain if the collector can buy a painting). I know this is a different kettle of fish, but can you relate to Paul McCarthy and *Painter*, or is that way off the mark in terms of how you work?

SJ:

Paul McCarthy, in a way, is the reason I became an artist. When I saw *Bossy Burger*, I knew that was going to be my job. So it's probably no coincidence that you mention him. Like him, I've a fondness for abject fluids and food that still shows up in my work.



Steffen Jørgensen, *VIDEO*, video (still), 2021

JF:

You recently did an animation of a pig and other animals singing (or lip-syncing?) Sting's 1988 hit *Fragile*. Can you tell me about the pig in that piece?

SJ:

The pig is no more or less important than the other animals in the video.

JF:

Why did you choose to animate these particular animals?

SJ:

It was important to me that they were the kind of animals we surround ourselves with in everyday life in the Western world. I wasn't interested in having pandas and vampire deer (Kashmir musk deer) in the video. Also, the setting is an old, ramshackle stable, something that once was. The dinosaur in the outhouse is from a past time, too. The stable and the outhouse are located in an overgrown jungle, which is a more dystopian future scenario.



Steffen Jørgensen, *VIDEO*, video (still), 2021

JF:

Why *Fragile* by Sting?

SJ:

It's such a hackneyed song. There are hundreds of different remixes of it – techno, reggae, piano. Something about that song and its simple lyrics hits the spot for a lot of people. *Fragile* is also a song that Sting trots out when performing in the wake of a deadly disaster. Will Benedict recently sent me a recording, from his holiday in Italy, of a restaurant band playing *Fragile*. You can dance, cry and, apparently, even dine to that song, too.

JF:

I just finished Haruki Murakami's *First Person Singular*, a collection of short stories that ends with a fine story, *Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey*: "'Excuse me,' he said in a low voice. It took me a while to realize that he

was a monkey. All the thick hot water had left me a bit dazed, and I'd never expected to hear a monkey speak, so I couldn't immediately make the connection between what I was seeing and the fact that this was an actual monkey." It's a very funny and natural story about a monkey that steals women's names (he calls women "human females"), because he falls in love with them. While I was reading it and writing the first questions for you, I suddenly noticed how many animated animals there are in commercials. Thinking back, they were always there. Have you noticed them?

SJ:

I love Murakami, but I haven't read that book yet. I don't have a TV, so I don't watch a lot of commercials. I remember one with an orangutan. Maybe people would rather buy a car from a dog than from a man in a suit. I don't know if this applies to art collectors, that they'd rather buy something from a pig than a person, but it gives me hope.

JF:

Can you do a technical breakdown of your approach to animation? What program do you use, and how?

SJ:

It varies. Often, I start with sculpting a figure. Then I texture it and finally make a rigging for it, so it can move. Alternately, you can buy a finished model. I do that, when it makes sense. There are many different options for 3D-modelling software, but right now Blender is what interests me. It's free and open source. Edward

Snowden uses it, according to the company's website.³
I don't know for what.



Snowden, blendernation.com, screenshot, 2021

JF:

Can you tell me about your collaboration with Will Benedict?

SJ:

I've known Will for close to 13 years. Our collaboration started when he asked me if I could help him with a couple of videos. In the process, we exchanged a lot of ideas and watched a lot of *Star Trek*, and I got more and more involved in his work. Also, because he barely knows how to use a computer. We decided to do a project together. The American band Wolf Eyes asked us if we could do something for their then new album *Undertow*. It occurred to me that what matched their album least was a cooking show. Will agreed. I also had an idea from an abandoned film project about a high-rise with a bunch of stuff going on inside and a long zoom out to reveal a snail-like alien with a long

² <https://www.blendernation.com/2021/07/19/edward-snowden-uses-blender/>

trunk, a "snailien". Will had written a text about someone encountering a prehistoric world, and from there we began the work that became *The Restaurant*.

JF:

How do you and Will develop a project together?

SJ:

We send each other videos, text excerpts and Instagram posts that we find interesting. From that, we develop or build another world, in which the videos or texts make sense as parts of a story. We may have a general idea, but often the found videos dictate the direction we take. We also use each other's old works or ideas in our collaboration. It's a very entertaining and light way of working. Anything can be used. Anything goes.

JF:

Can you talk about *The Restaurant*? How are the individual episodes constructed? Does each have a separate theme, and how do you view this wonderfully bizarre work?

SJ:

The Restaurant is set in a skyscraper full of restaurants. We follow the chef at the restaurant *Chez Shit* in his attempts at cooking. Each episode is based on a dish: french fries, pizza, chicken, etc. The clueless chef searches YouTube for videos and tutorials for making french fries, misunderstanding or elaborating on the recipes he finds. In every episode, he orders his ingredients from his supplier, the Snailien. The Snailien

observes us over the course of the series and delivers a profound monologue to conclude each episode.



Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, *The Restaurant, season 2*, video (still), 2021

JF:

Søren Aagaard is a chef and an artist. Why did you decide to feature him in Season 1?

SJ:

Søren is a good friend and a great artist. I like working with my friends and people I know. It makes everything so much easier than the few times I've worked with actors. When we shot the french fries tutorial, he was in Berlin doing a project about french fries. In return for using him in the video, I helped him out. In the 30 minutes of footage, we shot – ten seconds of which we ended up using – I'm wearing a big french fry costume that we never get to see. I also filmed my former collaborator Robert Kjær Clausen for a tutorial on cider-making. Moreover, Søren and I work together in the YEARS collective, which also

includes the artists Anna Margrethe Pedersen, Ditte Soria and Merete Vyff Slyngborg.

JF:

That sounds like fun. How much footage do you have for each season? How much is stripped away and can it be recycled?

SJ:

It's hard to give a general figure. It depends on who is in front of or behind the camera. When I'm filming, I tend to film too much, because I want to be sure to have everything I need. Also, I like to try out a lot of different ideas that end up on the cutting-room floor. When I hire people to film for us, it becomes a financial matter of how much we're getting for our money.

JF:

What do you say we ask Will Benedict if there's anything he would like to ask you?

SJ:

Alright, let's do it.



Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, *SNAILIEN*, Digital photo, 2019

JF:

Will, do you have any questions you've always wanted to ask Steffen but were afraid to? It could be a top ten list of banal yes-or-no questions or simply thoughts about Steffen you'd like to share with our readers?

WILL
BENEDICT:

How bad is too bad? I feel if we're not careful, we might nosedive into steampunk. And would that be okay?

SJ:

It just has to be very, very bad. Then you mix it with something very, very good, and voilà! Steampunk is bad. We can do it!

WB:

Okay, so you mean, if you add some (very, very good) Shakespeare to some (very, very bad) steampunk, then voilà? A masterpiece of steampunk Shakespeare? What exactly even makes steampunk so bad? Is it the unused goggles on the forehead? Hayao Miyazaki made that cool by putting the goggles on a pig. So (very, very bad) goggles on a (very, very good) pig. Voilà! I think I'm getting it. Where in the badlands of bad are you headed next?

SJ:

I don't know. There's so much bad stuff to choose from. Lately, I've been thinking a lot about bad 3D – again. This kind of aesthetics feels like having a fever.

It seems empty, but still full of horror. Bad 3D and the Smurfs mixed with some newbie Marxist views. Maybe Marxism and the Smurfs aren't far enough from each other. The Smurfs' village is maybe too close to a Marxist utopia. Then we've Gargamel Bezos who comes to eat them all. Okay, maybe something else. Weed aesthetics. Hemp-leaf Monet. I think the reason why steampunk is bad is that it isn't honest. It's full of nostalgia for things that were: rusty old pipes, gears and silly-looking computers. It's trying to be simple and friendly, but it still wants to compete with today's technology.

WB:

Ya, nostalgia is the worst. What do you do to relax?

SJ:

Podcasts. Or work. I love to work, but, with two kids, time is limited. It depends, I guess. I relax when I think about things I want to do. Right now, I want to finish my kitchen. But then when I can't do it, I get really frustrated, and that's not very relaxing.

WB:

You think someday you might be the kind of guy who wears funny hats?

SJ:

I could be that kind of guy. I sometimes dream about having a haircut that looks like a hat, but my skin condition won't allow me to grow my hair long anymore. I guess you also need to be a certain age for a hat. I'm too young. Do you spend time imagining me with a



Found image, 2022



fqu9hhnp1al31.jpg, www.reddit.com, screenshot, 2021

hat? I often imagine you with a big futuristic motorcycle between your legs. You'd ride it through the South of France in the summer. You're wearing those sweatpants of yours with the brown stain on the ass. A worn T-shirt. You're too cool for a helmet. It should be one of those motorbikes where you sit inside the wheel. People would be sitting at those little café tables, and you'd ride by on your noisy-ass machine. The sound of the bike mixed with the sound of spoons rattling in espresso cups and people choking on their shitty, little coffees. They would call you Monsieur Hamster.

WB:

Beachfront property or big-city penthouse?

SJ:

A few years ago, I'd have chosen a beachfront property, but now I'm too worried about *Waterworld* becoming a reality. Okay, maybe I'd still choose to live by the beach.

WB:

Rectangular or square tissue boxes?

SJ:

We've neither of those in Denmark. At least I haven't seen them. Rectangular looks more stable. You can still pull out tissues with an attitude. The square one looks like you'd just pull the whole thing off the table.



Tissuebox Rectangle, private photo, 2022



Tissuebox Square, private photo, 2022

WB:

The square one works just fine. If you could start from scratch, what color would you tile your bathroom?

SJ:

I just talked with Ditte about our bathroom. We had planned to make it all mirrors. Mirror tiles. I think I'd like it if I got a feeling of being in an exotic jungle, or just somewhere outside, when I shower. I don't get that by watching my own fat, white ass.

WB:

And what's your favorite scent?

SJ:

Favourite scent? I don't know. I like fresh-cut lemongrass, roses (not old-lady roses, but the yellow ones), violets, raspberry. All floral scents, but not lavender.

WB:

Which of your two kids is your favorite?

SJ:

My favourite kid is ... ahhhhh, haha! You know who it is.

WB:

Kumquats?

SJ:

Love kumquats. All citrus fruits are awesome: Buddha's-hand, bergamot, kumquat, lime.'

JACOB FABRICIUS:

Let's talk about the two new episodes of *The Restaurant* you made in 2021. They are done in a new way. There are fewer quick cuts. How is *The Restaurant's* story structured?

SJ:

When you start a film, you have a lot of ideas about shooting and editing it. Seeing what you shot is always surprising, because that's when you start knowing what the footage can and wants to do. The difference between season one and season two is the dialogue. We wanted season two to be very dialogue-driven. Moreover, we thought it would be fun to split each episode in two, like combining two series that are different visually and content-wise. Doing so feels pretty organic, and I think we'll be editing it further. That's what we did with season one. It actually took us several years to finish making and editing season one. It's a giant jigsaw puzzle, and it takes an incredibly long time, at least for us, to put it all together the right way. This time, the puzzle, the difficult exercise, lay in weaving the interrogation-like interview from *Café Wha?* Together with "animal fart", the 3D-animated sequence.

JF:

You mentioned once that the first two episodes of *The Restaurant* were conceived as a sitcom-like cooking show. I think the two new episodes are closer to that than the first ones were. The interrogation scene, where the female detective asks standard foodie questions of her two victims is incredibly funny and

utterly absurd. Like, "Would you call food a habit?" and "Are you afraid of your kitchen?" The victims appear to be innocent, but the unconventionally dressed detective is trying to make their eating habits weird and guilty, as if she were coercing them into confessing their eating disorders or penchant for organic produce and specialty products. What seems normal is criminalized. How did you come up with those characters?

SJ:

It's not that far from the real world, I think, to imagine a food police. That's a pretty banal thing, which I like. I like pushing banalities to an extreme. The subject of food covers such a wide variety of things: identity, nationality, politics, religion, rituals. Meanwhile, it's so fundamental. We've to eat. We like things that taste good. In the vast system that has been constructed to feed us, the basic has become complex. Now, it takes an army to produce food, and you have to think twice before eating an apricot from Spain or a vinaigrette made with garlic from China.

JF:

What would your answer be to the question, "Is family just a refrigerator you feel entitled to?"

SJ:

No.

JF:

"Sweet, sour, bitter or savoury?"



Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, *The Restaurant, season 2*, digital photo, 2021

SJ:

Sour.

JF:

Can you talk about how you used sound effects in the interrogation sequence?

SJ:

The sound effects are there to create the illusion of an audience in the interrogation room. When they laugh or boo at weird moments, it makes the situation even more absurd. You might feel you're misunderstanding or failing to understand something vis-à-vis the audience.

JF:

After the detective gives the criminalized people a chance to eat (they are offered "dulce tamale con crema with nopales, a lemon zest crema and salsa verde,

watermelon and feta salad with pomegranate and lime dressing with fresh mint and oregano, a blue-green BLT – bacon, blue cheese and green apple on a fruit and nut bread with chives"), she returns to interrogate them further but quickly leaves again with the words, "I can tell you're not ready to talk." There's no resolution or conclusion to the interrogation. Instead, we cut to an animated scene of a stable with animals and two radio presenters (read: aliens) interviewing a highly intelligent fly atop a turd on the table. (If I read that description without having seen the film, I'd rush out and get a copy immediately.)



Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, *The Restaurant, season 2*, (still), 2021

SJ:

Thank you. That's another thing that's important to us: setting up an experiment you'd like to see yourself, like mixing a classic procedural with a cooking show. You don't know until it's done whether the experiment was a success. Season two is still pretty new to me, and I still question whether we've completely succeeded. But I'm sure we will at some point.

JF:

The end credits list you as the wise fly. Why did you want to play that particular part?

SJ:

I'm actually credited as Paranoid Fly. There are two flies in the film. We hired David K. Jones to play the part of Doctor Fly because of his Dracula impression. As it turned out, he specializes in scientific voiceovers and did the whole thing in one take. I did the voice of Paranoid Fly, which in every episode tells the camera that the victims shouldn't have ordered that particular dish on the menu. I don't know if I can say why I picked that part, but we imagine it will be even bigger in coming episodes.

JF:

Would it be wrong to characterize *The Restaurant* as absurd, political and satirical? What TV series or other historical works would you say inspire you?

SJ:

It's hard to say exactly what inspires us. One thing I saw recently and really like is HBO's *Watchmen*. Will and I are huge consumers of good and bad entertainment: TV, movies, news, Instagram, podcasts and, as a new thing, computer games. Will gave me a Nintendo Switch last summer. It all blends together in our heads, is partially digested and comes out as some kind of idea.



Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, *The Restaurant*, season 2, (still), 2021

JF:

In the “science” dialogue, the fly mixes fact and fiction about bacteria, human microbiomes (what’s in human tissues and biofluids) and deep-sea mining (for elements like nickel, yttrium and tellurium) – a crazy mash-up of words describing sustainability for the body and soul, a critique of capitalism and exploitation of natural resources. What’s behind the dialogue about this “Happy Health Regular Balanced Shit”?

SJ:

We navigate a swamp of real information and trivialities. In that swamp, we found the story about human symbiosis with microbes, in a Radio Lab podcast, and the one about deep-sea mining, in an article in *The New York Times*. Juxtaposing the two stories was interesting for us. Both stories are about tiny entities intended for improving a larger system, and their capitalist exploitation.

JF:

It's interesting that you use the word "swamp", which has been wielded by rightwing politicians like Ronald Reagan, Donald Trump and Inger Støjberg, to mention a few. They all say "drain the swamp" as a metaphor for cutting of red tape, reducing bureaucratic obstacles, fighting terror, etc. Are you out to stir up the swamp?

SJ:

I hadn't thought about that. But I don't want to drain a swamp. It's more that I'd like to see what's hiding in the murky water. Where it all gets mixed together. They're probably talking about a different kind of swamp.

JF:

The new episodes of *The Restaurant* are no less absurd, by any means. But there seems to be more shape and story to them, even an outright critical message. Do you see that development, too?

SJ:

Yes, I can see that. Our starting point was to use a more ordinary storytelling style, which I've worked with before, with Robert Kjær Clausen and Allan Nicolaisen. But it didn't really work for Will and me. Also, I think, a partnership and the works you produce together undergo a development. They age and mature, and become more ambitious over time. At least that's my experience.



Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, *The Restaurant*, season 2, (still), 2021

JF:

The equation $E = mc^2$ was first formulated by Albert Einstein in 1905, in his four treatises *Annus Mirabilis*. They are the cornerstone of modern physics. How did "animal fart = mc^2 " end up in *The Restaurant*? What does "animal fart = mc^2 " mean to you?

SJ:

E is for energy, which we've replaced with "fart". As Steve Kado wrote, about *The Restaurant*, "Benedict & Jørgensen's fable shows us that we are no longer eating to provide energy and motion to our organism, but rather the reverse: the shit is driving the body." Also, it just looks sciencey.

SJ:



JF:

What's this? An animal you dug up in the garden?

SJ:

It's a failed attempt to make the ultimate Christmas dessert: bonbons and a chocolate Santa filled with rice pudding encased in cherry jelly, moulded in a Coke bottle.

JF:

For the exhibition *iwillmedievalfutureyou1* at Art Sonje Center, Seoul, in 2019, you made an installation based on *The Restaurant*. Would you like to talk about that work? How did you pick the objects for this installation?

SJ:

It was a fun project. We got to rummage through the basement of Art Sonje. We wanted to make a kind of backstage setting out of cleaning products and junk, combined with local souvenirs. Placing the Snailien in that

kind of setting was a perfect fit for us. In *The Restaurant*, he's a background character observing the events.

JF:

I actually thought the Snailien was the protagonist. The Snailien is the narrator, recapping or, more accurately, introducing the episodes. Also, he has the sickest truck. But you see him more as a fly on the wall?

SJ:

He has a big part in *The Restaurant*, but I think of him exactly as a fly on the wall, as someone in the background pulling the strings, in a way. After all, he's a supplier to all the restaurants in *The Restaurant*. Everybody knows him and he knows everybody. He needs a sick truck.



JF:

Can you tell more about the Snailien? How did he get his shape and identity?

SJ:

Years ago, I started collecting illustrations of aliens for an idea that never panned out. One of the pictures was of a sillier, chubbier version of the Snailien. I was going to use the character in another project, but then it became the Snailien. I think he got the part precisely because of that truck. This clip is from a stock-footage website that we spend a lot of time browsing. We needed someone to drive that truck, and an idea why.

JF:

Identity is a much-discussed topic these days. Have you defined the Snailien's gender?

SJ:

We haven't actually defined the gender, though we refer to him as a "he". When I started sculpting him, I made the basic shape in a program called Make-Human. It has a lot of sliders for adjusting what the model is going to look like, including age, muscles, weight and gender. I remember that the gender slider was in the middle. We've discussed the Snailien's genitals, but we'ven't arrived at what they look like. Partly unconsciously, I think, it was important for us not to define his gender too specifically. A lot of species of snail are hermaphrodites.

JF:

Have you considered doing more installations?

SJ:

Yes, we talk about doing more. We also envision doing installations that bring something else to the table and don't repeat what happens in the movies. At BIM'21 (Biennale de l'Image en Mouvement), we placed the entrance right in the middle of the video projection, so that the video was projected right into your eyes when you entered the room, while everyone was looking at you. At the back of the room, you discovered yourself in a one-way mirror, and behind the mirror you could watch people watching the film.

JF:

Would you like to share the sketches, the "doors", you showed me earlier? Or are they secret?

SJ:

No, they're not secret.



Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, installation model, 2019



Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, installation model, 2019

JF:

Shit is discussed several times in the new episodes. The “science” dialogue includes a very funny conversation about the fly’s relationship to shit and the rat’s relationship to the fly. At one point, it goes, “The fly is a doctor. It asks its patient for a sample of poop to do a faecal transplant from humans into rats.” Are we back where we started our conversation about pigs and making a mess?

SJ:

Yes, funny we should end with that. It seems a very natural and inevitable conclusion. I remember a performance I did back at the academy, where, in a kind of lecture situation, I drew and discussed a drawing (the same drawing that the snail draws in the *Fragile* video) of an ass shitting into the mouth of a person whose brain fills up with maggots and explodes out of the head of the person, who’s lying down. I don’t remember all the details from back then, but afterwards I told the audience that I was going to look at them one by one and imagine that I was taking a shit in their mouth. Jakob Jakobsen, an artist and instructor at the school, was in the audience, and it was very hard for me to imagine shitting in his mouth. I like Jakob, so of course it was hard. He liked the performance. Like I said, I’m really good at ingesting things. Both food and information. I probably have a good addiction gene. Everything I take in is transformed and digested and has to come out as something. There have been periods when I haven’t had time to make art and have come close to giving up. The result was that I got backed up and depressed. Yes, I probably have a childish fascination with messiness and shit.



Steffen Jørgensen, *VIDEO*, video (still), 2021

JF:

Have Will and you discussed what the future looks like for *The Restaurant* and your partnership?

SJ:

We haven't really discussed the future like that. We're going to finish season two. That will probably take a couple of years. Then we'll see what happens.



Steffen Jørgensen, *VIDEO*, drawing, 2020

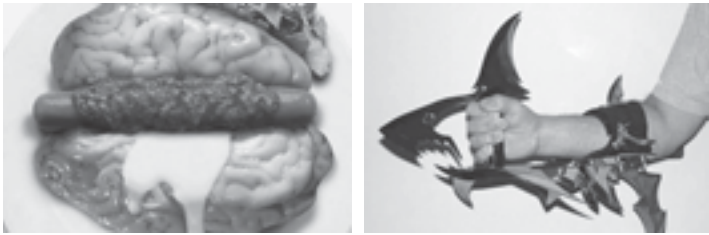
EPILOGUE

JF:

Can you make lists of the below (answer in text or image form)?

Five things you don't want to eat:

SJ:



Found images, 2022

JF:

Five places you would like to eat:

SJ:



Found images, 2022

JF:

Five ingredients that aren't used enough in cooking:

SJ:

- Confectioners' sugar
- Roses
- Movies – i.e., movies that match the food, or vice versa
- Surprises
- Citrus fruits other than lemons, like Buddha's-hands.

JF:

Five recipes you would recommend:

SJ:

I really don't know. I can't remember the last time I cooked something that didn't have to be done in a hurry, except for the ultimate Christmas dessert:

Ingredients:

- One hollow chocolate Santa
- One box of bonbons of your choice
- Approx. one litre of cherry sauce
- Rice pudding (not a lot, maybe 300 ml). Can be purchased readymade and mixed with port or red-wine syrup
- 4 ml elderberry cordial
- 1/2 litre empty Coke bottle
- Gelatine.

Preparation:

- 1 First make the rice pudding for filling the hollow chocolate Santa. Remove the hat from the chocolate Santa with a hot knife. Fill a piping bag with rice pudding and fill the Santa. Replace the Santa hat. Melt the edges with the hot knife and "glue" the hat back on.
- 2 Empty the Coke bottle and halve lengthwise. Mix the elderberry cordial with gelatine and pour into the bottle. Freeze. Make sure the bottle is horizontal.

- 3 When the jelly has set, remove the Coke bottle from the freezer. Place the Santa face down on the jelly. Decorate with bonbons. Return the bottle to the freezer.
- 4 Heat the cherry sauce and strain out the berries. Mix in the gelatine. When the sauce has cooled, remove the Coke bottle from the freezer. Carefully pour the cherry sauce over the chocolates in the bottle. Immediately return the bottle to the freezer.

This recipe was a complete failure!

JF:

Shoulda, woulda, didn't:

SJ:





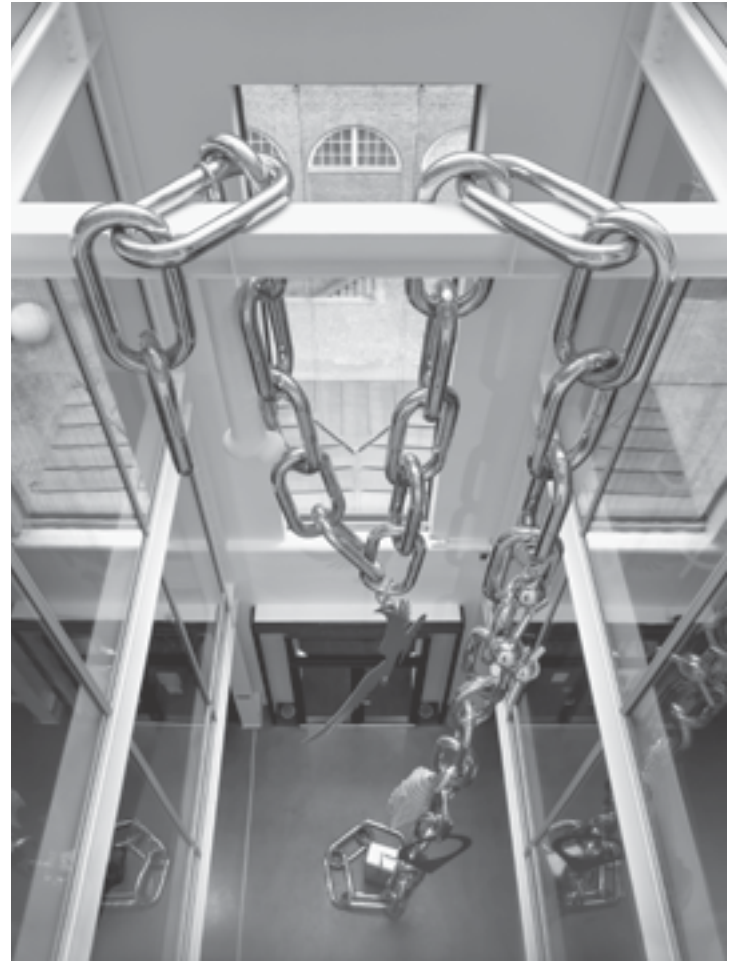
I just ate a human child.

Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, *The Restaurant*, season 1, video (still), 2017-2020 (pp. 46-49)



- when we return to that essentially dark state -



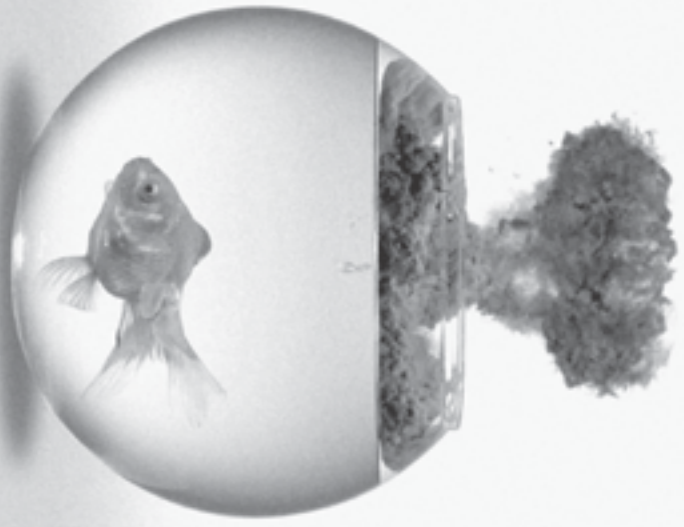




Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen,
CIVILIZATION SLID OFF LIKE A BATHROBE, Digital print, 2019



Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen,
Untitled, Digital print, 2019

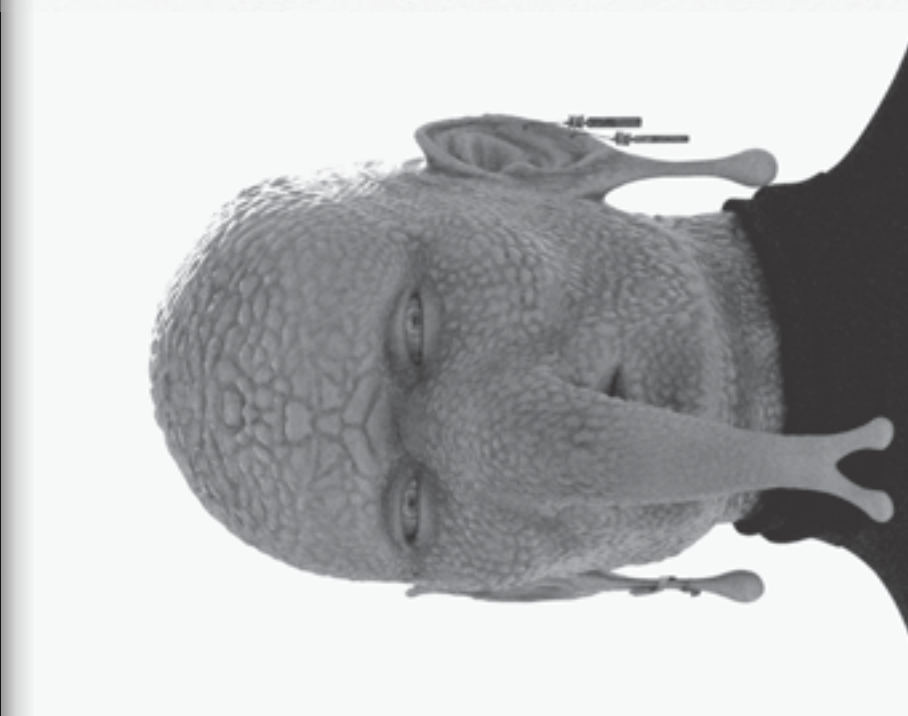


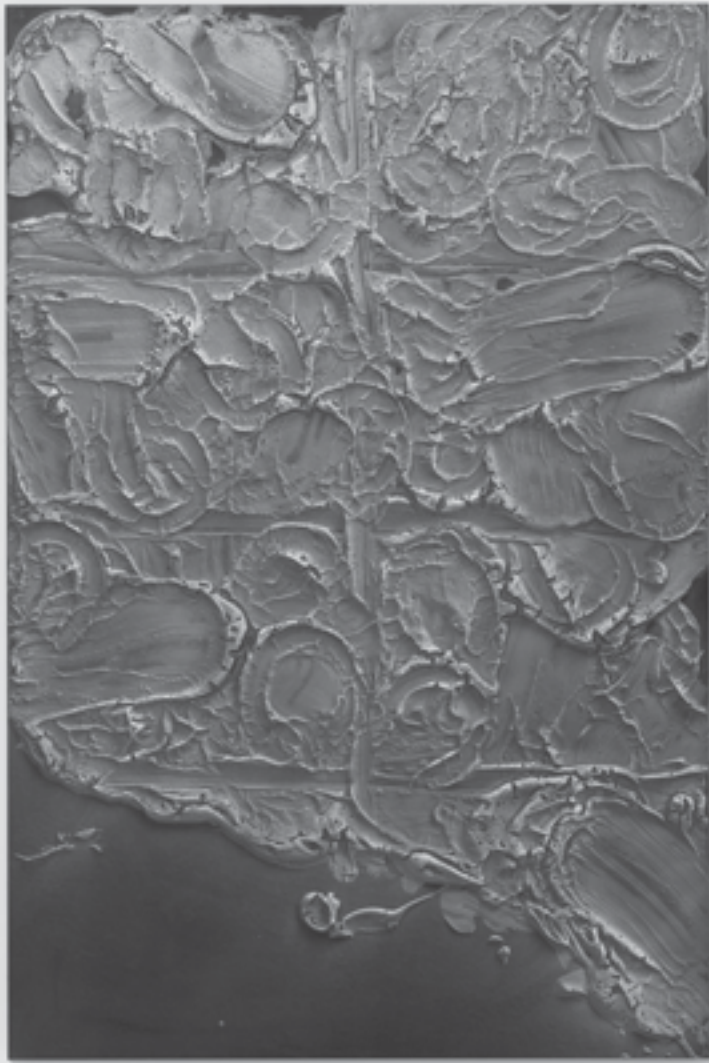
Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, *I SPEND TOO MUCH TIME OUTSIDE*, video (still), 2019 (pp. 54–59)



I SPEND TOO MUCH TIME OUTSIDE







Steffen Jørgensen, *Cherry Picking (Dirty Hands (Horse Chocolate))*,
Glue, acrylics, spray paint on MDF, 2021



Steffen Jørgensen, *Cherry Picking (Dirty Hands (Chicken Swiss Roll))*,
Glue, acrylics, spray paint on MDF, 2021



Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, *What Do People Do All Day*,
Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, Installationview,
Photographs: David Stjernholm (pp. 60–61)



Will Benedict & Steffen Jørgensen, *Mosquitoes*, Installation view, *iwillmedievalfutureyou1*, Art Sonje Center, 2019, Photographs: Euirock Lee (pp. 62–63)



YEARS, *I dont want to live, I dont want to die*, Den Frie, Copenhagen,
Installationview, Photographs: David Stjernholm (pp. 64–65)

