

CHRISTINE DAHLERUP
The Negative of Knowing



THE NEGATIVE OF KNOWING

Text by Christina Dahlerup, Paola Paleari

The canteen on the first floor of the building at Thoravej 29 is coupled with a lovely terrace, wooden-decked, with long tables and benches perfectly positioned to soak up every ray of the midday sun. When lunchtime arrives and the weather is kind, the terrace becomes a prime spot for people working in the building to escape their office chairs and laptops for a meal and a breath of fresh air.

Across from the terrace is a primary school. Lunch at Thoravej 29 coincides with breaktime for kids craving an outdoor escape just as much. The time they spend on eating is minimal; far more is spent on funner activities such as running, kicking, chasing, throwing, and jumping. Excited squeaks and high-pitched voices rise from the enclosed schoolyard, bouncing upward when echoed by the hard surfaces around them like a ping-pong ball caught in a gust of wind.

“So annoying,” I’ve heard people mutter more than once. “With all this noise, it’s almost impossible to have a conversation.” Which is indeed true, and almost makes one wish the school wasn’t there, forgetting that it stood long before the elevated plateau was ever turned into a mingle-spot for the directors, employees and freelancers next door.

Now that November is upon us and the benches and tables stay damp most days, people eat their lunch behind the long-windowed wall separating the terrace from the canteen and don’t really think about the students’ hubbub anymore. But when Christine Dahlerup began her six-month residency at Art Hub Copenhagen/

Thoravej 29, it was in the midst of an exceptionally mild and sunlit September. This allowed her to experience the lunchtime chorus at full force, and eventually led her to discover the seed of her current work. Funny how art making – as with many other things in life – often comes down to fortuitous timing.

Just a five-minute walk from Thoravej 29 lies an old-fashioned metal vendor, resisting the rising tide of the neighbourhood's gentrification by selling metal pieces in all shapes and sizes at cheap prices from its dusty shop. Christine bought two long and slender aluminium plates there, which she then stored in Art Hub Copenhagen's metal workshop until one morning when she carried them over to the schoolyard to lean against a pair of goalposts.

In agreement with the school, Christine invited two fourth-grade classes to play balls off the plates, each hit slowly moulding and bending the malleable metal surface. At first an alien presence, the plates soon became a backdrop for the kids' game – a coulisse folded into their daily-rehearsed choreography of running and kicking about, and a witness to the shifting alliances and small hierarchies animating the brief interval between classes.

Bent and creased, the plates are now back in the metal workshop, waiting to be powder-coated white. Eventually, they will resemble oversized sheets of crumpled blank paper. Or, rather, their negative, as the plates left Art Hub empty only to return there loaded with data.

Loaded with physical data: the points of contact between the ball and the surface, holding the kinetic energy of the first and the elasticity of the second.

Loaded with suggested data: the thumps, the shouts, the laughter and the tensions; all the noise and the invisible structures of a school playground during recess. Loaded with contextual data: Copenhagen's Nordvest district, the year 2025, Al Quds Skole and Thoravej 29, their new neighbouring *community*.¹

Properly loading the film determines whether a roll yields usable images or nothing at all, making this initial action particularly exposed to the shortcoming of the final output. For Christine Dahlerup, the same persistent awareness of potential failure is coupled with an attention to information density and its extremes – the blacks and whites of existence (understood, as in a film negative, as an accumulation or lack of data, and therefore of meaning). Together, these concerns form the connecting thread between the various shapes she gives to her works.

Among them, analogue photography holds a special place in her artistic heart, given its intimate relationship with eternity and disappearance – the way it freezes a moment while acknowledging its loss. Sculpture, on the other hand, grounds this same tension in the physical world. It supplies the invisibility of a concept with weight and volume, allowing perception and material to meet in a physical body. They both transform our lived

1. "Thoravej 29 er vores bygning i Københavns NV-kvarter.(...) Det er samtidig et community, som arbejder for at skabe positive forandringer for mennesker og samfund ["Thoravej 29 is our building in Copenhagen's Nordvest quarter. ... It is also a community, working to create positive change for people and society"].

<https://www.bikubenfonden.dk/indsatser/thoravej-29>.

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experience into absence, and then into presence again: the one through light, the other via structure and touch.

Christine Dahlerup is not the know-it-all kind of artist. At first glance, her gestures might seem unequivocal, her works self-contained. But in fact her practice is charged with possibility. It carries a frank awareness of its creator's own limits, paired with an implicit demand on the viewer to find and fill the gaps that inevitably occur.

I have often thought about ancient oracles since my first encounter with Christine, and the reason why has slowly become clear to me, like the image on a silver print surfacing in the darkroom tray. Perhaps this is how we tend to see conceptual artists – as omniscient figures, producing statements and prophecies for us to follow. If so, we have been chasing an illusion all along. An oracle channels information, she does not dictate knowledge. She is a mediator, not a problem-solver. But at the end of the day, oracles were mostly women, and those who came seeking answers were mostly men in positions of power, hearing only what they wished to.²

The same oracle-like framework of mediated understanding and active interpretation can be found in the titles Christine gives to her work, which could partly explain why titles are so crucial for her. *Death, The Moon, Hundred Years* are just some examples. Pregnant words ("loaded", we might say), each one opening several

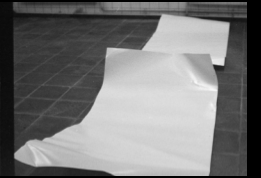
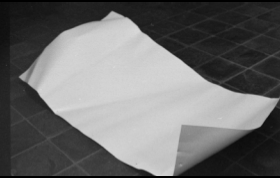
2. A famous example is King Croesus of Lydia, who asked the Oracle of Delphi whether he should wage war on Persia. According to Herodotus (Histories, 5th century BCE), the oracle replied that if he went to war he would "destroy a great empire." Croesus let his bias fill in the meaning and assumed it referred to Persia. He attacked, and it was his own kingdom that ultimately collapsed.

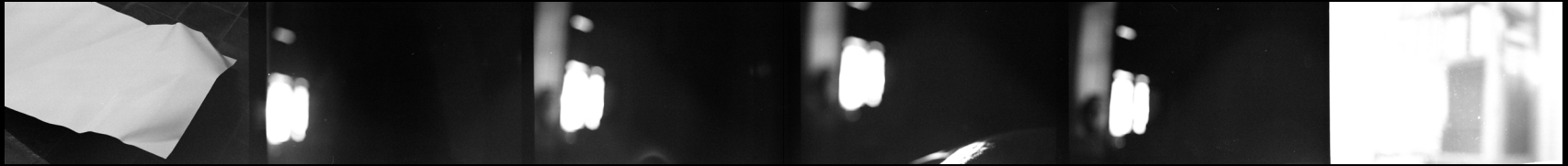
ways in rather than closing a meaning down. At the moment of writing, the schoolyard pieces are still to be titled.³

Today I went to the canteen, my mood brooding from trying and failing to conclude this text. I sat almost alone at the long communal table, facing the large window wall, when a football suddenly appeared in view. It flew over the tall metal fence surrounding the schoolyard, arced through the air, vanished, then surfaced again. It travelled through the air in perfect silence, all the noise sealed out by the thick glass.

The whole thing lasted only a few seconds. But in that brief moment the essence of the plates (and the influence they have played on my subconsciousness) became clear to me. Some understandings do not arrive by intention but by small coincidences, through the repetition of looking, through a kind of re-making that happens almost without our consent. Christine Dahlerup's work lives in that space. It sits in a slipping between attention and chance, between what we think we know and what reveals itself to us when we stop chasing it. It is the manifestation of what happens when we stay with the flow of life long enough for it to shift and (re)arrange itself.

3. In the days following the writing of this text, the schoolyard pieces were titled *recess a)* and *recess b)*. *Recess* as an English term for *frikvarter*, and more broadly intended as a temporal or spatial phenomenon; *a* and *b* as in multiple choice exams, as well as the names of the two fourth-grade classes that collaborated with the artist to produce the works.





Photos by Christine Dahlerup
Untitled #1, 2025, scan of negative film
Untitled #1, 2025, scan of negative film

CHRISTINE DAHLERUP

In her work, Christine Dahlerup integrates sculpture, installation, text and images with form, mediation and spectatorship. Exploring how narratives about society are constructed, she has an interest in how we engage with flatness and what is framed. The space occupied tests the 'weightiness' of art historical discourse and examines the properties of image and vision. The authorship of each work aims to contain both the innateness of things, the artist, the exhibition space, and the eyes looking at the work.

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