

MADELEINE ANDERSSON
Sometimes We Are Eternal



SOMETIMES WE ARE ETERNAL

Text by Bluestockings (bs)

Behind the grotesquely slick, humorous and seductive aesthetic of Madeleine Andersson's work lies the drive to explore our emotional and rational terrain – to uncover or obscure how we as humans act, produce, experience and perceive these states of complex psychological and physiological responses. Obsessed with our present reality, Andersson locates the strange normalcy and fetishisation of Western terminologies and epistemic fixations in everything from consciousness, the apocalypse and climate-social justice to AI and the attention economy. She challenges us with the more leaky and aberrant concepts: Ideas, drives and bodies that refuse to be smoothed into the mould or any ideally ascertained category.

Andersson combines research-driven speculative and dialectical thinking with a distinct use of materials and objects to produce works as tricky as they are highly communicative and disturbingly accurate. She has been building this vocabulary for years, constructing increasingly elaborate headfucks and skydives into ideas and concepts, strategically rousing and re-routing our nervous systems, cognitive abilities and curiosities through video works, texts, lecture performances, sculptures and now larger-scale installation work.

THE COMBINATION GAME

Through meticulous note systems and research, Andersson builds elaborate archives for both ideas and objects. Remarkably, her work skirts the general superabundance of research-based art. There's no denying that her carefully constructed video works, texts and



Madeleine Andersson, *Degenerative Knowledge Production*, 2024, Overgaden.
Photo by David Stjernholm



Madeleine Andersson, *Ding-dong-daddy*, 2024, Degenerative Knowledge
Production, Overgaden. Photo by David Stjernholm

objects are filled to the brim with information, nuances and juxtaposed material properties. But her work is more minimal, each element building suspense in real time, tilting the audience towards some pivotal and visceral viewpoint – as in the case of the most recent triptych of exhibitions *Degenerative Knowledge Production* (2024) at O-Overgaden, *Shock Value* (2024) at Index in Stockholm and *10K VIRGIN BRAINS* (2024–25) at Kunsthall Trondheim. The three exhibitions all feature elements of the same body of work centered around the speculative documentary *Degenerative Knowledge Production* (2024). Across historical and contemporary contexts, the exhibitions examine the Western notion of progression through our brain as idea, matter, electrical circuit and currency to uncover absurdities of human intelligence and technologies.

Recurring elements in the exhibitions are video works such as *Bataille's Flies* (2024), looping close-ups of flies ripping off their own heads, and sculptural pieces like the catchily-titled *Ding-dong-daddy* (2024) featuring two severed plastic hands clasped onto business briefcases.

Still, each iteration radically twists away from its predecessor, not just through differentiating titles but in terms of how each one builds physical layers to the presentation adhering to the site-specificity of each exhibition space.

Andersson methodically connects materials, objects and installatory parts to physically place and situate the audience in her elaborate inquiries. With the installation piece *10K Virgin Brains* (2024–25), she adds an almost architectural feel, superimposing a wall-like structure into the space. Sleek and minimal in its form,

the installation consists of white shiny buckets with hair neatly hanging out. The work is made as a replica of the world's largest preserved brain collection housed in Odense, Denmark. The brains in the collection were taken, stolen or donated from individuals diagnosed with mental illness, and who were never subjected to medication, hence the “untouchedness” of the brains. The collection spurred the first public discussion on scientific ethics in Denmark, raising questions around violence, care and progress. The image of random brains in ordinary buckets in an abandoned archive gathering dust in a vast cellar is given a monumental capacity in its sculptural form becoming that uncomfortable thing in the middle of the room. With stumped fascination we are placed in front of the endless rows of white buckets, as if to remind us that sometimes we are eternal, and in this reality immortality is horrifically bizarre.

Just as much as her research becomes a speculative mapping of an idea, the full-scale installation forms its physical blueprint to choreograph and construct clear pathways and cul-de-sac moments for the audience. And what do we meet? Science or knowledge production as a collective nightmare that tells on us all, exposing our complicity in the violence of progress and implicating us in larger, more ungraspable, systems. The piece itself expands and intervenes differently with the architectural floorplan of each exhibition space. Together with anchoring sculptural pieces such as *Self Portrait I* (2024), an empty metal ball cart adorned with chewed pink gum resembling small brains, the works subtly set new directions and interact with the fast-paced, multi-channel versions of *Degenerative Knowledge Production*. There are also video works such as *Props* (2025), a new film in which adoration, fixations or cruel intent surface as humans interact, caress,



Madeleine-Andersson, *10K Virgin Brains*, 2024, Degenerative Knowledge
Production, Overgaden. Photo by David Stjernholm



Madeleine Andersson, *Self-portrait*, 2024, Shock Value, Index.



Madeleine Andersson, *"For a dirty mind"*, 2025, 10K VIRGIN BRAINS, Kunsthall Trondheim, Photo by Evelina Elere

fondle or smash representations of human heads. The *10K Virgin Brains* installation and the questions it raises seem ever-growing; the work takes an almost parasitic hold on the spaces of Index and Kunsthall Trondheim. The infrastructural framework is altered to deliberately obstruct the gaze, blurring inside and outside, or any 'right' or 'wrong' side altogether, as the audience is led through elements resembling those of a videogame or a house of horror. Highlighting the weird aspects and troublesome character of striving, power and progress-hunting humans, Andersson situates the audience within the visceral impact of materials to investigate what notions of progress, complicity, labour and care really look and, crucially, *feel* like.

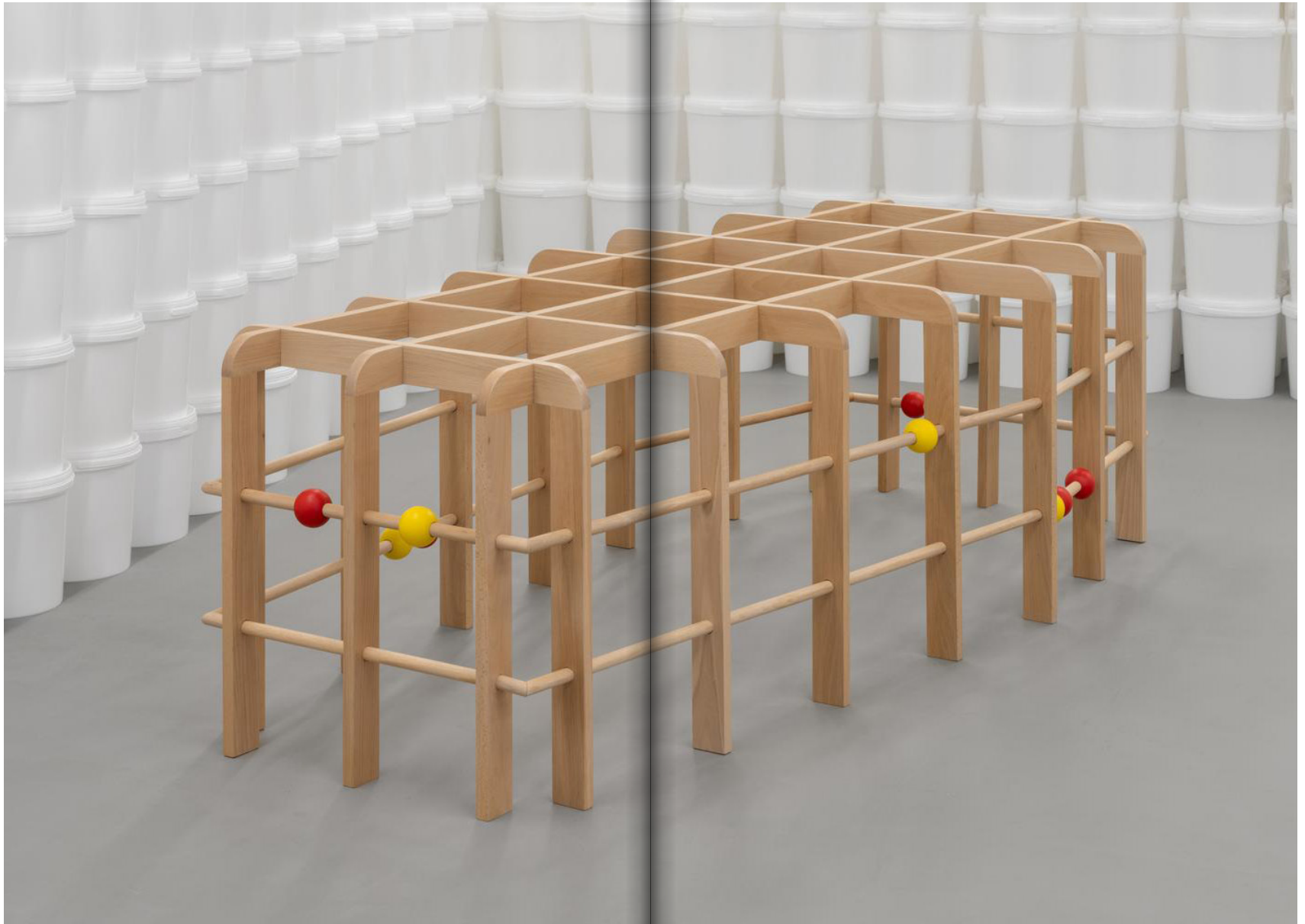
THE STUBBORN OBJECT

In the hands of Andersson a good material is a communicative material. In every aspect of her practice this means that to embody certain ideas the artworks must be very communicative before they function. Not one known for utilizing unassisted readymades, her works are always accompanied by texts, charts or other contextual information. Products or things made for use are valued so that their known tactility, clear purpose or utilitarian function becomes their superpower. In this way, Andersson favours objects that are, in a sense, super straightforward. As an artist working with sculpture, she oscillates between making illustrative works – objects that point to something very clearly, like *10K Virgin Brains* – and objects that invoke something else that exists alongside a more enunciated part of her practice. Like the wooden structures mimicking baby playthings in the work *Knock Knock* (2024), built as a remake of the protective iron cage structure of a mortsafe, used by British and American churches in the 17th and 18th

centuries to prevent corpses being stolen and used to advance medical research. Her readymades and re-makes toy with the idea of authorship and authenticity while continuing to be clear about the strange immediacy that they hold: a way to fast-forward, short-cut or enhance stimuli, like shock-play, to physically evoke and enhance communication with the audience.

Part of the pleasure in Andersson's work is her embrace of the abject and the lewd. The soft, chewed pulpy parts; the awkward, libidinal or fallible elements found in concepts seemingly set in stone. The abject alters the idea or object in unforeseen ways. Equally inscribed with elements of violence and care, the objects in her works simultaneously hold connotations both scary and weird, creating a hypervigilant effect. In her sculptural work, we see our humanity reflected back at us in unexpected forms. The rubber lab gloves with magicians' fingers in *Reversed lab-girl* (2024) emulate the body without the body. If the hair extensions placed on the verge of the white buckets of *10K Virgin Brains* are terrifying, they are neither disordered nor blood-splattered; they are, rather, carefully combed and curled, returning a portion of dignity and humanity to the subjects portrayed, and to us, in our compliance with these larger systems of degradation and exploitation.

Taking on the artistic strategy of the readymade, something by necessity always reinventing itself, she obscures or alters these odd and everyday objects, letting them become part of a much larger syntax of meanings and ideas. It is in this embodied method that Andersson locates and teases us with the strong hold of her objects.



Madeleine Andersson, *Knock Knock*, 2024, Degenerative Knowledge
Production, Overgaden, Photo by David Stjernholm



Madeleine Andersson, *Reversed lab-girl*, 2024, 10K VIRGIN BRAINS,
Kunsthall Trondheim, Photo by Evelina Elere

MADELEINE ANDERSSON

Madeleine Andersson's multidisciplinary work across video, sculpture and performance blends together academic theory, scientific instruments, pseudo-scientific excitement, social media and horror films in playful installations. Her research practice proposes alternative historicalisations and speculative structures to expose and disrupt the psycho-social dimensions of knowledge production. This eclectic collection of things allows her to investigate the intersection of science and pop culture; their self-experimentation, quest for inner truth and struggle with inhibition.

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