

Conversation with  
JACOB FABRICIUS,  
Kunsthall Aarhus

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I is for

Institute

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What's in a name? This is the question underlying our investigation into ICA: how it came to be, what it means now, and how we might imagine it in the future.

In a field so often defined by precarity, this project is grounded in a spirit of collegiality, a looking outward that aims to facilitate self-reflection. As such, we have engaged colleagues primarily from small- and mid-scale contemporary arts organizations to discuss their institutional histories and how they understand the stakes of their work. The *I is for Institute* website acts as a repository for these ongoing conversations, as well as archival material relating to ICA's history. We thank our many colleagues for their generosity, enthusiasm, and frankness. Their thinking has in turn energized our own.

— Alex Klein,  
Dorothy & Stephen R. Weber  
(CHE'60) Curator, Institute  
of Contemporary Art,  
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Kunsthal Aarhus

Jacob Fabricius is the Artistic Director at Kunsthal Aarhus in Denmark and is the Artistic Director for the 2020 Busan Biennale.

With Alex Klein and Tausif Noor

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ALEX KLEIN

What is your role at the Kunsthal Aarhus, and how long have you been at the institution?

JACOB FABRICIUS

I'm the Artistic Director and I've been here since 2016. My contract is for four years, and there is the possibility of prolonging it, but that's the general shuffle of kunsthalls in Denmark.

AK

Historically, has there really been a different director every four years in your institution?

JF

The Artistic Director position was implemented in 2006. I think I have been in the position longer than my former colleagues. It's a funny institution because, well, it's an old institution. It opened in 1917, and over the years it has changed names three times and has had multiple functions. It was originally built as a space for art exhibitions, and two buildings were added to the Kunsthal in 1993 and 2003 respectively.

Around 2005 or 2006, Brian Mikkelson, the Minister for Culture in Denmark, began a process to professionalize a lot of Danish institutions that were artist-run, or that were run by artist organizations. So that's a Danish tradition. Very few of the institutions are still artist-run or organized by associations today. Spaces like Den Frie, Charlottenborg, Overgaden and the Kunsthal Aarhus used to be, but not anymore. In the past, associations like Grønningen would show for 4–6 weeks, and afterwards another association's members would present their works. The programming for each institution was kind of packed with the associations, and they expected their yearly

show at these institutions. In the 20th century, there wasn't a strong gallery structure in Denmark, so the artists associations had a lot of power. It has a very mixed history, and that's normal for quite a few of the Kunsthals in Denmark. Instead of being called "Kunsthals," they were called "Art Buildings," or *kunstbygning*, and in general, people in Aarhus still refer to them as such.

AK

Interesting. When did this change occur?

JF

If you look across the water to Sweden, you can see Malmö Konsthall, which is a modern space built for art. Since the 1980s, people in Denmark have been wondering, "Why don't we have a professional contemporary art building in Denmark?" As I mentioned earlier, Denmark's Minister of Culture wanted to professionalize these art institutions, and a lot of them changed their names between 2006 to about 2012. As part of this process, a lot of the artists' associations were kicked out, or were limited in how they could present exhibitions—some of them could stay in their buildings, but got much less exhibition space and/or shorter exhibition periods. There was also a more professionalized directorship put into these buildings. It was kind of a wave from 2006 onwards.

AK

So, in some respects the Kunsthall Aarhus is still a young institution, if you think of it within its modern, or contemporary formation.

JF

Yes, you could say that.

AK

Are you in the same building that you've always been in?

JF

Yes, there are three original spaces from 1917. And then there are the two additional buildings.

AK

How many people work at the Kunsthall?

JF

Basically, there's me and about eight others. There are the directors— the Administrative Director Iben Mosbæk and myself, the Artistic Director. And then we have technicians, PR, an account, and project managers with whom we discuss the programs. As Artistic Director, I make the program and I assign the different parts to the project managers.

AK

Is there a particular rhythm to the season? Do you have a set number of shows per year, or is it always changing?

JF

It's kind of always changing—it's very organic. For instance, the first year that I was here there were quite a few group shows. There were a few open calls for artists and for curators. Then we had a year of solo shows, and last year we had a mixture of group shows and solo shows. The duration can be between four weeks, but our current exhibition, *Post Institutional Stress Disorder*, runs over the course of 12 months. PISD is a special exhibition which started out with one work in a dark room in one gallery and has expanded from here. Every one or two weeks, we've added a work to the exhibition. So, it's an experiment within the institution.

AK

You have a really interesting curatorial background. We've followed your work in different dispensations. I know you were at Kunsthall Charlottenborg and Malmö Konsthall before, and you have your own independent publishing imprint, Pork Salad Press. I'm curious if you have full independence and autonomy in your current institution, or do you have to report to a board? Do you have to run your ideas by other people?

JF

I would say that there's complete autonomy. We have a board, which has developed and changed over time. Five or six years ago the board was made of local artists with specific wishes, but that has changed to people from different professional backgrounds who didn't have specific interests, but had competencies relevant to a professionally-run institution. We have to report which exhibitions we do to the board, and how the budget fits with each show. But I think as long as we stick to the budget and stick to the number of visitors, they are happy. They don't get involved in the programs. The board has also given me free rein to curate exhibitions that are not directly connected to the activities at Kunsthal Aarhus, like the exhibition *iwillmedievalfutureyou1* at Art Sonje Center in Seoul. So, I have a lot of freedom.

AK

How does funding work?

JF

We get funded by the city for the building and approximately 75% of our operating costs. Then, on top of that, like most kunsthalls in Denmark, have to apply for a grant from the state. So, every two years we apply and we list all the artists that we want to work with and all the programs we want to do. It's flexible, but the general structure is that we have to have an agreement with the artists, and then we send an application to the Danish Art Council.

The Danish Art Council consists of two boards for visual art: the project board and the artists' stipend board. The project board supports exhibitions abroad as well as production for exhibitions in Denmark. You can apply for funding for exhibitions in America, or Thailand, or Madagascar, or wherever, and you can also invite artists from other countries to Denmark. So, for instance Alex, if you were curating a show in Denmark, we could apply for you to come over.

The other board is the artists' stipend board, which I'm actually a part of. The boards are completely divided—I think we've met once during the three and half years I have been there. As part of an institution, I apply for support from the project board, and they also select the artists for the Danish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, which is right in front of the American Pavilion, more or less. So, they handle the Venice Biennale and then they handle all the support for cultural exchange with other countries.

AK

That's great.

JF

The project board consists of four artists and one museum director. It's a similar structure to my board, where you are also appointed for four years and deal solely with artist grants. Artists can apply for grants once per year; we typically get about 950 applications. The grants come in three structures: the smallest grants are about \$8,000 USD and the bigger are between \$15,000–\$20,000 USD. The largest are three-year grants, which are about \$50,000 – \$150,000 USD each year for three years. For the other grants, there's about \$5,000 USD each year. Altogether we support 220–250 artists each year, which amounts to about \$2.5 million USD. Artists can apply to my board once a year, but we also invite artists to do public commissions for schools, hospitals, police stations, roundabouts, public squares or other spaces that have public access.

AK

Wonderful.

JF

We are very fortunate with the funding structure in Denmark. If I am showing an artist at Kunsthall Aarhus or have a conflict of interest of some sort with an artist, and she or he applies for an artist grant, I have to step outside and can't follow discussions or recommend anything.

AK

What is your operating budget?

JF

The exhibition budget changes quite a lot according to the program and how successful we are with our applications. For the first application that we sent in while I was here we received \$350,000 USD for exhibitions over two years. The second was a little less, maybe, \$220,000 USD.

AK

I'm assuming that covers the programs and not the nuts-and-bolts of the building such as electricity, the salaries, and things like that?

JF

Not the electricity and salaries, but the fees for artists, the bills, and the brochures.

AK

I'm glad you brought up fees for artists because that's one of our questions. Do you pay artists for their labor?

JF

We pay artist fees. For larger solo shows with a duration of 6–10 weeks, we pay 3,000 Euros. For smaller solo shows, we pay 1,500 Euros. On top of that, we pay quite a bit for the production of new works.

AK

Have they always paid artists within the institution? Or is that something that you instituted? Were they doing that before?

JF

Yes, but a lot less—around 600–800 Euros for a show.

TAUSIF NOOR

When you're working with artists, are you working on new commissions or things that they've shown previously?

JF

It doesn't have to be new commissions, but they mostly turn out to be. We sometimes work with other institutions, galleries, and museums—it always depends. To me, the new commissions are always the most interesting and the most challenging in some ways. I'd rather spend money on a new production than spending money on crates and transport. Generally it's just more interesting.

AK

I'm assuming you don't have a collection?

JF

No.

AK

Do the commissioned works return with the artist afterwards?

JF

Yes.

AK

I was just reading your mission statement earlier and I wanted to hear you talk a bit about it. Did you recraft the mission when you arrived? I'm specifically interested in how you talk about being "connected to other fields of human activity, other disciplines, and to a wider society as part of a sustainable approach." There are specific words that imply participatory structures, or transdisciplinary words, such as "dynamic," "flexible," and "values of diversity." I'm intrigued by the way you've crafted that language.

JF

I would say quite a few of those things were already part of our DNA. Over the last ten years, more or less, Aarhus University has been a really strong presence in the institution. It's a huge resource and brings a lot of young people here from all kinds of countries, and scientists from universities all around the world. It's a huge resource. Compared to the size of the city, the university has a lot of potential and a lot of money to do new and interesting research. There's an interest in dialogue, and it also links up to our interest in working with scientists. Before I started, there was the idea of the "museum without walls." This is something that we've continued, because it interests me a great deal to work with public spaces and work with the audience in many different ways, and we've just added onto that. Every year, we do at least one project in the public space— sometimes small-scale, sometimes larger-scale.

AK

Interesting.

JF

Of course, again when you do projects on top of the shows that we do in-house, sometimes there are different production methods, and sometimes there are different fees. If we can give higher fees than regular shows, we do that. But it all depends. It depends on the project money that we've received.

AK

What is the context of the city that you're in? Can you help position us a little bit with regard to your location, and speak a little bit about the local ecology and where the Kunsthall Aarhus fits in?

JF

It's really interesting. In short, the Kunsthall Aarhus was built from an association of businessmen and philanthropists called the Art Association of 1847. These friends felt that they needed culture in the provinces. They looked at Copenhagen, the capital, and saw that there were a lot of institutions and museums. They wanted similar institutions and they gathered money through membership fees and such to institute them. There's an interesting dynamic between Copenhagen and Aarhus; here, we want to prove that we're better, or at least on the same level.

AK

We're in Philadelphia, so we understand that well. How far away are you from Copenhagen?

JF

Three hours by train. It's the same distance, actually, from Malmö, where I used to work. There's a similar relationship: Malmö is kind of like the old industrial city. It's much more innovative than the bourgeois attitudes of Stockholm or Copenhagen. There's always this push against the capital, and that's the same here in Aarhus. I'm not from Aarhus; I'm from a city 45 km away. I lived in Copenhagen for 25 years, so I know the mentality well, but I also know the perspective.

But to go back to the Kunsthall's origins, the initial association split up into four institutions, of which today the Kunsthall is the smallest. The Kunsthall was built in 1917, and then there was the Århus Kunstmuseum, which is now called ARoS – Museum of Fine Arts. If you Google it, you will probably recognize the Olafur Eliasson rainbow panorama walk. Fifteen years ago, we

had the same attendance as the museum before they had their new building—about 50,000 visitors. Then they got their new building and, in the beginning, it looked super boring—it was a red brick, square building. Then a couple years later, they gathered something like \$8 million USD to construct the Olafur Eliasson piece. They had to make a new foundation because of the weight of the roof. And in some sense, a lot of city officials and institutions thought, “This is crazy—why spend so much money on a work that’s on a roof?” Museum-wise, it’s a masterpiece because it engages people and has become a symbol of the city. Everybody sees it as this swoosh of light, and it’s used as city-branding. The museum could close the exhibition spaces or do the worst, crappiest show ever, and they still have an attendance of almost 350,000 visitors a year, just because people want to go upstairs and see the view from the city. From a museum perspective, discussing the numbers and things like that, it’s perfect.

Years ago, we had the same attendance as the Kunstmuseum as I mentioned, but now we are definitely forgotten in some sense, because most people think about Olafur’s rainbow when they think about art institutions in Aarhus. In the past the Kunstmuseum was where the *hattedamer*, which is Danish for “hat ladies,” would gather.

AK

The hat ladies?

JF

The “hat ladies” are like the upper class, like nice small hats.

AK

In the U.S., we call them “ladies who lunch.”

JF

In the past, the Kunstmuseum was where the upper class came to receptions. Kunsthal Aarhus was the place for the artists—to hang out, for artists’ experiments and such. But then the culture minister came and pulled out the carpet from under all of these associations and that created frustration, because this was supposed to be our place. It was a really difficult transition when we lost a lot of the foundation and support from local artists. That also influenced what happened to Aros versus the Kunsthal. Those were the two art branches of the original Art Association of 1847. Other institutions from the same original initiative are MOMU Moesgaard Museum and Antikmuseet og Aarhus bibliotekerne.

Then there is Den Gamle By, which means The Old City. It’s a city-within a city, with houses from the 16th century, 17th century, and 18th century. The

streets are paved with cobblestones and the people in the houses do a kind of roleplaying thing.

AK

Do they do historical reenactments?

JF

Yes. You walk outside, and you can go in the houses and you get a view of what it would be like to be a blacksmith—things like that. As a kid I thought it was old and beautiful and magical. You can go and buy candy sticks and things, but it's not Disneyfied at all, just really old school. That was the third branch. The fourth branch was called Moesgaard, and that's south of the city. Now it's called Mo, and that the archaeological museum. That's where the whole pre-historic Danish stuff is.

TN

Is the Tollund Man there?

JF

The Tollund Man is actually in my home city, Silkeborg. But there's Grauballe Man and that's similar to the Tollund Man. It's a body found in a swamp or bog in 1950s, after being buried there 2,000 years ago.

AK

Are there other arts organizations in the city? Are there artist-run spaces?

JF

There are a few, such as KH7, Spanien 19C, rum 46 and Sigrids Stue. There are two art schools. One is a very traditional art school called Aarhus Kunstakademi, with modeling, croquis drawing and things like that. The other one is a more theoretical school called Det Jyske Kunstakademi, like the Royal Academy in Copenhagen. There's the Women's Museum, which is in the old city hall and police station. They do art exhibitions with mostly female artists, and exhibitions on gender and identity. Their next opening is an exhibition by Peter Land. They just opened a project by Soshiro Matsuba, who is part of the group exhibition *I'm in your veins*, curated by Charlotte Sprogøe. Then, there are also artist spaces and spaces for experimenting with architecture and stuff like that.

AK

It sounds like the Kunsthal Aarhus is really the hub for these kinds of contemporary art projects in your city. How do you consider how language works in your institution, both on a local and international level?

JF

All of our information is in English. Sometimes we run only English titles for the shows. The catalogue we're doing with Kim Boem is in three languages. It's published by a German company, Hatje Cantz, and the main language is English, but all texts are translated into Danish and Korean.

AK

I'm currently working on a Korean-English publication myself, so I know it's not that easy.

JF

No, not easy. But it's fun.

AK

I'm assuming that the bilingual nature of what you're doing is so that you reach multiple readers and audiences.

JF

Yes, of course. We have a lot of foreign students and tourists who come through here, so we want to make it accessible. Some of the professors at Aarhus University are from English-speaking countries, so that's part of the structure of the house. Most of our talks and presentations are in Danish, but we also host English-language talks, and usually we announce them in advance. But that's kind of the structure. If we have English-speaking artists, we will maybe introduce the exhibition in Danish and then switch to English.

AK

We're curious to hear about who you think your audience is and how you think about audience.

One of the things we've been really excited to ask people is, if you think about your audiences in the same way that you think about your communities—are they the same thing?

JF

I would say that the audience is definitely a young audience. It's very mixed, but definitely a lot younger than the Kunstmuseum audience—a lot of our visitors have some connection to the University.

TN

Going along with that, who do you think of as your peer institutions? This could be conceptually, or historically, but I'm really interested in how your institution is looking outward. What institutions do you see yourself aligned with, whether it's in the mission or the programming?

JF

I have quite a few institutions that I like to look at. Personally, I've followed Malmö Konsthall for a long time. But I would say WEILS in Brussels. I used to really like ICA in London, but I haven't been to London for quite some time. And then there's a lot of smaller institutions, such as KW Institute in Berlin, which does multiple shows at the same time, sometimes group shows, sometimes solo shows. I tend to also go to a lot of artist-run spaces when I'm abroad.

TN

Fantastic.

AK

I'd love to circle back around to your mission statement since you talk about accessibility, and that's a word that has a lot of different valences to it. How does that play a role in your work as Artistic Director?

JF

Well, it's changed a little bit because it was quite academic before. It still is, but we try to make the texts more accessible. I'm sure some people would say we're not so accessible. Some might say that. I think we have a graphic design profile that is accessible. We do a small free poster for each show, and it has a general statement about the artist. Sometimes when we can, we publish books with longer texts. We're not the type of institution that has explanatory texts for each work. That would be good, but we just don't have the manpower to do that.

AK

We understand that.

JF

We have to limit ourselves to what is possible at the moment, and what seems possible. It's really difficult to get funding. We have high taxes in Denmark, and there isn't a tradition of private sponsorship. People feel that because they pay their taxes, the state should pay for these museums and institutions. The government is cutting back on culture, which is part of the right-wing movement in Denmark. It's a paradox because on the one hand they say, "We want to preserve what is very special about Denmark and Danishness"—whatever that is—and in some sense, they believe that there should be cultural heritage and museum education. But on the other hand, they also say, "We have to cut away culture." The citizens expect that the state will pay for culture, but the state cuts those budgets down, which is why we're sort of squeezed. You typically can't apply to the private foundations for manpower—it has to be some project.

AK

Right, so that must be frustrating.

JF

Yes.

AK

I'm glad you brought up the political context, because in the U.S. we often regard Denmark and Scandinavia as these social democratic utopias. But I've also heard reports of Denmark wanting to ship off immigrants to an island for sick animals. You're not immune to the right wing, populist extremism that's on the rise globally, and I'm curious how that's impacted the work that you do.

JF

It's a misunderstanding that Denmark has not been touched by the right-wing movement. I'd say, on the contrary, we've been frontrunners on the right-wing movements, but we've just been able to wrap it up in a word called *hygge*, which connotes coziness and has come to define Danish culture.

AK

Yes, that's such an interesting observation!

TN

It's interesting to see how that national branding reads internationally.

AK

*Hygge* has become very monetized and a real catchphrase here.

JF

It's funny how that's become a brand. Of course, I know that sometimes we take some things for granted and that's been framed as *hygge* somehow. But you just have to put one letter in front of *hygge* and it becomes *uhygge*, which translates to "uncanny" or "being scary." So, you can also un-*hygge* something.

TN

I'd love to continue talking about your exhibition *Post-Institutional Stress Disorder*. Maybe we can start with what "post-institutional" might mean for you, and then how PISD emerged out of that thinking.

JF

*Post Institutional Stress Disorder* is derived from "post-traumatic stress disorder," which is something that can hit a person like a shock if they've experienced violence, such as war, rape, or a traffic accident. I basically just altered and coined the term by putting in the "institutional." In some sense, I see PISD as a more long-term project. When you're born in Denmark, within five minutes of your birth, you're already checked and measured as an appropriate citizen and you get a social security number. It actually starts before you're even born because you're tested to see if you have deformities. You become an individual even before you're asking for it. Throughout your childhood people choose for you and these choices are distinct. Of course, when you're an adult you feel like you choose, but you don't. Those are the themes of the show, starting from the individual and adding information onto them.

The show started out in a dark room with one work, *Udmeldelse af samfundet (Resignation from Society)* (1993) by the artist Jes Brinch.

It's a form that you fill out: You write the date you want to resign, the reason why, and you accept that as a result you don't have a social security number, you don't have a postal address, phone number, keys, or electricity. You're not part of Amnesty International anymore. You don't have to be part of the army anymore—all these things. It's a very simple gesture towards resigning or giving up somehow on a formula. PISD started with this work and the show was built up with works once a week, or every two weeks and so on. For quite a few of the works, you could categorize them within two categories: resistance and the other could be about either giving up or boredom. We've added works over time. We've had about six talks by different professors. We had a Danish researcher who was super popular, and he was talking about Foucault. There were like 350 people here listening to Foucault and they were all younger than 25 and I was like, "Wow."

We brought Suresh Rattan, a biogerontologist from the University of Aarhus who researches the impact of positive and negative stress on the nervous system and how we handle those different levels of stress. It's both from the physical and bodily experience of stress—how society pushes you to the theoretical, you could say.

The exhibition closes in ten days, but we're still adding works, and we'll continue adding them right until the end of the exhibition. The last piece that'll be installed in PISD is *Occupational Placement (OP)* by Julia Scher, a 1989 video work showing prerecorded surveillance footage. It will be installed on the last day of the exhibition above our office door, very close to the entrance of the exhibition space and stay up after the show is taken down.

PISD isn't packed, but it's full compared to where it was ten months ago. There's been a work, *Rechte Ecke*, by Henrik Olesen that was a cast of the right-hand corner of the gallery. We've also built walls in the space while the show is on, and while the audience is in the space. We've had artists do murals and drawings on those walls—Henrik Plenge Jakobsen did his TOTAL INSTITUTION wall mural, and Dena Yago was in the space for a few days during opening hours making a large-scale wall drawing called *Boring From Within* (2018). It shows three of the seven dwarves from Snow White protesting at a Tesla Plant.

The exhibition begins outside the exhibition space. There is a wall-mounted hand sanitizer, so you can clean your hands before you enter or when you exit. There's a shelf with leaflets from the city with general public counseling information, materials we picked up from dentist offices and other places. They're on topics like women not drinking when they're pregnant, boys who love boys, sun protection, etc. Kunsthal Aarhus people can also pick them up and take them home with them.

There is a small shelf with Adrian Piper's *My Calling (Card) #1-2* (1986), which might be the first art work people notice. Piper's text begins like this: "Dear Friend, I am not here to pick anyone up, or to be picked up. I am here alone because I want to be here, ALONE." Then, we have the work *A Conspiracy (Contracted)* (2018) by Carolyn Lazard. Next to that, in the doorway, there's a work by Cameron Rowland called *7.5'* (2014), which is an exit height strip, 36 inches x 1 inch. It's a measuring strip that allows surveillance cameras that are usually used at the door of gas stations and convenience stores to measure heights of people they suspect to be committing crimes.

I was interested in opening the gallery with a wall that visitors would enter with their backs toward. On that wall is a clock that's three and a half hours off—as a visitor, you might be confused and think, "Did I miss my appointment?" The clock is a work by Jens Hanning called *Kabul Time (Gold Edition)* (2017) that reminds Danish audiences that they are also involved in global conflict—Danish forces were some of the first to join the American military in the war in Afghanistan.

AK

Is military service required in Denmark?

JF

No, but there is a draft system. The video installation *American Buddhist* (2016) by Maryam Jafri, shows a meditation workshop led in 2010 by the first Buddhist chaplain in the U.S. army. It had to be taken down recently, because it had to be shown somewhere else. It is actually the only work that was taken away during the show; otherwise we have only added works. We put in a small Michael Smith photograph instead, called *The Big Relay Race* (1981), and he also has another work called *My First Photo* from 1972. It's like a coffee maker. I wanted to have it as the second piece in the exhibition because I wanted to force people to move all the way down to the end of the room. It's placed low— table height—in the corner, to indicate a meeting spot. With today's open offices, the meeting spot is usually the coffee machine or the water dispenser. There is a work by Hannah Heilmann called *Mors og fars sexliv* (2017), which is a handmade quilt made from layers of cheap baby quilts. The title translates to "Mother and Father's Sex Life,"—a funny, and maybe sad comment on the possible loss of sexual attraction among young parents.

Because there is so much work, we wanted to find a simple analog way to convey information about the works in the show, so there's a Rolodex with artist and title information. Each time new work is installed in the exhibition, we add an index card to the Rolodex and there's also a poster that maps the space and we add the now works to that too. Sten Kalin and Sture Johannesson's work *Computer Paragraph* was made between 1972–3, when they went from the psychedelic posters to his digital body of work. It is a section sign (§) referring to legal codes, but Sture has digitally manipulated and stretched out the sign several times, suggesting that legal codes can and should be altered. We included Fred Lonidier's work, *29 Arrests*, from 1972. We have a stencil work on the ceiling from an Iranian artist named Shahab Fotouhi, which was originally shown at Azad Gallery in Tehran. Normally, galleries in Iran have to obtain permits from the Ministry of Culture, but Azad is privately owned, and in 2009, Fotouhi transformed the gallery space into a political meeting location for Hossein Mousavi, who ran a reformist presidential campaign in opposition to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

AK

Thanks so much for taking us virtually through the show. You touched quite a bit on the state of institutions as well as the relationship between the institution and the state.

I'm curious how your own relationship to the art institution might have also informed some of your thinking about this show.

TN

Right—one way to think about PISD is that it serves a diagnostic function.

JF

I haven't found a vaccine yet for the institution, but I'm trying. My relationship to the institution is okay, but I think a lot of things can be done and tested. I'm not so conventional that I don't like to test the borders or the structural side of things. The show has been on view for such a long period, and in the beginning, people really thought there was one work, a piece of paper. That's one way of testing a format of the exhibition. In that sense, I'd like to test and try out different things within the institution. What can be done in an institution? How can you break the rules, and what happens when you break the rules? It doesn't have to be in the space; it can happen outside. How can we research and give something back to the audience?

One example is a project we did in 2017 with the English artist Gillian Wearing called *A Real Danish Family*. It was in some sense a really small project within Kunsthal Aarhus's institutional frame, but quite a big project from a national perspective. We collaborated with National Gallery and the Danish National Broadcasting Corporation and first launched the project in 2016 by inviting families to take part in a competition to be immortalized in bronze. We went to 14 different cities, inviting everyone who considered themselves a family, whether they were a single-parent household, nuclear, rainbow, etc.—whatever their family structure, they could sign up. And families did.

Around 500 families signed up and DR followed the whole process. They went through an *America's Got Talent* or *X-Factor* kind of process and it was narrowed down to 10 families. The camera crew went to their homes and did interviews with participating families across the country and then also documented the jury's deliberations. The final choice was a woman who was adopted as a child in Denmark from Colombia and her husband, who grew up in a suburb of Copenhagen. They met on a first date on New Year's Eve, through mutual friends. Ten months later, they had a baby. They were selected because of the way they told their story, and now they are cast in bronze in a one-to-one scale that's displayed in Copenhagen. It was our project, but it took place in the National Gallery and in public spaces. That's a different way of challenging the format of a gallery, I would say.

AK

I know you're about half-way through your appointment at Kunsthal Aarhus. To conclude, I'm wondering what your goals are in seeing through the rest of your tenure and what your plans for the future. Do you hope to continue on for another appointment? What are you dreaming of at the moment? What's exciting you?

JF

To be quite honest, I do like what I do. I can be quite fed up with the system and the relations of power in this art world. I don't think it's any different if you're a doctor at a hospital. I think there are the same power structures as in a university or something like that, but sometimes I feel that the games played within the art world are quite superficial. If I'm quite frank, that's not my cup of tea. But I still think that it's interesting being in this world, the institutional world. It's still a place for discussion and dialogue. It's still a place where people engage themselves in different dialogues with multi-inputs. And it's still interesting to try to moderate these issues and these political and social issues and get them out to a broader audience. So that's my main reason. I don't have any goals for where I want to be in two, five, or ten years, and I never really have.

AK

I hear you.

JF

Writing a fiction book, that would be my biggest dream. If I had a talent for helping build a water channel or being a doctor, I would probably sign up for Doctors Without Borders or something like that. I did actually try to apply for a job in a village, a sort of social thing, and that was 15 years ago. They didn't even want to interview me, but it would not frighten me to do some very different kind of work.

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