

ELMGREEN & DRAGSET

Art Daily,

Elmgreen & Dragset open "Useless Bodies?" at Fondazione Prada

March 2022



Elmgreen & Dragset open "Useless Bodies?" at Fondazione Prada

MILAN.-Fondazione Prada

presents "Useless Bodies?", an exhibition by the artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset taking place in Milan from 31 March to 22 August 2022.

Spanning more than 3,000 square meters, "Useless Bodies?" is one of the most ambitious thematic investigations realized by Fondazione Prada to date. Conceived for four gallery spaces and the courtyard of its Milan venue, the exhibition explores the present condition of the body in the post-industrial age in which it seems that our physical presence is losing its centrality or is even completely superfluous. This shift impacts every aspect of our lives: from our working conditions to our health, our interpersonal relationships, and the way we retain information. The exhibition "Useless Bodies?" also explores how we physically adapt to a world increasingly based on two-dimensional imagery, not least in the light of the current pandemic. Fondazione Prada presents "Useless Bodies?", an exhibition by the artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset taking place in Milan from 31 March to 22 August 2022. Spanning more than 3,000 square meters, "Useless Bodies?" is one of the most ambitious thematic investigations realized by Fondazione Prada to date. Conceived for four gallery spaces and the courtyard of its Milan venue, the exhibition explores the present condition of the body in the post-industrial age in which it seems that our physical presence is losing its centrality or is even completely superfluous. This shift impacts every aspect of our lives: from our working conditions to our health, our interpersonal relationships, and the way we retain information. The exhibition "Useless Bodies?" also explores how we physically adapt to a world increasingly based on two-dimensional imagery, not least in the light of the current pandemic.

As stated by Elmgreen & Dragset, "our bodies are no longer the main agents of our existence. They don't generate value in our societies' advanced production methods as they did in the industrial era. One could claim our physical selves have even become more of an obstacle than an advantage. In the 19th century, the body was the producer of daily goods, whereas, in the 20th century, the body's role became more that of the consumer. Twenty years into the 21st century the status of the body is now that of the product – with our data gathered and sold by Big Tech. With the publicly available knowledge surrounding the harvesting of data from tech companies being so inane, and the rapidly accelerating rate at which such companies are expanding into every aspect of our lives, it does sometimes feel a little scary to think about our bodies' future role." As stated by Elmgreen & Dragset, "our bodies are no longer the main agents of our existence. They don't generate value in our societies' advanced production methods as they did in the industrial era. One could claim our physical selves have even become more of an obstacle than an advantage. In the 19th century, the body was the producer of daily goods, whereas, in the 20th century, the body's role became more that of the consumer. Twenty years into the 21st century the status of the body is now that of the product – with our data gathered and sold by Big Tech. With the publicly available knowledge surrounding the harvesting of data from tech companies being so inane, and the rapidly accelerating rate at which such companies are expanding into every aspect of our lives, it does sometimes feel a little scary to think about our bodies' future role."

Perception of the body is an underlying theme that connects many aspects of the sculptural and performative work of Elmgreen & Dragset, who throughout their career have explored subjects such as growing up, intimacy, identity, different modes of living and how we navigate the public sphere.



Following the exhibition path from the Podium, to the Nord gallery, to the Cisterna, the audience will encounter several immersive installations. The Milan premises of Fondazione **Prada** are transformed into a series of different universes, each with its own atmosphere, theme, and aesthetic.

On the ground floor of the Podium, classical and neoclassical sculptures meet works by Elmgreen & Dragset in a synchronic constellation. Inspired by Fondazione **Prada**'s inaugural exhibition "Serial Classic," curated by Salvatore Settis and designed by Rem Koolhaas in 2015, this juxtaposition of contemporary and historic sculptures shows both similarities and differences in how artists have mediated the male body through sculptural practices spanning centuries. In this section the artists have developed a complex system of crossreferences creating a dialogue between old and new that demonstrates that, "the past is never dead. It is actually never past," as stated by the American writer William Faulkner.

The second floor of Podium is transformed into a vast, abandoned office landscape which focuses on the changed role of the body in the context of labor. The installation consists of a repetitive pattern of seemingly endless rows of workstations, referencing the geometric formats of 20th century minimal sculpture. This environment also evokes dystopian movie sets from films such as Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967) and Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985).

In the Nord gallery, the audience enters a futuristic vision of a domestic setting—an eerie fusion of a bunker, a spaceship, and a science lab, portraying an unlivable home of extreme vanity. The immaculate, dehumanized appearance of this space, emphasized by clinically designed objects, raises questions about how we exist in our homes today, especially now that we share them with technology to such a high degree. Like a detective or an uninvited guest, the visitor is free to wander the space, gather clues, and make up stories in an alienating environment, similar to a sci-fi movie set in which the only moving presence is that of a robotic dog.

In the Cisterna, the artists look into how the wellness, leisure, and health industries pressure us to conform to new body ideals. The three rooms of this building are turned into a forsaken spa-like environment, including an abandoned swimming pool and a locker room. As our bodies are being rendered useless by technological innovations, the ever-expanding wellness, leisure, and health sectors are offering countless new ways to "solve the problem of the imperfect body". The central room of the Cisterna features a new work titled *What's Left?*, which can be interpreted as a representation of the body that today struggles to find its role as a political actor or instrument of social change.

The way our bodies are physically regulated in the public sphere is explored by a number of sculptures by Elmgreen & Dragset presented in the outdoor spaces of Fondazione **Prada**. These works are subtle alterations of everyday objects, none of which can be used as we would expect them to be. They encourage a re-evaluation of the ordinary and highlight how we negotiate the control mechanisms embedded in public spaces.

A 500-page publication, titled "Useless Bodies?" and published by Fondazione **Prada**, is conceived as a thematic extension of the exhibition rather than a conventional catalogue. It is a reader with multiple perspectives from over 35 authors —philosophers, artists, writers, scientists, and thinkers— addressing our changing perceptions of the body and its status today.

