

**PRESSBOOK**

Elmgreen & Dragset  
*The Evening Standard*

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**Arts & Culture**

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The bookies odds are close on all the different acts, but Forensic Architecture comes out a little ahead, and Prodger a little behind. I personally think Forensic Architecture will be the likely winner for its film analysing what really happened in the Israeli police attack on that village, which resulted in two deaths – one a local teacher and the other a policeman.

The group's whole notion of art is strikingly original. I think its work being not just evidence but also about a sexy gloss of technology isn't necessarily a minus. And not just affectation. It relates to traditional painting where the approach and subject are known as "history painting". Say, Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*, 1819. The political events he was referring to were recent: an incompetent captain appointed only because of a corrupt government, resulting in shipwreck and death; instances of cannibalism and the murder of survivors from the wreck. Out of them, Géricault makes a metaphor of a lost ship and a society adrift. The story was known to many. But the painting introduced it to others. You wanted to find out more.

The painting still makes an impact because of the great, soaring, powerful composition and the grand handling of the medium. That approach to composition is the equivalent of the sexy gloss of Forensic Architecture's films. The group is concerned with analysing evidence and exposing injustice, but also with a sort of filmic effect, where the

viewer is overwhelmed by whizzing technology. And that whizzing is like Romantic painterly composition and the whipping up of the painterly surface. It's up to you to find out more.

I'd be happy if Prodger won, if only because the tone of her film – all of it shot and recorded on a phone – is so disarming. Wherever the chat and imagery roams – her cat, her gayness, her inquiries via Julian Cope into Neolithic female deities – it always convincingly ties-in to the question of identity being fluid or static.

But if pushed, I would say Mohaiemen's film *Two Meetings and a Funeral* is the most compelling. Its virtue is that he seems to be everywhere at once in relation to his subject. It is an immense history of presidents and prime ministers and he is both inside and outside, taking it apart, looking at its ruins and debris, in at the beginning and in at the end. We gradually get the message that, initially, separate oppressed nations attempted to unify around left-wing politics. Eventually unity was around religion instead, with fatal results. Hope for social justice gave way to disenchantment. Archive footage of leaders giving speeches in outrageously extravagant stadiums, firing-up other leaders with idealism, gives way in the film to subtitles informing the viewer of so many of these leaders' deaths by assassination, firing squad, hangings and poisonings. Mohaiemen is a little distanced and funny about it but, underneath it all, he's also heartbroken.

● *Turner Prize 2018 is at Tate Britain, SW1 (tate.org.uk), tomorrow until Jan 6*

# Lament for a lost pool

## EXHIBITION

Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset's new installation is an elegy for a civic space that never really was, they tell **Ben Luke**

THE Whitechapel Gallery has undergone many changes in its long history but none as surprising as this. The Evening Standard can now reveal that artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset's much-anticipated autumn installation has transformed the gallery into a disused swimming pool on the brink of reinvention as a luxury spa.

When I meet the Scandinavian duo (Elmgreen, 57, was born in Copenhagen, Denmark; Dragset, 49, in Trondheim, Norway), the installation is in its early stages. But already the Whitechapel's lower gallery is shape-shifting into a light-filled yet forlorn early Edwardian public pool. The pair's sculptures will be dotted here and throughout the galleries in a show titled *This Is How We Bite Our Tongue*. Upstairs is what they call *The Chapel*, a brooding, gloomy negative to the daylight pool below, sardonically reflecting on contemporary masculinity. Even incomplete, it's a spectacular show.

The pair are "encouraging the space to perform new roles," Elmgreen says. "I feel the ground floor [the pool] is playing along," responds Dragset, with a laugh. "Yes, it really wanted to become a public pool," Elmgreen adds. Dragset explains the way they work: "You come in, you analyse the space, you get inspired by the architecture and interior, the surroundings, what this space means in the local environment, and then ideas come up."

The Whitechapel and its environs proved to be fertile ground for the artists to further develop long-explored political themes. "Even since 2007 when I moved to London, Aldgate has been so changed, all these hideous glass towers have come up in that period," Elmgreen says. Dragset points out that the Whitechapel is "from a time when it was a civic ideal to bring art and culture to poorer areas, in 1901 – so it

springs out of the same period when public pools also became popular".

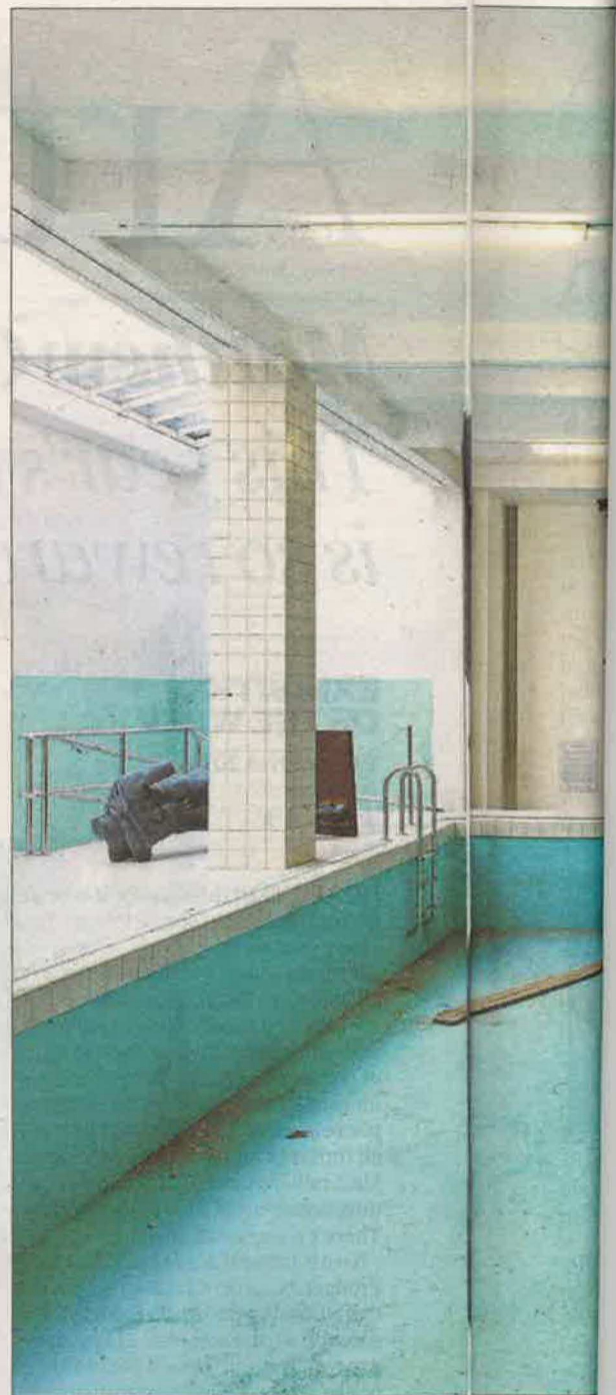
The pool is a contemporary fable, its fictional history told on a wall plaque: philanthropic funding, Fifties refurbishment, inspiration for David Hockney's swimming pool paintings, peak years in the Seventies. And then losing its funding "in the last year that Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister", Elmgreen says, before being squatted, raided, abandoned and, finally, it was sold to be an "art hotel and resort" in 2016, during Boris Johnson's last year as Mayor.

It's a long history but Elmgreen and Dragset are addressing acute issues: the closure of civic spaces due to government cuts: not just public pools but most notably libraries – the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy said last year that 449 UK libraries had closed since 2012.

The duo see the exhibition as a follow-up to their 2006 *Welfare Show* at the Serpentine, partly a critique of the welfare state but also reflecting "how important it was, in order to take care of people who were not that fortunate, or make a society that would be for everyone," Elmgreen says. "Since then, it's over."

Johnson's fictional sell-off of the Whitechapel Pool is particularly pointed. "A lot of what we see around us, all the sell-offs to Qataris, were happening when he was Mayor," Elmgreen says. "That was easy money in the pocket, for a very short time. It's like peeing in your pants when it's cold: it warms nicely in the beginning and then it becomes really bad."

The duo clearly despise the former Foreign Secretary, who drew their ire when, in 2011, they won the commission for the Fourth Plinth for their work featuring a golden boy on a wooden rocking horse. Turning up late, Johnson



made a characteristically glib speech about the work symbolising Britain's quest for Olympic gold; Elmgreen publicly corrected him. "It was so arrogant and so disrespectful," he says. Joanna Lumley unveiled the work in 2012, avoiding more of Johnson's inane bumbblings.

The pair are now based in Berlin. Inevitably, they're appalled by the Brexit vote and the rise of populist politics. "We're really sad to lose you, obviously," Dragset says. "And we don't understand what's going on – in



Turner hopefuls: above, *Two Meetings and a Funeral*, by Naeem Mohaiemen. Left, Forensic Architecture's installation at the ICA



MARK BLOWER

## Gripped by the hand of giants

**OPERA**  
**Das Rheingold**  
Royal Opera House, WC2  
★★★★☆  
**Barry Millington**

SO keenly observed is Keith Warner's *Das Rheingold*, launching the second revival of his 2007 staging of Wagner's Ring cycle, that one hardly dares blink for fear of missing some witty insight. This is a production that has been developed, line by line, phrase by phrase, with a largely new cast and the result is gripping.

I relished the way the giants thumb demonstratively through their contract with Wotan, neatly mirroring the emphatic descent of their motif. Lise Davidsen's impressive Freia is

clearly seduced by Fasolt's prodigious attributes (Günther Groissböck very moving as Fasolt), but suffers some traumatising experience in her stay in Riesenheim. Sarah Connolly has deepened her fine characterisation of Fricka; no puritanical harridan but a flesh-and-blood wife with emotions and ambitions of her own.

Wiebke Lehmkuhl makes her Royal Opera debut with a warm-toned, oracular *Erdä*. Alan Oke is an excellently wheedling Loge.

John Lundgren, the new Wotan, hasn't yet the vocal complexity or texture of his predecessors John Tomlinson and Bryn Terfel, but he does bring considerable musical and dramatic intelligence to bear. Johannes Martin Kränzle too lacks something of the conventional baleful



BILL COOPER

rasp of Alberich, but offers a superbly nuanced portrayal. Antonio Pappano complements the lively action ideally with his sentient reading.

● *Four cycles (020 7304 4000, roh.org.uk) to Oct 26*

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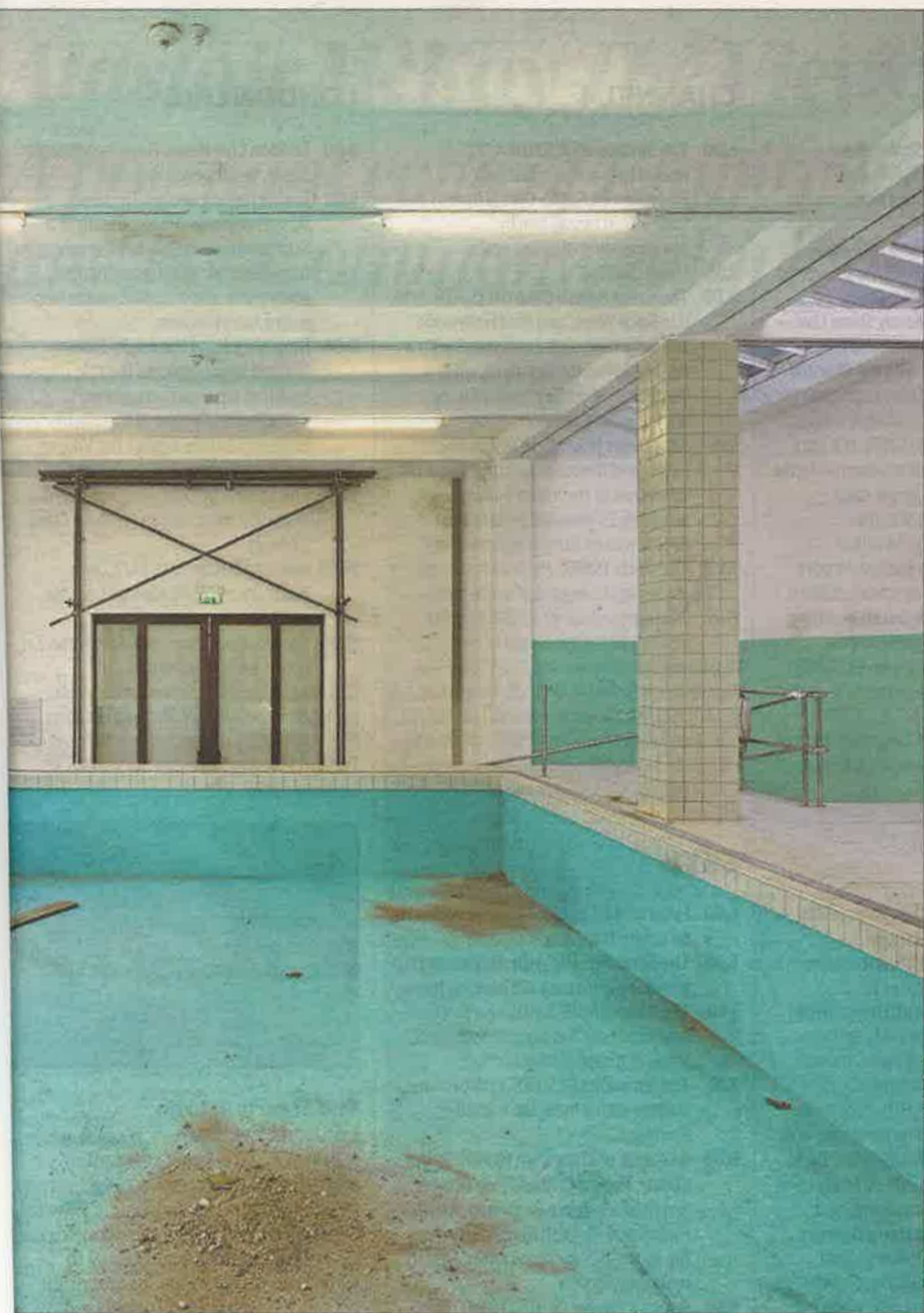
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WHITECHAPEL GALLERY/JACK HERRIS

Europe, as well. Why did this happen?" Both note a difference in London since the vote. "There's not the same optimism," says Elmgreen. Swimming pools have long reflected a sense of hope in the duo's work. Pools were "a place where people dared to show their bodies in front of each other... where people actually could socialise, different classes, to a certain degree at least, and interact in a freer way." So the empty Whitechapel pool prompts an elegiac mood. The work of Elmgreen and Dragset is often charac-

**Empty dream:** Elmgreen and Dragset's fictional swimming pool at the Whitechapel Gallery tells the sad story of civic demise in London

terised as ironic and satirical but Elmgreen says that's not intended. From our conversation it's clear that their work reflects sincere concerns and an underlying anger. "Humour is a way of dealing with it, to make it bearable, not to cry or scream," Elmgreen says. He pauses for a moment. "But f\*\*k, we mean it!"

● *Elmgreen & Dragset: This Is How We Bite Our Tongue is at the Whitechapel Gallery, E1 (whitechapelgallery.org), from Thursday to Jan 13*

## Slippery effects of a funny turn

**THEATRE**  
**The Other Place**  
Park 200, N4  
★★★★☆  
**Henry Hitchings**

IN Sharr White's disorientating play, a no-nonsense businesswoman is losing her grip on reality. At a swanky convention, Juliana Smithton has a funny turn while delivering a sales pitch for a new drug that delays the worst effects of dementia.

In the middle of a speech, she becomes obsessed with an audience member in a yellow bikini. Memories and unwelcome feelings interrupt her flow. Is she suffering from paranoia, cancer of the brain or some other affliction? Is she, for that matter, in

the midst of a divorce? Karen Archer as Juliana has a brisk authority at first, but gradually reveals layers of vulnerability. She's well supported by Neil McCaul, as her husband Ian, and Eliza Collings as three very different characters, including the couple's estranged daughter.

Claire van Kampen's production shows how fractured Juliana's perceptions have become. At one point she blunders into a stranger's home, where her imposing manner gives way to helplessness. It's the play's most tender scene yet not a wholly credible one and while White is astute about the slippery nature of recollection, his crafty storytelling sometimes feels too contrived.

● *Until October 20 (020 7870 6876, parktheatre.co.uk)*

## GO GUIDE

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Log on to: [standard.co.uk/GO](http://standard.co.uk/GO)



**1 Sara Pascoe**  
*Richmond Theatre, Oct 1*  
If you missed this post-break-up show in the West End catch it in Richmond. [atgtickets.com](http://atgtickets.com)



**2 Sara Barron**  
*Bill Murray, N1, Tonight*  
UK-based American with an excellent line in cynicism about sex, life and friendship. [angelcomedy.co.uk](http://angelcomedy.co.uk)



**3 Lou Sanders**  
*Soho Theatre, W1, Ton-Sat*  
Candid confessions from a shameful life by this frank oddball comedian. [sohotheatre.com](http://sohotheatre.com)



**4 League of Gentlemen**  
*Eventim Apollo, W6, Wed-Sat*  
The classy sketch team brings their gallery of grotesques back to life. [ticketmaster.co.uk](http://ticketmaster.co.uk)



**5 Olga Koch**  
*The Albany, W1, Thu*  
Edinburgh Fringe Best Newcomer nominee with vivid vodka-soaked tales of her Russian youth. [objectivelyfunny.com](http://objectivelyfunny.com)



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