

# Elmgreen & Dragset

Teaching Resource

*Elmgreen & Dragset: Sculptures* / September 14, 2019 – January 5, 2020



Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset

## About Elmgreen & Dragset

Artists Michael Elmgreen (born 1961, Copenhagen, Denmark) and Ingar Dragset (born 1969, Trondheim, Norway) met in 1995 and have worked together as an artistic duo ever since. Under the name “Elmgreen & Dragset” they have produced sculpture, paintings, films, monumental public artworks and intricate installations that transform galleries into domestic settings called that place the viewer among fictional characters dealing with dramatic situations.

## Pairs

Elmgreen & Dragset work together as a team, and many of their sculptures feature pairs of objects placed together.

- In your everyday life, what examples of pairs can you find? Name some examples of pairs in nature. (a pair of cherries with connected stems) What are some manmade examples? (a pair of shoes).
- Elmgreen & Dragset used diving boards and sinks placed next to each other to convey the idea of marriage. What items would work to show a relationship between two people? Draw your idea.

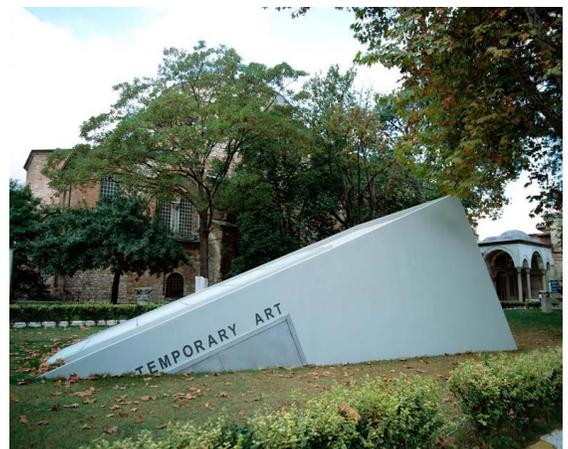


*Couple, Fig. 21, 2016.* MDF, PVC, aluminum, and stainless steel, Each: 86 3/4 x 18 5/8 x 12 1/2 in. (220.3 x 48 x 32 cm). Private Collector. Photo by Roman März, courtesy of Perrotin.

## Power

Through their Powerless Structures series, Elmgreen & Dragset challenge the idea of power: who has it, who gets to keep it, who is benefiting from keeping things the way they have always been? Artworks in this series expose the invisible ways in which we form ideas about what is “normal.” The artists create work that may seem to encourage interaction only to deny the expected use of the objects they display.

- Find an artwork that shows an everyday object that has been changed in some way. What power did this object originally have? How did the artists alter it or take away its power?



*Traces of a Never Existing History/Powerless Structures, Fig. 222, 2001.* Wood, stainless steel, aluminum, perspex, paint, cement, vinyl profile lettering, and fluorescent lights, 122 x 169 1/3 x 307 in. (310 x 430 x 780 cm). Installation view: 7th Istanbul Biennial, 2001. Photo by Muammer Yanmaz.

**Nasher Sculpture Center**

## Stories

Many of Elmgreen & Dragset's artworks invite us to create a story or explanation of how they came to be. The artists sometimes even create installations of work called "stagings" that place sculptures together to act as characters in an imagined scene. Michael Elmgreen described these installations as being "like films you can walk into."

### *Invisible*

Hunched on the ground, clasping his knees and staring distractedly into space, the boy in *Invisible* seems to feel isolated and out of place in his own home. He uses his own body and the architecture of his home to create a safe space for himself.

- **Have you ever felt invisible or ignored? What made you feel this way? How did you react? What are some ways you can make yourself visible?**

### *Modern Moses*

This artwork features a realistic wax infant and a non-functioning ATM. When *Modern Moses* was first displayed in London in 2006, it was meant to comment on the failure of government programs meant to help children. When it was shown in Beijing in 2016, it referred to the trend of people choosing careers over having a family. In Dallas, it relates to Texas's "Baby Moses Law," which allows parents to leave unharmed infants up to 60 days old at any hospital or fire station.

- **The biblical story of Moses takes place more than 3,000 years ago. His mother hid him in a basket next to a river so he wouldn't be harmed. How might this sculpture show a "modern" Moses?**
- **What does this sculpture suggest about the role of money in caring for a child?**

### *One Day*

The title of this sculpture asks us to imagine the future of the boy it represents and how the gun may be used by or against him.

- **This artwork was created when a patron asked the artists to create a sculpture based on the theme of "desire." What do you think the boy desires?**
- **Write a poem. Finish a sentence that starts with "One Day" five times from the figure's point of view. Include sentences that relate to different points throughout his life.**

(pre-school)            One day \_\_\_\_\_

(elementary)           One day \_\_\_\_\_

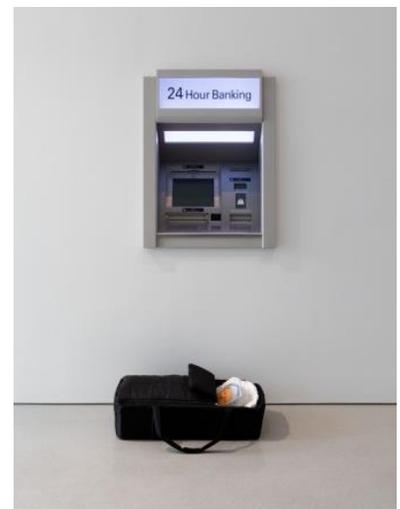
(teenager)                One day \_\_\_\_\_

(adult)                    One day \_\_\_\_\_

(senior citizen)        One day \_\_\_\_\_



*Invisible*, 2017. Bronze, marble, wood, lacquer, and clothes, Fireplace: 49 1/4 x 33 7/8 x 17 3/4 in. (125 x 86 x 45 cm), Figure: 24 1/2 x 10 1/4 x 25 1/4 in. (62 x 26 x 64 cm). Nicola Erni Collection. Photo by Elmar Vestner, courtesy of Perrotin.



*Modern Moses*, 2006. Carrycot, bedding, wax figure, baby clothes, and stainless-steel cash machine, 73 1/2 x 28 x 14 1/2 in. (186.5 x 71 x 37 cm). Courtesy of the artists.



*One Day*, 2015. Aluminum, lacquer, glass, wood, fabric, and clothes, Figure: 41 x 15 3/4 x 15 3/4 in. (104 x 40 x 40 cm), Vitrine: 21 2/3 x 57 x 7 5/8 in. (55 x 145 x 20 cm). Colección Fundación Maria Jose Jove, A Coruña, Spain. Photo by Holger Hönck, courtesy of the artists.

## Public Sculpture

### *Human Scale (Bent Pool)*

This artwork recreates a monumental public sculpture at human scale. *Bent Pool*, installed outside the Miami Beach Convention Center in 2019, is a sculpture of a full-scale swimming pool bent into an upside-down U shape. The artists consider this work to have an environmental message, asking viewers to consider what will happen to Miami if the water levels rise.

- Design a public swimming pool. What features will it have?
- Design an original public sculpture. Write a short proposal explaining your idea, where you would place it and why, and what impact you hope for it to have on viewers. Support your proposal with a sketch that shows the sculpture and its surroundings, its dimensions, and materials you would use to make it.



*Human Scale (Bent Pool)*, 2018. Silica sand, resin, aluminium, steel, lacquer, polyurethane, and mirror-polished stainless steel, 47 1/4 x 26 x 25 1/4 in. (120 x 66 x 64 cm). Private Collection. Photo by Elmar Vestner, courtesy of Perrotin.

### *He (Silver)*

Created as a male counterpart to Denmark's *The Little Mermaid* sculpture, Elmgreen & Dragset's version includes a young man seated in the same posture as the famous sculpture of the female mermaid. In place of the iconic fish tail of Edvard Erikson's 1913 sculpture, the artists left the figure's legs intact. The original version, titled *Han*, is permanently on view in the coastal city of Elsinore in front of Kronberg Castle, which was the setting for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

*Han* sparked public debate on a national level in Denmark when it made its debut. Residents of the city of Elsinore took issue with the artist's depiction of a nude male body in a reclining pose, claiming it was not masculine enough to be placed where it was on the site of a former shipyard that had been mostly staffed by male workers. Eventually, the city came to appreciate the sculpture and today it has become part of the city's visual identity.

- What sculptures in our country have become part of our national identity? Design a sculpture that could represent your city or school.
- Stage a classroom debate about this sculpture. First, determine the stakeholders (Director of the Lake Elsinore Cultural Arts Center, Elsinore resident, local teacher, tourist, Mayor of Elsinore, etc.). Divide the class into a "for" team and an "against" team. Designate students as different stakeholders in both teams (for instance, a local teacher in the "for" group and in the "against" group). Depending on the class size, there may be 2 or more students who work together to develop arguments for a stakeholder. Have students develop 1 or 2 argument from their stakeholder's point of view. Stakeholders take turn presenting their arguments. At the end, the class decides which team won the debate.



*He (Silver)*, 2013. Epoxy resin, polyurethane cast, silver coating, and clear lacquer, 74 3/4 x 55 x 39 1/3 in. (190 x 140 x 100 cm). Private Collection, Paris. Photo by Holger Hoenck, courtesy of Perrotin.

## Performance

### *Dallas Diaries*

*Dallas Diaries* features three young male or male-identifying performers seated at desks, keeping diaries throughout the run of the exhibition. The audience is free to walk around, read over the diarist's shoulder, and flip through the notebooks when the performer is on break. At the end of the exhibition, the diaries become a record of the performance and a portrait of the city in which they were written. By casting male or male-identifying diarists, the artists reflect on their own youth and comment on "diary" as a gendered term usually applied to the writings of young women.

- **Create your own space for reflection. Spend five minutes recording your thoughts, frustrations, successes and experiences. How do your words create a portrait of you?**



*Paris Diaries*, 2003. Performers, tables, notebooks, writing tools, and personal items. Desks each: 29 1/2 x 63 1/3 x 26 in. (75 x 161 x 66 cm). Installation view: *Paris Diaries*, Perrotin, Paris, 2003.

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## Additional Resources

Video: Elmgreen & Dragset on Creating the Unexpected

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpuc2hNcD60>

Elmgreen & Dragset advocate for Han to Elsinore officials

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSablax2i4>

*Elmgreen & Dragset: Sculptures* at the Nasher

<http://www.nashersculpturecenter.org/art/exhibitions/exhibition/id/662?elmgreen--dragset-sculptures>

Elmgreen & Dragset at Perrotin Gallery

[https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Elmgreen\\_et\\_Dragset/32#news](https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Elmgreen_et_Dragset/32#news)

## Suggested Curriculum Connections (TEKS)

Fine Arts: Creative Expression, Critical Evaluation | §117.52. Art, Level I (c) (2) and (4)

Social Studies: Culture | §113.42. World History (c) (25)

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