# **<b>TURES** ELMGREEN & DRAGSE

Nasher Sculpture Center

# ELMGREEN & DRAGSET: SCULPTURES

Michael Elmgreen (Danish, born 1961) and Ingar Dragset (Norwegian, born 1969) have worked together as Elmgreen & Dragset since 1995. In that time, they have developed a hybrid practice that encompasses varied modes of making—sculpture, architecture, theater, and performance—in their exploration of the enduring themes of youth and aging, and the subjects of LGBTQ rights and the privatization of public space. From their permanent site-specific installation of a forever-closed Prada boutique in the West Texas desert in 2005, to their contributions to the Danish and Nordic Pavilions at the Venice Biennale in 2009, to their giant upright swimming pool at Rockefeller Plaza, New York, in 2016, the artists have consistently devised new possibilities for the way art is presented and perceived, and how we use and organize public space.

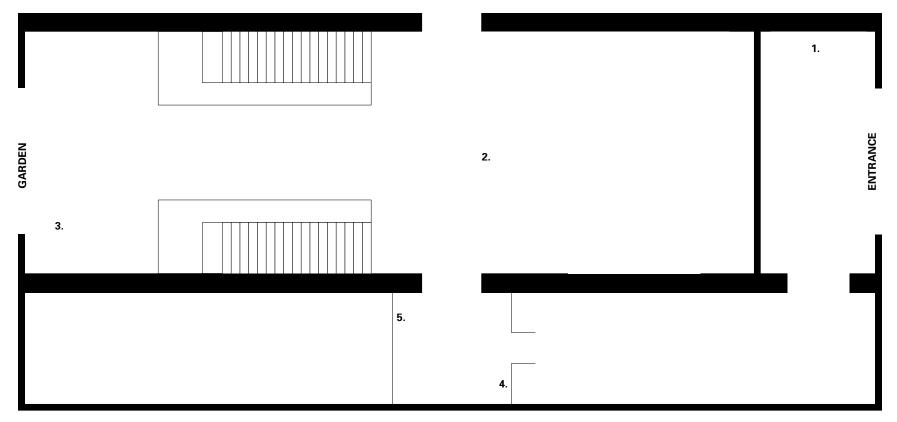
The first US museum exhibition of the duo's work and the firstever in-depth survey of their sculpture, *Elmgreen & Dragset: Sculptures* includes sculpture and performance from the beginnings of the artists' collaboration, as well as new work created for this presentation. Installed throughout the interior and exterior spaces of the Nasher, the works on view exemplify the artists' use of multiple aesthetics and working methods, and draw upon Minimalism, conceptual strategies, and the figurative sculpture tradition.

Front cover: *Pregnant White Maid*, 2017. Aluminum, stainless steel, lacquer, and clothes. 66 1/8 x 17 3/4 x 26 in. (168 x 45 x 66 cm) Collection of Bancrédito, Puerto Rico. Photo: Kevin Todora

1. *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. Photo: Kevin Todora



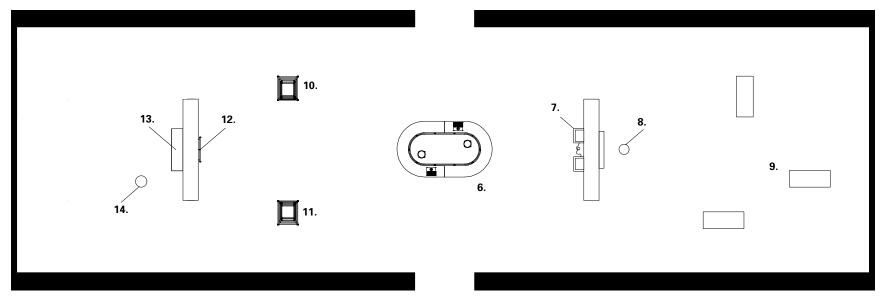
# **VESTIBULE, ENTRANCE, AND FOYER GALLERIES**



- 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
- Donation Box, 2006 Glass, stainless-steel, adhesive lettering, various objects 41 1/3 x 17 1/2 x 17 1/2 in. (105 x 44.5 x 44.5 cm) Courtesy of the artists
- 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

- 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
- 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

## **GALLERY 1**



- Queer Bar/Powerless Structures, Fig. 221, 2018 Corian, stainless steel, beer taps, MDF, and bar stools 44 1/2 x 147 2/3 x 86 2/3 in. (113 x 375 x 220 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery
- Marriage, 2004
   Mirrors, porcelain sinks, taps, stainless-steel tubing, and soap
   70 x 66 1/8 x 31 5/8 in. (178 x 168 x 81 cm)
   Courtesy of the Pomeranz Collection
- 8. 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) Coleción Fundación Maria Jose Jove, A Coruña, Spain

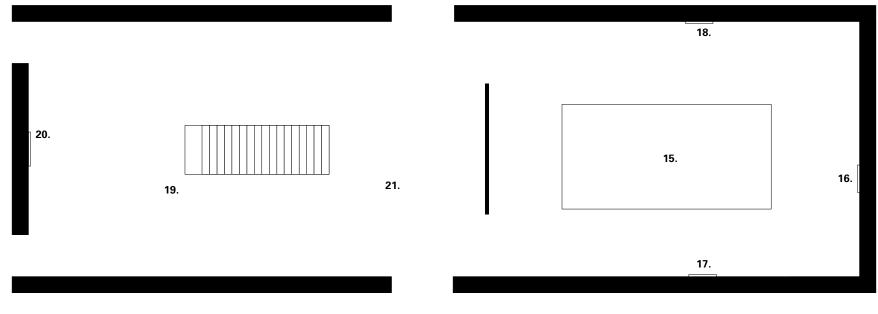
- Dallas Diaries, 2019 Performers, tables, notebooks, writing tools, and personal items 3 desks in total, each: 29 1/2 x 63 1/3 x 26 in. (75 x 161 x 66 cm) Courtesy of the artists
- Watching, 2016
   Polished stainless steel
   126 x 33 1/2 in. (320 x 100.2 x 84.9 cm)
   Collection Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman NY
   Courtesy the FLAG Art Foundation
- **11.** Lifeguard, 2018 Polished stainless steel 112 x 39 1/2 x 33 1/2 in. (284.5 x 100.2 x 84.9 cm) Private Collection

- Circulation, 2019 Stainless steel
   39 1/3 in. diameter x 1 1/2 in. (100 cm diameter x 4 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery
- 13. 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

14. Pregnant White Maid, 2017 Aluminum, stainless steel, lacquer, and clothes 66 1/8 x 17 3/4 x 26 in. (168 x 45 x 66 cm) Collection of Bancrédito, Puerto Rico

### LOWER LEVEL



NASHER HALL



- 15. Broken Square, 2018 Asphalt, styrofoarn, stainless steel 39 1/3 x 315 x 157 1/2 in. (100 x 800 x 400 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery
- Highway Painting, No. 4, 2018
   Paint on asphalt, aluminum
   80 3/4 x 41 1/2 x 3 1/8 in. (205.5 x 105.2 x 8 cm)
   Kunsthalle Praha, Prague
- Highway Painting, No. 2, 2018
   Paint on asphalt, aluminum
   80 3/4 x 41 1/2 x 3 1/8 in. (205.5 x 105.2 x 8 cm)
   Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery
- Highway Painting, No. 5, 2018
   Paint on asphalt, aluminum
   80 3/4 x 41 1/2 x 3 1/8 in. (205.5 x 105.2 x 8 cm)
   Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery

- Powerless Structures, Fig. 19, 1998
   Underwear and blue jeans
   Dimensions variable
   Courtesy of the artists
- Powerless Structures, Fig. 123, 2000 MDF, wood, hinges, door handles, and locks 82 1/2 x 51 1/4 in. (209.5 x 130.4 cm) Courtesy of the artists
- Adaptation, Fig. 12, 2019 Polished stainless steel 106 1/4 x 17 3/4 x 15 3/4 in. (270 x 45 x 40 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery
- 22. Drama Queens, 2007 Video 50 minutes Courtesy of the artists Screening daily in Nasher Hall

# **NASHER GARDEN**

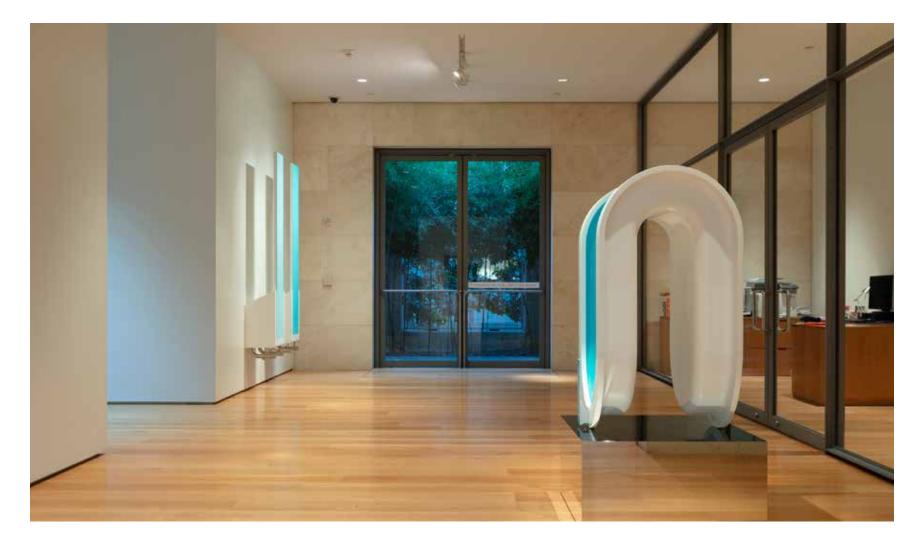
- **23.** Adaptation, Fig. 6, 2019. Polished stainless steel 106 1/4 x 17 3/4 x 15 3/4 in. (270 x 45 x 40 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery
- 24. Traces of a Never Existing History/Powerless Structures, Fig. 222, 2001/2019. Wood, stainless steel, aluminum, brushed aluminum, paint, Plexiglas, and LED lights 122 x 169 1/3 x 307 in. (310 x 430 x 780 cm) Courtesy of the artists
- 25. Si par une nuit d'hiver un voyageur, 2017 Bronze, stainless steel, black patina, and wax 126 x 82 2/3 x 51 1/4 in. (320 x 210 x 130 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery

- Marbella Beach, June 21st, 1989, 2015 Bronze and paint. 19 1/4 x 15 3/4 x 10 1/2 in. (49 x 40 x 27 cm). Private Collection
- Untitled–Prada Marfa Sign Edition, 2005/2019 Vinyl and aluminum. 120 x 72 x 6 in. (304.8 x 182.8 x 15.2 cm). Courtesy of the artists





2. Donation Box, 2006 Glass, stainless steel, adhesive lettering, various objects 41 1/3 x 17 1/2 x 17 1/2 in. (105 x 44.5 x 44.5 cm) Courtesy of the artists. Photo: Kevin Todora 3. 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: Kevin Todora



4. *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: Kevin Todora 5. 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: Kevin Todora



6. Queer Bar/ Powerless Structures, Fig. 221, 2018 Corian, stainless steel, beer taps, MDF, and bar stools 44 1/2 x 147 2/3 x 86 2/3 in. (113 x 375 x 220 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery. Photo: Kevin Todora





7. Marriage, 2004. Mirrors, porcelain sinks, taps, stainless-steel tubing, and soap 70 x 66 1/8 x 33 5/8 in. (178 x 168 x 81 cm) Courtesy of the Pomeranz Collection. Photo: Kevin Todora 12. Circulation, 2019 Stainless steel 39 1/3 in. diameter x 1 1/2 in. (100 cm diameter x 4 cm) Courtesy of the artists. Photo: Kevin Todora





9. *Dallas Diaries*, 2019 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: *Dallas Diaries*, Dallas, Texas, 2019. Photo: Kevin Todora 8. One Day, 2015 Aluminum, lacquer, glass, wood, fabric, and clothes Figure:  $41 \times 15 3/4 \times 15 3/4$  in.  $(104 \times 40 \times 40 \times m)$ Vitrine:  $21 2/3 \times 57 \times 7 5/8$  in.  $(55 \times 145 \times 20 \text{ cm})$ Coleción Fundación Maria Jose Jove, A Coruña, Spain. Photo: Kevin Todora





OPPOSITE: 11. *Lifeguard*, 2018 Polished stainless steel 112 x 39 1/2 x 33 1/2 in. (284.5 x 100.2 x 84.9 cm) Private Collection. Photo: Kevin Todora

10. Watching, 2016 Polished stainless steel 126 x 39 1/2 x 33 1/2 in. (320 x 100.2 x 84.9 cm) Collection Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman NY, Courtesy the FLAG Art Foundation. Photo: Kevin Todora



13. 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: Kevin Todora

14. *Pregnant White Maid*, 2017. Aluminum, stainless steel, lacquer, and clothes. 66 1/8 x 17 3/4 x 26 in. (168 x 45 x 66 cm) Collection of Bancrédito, Puerto Rico. Photo: Kevin Todora





Broken Square, 2018
 Asphalt, styrofoam, stainless steel
 39 1/3 x 315 x 157 1/2 in. (100 x 800 x 400 cm)
 Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery.
 Photo: Kevin Todora

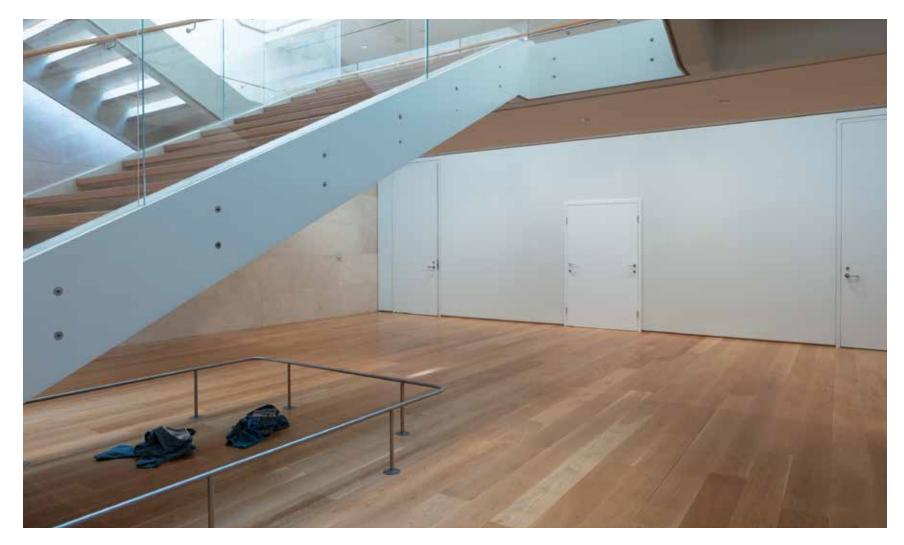
16. *Highway Painting, No. 4,* 2018 Paint on asphalt, aluminium 80 3/4 × 41 1/2 × 3 1/8 in. (205.2 × 105.2 × 8 cm) Kunsthalle Praha, Prague Photo: Kevin Todora



17. Highway Painting, No. 2, 2018 Paint on asphalt, aluminium 80  $3/4 \times 41$  1/2  $\times 3$  1/8 in. (205.2  $\times$  105.2  $\times$  8 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery. Photo: Kevin Todora



18 Highway Painting, No. 5, 2018 Paint on asphalt, aluminium 80 3/4 x 41 1/2 x 3 1/8 in. (205.2 x 105.2 x 8 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery. Photo: Kevin Todora



19. Powerless Structures, Fig. 19, 1998 Underwear and blue jeans Dimensions variable Courtesy of the artists. Photo: Kevin Todora 20. Powerless Structures, Fig. 123, 2000 MDF, wood, hinges, door handles, and locks 82  $1/2 \times 51$  1/4 in. (209.5  $\times$  130.4 cm) Courtesy of the artists. Photo: Kevin Todora



21. Adaptation, Fig. 12, 2019 Polished stainless steel 106 1/4 x 17 3/4 x 15 3/4 in. (270 x 45 x 40 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery. Photo: Kevin Todora



23. Adaptation, Fig. 6, 2019 Polished stainless steel 106 1/4 x 17 3/4 x 15 3/4 in (270 x 45 x 40 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery. Photo: Kevin Todora

24. Traces of a Never Existing History/Powerless Structures, Fig. 222, 2001/2019 Wood, stainless steel, aluminum, brushed aluminum, paint, Plexiglas, and LED lights 122 x 169 1/3 x 307 in. (310 x 430 x 780 cm) Photo: Kevin Todora a Flüpor ARY ART



25. Si par une nuit d'hiver un voyageur, 2017 Bronze, stainless steel, black patina, and wax 126 x 82 2/3 x 51 1/4 in. (320 x 210 x 130 cm) Courtesy of Perrotin Gallery. Photo: Kevin Todora



26. Marbella Beach, June 21st, 1989, 2015 Bronze and paint 19 1/4  $\times$  15 3/4  $\times$  10 1/2 in. (49  $\times$  40  $\times$  27 cm) Private Collection. Photo: Kevin Todora



27. Untitled–Prada Marfa Sign Edition, 2005/2019 Vinyl and aluminum 120 x 72 x 6 in. (304.8 x 182.8 x 15.2 cm) Courtesy of the artists. Photo: Kevin Todora

### NARRATIVE AND ROLE-PLAY

Elmgreen & Dragset construct entire worlds in museum galleries-domestic interiors or generic non-spaces, such as airports and art fairs.<sup>1</sup> Central to these immersive installations what the artists call "stagings"-are their meticulously fabricated sculptures that serve double duty as autonomous works of art and as characters playing their part in imagined narratives. A recurring character in their narrative stagings is the sculptural installation Modern Moses. Comprising a wax baby in a carrycot placed in front of a nonfunctioning ATM, the work debuted in the artists' 2006 exhibition The Welfare Show.<sup>2</sup> In the narrative context of that exhibition—the erosion of social welfare programs throughout the world—*Modern Moses* represented the privatization of those programs at the expense of the citizens who rely on those systems for support. The abandoned baby became a stand-in for those left behind and unable to access support in the form of funding or social programs. The sculpture's meaning shifted slightly when Elmgreen & Dragset included it in their exhibition The Well Fair at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing in 2016, as the artists discussed in an interview: "There are changes occurring in the demographics of most of the developed world today, particularly in regions like Korea and Japan. People consider a professional career more important than having children, and the result is a dramatic decrease in birth rates. The title of this work is Modern Moses. A forgotten baby."3 The sculptural installation takes on new meaning here in Texas, the first state in the US to enact the "Baby Moses Law" in 1999, which allows parents to leave unharmed infants up to 60 days old at any hospital or fire station, with "no questions asked."<sup>4</sup>

The figure of the maid is another leitmotif in Elmgreen & Dragset's large-scale stagings. The artists fabricated their first maid sculpture in gilded bronze in 2006 and have since made other versions finished in matte white. The material that remains constant throughout the series' many variations is the maid's uniform, which each sculpture "wears"-combining readymade with handmade in sculptures that complicate traditional understandings of statues as conveying exemplarity, or as stand-ins for something to be aspired to or remembered. To create the maid sculptures, the artists cast the bodies of real-life maids: a Mexican housemaid named Rosa modeled for their first figure, while Pregnant White Maid (2017). on view in Gallery I, was cast from a Swiss housemaid. The maid figures are simultaneously generic and individualized, cast in the same anonymous role as stiffly posed attendants. The artists have noted that there is something absurd about casting "a maid as a sculpture, an actual object" and relate them to the decorative figures of various forms of manual labor created by porcelain factories in the 19th century.

The uniform suggests *Pregnant White Maid* takes the role of a domestic laborer, while the statue's sexuality is depicted through her apparent pregnancy. As art historian David J. Getsy notes, "This alone allows narrative to rush in, and many might immediately connect this work to the long history of abuses of servants and workers by those in power. The sculpture begs the questions of whether the father is the man of the house and whether the child will be legitimate."<sup>5</sup> Elmgreen & Dragset's placement of this work facing the sculptural installation *Invisible* (2017), which comprises a figure of a young boy crouching within the alcove of a large marble fireplace, furthers the narrative introduced with *Pregnant White Maid*. Similarly adorned with actual clothing over his matte-white body, the boy in *Invisible* appears engrossed in his own thoughts and anxieties—has he retreated to this space to become invisible, or perhaps was he banished and made invisible? Together the two sculptures function as a small-scale staging, exemplifying the artists' use of narrative to heighten the psychological emotion inherent in many of their works.

In the garden, the artists' rendering of a contemporary art museum appears to be either emerging from or sinking into the groundthe words "TEMPORARY ART" are all that remain visible above the door, with the implication that the beginning of the word, "CON", is obscured underground. Titled Traces of a Never Existing History/Powerless Structures, Fig. 222 (2001/2019), the sculpture develops a narrative of a different kind. It was originally commissioned as part of the 2001 Istanbul Biennial, where it had specific meaning and connection to its site on the historic grounds of the Royal Mint of the Ottoman Empire, a location with a complex history. In the Nasher Garden, the sculpture perpetuates the narrative that Renzo Piano initiated with his architectural concept of the Nasher Sculpture Center itself as an ancient ruin amid the shiny new skyscrapers that dominate downtown Dallas. Here, Elmgreen & Dragset reverse the notion of a sculpture deriving meaning from its context. With Traces of a Never Existing History, our understanding of the Nasher Garden is transformed the work shifts the context from a sculpture garden to a ruin, or a cemetery, and makes a tongue-in-cheek reference to the notion that museums are places art goes to die.

### PERFORMANCE SCULPTURE

In the beginning of their collaboration, Elmgreen & Dragset's work revolved around personal experience and the artist's most readily available material: the body. Inspired by the reemergence of body art in the mid-1990s and the plays and films of Jean Genet, Elmgreen & Dragset's early performances centered on autobiographical indexes and descriptors of their identities as Scandinavian, queer boyfriends.

In the Nasher Galleries, alongside their sculptural works, the artists have staged the fourth iteration of their Diaries series of durational performances. Originally presented at Perrotin Gallery in Paris in 2003 as *Paris Diaries*, the series has been subsequently presented in Istanbul (2013) and Hong Kong (2015). Dallas Diaries features three three young men or maleidentifying performers seated at desks, keeping diaries in the gallery 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 a break. The work speaks to voyeurism and the gaze, transforming the diarists into objects to be observed. Relating also to Elmgreen & Dragset's world-building, Dallas Diaries illuminates the private, individual universes that exist in each of the performers' minds as they put pen to paper, thus making public their inner workings and thoughts. Following the close of *Elmgreen & Dragset: Sculptures,* the diaries become a separate, related work of art that functions threefold as personal or private written recordings, performance documents, and portraits of the city in which they were made. The diarists' musings cultivated throughout the duration of the Nasher performance become simultaneously distinct from and integral to the broader Diaries network of Paris, Istanbul, and Hong Kong. The series further reveals how the

activity of recording private thoughts is commonly gendered, as men and boys keep journals while women and girls keep diaries. By casting male or male-identifying diarists, the artists turn the tables on gendered language surrounding the activity of recording one's private thoughts or daily happenings.

### MINIMALIST AND LAND ART AESTHETICS

Early on in their collaboration, Elmgreen & Dragset adopted a Minimalist aesthetic to infiltrate the history of "high" art. Elmgreen explained in an interview, "Minimalism was always the thing that was shown in large scale in the most important American art institutions.... So dealing with Minimalism was a kind of challenge for a gay person—also to break the stereotype image of gay people being interested in camp and being very feminine in their way of expressing themselves."<sup>6</sup> The movement has remained a central point of reference for Elmgreen & Dragset, both because of its impact on Scandinavian design and aesthetics and, more directly, because of the ways in which American Minimalism's spatial and bodily engagement offers a founding example of how artists address and challenge the constructed space of the white cube.

*Couple, Fig. 21* (2016), on view in the Foyer Gallery, is part of a series of vertical, paired diving boards the artists began that same year. Seemingly readymade but created entirely by hand, Elmgreen & Dragset's diving boards are painted in a range of shades from cyan blue, as in *Couple, Fig. 21*, to stark black or pink, and recall the handmade Minimalist sculptures by John McCracken and Anne Truitt. The doubling of an ordinary object, and the series title, further reference Minimalist artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres's pairings

of such everyday household objects as clocks as markers for same-sex couples.

Over the past two decades, Elmgreen & Dragset have also been making a series of sculptures titled Queer Bar. These are among the artists' most iconic works, and they encapsulate a number of key themes. Originally manifested in 1998 as an enclosed square bar in which inside and outside had been inverted, with the stools for patrons in the interior space and the beer taps facing outward, variations in the series have since been iterated in different geometric shapes, such as the oval Queer Bar/Powerless Structures, Fig. 221 (2018), on view in Gallery I. Identified through its title as part of the artists' Powerless Structures series, Queer Bar is representative of the artists' "denials"—they often invite participation only to frustrate it. With the patrons' stools on the inside of the bar and the beer taps facing outward, conventional use of the bar is made impossible-there is no place to sit and any promise of relaxation affiliated with being at a bar is denied. The sculpture places the visitor in the role of a server-a flipping of expected positions that raises questions about who is seeing or being seen, and who needs whom. While the sculpture has recognizable elements and is representational, it also directly references abstract sculpture. Its white, human-scale geometric shape speaks to the stereotypical image of Minimalist art and its legacies. In the 1960s, such artists as Robert Morris, Tony Smith, and Donald Judd created reductive, geometric abstract sculptures that, like Queer Bar, were made to fill and obstruct space with objects scaled to the human body in order to activate a corporeal engagement with the standing viewer.

Installed outside the Nasher, Elmgreen & Dragset's road sign indicates the number of miles to "PRADA MARFA," a direct reference to *Prada Marfa* (2005), the artists' site-specific "Pop/

Land art project in the middle of [the] desert," permanently installed on the side of a lonely highway in West Texas, approximately 37 miles from the village of Marfa.<sup>7</sup>

One of the artists' best-known works of art, the ostensible Prada boutique—complete with shoes and handbags, and a door that is always locked—exemplifies Elmgreen & Dragset's various aesthetics and conceptual strategies, in particular their use of Minimalist aesthetics and references to Land art. To help fund the making of *Prada Marfa* in 2005, Elmgreen & Dragset produced limited-edition sculptures such as *Untitled–Prada Marfa Sign Edition* (2005/2019)—recalling the work of Land artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude, who produced drawings and prints related to their large-scale interventions in the landscape as a means of financing the immense costs of production at that scale. Though editioned, each Elmgreen & Dragset sign, including this work at the Nasher, is unique in identifying its location in relation to the replica store, effectively creating a temporary, site-specific sculpture that points to the permanent installation located in remote West Texas.

In the Lower Level Gallery, Elmgreen & Dragset installed *Broken Square* (2018)—a room-encompassing work of art that comprises massive, broken shards of asphalt piled into the center of the gallery in a reference to the urban landscape the Nasher was built on top of in 2003 (prior to that, the land beneath the Dallas Arts District functioned as a series of used car and surface parking lots). The piled-up material likewise recalls the work of such Land artists as Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, and Richard Long. Embedded within the flat, black surfaces are remnants of common street fixtures—an anchor pole from a lost traffic sign and twisted metal that may have once been a bike rack. Tools once used to control and encourage social use of public space have been displaced or rendered useless. The installation poses questions about not only our shared public spaces but also the setting of the gallery itself by displacing the broken pieces of the street and recontextualizing them within the pristine white-cube gallery environment.

### **PUBLIC SCULPTURE**

Since the beginning of their collaboration in 1995, Elmgreen & Dragset have been concerned with the ever-changing dynamics of public space, making sculptural works and installations that respond to both the histories and the sociocultural challenges that define our shared or community spaces. Distinguishing a number of their sculptures as "public" introduces a tradition that comes with its own set of connotations, expectations, and perceptual conditions. Some might associate modern public art with abstract plastic forms sited in front of architectural landmarks or correlate the tradition of public art with other representational sculptures, such as equestrian statuary, intended to commemorate a historical event or person. In their public artworks, Elmgreen & Dragset have tackled these expectations head-on by unconventionally meeting these demands for familiar forms. The artists turn the familiar and easily recognizable into something extraordinary by revealing the complexity of what might not normally be considered worth highlighting. Their public artworks memorialize the less spectacular and non-heroic, if quotidian, experiences of daily life.

The swimming pool sculpture—*Human Scale (Bent Pool)* (2018), on view in the Foyer Gallery—references the monumental public sculpture Elmgreen & Dragset installed outside the Miami Beach Convention Center in 2019. Rendered at human scale, the work recalls its larger counterpart and formally calls to mind biomorphic modernist sculpture by such artists as Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and Jean Arp. The swimming pool and its accoutrements are a recurring trope in the artists' work. In 1997, after two years of performance-based work, Elmgreen & Dragset made their first sculpture, *Powerless Structures, Fig.* 11: a diving board thrust through the panoramic windows of the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark. In the years since, the artists have developed this motif, making paired diving board sculptures (see *Couple, Fig.* 21, 2016 in the Foyer Gallery), ever-watchful lifeguard statues (see *Watching*, 2016 in Gallery I), and swimming pools both as monumental public sculptures and as evocative, immersive stagings. In 2018 the artists transformed London's Whitechapel Gallery into an abandoned neighborhood swimming pool as a comment on the increasing privatization of public spaces in the wake of gentrification.

A key example of Elmgreen & Dragset's interest in memorializing everyday experiences is the artists' series of cast bronze coolers (also referred to as "Cooling Boxes") made between 2004 and 2015. Realized in a variety of color combinations, each cooler is assigned a title that references a location and date, for example, Marbella Beach, June 21st, 1989 (2015), installed in the Nasher Garden. The contents of the cooler are unknown and unknowable—the sculpture is instead a denial, a copy of an everyday object typically reserved for minor events not worthy of commemoration: picnics, road trips, perhaps a visit to the beach, as the title of this example suggests. The artists claim that the date refers to a fictional event—but it is perhaps more accurate to describe the date as marking an unknowable event: While Elmgreen & Dragset cannot claim to know what happened on June 21, 1989, on Marbella Beach, there is a likely possibility that something meaningful happened in that place and time. Though the dates are randomly chosen, the places all refer to

well-known gay beaches and places of leisure. Unlike a functioning cooler—intentionally lightweight for ease of portability—Elmgreen & Dragset's versions are instead heavy as bronze sculptures, and in public settings the works are secured to the ground. Like the artists' interest in the swimming pool as a symbol of leisure and aspiration, this series takes as its subject an object that has symbolized portability, travel, and leisure since the 1950s.

In a departure from their frequently deployed strategy of stagings, Elmgreen & Dragset have chosen to present their sculptures at the Nasher free of fictional mediations. Interested in how the context in which a work of art is displayed affects its meaning, the artists' installation at the Nasher asks how a "sculpture center" shapes the interpretation of objects displayed within it, and what new readings of the works it might invite. Elmgreen & Dragset's exhibition demonstrates the compelling way their work engages with—and offers new insights into—the museum's environs, its history, its permanent collection, and indeed the long cultural tradition of sculpture.



22. Drama Queens, 2007.Video50 minutesCourtesy of the artistsPhoto by Roman Mensing

<sup>1</sup>Marc Augé is an important reference point for Elmgreen & Dragset, notably in the concept for their exhibition Aéroport Mille Plateaux (2015), which transformed the Samsung Museum of Art in Seoul, Korea, into an airport. Augé coined the term "non-places" to refer to the kinds of transitory, generic places that have no memory and otherwise allow humans passing through them to remain anonymous. See: Augé, Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supernodemity, trans. John Howe (London, 1995).

<sup>2</sup>Organized by Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, in 2005, *The Welfare Show* traveled to and was adapted for exhibitions including the BAWAG Foundation, Vienna (2005); Serpentine Gallery, London (2006); and the Power Plant, Toronto (2006).

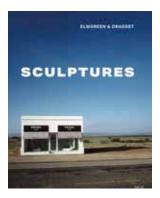
\*Elmgreen & Dragset quoted in Catherine Shaw, "Transitional Space: Elmgreen & Dragset Create Airport for Seoul's Plateau," Wal/paper\*, August 18, 2015, https://www.wallpaper.com/art/transitional-space-elmgreen-dragset-create-airport-for-seoulsplateau (accessed August 9, 2019).

"See: "Baby Moses Law or Safe Haven," Taxas Department of Family and Protective Services, https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/ Child\_Protection/Child\_Safety/Resources/baby\_moses.asp, and "The Baby Moses Project," http://www.babymosesproject.org/ index.html [both accessed August 9, 2019].

<sup>5</sup>Getsy, "Queer Figurations in the Sculpture of Elmgreen & Dragset," in Leigh Arnold and Anita lannacchione, eds., *Elmgreen & Dragset: Sculptures* (Dallas and Berlin: Nasher Sculpture Center and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2019), p. 176.

<sup>®</sup>Michael Elmgreen, interview by Hans Ulrich Obrist, in *Powerless Structures: Works by Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset*, exh. cat., Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art and Gallery I8 (1998), p. 27.

<sup>7</sup>Ingar Dragset, interview by Linda Yablonsky, in Michele Robecchi, ed., Elmgreen & Dragset (London, 2019), p. 29.



### **ELMGREEN & DRAGSET: SCULPTURES CATALOGUE**

The first-ever dedicated study of the duo's sculptures, this extensive publication covers the artists' production in this field from the mid-1990s through the present day. Included are extensive photographic documentation of 112 of their works in 198 color illustrations and five essays approaching their practice from various arthistorical and thematic perspectives.

\$75 / Nasher Members receive at least 10% off purchases at the Nasher Store. Also available at store.nashersculpturecenter.org

Co-published by the Nasher Sculpture Center and Hatje Cantz Verlag

*Elmgreen & Dragset: Sculptures* is made possible with leading support from the Texas Commission on the Arts and Perrotin. Major support is provided by Garance Primat, Domaine des Etangs and The New Carlsberg Foundation, with additional support courtesy of Lora Reynolds and Quincy Lee, Leigh Rinearson, Sharon and Michael Young, The Danish Arts Foundation, Lucilo Peña and Lee Cobb, and The American Scandinavian Foundation.

