

IT IS ONLY A PAPER MOON

CHRISTIAN TANGØ, ART AND REALITY

Ole Lindboe

Edition

gallerimiva

ARTPAGE

It is Only a Paper Moon

Christian Tangø, art and reality

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my friend Jan Daggry – or, as I prefer, Mr. Dawn.

Apart from writing the smash hit *Superman*, he is that gifted musician I always wanted to be.

Christian



Among New Friends, New Colours Around
40 × 56 inches

THE WORLD APART



Funeral of Abstract Art 29.5 × 47 inches

"It is an experience of ecstatic joy ... And I am in the golden heart of the city, my heart cheering lightly. Everything is going smoothly for me, for others around me, for us all. In this corner of being, the world suddenly functions. Endlessly open and erotically receptive. All by itself, like a dream."

We are following the Danish author Hans Jørgen Nielsen in London. The year is 1980 and this beehive of sound, light, energy, speed and rhythm is the city. Everything swings,

and the author realises that we are in the midst of the modern urban landscape where everything is fragmented, a "world in pieces" where everything happens at an immense pace.

This is it. Modern reality is a veritable carousel ride in which the different impressions swirl round inside the head of the voyeur, who constantly feels that he has no other choice but to let himself be guided round and round, until he feels dizzy.

If reality is dizzy and confused, then what is art? Absorption can easily become a postulate, if all we experience are glittering surfaces and rapid impressions. If reality is ripped apart and fragmented, art becomes – not surprisingly – a mirror of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

For a modern artist like Christian Tangø, the everlasting flow of images around him is a source of curious observation. With a certain sense of cynical merriment, he observes the chaotic world around him, with its many image fragments. He sets out on a voyage of exploration and picks out photos that he then reconfigures into new images through his art.

Andy Warhol became famous for sayings like "Surface is everything, it's all there is" – but Christian Tangø does not necessarily agree. "The world is, of course, much more than just something superficial," he says. "All surfaces have scratches that you can investigate in search of their hidden messages. Actually, what we want and what we pursue is a sense of nearness, and that which is important is content. We just have to penetrate the surface first. Simply put, technology and the media are choking the content. We have become raving narcissists who worship the surface indiscriminately.

Marilyn Behind Bars
59 × 47 inches





Blue Note Famous Girl 59 x 47 inches

We can neither deny nor avoid these surfaces, because they divide us and bring us together, all at the same time."

For the modern artist, all surfaces are interesting. Every surface has – paradoxically but not surprisingly – its own special content. The surface is often mistaken for the content, and that is pretty much the intention – to catch the audience's attention and then fascinate them. This is an important point in modern art: art as entertainment.

Modern art is very much about seduction. The British artist Richard Hamilton provided the following description of Pop Art: "Popular (designed for a mass audience), transient (short-term solution), expendable (easily forgotten), cheap ... young ... witty ... sexy ...".

Christian Tangø agrees with the description of Pop Art as superficial, but on the other hand he also feels that there is much more to it than that. Art can twist even the most popular, superficial and smart ideas so that art transforms the popular idiom and reveals a new meaning. It then becomes a new form of reflection – and meaning.

Pop Art was – according to the British critic Lawrence Alloway – the art of industrialism – before it became an American art form. "Mass production techniques, applied to accurately repeatable words, pictures and music, have resulted in an expendable multitude of signs and symbols ...," he observed. Moreover, the aesthetics of plenty "oppose a very strong tradition which dramatises the arts as the possession of an elite." But "then, after pop, unique oil paintings and highly personal poems as well as mass distributed films and ... magazines can be placed within a continuum ..." wrote Lawrence Alloway in the essay *The Long Front of Culture*, 1958.

According to Alloway, the definition "Fine arts" and its limitation of the definition of art to painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry discriminates because it excludes too many other forms. In that sense, Pop Art has been a strong critical voice in itself, since it threatens the classic, elitist conception of art.



Then We Take Berlin 39 × 55 inches



Motherboard Attack 36 × 47 inches

Pop Art has for the same reason never been afraid of the label populist, since it lives off mass culture (some might say as an extension to mass culture) and coexists with the media.

Pop Art is able to dazzle and infatuate; it can show off and make a fool of itself. It disregards the speed limits, and the predilections of fine culture are unable to stop it. It has no shame, and plays along with the conditions applied by the most recent media technology.

It is in a state of constant evolution

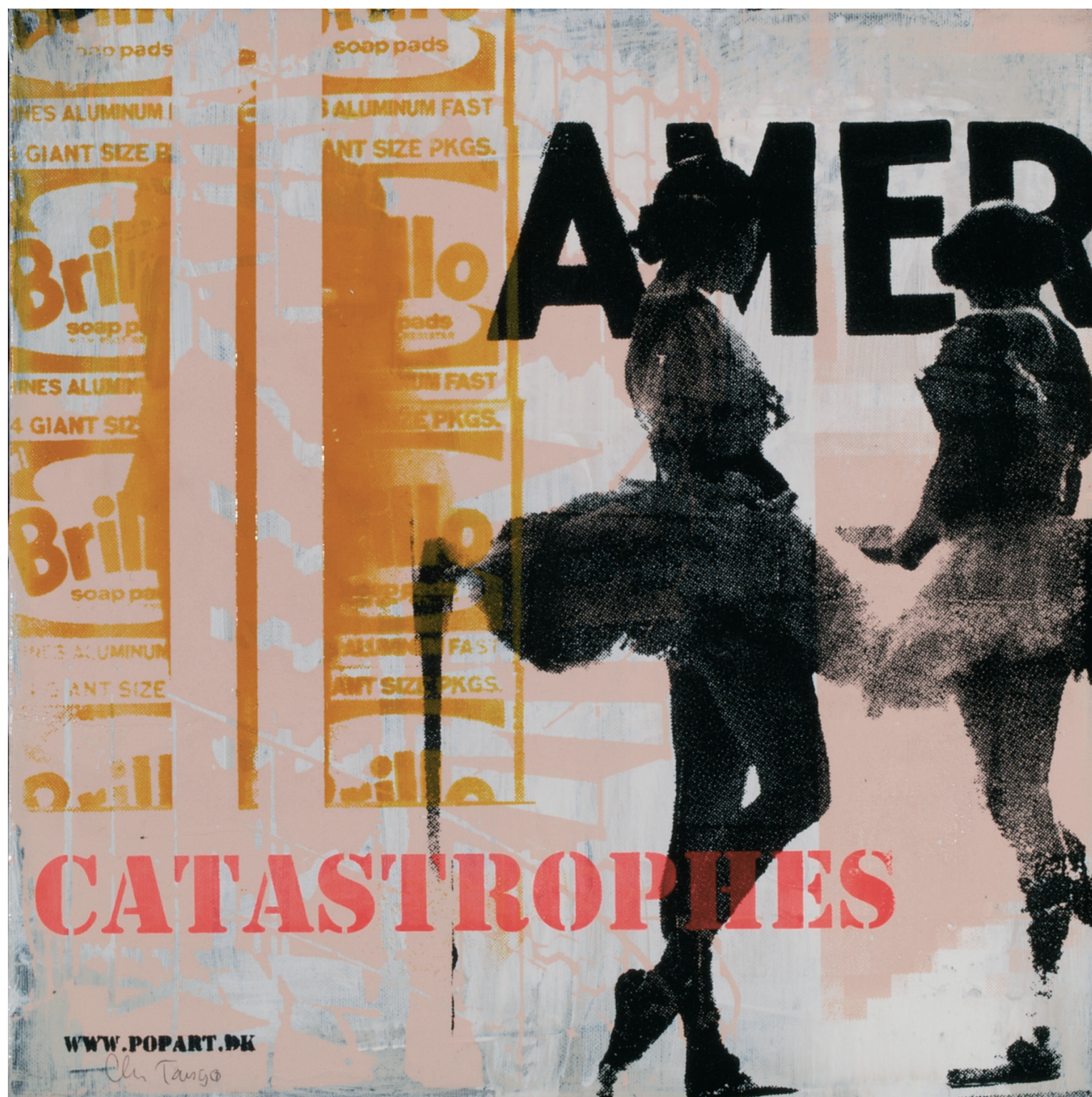
We can only watch – amazed, curious and terrified, as if standing on a street corner watching the world thunder past.

Artist's note

Content and surface (form) are inseparably entwined. To separate the two would constitute deceit, an intellectual disposition from Greek Antiquity, as Susan Sontag has pointed out.



My Grandmother's Doll 59 × 47 inches



THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE



The medium is the message
Martin Dam Kristensen,
Galerie Bogø 2004

“Rapidly we approach the final phase of the extensions of man – the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media.”

This was the beginning of a new era, according to media scientist Marshall McLuhan, who published his revolutionising book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* in 1964. Here the main thesis was that “the medium is the message” in the sense that a particular communication medium through its very nature, for instance its specific way of communicating content, creates certain specific types of stories.

McLuhan became a media prophet of the modern age. Through his descriptions of the revolutionising character of the media, he was the first to foresee the impending media explosion that would dominate our consciousness for many decades to come. Today, the global revolution is a fact. The ever-powerful media exert a strong influence on both political and cultural agendas.

Information for the people

McLuhan's views about the media – and in particular their technological ingenuity and inherent power – represented a challenge to many. To McLuhan, “media” are not just the mass media, but apply on a larger scale to all forms of technology, with the light bulb as just one example. “The General Electric Company makes a considerable portion of its profits from electric light bulbs and lightning systems. It has not discovered that, quite as much as A.T. & T., it is the business of moving information.” Moreover, “Whether the light is being used for brain surgery or night baseball is a matter of indifference,” he says. “It could be argued that these activities are in some way the ‘content’ of the electric light, since they could not exist without the electric light. This fact merely underlines the point that ‘the medium is the message’ because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.”



*Whatever Happened to the Male after
Women's Liberation 80 × 56 inches*



Turning Torso 16 × 16 inches

In other words, we are too busy experiencing the things that the electric bulb lights up. So busy, in fact, that we forget the medium itself. Electric light is no longer a natural thing. We live in the electronic age, where light is technology, a medium in itself.

Each new medium always uses technology and is always subordinate to technology. The newspaper article will never be able to reach the same “depth” as a book: it simply does not have enough words or information put into it. Talking about electric light, the experiences of colour vary vividly from one light source to the next, and differ again between a print version and the computer screen.

Probably the most important contribution that McLuhan made was that he came to pinpoint that we live in an electric or electronic era. His main criticism was aimed at television, in particular, as this medium was experiencing its breakthrough at the time when his book was first published in 1964.

McLuhan's argumentation is no less relevant today than when it first emerged in the 1960s. When we talk about Virtual Reality or the latest, most advanced computer games, the digital technology involved provides a new sense of reality. The same goes for mobile phones, which now seem to be able to fulfil our smallest wish – and which yet still control our behaviour (1). If one wishes an update on McLuhan, it is important to realise that the interface between user and machine now takes up an ever-larger space. It is in this light that one should consider Christian Tange's work. He says: “The interface and the interplay between user and machine are very important right now. The entire world of media is changing drastically, and I have to relate to that as an artist. This is why my works contain items like Windows icons, suddenly appearing outside the computer, in a different context (the canvas), where they become subject to critical investigation, just as does the computer in general and technology as such.”

The machine is supposed to be a tool in its pure form. However, updating and maintenance of these machines have



Media Madonna 39 × 55 inches



A Tribute to Max Planck 29 × 47 inches

now become the order of the day. The computer should have been pure form, but has become content itself. The media should have been placeholders for information – pure form – but instead take over the content within them. The interplay between form and content is not just a media phenomenon, but is also central to Pop Art. If one wants to understand Pop Art, it is important to observe how form and content constantly fuse together.

Form and content

Regardless of whether we call painting “slow art” or expect some kind of contemplation from it, the question of style is always important in art. Without a defined style there is no power of penetration, and the greatest artists are known for creating a form of expression that is later defined as a movement or style – or maybe even an “ism”. Style is an important part of the content.

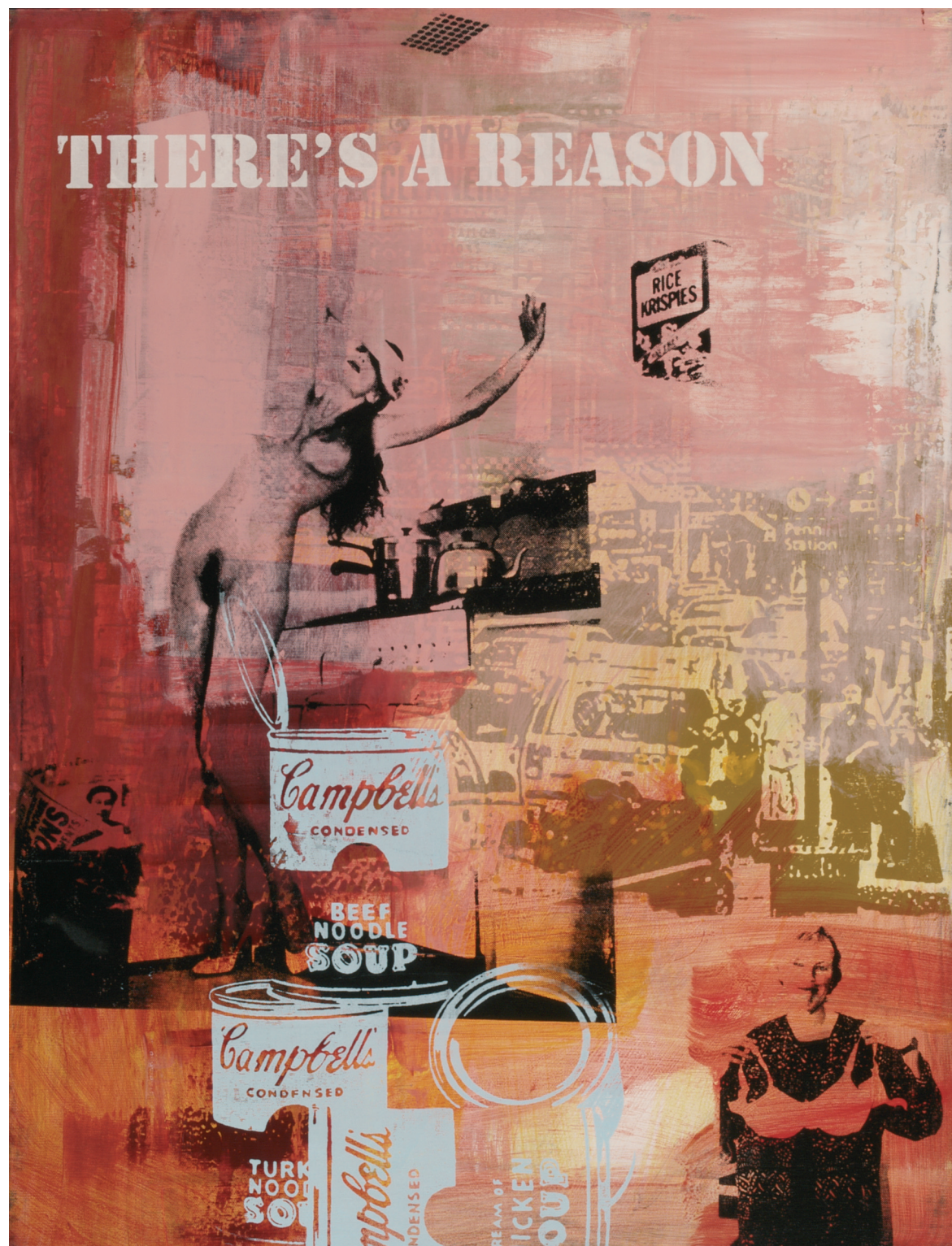
For Pop Art, this was an important issue right from the beginning, partly because Pop Art invented a brand new form of expression. Moreover, it created a series of new ways to produce paintings, specifically with Andy Warhol's silk-screen picture of Marilyn Monroe from 1962.

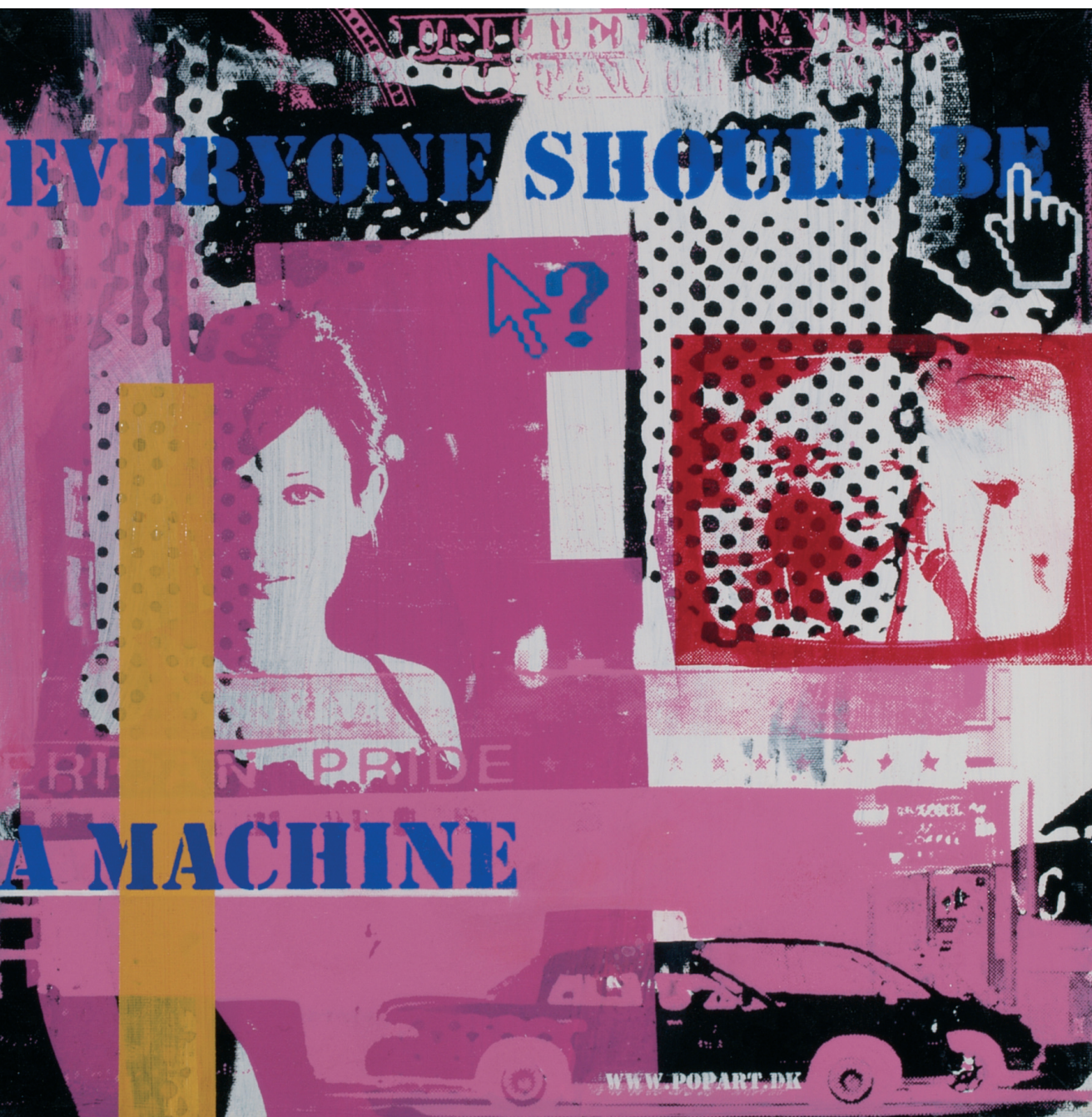
In a famous essay from 1958, the critic Lawrence Alloway argues that the culture of modern art is dramatically changing modern perceptions of reality as well as the hierarchy of traditional art. Art must adjust itself to the taste of its audience, or end up being irrelevant. Visual art – whether it realises the fact or not – interacts strongly with the surrounding popular culture and its consumer aesthetics. That which the elitist culture considers mere surface can in Pop Art suddenly become the very content of art.

Everyday pictures

Though glamour has a slight precedence, Pop Art has no limits as to which motifs can be used. According to Alloway, “Pop Art deals with material that already exists as signs

CandyCrash Can
39 × 31 inches





Untitled 16 × 16 inches

... The subject matter of Pop Art, at one level, is known to the spectator in advance of seeing use the artist makes of it. Andy Warhol's Campbell soup cans, Roy Lichtenstein's comic strips ... Marilyn Monroe ...". Not only will the spectators' way of viewing these common objects change, Pop Art even affects our whole perception of reality. "The communication system of the twentieth century is, in a special sense, Pop Art's subject."

Hollywood culture, with its effective stereotypes in films and advertisements, has in many ways taken over the more sublime and discreet artistic vocabulary of the cultural elite. It has broken down the demarcation lines between fine culture and mass culture. From westerns to science fiction movies, from comic books to graffiti, the classical imagery has been under constant fire. The pulp fiction genre has overtaken and overthrown modern visual art in a way that is revolutionary.

Art on the lookout

It is well known that internationally known artists such as Gerhard Richter and Martin Kippenberger have – to a remarkable extent – taken the clichés of popular culture and made them their own. They have been inventive and original in their use of modern visual imagery, which has moved artistic frontiers.

The artist resumes a position where he – speaking with the astoundingly prescient Marshall McLuhan – is returning to the role of a shaman. The artist has something important to say to his fellow citizens. Art is moving from being a diet for the elite to a necessary part of the education of the masses.

The comparison with the musical revolution of rock'n'roll is obvious. From the 1950s onwards, rock music changed the way the world perceived and listened to music. The right-wing American public called it "communist nigger music" and condemned what, in their opinion, was vulgar. Similar criticism hit Pop Art when it emerged in the late fifties, and the same happened somewhat later with graffiti, which came in from the gutter and brought with it the aesthetics of the street.



Academic Beauty 35 × 47 inches



All the Things You Are ...
80 × 80 inches

Street art

Graffiti was not alone when it came to conquering the streets' and the cities' many spaces – large and small. Commercials have long been a part of the urban profile – omnipresent and right in your face. They are on every street corner. From massive billboards on the highway to gigantic gable advertisements strategically placed in the urban landscape. The newest billboards feature huge plasma screens with rapid-fire film clips that tantalise passers-by. One moment they are showing the president of the United States, the next disillusioned protesters, then partisans firing weapons and then lions hunting on the savannah. All mixed up and jumbled together with commercials for virtually every conceivable product.

It is not at all surprising that entertainment can be mistaken for information and vice versa. Who can tell the difference? Many media scientists speak of infotainment when they try to describe how information and entertainment melt together and affect our individual media consciousness.

The many images create a constant, pulsating image tapestry, in which substance fades in step with their volume and speed. So wildly that it seems like a mix between reality and insanity.

(1) A very recent example of how the media create their agenda is the phenomenon known as “happy slapping”, where mobile phones serve as camera, network, broadcaster and video recorder all at once, and record and spread violence committed against innocent people – as entertainment. Again, the mere existence of the media and the unadulterated news coverage of happy slapping video clips on TV have certainly inspired even more of these violent attacks.

Twelve Before Nine
(Wake Me Up, Before You Go...)
40 × 32 inches





Crosstown Traffic in the Machine
(To Hendrix) 39 × 55 inches

THE WORLD AS RETRO



When You Are on the Streets
35 × 47 inches

Do you remember, back then?

Culture has long since turned retro, judging by the way ads, movies and images appear everywhere in the media.

The modern visual reality has ended up taking a long cold walk down memory lane – call it paraphrasing, copying or style awareness, as you prefer. Maybe it is a kind of narcissistic reflection in a culture that lacks any real identity other than what it can see in the mirrors of our French-style cafés.

The 1950s have long been the decade that most visual artists seek to court. This was a decade when Hollywood created many of the great icons we still revere today, such as Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Superman, Wonder Woman, Elvis Presley and, of course, Marilyn Monroe.

The style was the message. The way Bogart recklessly let his cigarette dangle from the corner of his mouth as he snarled out his lines. Lauren Bacall leant backwards in her chair, as she let cigarette smoke swirl up into the air, creating fascinating circles. Superman flew over Gotham City in supersonic macho style. Wonder Woman firmly placed her hands on her hips before kicking her opponent to the ground. Elvis Presley rotated his hips like a Harlem queen, playing with the microphone as if it were a woman. Marilyn Monroe displayed her generous cleavage while pouting at the observer.

Iconography

Andy Warhol had a good eye for these things and therefore rapidly enrolled Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe into his artistic universe. They were already part of the great American visual atlas. They were legends, myths, something beyond themselves.



My Lucky Dollar
47 × 39 inches



Big City Monster Starring Adriana 39 × 55 inches



The Usual Suspects 29 × 140 inches



Digital Dingyness
72 × 72 inches

Already at a young age, they had become ever-radiant icons in the star-spangled American firmament: young, beautiful, sexy and dangerous. They were role models to such a degree that many people mimicked every detail of their appearance.

This kind of icon worship was from the very beginning an important part of what Pop Art represented. It cultivated the superficial life of these cultural icons, but also the nostalgia surrounding them. One might say that Pop Art was, and as a retro style still is – even today – interested in the past for decorative reasons. It goes for *style*. It is on the lookout for images that epitomise the past. This is because Pop Art reflects the well-known aspects of mass culture, press photos, common objects, brand names and media content. This is why Pop Art has a retro aspect to it by nature, regardless of whether it is critical and up to date, dealing with Windows icons, or a retro painting of Marilyn Monroe.

Pop Art wants to show the legendary, but often transforms the banal so that it appears legendary. More precisely put, Pop Art engages – in the words of Alloway – neither in the realistic nor in the abstract, but focuses on signs and typologies within modern mass communication. It engages in fame mostly for the sake of the iconography. “What happens when an artist uses a known source in popular culture in his art is rather complex. The subject of the work of art is doubled: if Roy Lichtenstein uses Mickey Mouse in his work, Mickey is not the sole subject. The original sign system of which Mickey is a part is also present as subject.”

According to the Danish art critic and philosopher Lars Morell, it is iconography – the special aesthetics of ads and the media – that is significant to Pop Art, rather than an empty admiration of fame itself.

Photography as a starting point

Photography, brands and designs are essential to Pop Art and are used extensively in contemporary Pop Art, in which these raw materials are transformed as part of the art process. It emphasises characteristics of the media (the iconog-



Come on Home 39 × 31 inches



Any Pose You Like 39 × 31 inches

graphy) such as screen dots, enhanced field depth, boosted contrast and/or colours. Pop Art is media-based and is considered media-critical by many art critics. In reality, it is a criticism of the way that the media attempt to monopolise reality.

An artist such as Robert Rauschenberg, working with photography and screenprint as his media, is an example. However, the use of well-known everyday objects, like the aesthetics of the city, also has other purposes. Pop Art also wants to show us the beautiful – not the beauty of nature or the evidently beautiful, but the beauty of the modern world.

It is in this context that we have to understand Christian Tøng's art.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia is sentimentality. It is a fascination with the past – not for its substance, but exclusively for its style. It is the longing for what is gone. Using nostalgia as a parameter, the good old days turn *hip*, and maybe even *camp* or *cool*.

Whatever catches the searching eye of nostalgia is constantly subject to change. Suddenly it is Art Deco, then the roaring twenties, the hectic thirties, then the forties and thereafter the fifties. The fifties in particular have become the focus for nostalgia.

Plastic is cool, as are fancy cars, girls in slacks, scooters, bobbed hair, cafés, turned-up coat collars and cigarettes dangling from the corner of the mouth.

The 1950s was the decade of James Dean, Marlon Brando and Elvis Presley. It was Marilyn Monroe, Betty Page and Jayne Mansfield. It was cheap detectives hiding out in alleyways, rock-hard lines and bare punches on street corners. It was cars with tailfins, neon lights on building façades, nylon stockings and high heels. It was suggestive, steamy striptease at the nightclub and jolly barbecue parties on the perfectly mown lawn.



Polaroid Puzzle 29 × 47 inches



Good Bye Dream Girl 78 × 55 inches

Kitsch

Nostalgia relates to kitsch, and some might argue that they are identical terms. The American kitsch prophet John Waters called kitsch the international humour of our times. Nostalgia often does worship the extremely bad taste of the past, but now it gets given an extra twist, when a decade's former bad taste is suddenly allocated its rightful place and is again an object of veneration – redefined as *good* taste.

Bad taste is an ambiguous phenomenon, in any case. It presupposes that we have a definition of what good taste is, which can in itself be quite problematic, to say the least.

In art, kitsch has created a make way for a different variety within Pop Art. The artist Jeff Koons used his inspiration from Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein to play on the extreme via exaggerations fetched out from the kitsch chamber of horrors. With the Italian porn star Cicciolina by his side as his greatest ally, he managed to make even the tasteless become art.

In Denmark, the artist Peter Carlsen has used this special mixture of Pop Art and kitsch in his "self-portraits", where he disguises himself as Willy the Adventurer (a Danish comic strip).

Hybrid

For artist Christian Tangø, neither nostalgia nor kitsch are goals in themselves. He does not expend a lot of energy tussling with them, because they are a natural part of Pop Art. "Art constantly plays around with different forms of expressions that have now disappeared. To use a photo from the fifties and then style it in a certain way can be enough to cause nausea or vomiting in some people. However, it can also be an iconographic documentation of the style prevalent in that era. My own grandmother appears in some of my paintings and looks like a beautiful media star of the fifties. Something can thus be totally kitsch from one perspective, yet very personal and meaningful from another. This kind of open interpretation is essential in art. It is a flirt with the superficial, but for the sake of meaning or content."



The Next Generation 31 x 39 inches



Mastercard of Loneliness Courtesy Ewire. 31 × 39 inches

Nostalgia and kitsch must be tools to create works of art that are complex or that – in combination – form special, personal or deep stories. The artist should be able to control his paintings and make them move in the direction he wishes to take them.

Our life today is constantly influenced by the enormous quantities of images that surround us. Like the very first media revolution in the fifties and sixties, we are now in the midst of a new revolution – the digital revolution. This inspires many artists and entices them to work with sampling either as a source of inspiration or as a tool.



A Hard Day's Night 19 × 47 inches

A critical angle

The unmistakable retro aspect in Pop Art is not only an expression of sentimental longing. It also contains a possible critical reflection concerning the objectification of the human relationship as seen through the media and especially advertisements. Critical reflection can come about using satire or using Pop Art as a reflection on Pop Art itself.

To Christian Tangø, the role of Pop Art is somewhat different today, compared to when it first saw the light of day. "Pop Art is still media criticism. Nevertheless, the media now dominate and manipulate more than ever. Once again, there is a call for an art form that reveals how the media manipulate. Moreover, critical Pop Art has become neces-

sary as a counter-strike against what I would call 'bad retro' in art, and against ads and the completely superficial consumer culture.

When TV reality shows like Big Brother and Temptation Island claim to be the culmination of western civilisation, it is time to use Pop Art as a weapon against the trivialising of culture and in favour of critical reflection."



My Daddy Grew Up, in a Brand New ... courtesy Blue Note,
New York and Universal Airlines. 29 x 47 inches

PERSON IN MOVEMENT



The Artist courtesy
Mads Greve

Journalist and jazz musician. Performer and escape artist. Conceptualist and classic artist. Christian Tangø is all of these and more. An artist on the move, a man with many facets, not to be restrained in any one context. An artist with opinions as sharp as a razor and an artist who occasionally pretends he is floating along the great river of images. Ironic, serious and playful.

Christian Tangø was born into a middle-class Danish family – his father was a photographer and his mother a psychologist. He was the first child of what were to become many half-brothers and half-sisters, and not too few stepfathers. Living with his grandmother and grandfather for longer periods, he first started out copying American dollar bills and experimented with stencil printing at the age of ten. He produced his first edition of counterfeit Danish banknotes on an old methyl duplicator while he was in primary school.

Right from the very beginning, he was a boy not too well adjusted, and later on, far from adjusted. He flunked out of high school (mostly due to smoking marihuana and drinking too much) and started work at the local shipyard. At the age of 18, he embarked on his first long trip abroad, to India where he “roamed about”, whenever he was not smoking hash.



Downscaling My Ego (To Andy) 35 × 47 inches



My Grandma's Grand Piano
35 x 35 inches

In and out of the world

"This was the beginning of my cultural education," Tangø remembers fondly. He returned home but was still restless and without a solid home base. What he wanted and who he was, were things beyond his conception – time would have to tell. He moved to Copenhagen and began working for a grass-roots radio station in the local community. In the different environments in which Tangø was involved, the general world view was left-wing, but he himself was too restless, nervous and critical to get involved in crude ideologies.

Instead, he travelled to New York as a freelance correspondent for the radio station *The Voice*. The hectic city hit him like a sledgehammer, and if one delves deeply into Christian Tangø's work and personality, there are still remnants of inspiration from that particular journey.

Round about the jazz

Music has always been one of his main interests. "I grew up beneath my grandmother's piano," he comments. However, jazz became his great love. At the age of fourteen, he began to play the drums. "In the beginning, it seemed like the easiest thing to do ...". For a period, it developed quite well and he began taking lessons from the world-famous drummer Ed Thigpen, who used to play with Oscar Peterson and Ella Fitzgerald. Several times, he was close to carving out a career as a professional musician, only to return to the media every time.

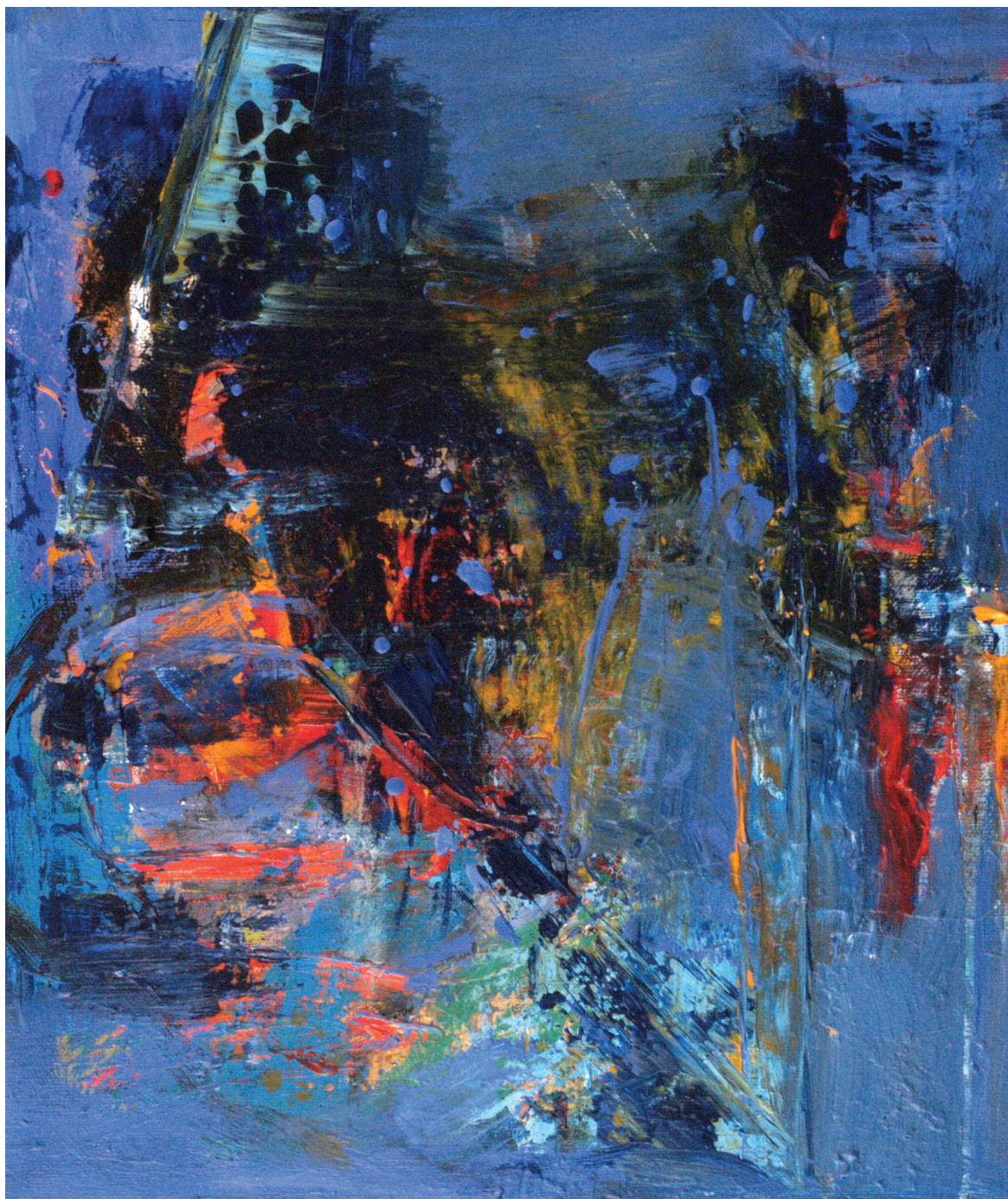
Journalism

1986 was a year of change. Christian Tangø passed the entry test at the Danish School of Journalism, and he settled in nicely at the college. The subject suited his curious nature and interest in media. During his practitioner period, he worked for the Danish Broadcasting Corporation.

Journalism suited his intellect and his restless disposition, but it was not quite enough. The superficial attitude and nature of the Danish media world frustrated him. There was too little art and too much of the nine-to-five job. "One morn-



Counterfeit 15 × 15 inches



Untitled, 2006.

ing, I suddenly realised that my life boiled down to getting up in the morning, eating a cucumber, going to work, going home again, sitting on the loo and then going to bed, day in and day out. It was just not working out."

The illness

At the age of 21, Tangø fell ill. During that crucial period, he made an assemblage created from his own blood and other materials. "I remember this special occasion as the point when I realised that art was something very special and meaningful. Not just as therapy, but as something that reaches beyond oneself," he remembers and emphasises that there is no romantic connection between illness and art. "I do not believe in the Van Gogh myth. Of course, a person like Van Gogh sees the world differently. He might be able to spot the cracks in reality, and can use this in his art. But illness does not automatically make life any easier or art any deeper."

In a way, this illness became an act of fate that cast him into the arms of art. After a final period as a journalist in 1991, he became a student of the Danish artist Charlotte Lütken. She gave him the push necessary to make him begin working consistently with art and painting. In the beginning, he painted mostly abstracts, then more figurative works and then again moved back to abstract expressionism. Conversations with Knud Nielsen, the old Cobra artist from the Danish Royal Academy of Art, experimenting with style and continuously playing jazz, all propelled him forwards, but in two distinct directions.

Life and art

From around 1995, the painting became "increasingly necessary", as Christian Tangø puts it. The professional results apparently came somewhat easier on canvas than in his music. An extended period filled with stylistic experiments followed. Tangø declared himself an experimental artist and constantly contradicted his own style as fast he could find it. Around 1999, he achieved his first real breakthrough in the form of an exhibition where Tangø dismissed "decorative living-room painting" and took it right to the other extreme,

becoming a *provocateur*, using porn, Bill Clinton's used condoms and silkscreening as his weapons.

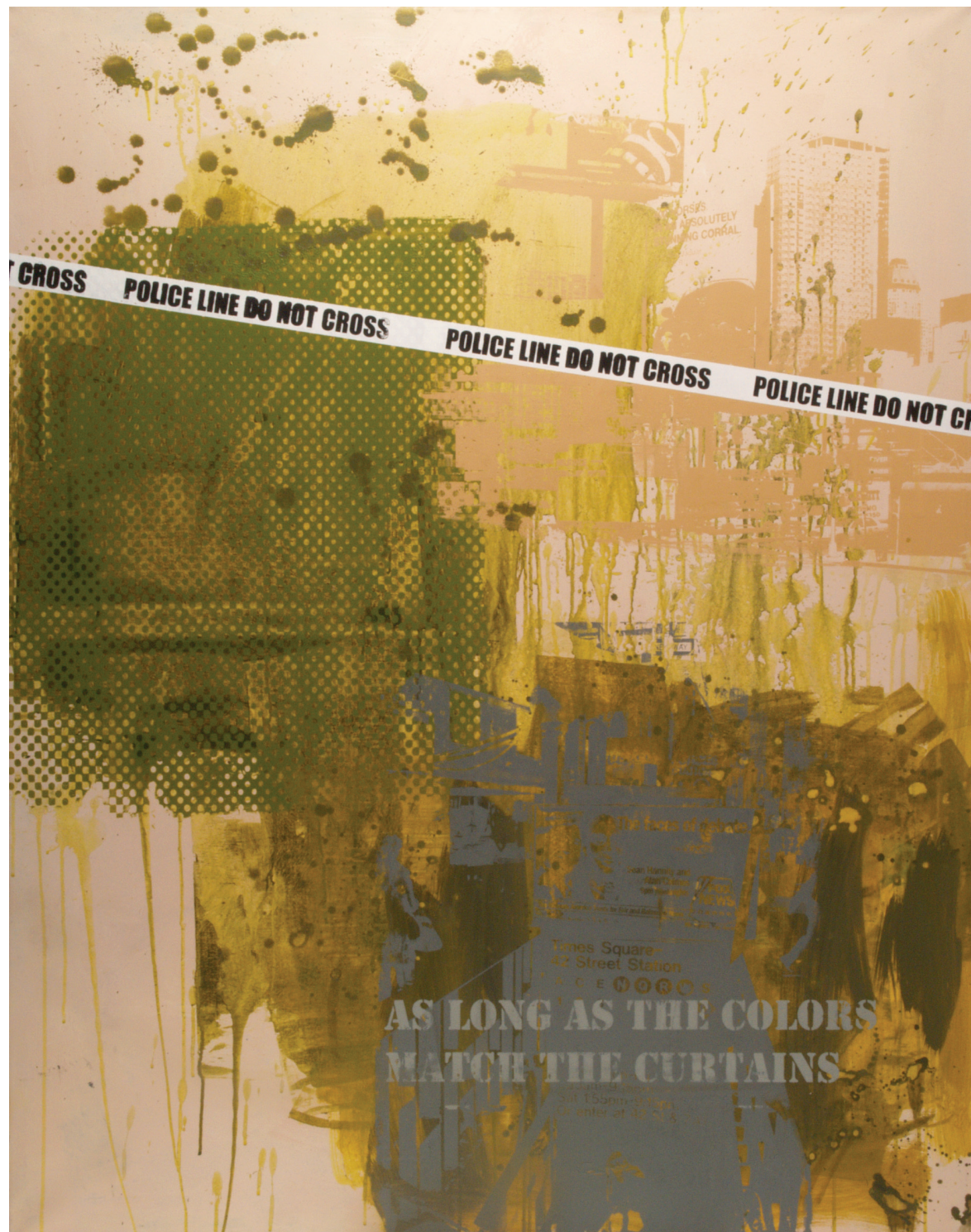
It was also around this period that Tangø found inspiration in the work of the great American artist Robert Rauschenberg, but not yet in the printing technique itself.

In his big silkscreen paintings, Rauschenberg used stringent colours to paint over things like large prints, and improvised with fragments of reality that were organised in an almost random manner on the canvas. He thus achieved an impression rather similar to that of television and commercials. Øystein Hjort has referred to the works of Rauschenberg as "highly sensitive barometers reflecting the artist's impressions of and reactions towards the many problems of the American society."

Initially, it was only the abstract elements in Rauschenberg's art that fascinated Tangø. However, after the *Samples towards 2000* exhibition, in which he used screenprinting for the first time, Tangø realised he had found something very personal in his way of working.



Study, approx. 2001



We Love Catastrophes 59 × 47 inches



In The Right Way, I May Be Wrong
35 × 35 inches

"I am a journalist and I am trained to tell stories. I started to include text in my screenprinted work and BANG, there it was – a Rauschenberg with text. How difficult can it be to find a style? Suddenly I could combine my journalistic knowledge and the creative process. I was no longer just an autodidactic artist, but a journalist expressing himself through the canvas, inventing the term Acrylic Journalist."

For Tangø, the initial years as a professional artist became a battle towards finding his own true expression and style. From the very beginning, he was intensely aware of the many images and impressions to be found all around him. Characteristically, it was not about getting into the slipstream of the established art scene. "I wasn't interested; I did not grow up with any particular generation of artists. And if I was searching in any specific direction, it certainly was not in the context of Denmark and Danish art, except maybe for Asger Jorn. I wanted to achieve a point of realisation that expressed my own personal understanding of reality."

A career in art

Tangø became more aware of the fact it is essential to have a good gallery to back you up. He started off working with contacts to different galleries, including Gallery Bach-Møller in Randers and Gallery Kragh-Halling in Charlottenlund, but without any significant results. During his entire professional work, he has been – and still is – associated with Bogø Design ApS, an art supplies company in the Danish city of Århus.

The first signs of real recognition came with the exhibitions in Illums Bolighus in Copenhagen and an invitation from The Royal Danish Consulate in New York, which wanted Tangø to decorate the Danish booth for the ICFF furniture trade fair in 2002. Since then, he has established close contacts with two main galleries, Gallery X in Rungsted and Galerie Helth in Copenhagen.

Galerie Helth, in particular, has established his name among the inner circle of galleries in Denmark, and made it possi-



All Dressed Up and Nowhere to Go 39 × 31 inches



Moulin Rouge Courtesy Preben Kirkholt. 31 × 23 inches

ble for Tangø to display his work at the Art Herning and Art Copenhagen trade fairs. The exhibition at Art Copenhagen 2003 also brought him – besides really good sales – a contact to Gallery Miva in Malmö, Sweden, now a dedicated lover of his work.

Provocation(s)

Tangø has learned the lesson that it is not enough just to be an excellent artist – you also have to be visible. This is where the art of provocation, in the right amount, comes to be a valuable asset.

In the summer of 2003, the Summer Exhibition in Tirstrup, Denmark, rejected his paintings. The censor committee had rejected all of his works, and a “very angry” Christian Tangø then took matters into his own hands. With a beautiful nude model by his side and his six works of art, he arrived at the opening amid considerable attention. He set up his own parallel exhibit outside the official exhibition hall, with the approval of the local police authorities.

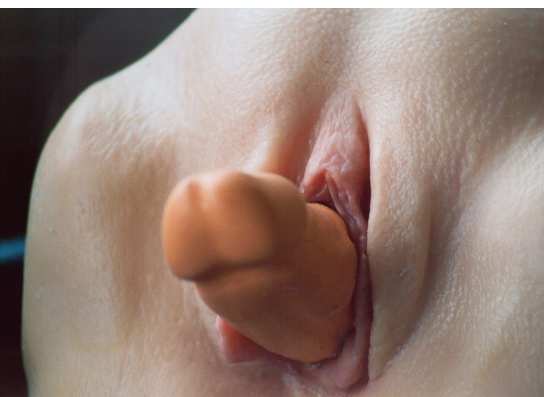
The media were on the spot, with the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, a regional TV station and the *Jydske Vestkysten* newspaper reporting from the provocative happening and duly quoting Tangø’s opinions about the narrow-mindedness of the established art institutions.

Later the same year, he argued that the local hot dog stand should be preserved and put in a museum. This story attracted the interest of Denmark’s largest newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*. Tangø knows how to handle the media, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde showed interest in his provocation. The head of the museum expressed her sympathy on the matter in the newspaper, but did not actually buy any hot dogs.

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Samples of Reality 2006 (Fuck Conventions)
35 × 120 inches



Out of Her Ready assemblage, silicone, destroyed after the *How to Become an Artist* event.

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Aura-strip

This was one of many such occasions to come. Holte Public Library asked Tangø to expand his exhibition of paintings with a "small installation or sculpture-type object. Nice if it could be a bit provocative." He then created an installation entitled *How to become an artist*, culminating in a sculpture with a dildo and plastic vagina. However, the library now did not want the sculpture to be visible, and Tangø had to avoid censorship by hiding the supposedly dangerous object in a black plastic bag. Media hell again broke loose, with the installation being presented on morning radio programmes and Danish national television, primarily because of the fact that the library had censored the installation. Later, one of the tabloids published a photo of the contents of the black bag.



Aura-strip in Cyberspace performance at the Gallery X. Troels Trier, Simone

Courtesy Jacob Ljørris, used by permission of www.godebilleder.dk



Run for Cover 35 × 47 inches



Close Up courtesy Tina and Peter. 39 × 31 inches

But this was nothing compared to a certain séance at Gallery X in Rungsted, where Tangø exhibited together with Troels Trier (a well-known Danish musician, political commentator and artist). To introduce a bit of excitement to the exhibition, the two artists had hired the stripper Simone, (famous from the Danish TV programme *The Stripper King's Girls*). The event culminated in the *Aura-strip in Cyberspace* performance, where Tangø used the stripper as a living paint brush to create a full-size study of the model. The audience was enthusiastic and Tangø declared that the scene was *Back to the sixties*, a complete organic happening with acid jazz and the whole works.

Porn event

The following year, in 2004, Christian Tangø was involved in even more happenings. He wrapped his gallery in Århus in black plastic and opened the doors for a porn event. Dedicated to Louise Gade, the mayor of the city, the exhibition took place under the name *Black Jack – A House of Illusion*. Almost the entire Danish press was there to cover the installation/performance/happening/media stunt. The mission was to “facilitate a discussion about the connection between porn, art and freedom of speech.” The performers included the artist himself, and a young couple who performed the exact manoeuvres that are the tableaux normally reserved for the porn industry.

This event had been preceded by the mayor trying to prevent the staging of a play during the Århus Festival, because – in her opinion – it featured certain pornographic scenes. Claiming that “Porn has the same right to be considered art as other objects,” Tangø invited both the public and the media to this special event.

Everything went as planned. The media fallout was seemingly endless, but Tangø himself reflects sceptically over his own event. “The point should have been to clarify and show different representations of reality, but this was not fully illustrated. It drowned in the political discussion surrounding the event and in questions regarding its legality. Finally, one must consider that Bogø Design is a small gallery and



The artist dressed as a police officer, in front of Galerie Bogø, 2004.
Courtesy Martin Dam Kristensen.



that it did not have the format or power to create an outrage in a manner that a forum like the city's ARoS museum of art might have been able to do. On the other hand, I do not regret the pornography as such, and it is only recently that I have come to understand the connection between porn and Pop Art. The point is that porn is the one thing that advertising, the popular press, TV and not least the Internet return to, time and time again. Porn and everything sexual are archetypal points of interest for the media, and Pop Art should therefore be critical about porn and the media, too.

The latest project is that I will actually get involved in the pornographic tableau myself. I have listened to many general critics concerning my own personal position in my art. One performer has declared that I myself should become a sex performer on stage. So I will, partly to show how sex appears in the most recent media such as the Internet, text messages and mobile phones. I would like to show how our fantasies concerning sexual life are both decaying and being cultivated at the same time.

We chat about our sexual fantasies on the Internet and are in contact with vast numbers of people when we do so. Here, the girls are often not girls at all, and people are not what they seem to be, sometimes not really even interested in the sexual fantasies or fetishes that they are actually talking about, when it comes to real life. It is a form of media criticism that I find extremely relevant right now, together with considerations concerning text messaging and chatrooms. Is it at all possible to say something that involves true feelings within these media? And is it anything but extremely time-consuming?"

The More I Listen to Your Song
 Courtesy of www.DR.tv and Ebbe
 Kallmeyer. Combined Painting
 39 × 31 inches



Stream of Consciousness 39 × 55 inches.

THE WORLD IS BEAUTIFUL



How Come?

What have William Shakespeare and Elvis Presley got in common?

They are both a part of modern culture. To express it differently, Shakespeare was the greatest writer of his time and Presley was the “greatest cultural phenomenon” of the twenty-first century, as Leonard Bernstein put it. So throw away all the current accounts and the aesthetic parlour sen-

sations – fine culture and mass culture have long since melted together, post-modernism or not.

Shakespeare was the grandiose storyteller and Presley the great interpreter. Each had their century and both are incorporated in the famous artist Peter Blake's painting *On the Balcony*.

The rich, the beautiful and the famous have always been the focal point for Pop Art and its media-fixated reality. It is no coincidence that Pop Art jumped the gun in the fifties. Many critics have turned to the British painter Richard Hamilton's 1956 collage *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing* as one of the first important paintings of this genre, a work that was almost a prophecy about what was to come.

The perfect life

In Hamilton's collage, we look into a “contemporary home”, a living room where the man is a muscular he-man type posing for the viewer. A scantily dressed woman sits on the sofa holding her smart hat with her one hand, while the other supports her well-proportioned breast. On the wall are a cover of the *Young Romance* comic magazine and a couple of Broadway photos, while a tape recorder is on the floor. On the small coffee table is a can of ham, ready for eating. We are obviously in the brave new world of consumer products, where everything is a commodity.

Pop Art had different starting points during the fifties and the early sixties. In Germany, Gerhard Richter was one of the first to set the tone, while in Britain, there were names such as Peter Blake, David Hockney and Richard Hamilton, who became major stars. In America, Andy Warhol, Roy Li-



Low Resolution Screen Mode



Oldenburg, Tom Wesselmann and James Rosenquist were those who defined the genre.

The history of Pop Art meshes closely with the new consumer society and media explosion that took place in the same period. Sharp colours and simplified imagery were characteristic for Pop Art in the beginning, but the artists quickly moved in separate directions.

Andy Warhol began by painting the archetypes of American icons such as Dick Tracy and Popeye the Sailor – and ended up painting Elizabeth Taylor, Elvis Presley and Jacqueline Kennedy. Roy Lichtenstein created huge paraphrased versions of romantic serials and other well-known comic strips. Tom Wesselmann painted large figurative works in strong colours and James Rosenquist painted collage-like works with elements taken from ads and magazines.

When Warhol started his Factory, it was a clear signal that art was a commodity that was a consumer item and something that one should not take too seriously. The Factory signalled series production, and Warhol deliberately hired people to create his paintings, which he then finished off by signing them. In the end, he even got other people to sign them for him and thus challenged the constant snobbishness surrounding the “true work of art” and the artist’s signature as something sacrosanct.

Photography as inspiration

What many pop artists had in common was an interest in – and fascination with – photography and film. Photography was “instant reality”. The rapidly paced press photos represented the ever-changing reality.

Andy Warhol was the most consistent user of photos as a starting point for his work. He enlarged these photos onto enormous canvasses and painted over them, often with a very thin layer of colour. He used his skilled sense of composition to create new pictures of something that, as a photo, could be quite banal. It could be just a question of a new way of cropping it, but often he used the picture as it was



When I Find Myself in Times of Trouble
 photo Bertel Jacob Tangø, 35 × 47 inches



Screen Saver 35 × 47 inches

– a black and white photo of an electric chair or of a car crash. Warhol transformed it into art simply by enlarging it. In many ways, he worked as a forerunner of today's computer arts, working as if the computer was already on the market.

Another front figure in Pop Art was Robert Rauschenberg. He created what we today know as the aesthetics of assemblage. In 1961, he exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York under the title *The Art of Assemblage*. Rauschenberg used a variety of different materials, including garbage, comic books, newspaper and small pieces of glass and wood, and combined them into large compositions that were also paintings. At the very beginning, he was on the outskirts of Pop Art, but his working methods exerted great influence on subsequent Pop Art.

Right from the beginning, Rauschenberg experimented. He created large white paintings that were open in their composition. The composer John Cage described these as airports for the light and the shadows.

Later, Rauschenberg became more figurative, although he mixed the recognisable with the more abstract. As he said in an interview, "It is today which is their creator."

The world is Pop Art

In the beginning of the 1960s, Andy Warhol and some of his friends took a trip across the USA in a large station wagon. They were on their way to an exhibition of Pop Art in Los Angeles. The trip across the great American landscape, alternating between small abandoned spots, great plains, wind-blown farms, run-down highway motels with defect neon signs and huge advertising billboards on the side of the road, was an eye-opener for Warhol and his friends.

Andy Warhol later wrote in his diary that it all became more and more "pop". Once you had caught the sensation of "pop", you could never see a road sign the same way again. Once you started thinking in this special mode, you could never see America the same way again.



Electronic Cirkus
78 × 78 inches



High Voltage Waste Bin 35 × 47 inches

Part of Pop Art was moving in a new, realistic direction. Artists were popping up everywhere, moving the focus to neon-lit big city panoramas, obscure bars, faded signs, broken pavements and flashing advertising signs. This again brought about a kind of nostalgia.

Rockwell and everyday life

One of the great illustrators – maybe the greatest – from the 1950s American magazine market was the legendary Norman Rockwell, then perhaps best known for his front-page illustrations for the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Rockwell had his own special eye for the idyllic side of American everyday life. His drawings showed life at the hairdressing salon, the postman on his rounds, boys fishing, the family gathered round the Thanksgiving dinner and the lazy life in small-town America.

His drawings were always on the verge of the sentimental, and he plucked at the heartstrings of the American public.

Comic strips

One of the most influential elements on Pop Art from the 1950s was the comic strip. It was the golden age for the American comic book. The “graphical novella”, as comic book creator Will Eisner called the series, featured hard-hitting, clear-cut imagery. They communicated straightforwardly and directly, and the audience was immense.

Major comic book publishers such as Marvel, DC and Disney supplied the American market with hundreds of different series and stories each week.

The upper class viewed comic strips as banal, as did the established art world. This was definitely *not* art. Pop Art helped change this viewpoint, and cartoons were also a source of inspiration to Pop Art.

The Inventor
31 × 23 inches





The Modern Revolution of Digital Technology
courtesy Adobe 29 × 47 inches

The effective form of storytelling used here was especially useful. The reticence that other artists felt towards comics was not something that pop artists shared. On the contrary, they saw the comics as one form of expression among many others within rapidly changing contemporary culture.

Danish impact

This is exactly how many Danish artists have related to cartoons. Most expressively in artists such as Peter Carlsen, Christian Schmidt-Rasmussen, Martin Bigum and Peter Rössell, (and even Per Kirkeby in his early years), who all owe a lot to the world of comics.

The same is true for Christian Tangø, even though one cannot say that cartoons influence him directly. However, the direct forms of storytelling do certainly inspire him. He finds his motifs among film and photography rather than cartoons, but edits them on his computer, so they end up looking like comic strips. He also borrows the comics' way of framing and manipulating perspective. Ultimately, it is more a question of the story that he wants to tell – from the highest perspective, he wants to help people realise that all media are mere fragments, illusions of reality.

Tabloid Special courtesy
Preben Kirkholt.
Property of the artist.





*Get Your Hands on,
Get Your Hands on ...
15 × 15 inches*

CONVERSATION ON ART



And Good Luck to you ... 29 × 47 inches

Christian Tangø is very conscious of the word's ability to create images. It lies in his old profession – The Reporter. Fifteen years after he left journalism, he still cannot avoid talking in headlines, in punch lines and sharp statements. His words are like his art, rapid snapshots of a world in movement.

He does hesitate a bit when one wants to pin him down as an

artist – who is he actually as an artist and what project is he thinking of next?

“I am a kind of neo-realist. I sample from reality. I find fragments of images, which I combine to form a new kind of reality. A reality that appears almost surreal. But in general I see reality as so surreal in itself that there is no reason for me as an artist to make it even more surreal.”

Q: Born in 1959, do you consider yourself a child of Pop Art?

“Yes, obviously. Sometimes I say that I am just too young to have become a real hippie, and I was born too late to become a real yuppie. However, I did grow up with Donald Duck and pornography. In the years 1967–68–69, I was just on the verge of my teens and was enormously affected by everything presented by the media. Televised images of man landing on the moon, flicking through the first porn magazines and listening to the Top 10 on FM radio. So if landing on the moon is Pop Art and porn is Pop Art, then yes I grew up with Pop Art.”

Porn as art

Q: Where does porn fit into the world of art – and why does it fascinate you?

“Porn is reality, but at the same time the absolute opposite because it is staged. We usually fence off the sexual within the private sphere. We keep it to ourselves. When we exhibit something private to other people, it requires staging. Such staging is essentially the manipulation of reality. Normally, we do not have sex in front of a camera, but underneath the bedclothes. On the other hand, if the actors cannot get fired up, there is no point in porn at all. Porn really



Canned Love 29 × 47 inches



Home Sweet Home 59 x 47 inches

triggers the question of what reality is and how it can be represented in the media. That makes porn an interesting phenomenon, since this question of representation and reality is very fundamental to any art form. It reminds me of Sven Dalsgaard's black bags. We want to see what is inside, see what is forbidden to us, what we can't see."

Art as a gimmick

"I don't really know very much about Sven Dalsgaard, but he did exhibit at the Aarhus Museum of Art for a period, when he suspended some black bags from the ceiling. It really fascinated me then, but I could not explain why. It was actually later, after his death, that I started to investigate his work a bit. Unfailing Dadaist that he was, he turned everything upside down and put the whole concept of art to the question."

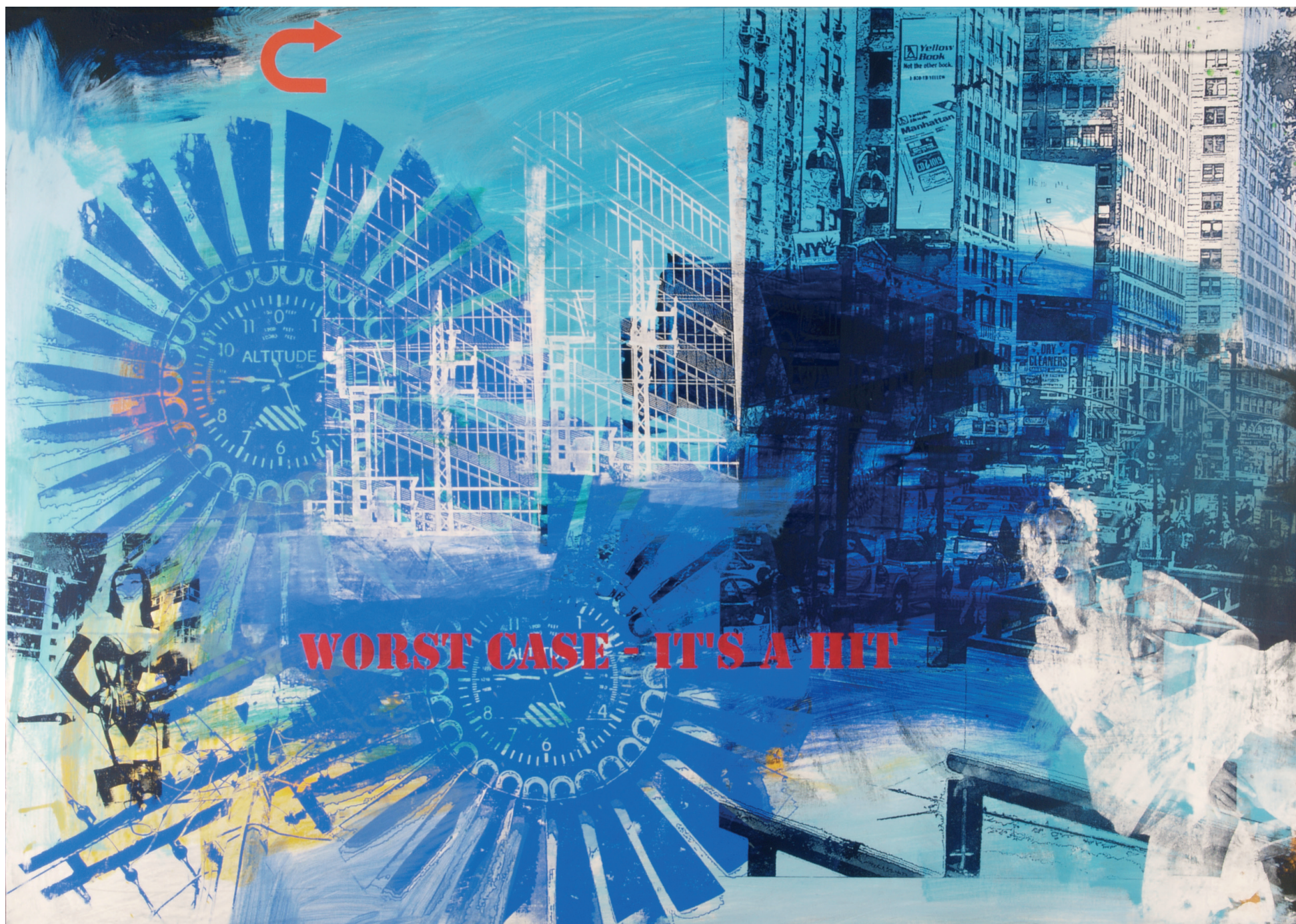
Q: Should art educate?

"I already think it does, no matter what. Art is educative to anyone who collects or even looks at art. Art is an interesting teacher because it is so unpredictable. In life, one can generally predict and assume different conclusions, but not in art. Art escapes any definition. You can only grasp art via intuition. Art is about developing a kind of holistic and causal thinking. It might be inherent or hidden in the work itself. It is always the observer's job to find the different interpretations. This makes true art very demanding and in that sense art educates and cultivates."

Art as an intellectual exercise

Q: Does this always apply?

"It is important to clarify. I have often wondered whether artists actually have to be completely conscious about the intellectual content of their work. I tend to believe that each artist must have a clear concept of the work concerned. The completely superficial can, of course, exert an immediate appeal, but in the end the quality of art depends mostly on its conceptual strength, the technical qualities and its relevance.



Ballet of the Jet Age 39 × 55 inches



Downtown Dreams 39 × 31 inches

These qualities demand not only a certain sense of cultivation on the part of the artist, but also education and training. You have to have looked into some of the mirrors of art history, to see where one belongs and what it actually is one wants to do. Or at the least have something to say about one's art, have a personal story to tell."

Q: But isn't it ultimately just a case of balance between instinct and analysis?

"I don't speak in favour of art defined by the elite. However, I do believe that some form of analytical sense is important. Painting is – in the process of creation – also analysis, a series of conscious choices made by the artist. The ultimate proof is that children cannot control painting in primary colours. They paint everything brown. You have to analyse in order to avoid repeating the same mistake over and over again. On the other hand, you cannot create a painting via analysis alone. The idea for any composition comes like a flash ...

I like the word intuition. It is all about striking at the exact right moment. It is the story of talent; you are born with talent, but talent only makes up 3% of the whole process, whereas the remaining 97% is sheer hard work. Don't rely on your talent, it is never enough anyway."

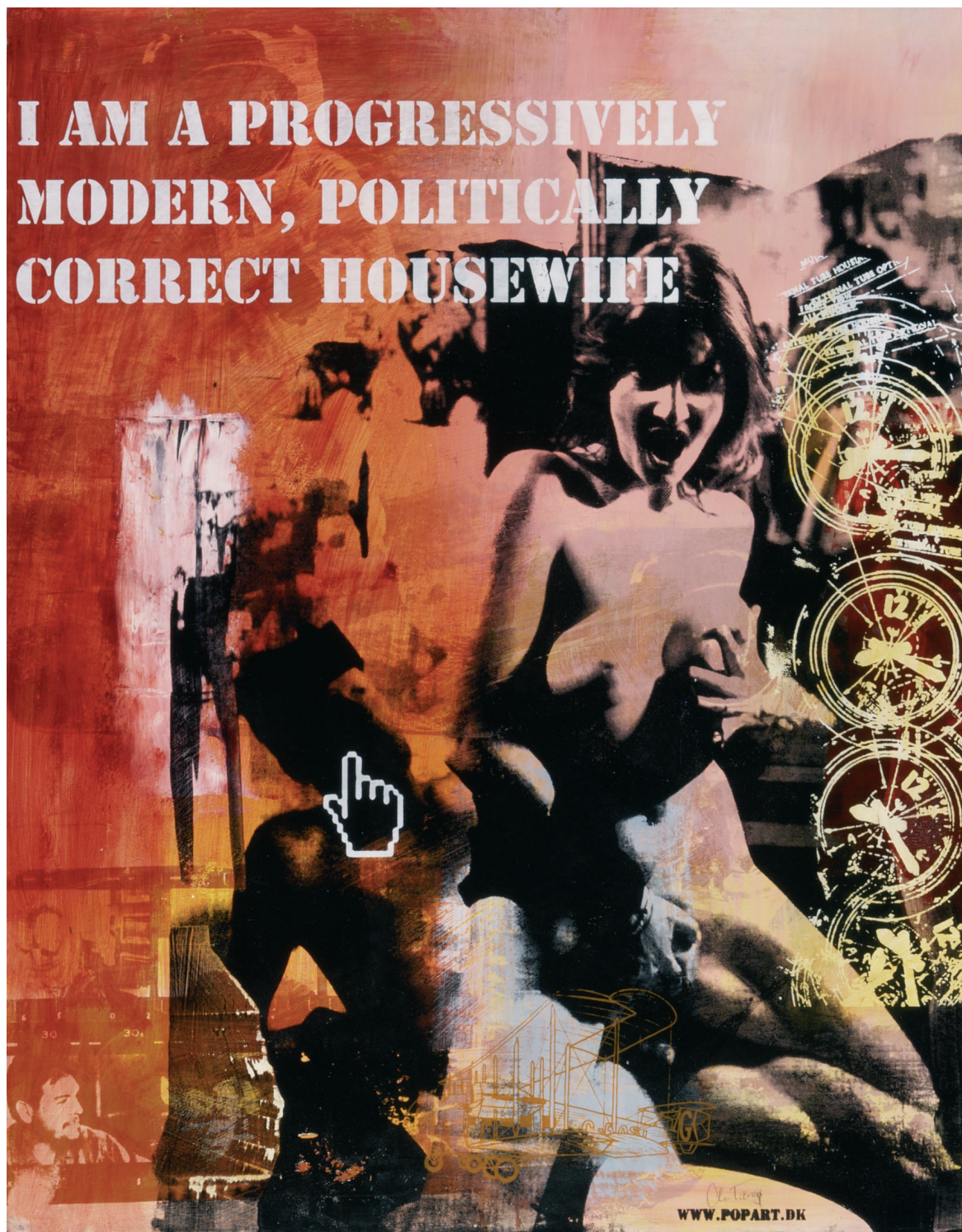
The role of art

Q: Is art at all necessary?

"Pragmatically speaking, the most important thing is that we survive, have somewhere to live and something to eat every day, and so on. The way society is today, there are a lot of things that take precedence over art in most people's lives. It is more important to pay for the car and pay off the mortgage. Art is, in that sense, a marginalised market. It is a surplus. It's a luxury commodity ..."



Angels of Technology 39 × 31 inches



A House of Illusion 39 × 31 inches

Q: Is it that simple? Where is the romantic in Christian Tange?

"I am talking about where art has ended up on the market in general. Art is undoubtedly necessary for society in a larger perspective. It is an integrated part of our life, and its scope covers everything about being human. I now see my own art as a critical comment on society and its development. What I produce is a kind of satire of the world I live in. In that sense, I am the absolute opposite of being a romantic."

Q: What do you wish a good painting should do for the observer?

"Well, I still believe in the basic romantic function of painting – that it should move or enlighten the viewer. A good painting should give him or her a cold shock right down the spine. A painting should also shock the viewer. Shake out some emotions. Unfortunately, paintings cannot reach the same Dionysian roar of emotion as music can. However, the painting exerts an influence over a longer period. It might change the way people think and relate to each other and the world. A painting is a 'frozen moment' of chaos, and can remind its owner of the beauty of everyday life. It can make people relate to their problems differently by simply making them 'see the world as it really is.' This is the beginning of transcendence. Suddenly you see the world as it is, without your own bias, or that of the mass media."

Art as an event

Q: You have also arranged different happenings. What makes you search beyond the painting to encourage this process of transcendence?

"It is all about the connection between reality and art. Photographed reality is an obligatory component in my works, but the nature of painting as a decorative object is sometimes not enough to question the overwhelming strength of photography. And what function does it have in society? Some pieces of art – like the works of my friend Jens Galschiøtt – have a more thorough function, and become a kind of installation in public space. It is ways of giving a very



In the Golden Shower
47 × 39 inches



Can't Get That Harley Feeling From Cyberspace
35 × 47 inches

ancient art form such as painting a new voice in the age of the media. That is why I occasionally create happenings. Instead of painting two people having sex – which somebody can then buy and hang on the wall – I can create a performance where you really see two people fucking and the painting at same time. By referring to the act as art, the audience starts to doubt whether it is art, speculation or provocation, and at the same time they wonder about reality and representation.”

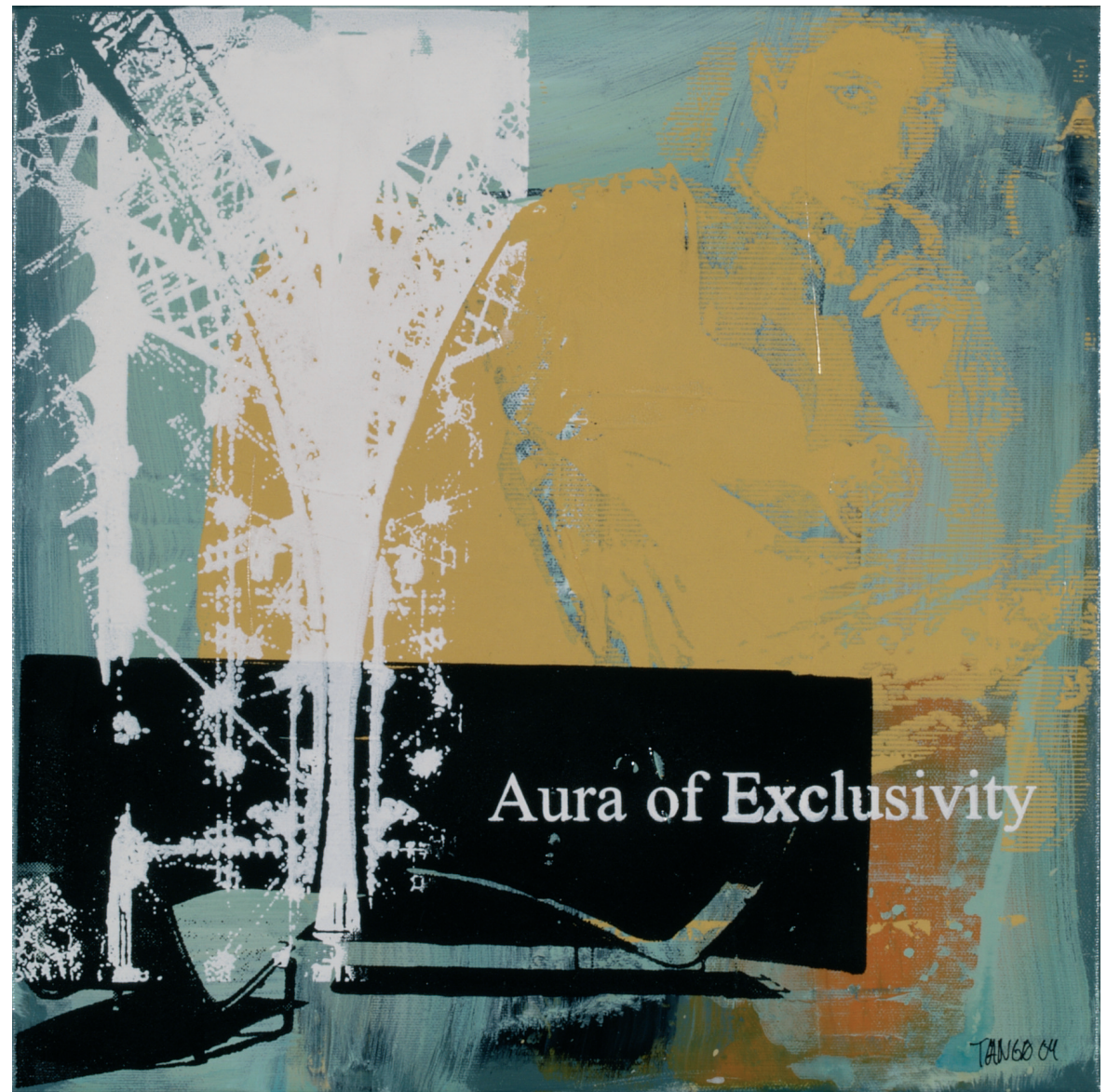
Staged reality

Q: Is it a kind of staging – but simply staging – like in your paintings?

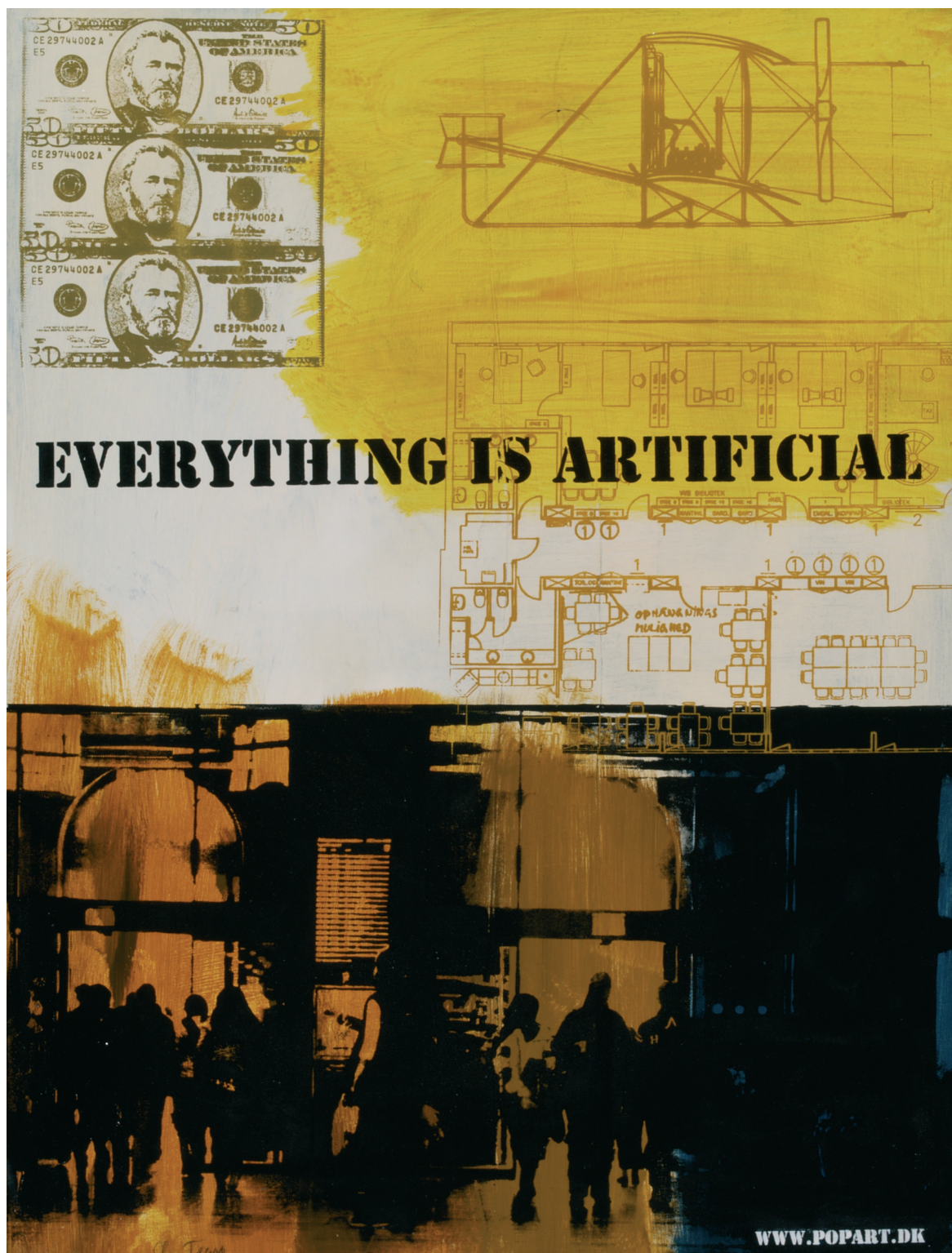
“It is. We always talk about staged reality. It is the code to understand my universe. Even photography in its pure form is staging. We rely too much on our ability to create a gestalt of reality. We therefore tend to forget that our conclusions are very often wrong. We forget the interplay between foreground and background, and that because our own senses are indeed ‘media’ themselves, we cannot actually rely on what we see. We may reach the right conclusion, but only if we take all the staging of life and media into consideration. In order to show this staging on the most extraordinary scale, in real life, I use the performance. It is the same process, but much more powerful.”

Q: If art constructs a piece of reality, would it then have an impact on reality itself?

“That is exactly what it will do. A banal example is architecture, which is both art and at the same time, a construction of a reality to come – a building. A painting always has an impact in the social sphere. It is ‘an installation in space.’ One might argue that a painting that features photographic content affects reality more than abstract decoration. That is certainly the way the mass media appear to work. In one installation, I wrapped my gallery in black plastic and put up neon signs with the words *Sex*, *Art* and *Porn*. In a sense, a very banal act, apart from the three neon signs, which cost a fortune. This piece of art really had an impact on real-



The Tower of Power courtesy Fritz Hansen A/S, Denmark, featuring the PK24 chaise longue, slogan used by assigned permission 15 × 15 inches



ity. People started to fantasise about what was in the gallery clad in black, and most were, of course, tricked by the professional neon signs. People got very upset a long time before the actual porn show took place.

On a much smaller scale, it is this 'construction of reality' in the form of the photos in my paintings that – I hope – evoke enlightenment as an impact on the viewer.'

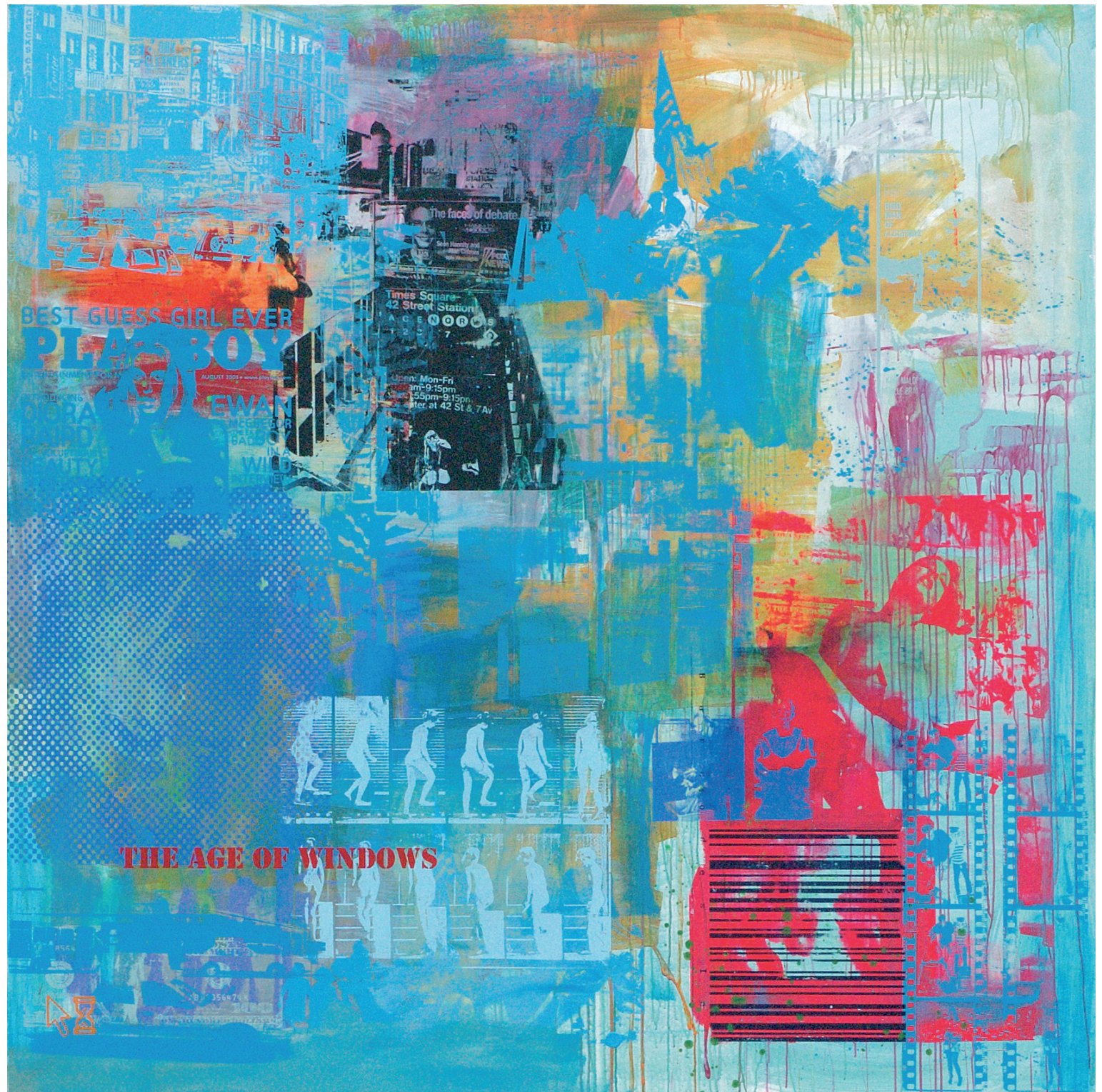
The work process

Q: What then decides which photos end up in the final painting?

"It takes on many different directions. Sometimes I have a specific idea, like in the porn show, or in the paintings *The Age of Windows* or *Like a Baby*. Then I seek out photos or screens from my stock. Sometimes I have to get certain photos and hire models. I collaborate on this with press photographers such as Preben Kirkholt and Martin Dam Kristensen. Other times it is more the abstract idea of media that makes me play in a more loose manner. I find that some of my best paintings feature my own photos.

When I work, everything has to pass through the computer and gets transformed into digital files. I use a scanner. I write texts, I use lots of different software to manipulate reality. Throughout the entire process, I am very receptive and open to impressions. I can sit and talk to somebody about a project in the future, and suddenly a sequence appears that I can use. But the process itself demands an extreme amount of preparation and logistics before I am ready to paint. These heavy printing frames that I have to treat in different ways, lighten with ultraviolet light, clean and develop and so on. When this process is finished, I have arrived in a traditional painter's workshop, one might say. By then I have already spent several hundred dollars on each painting in advance, without knowing if anything will turn out right.

Central Station Illegals 31 × 23 inches



Join the Subway Now
 (42nd edition)
 78 × 78 inches



Then I start from scratch, like an abstract painting, building up different layers on my canvas. It can become very abstract and when I have my background established, I start to print on top of that, see whatever turns out, paint over it, over-print and so on ...

In that sense, my process is quite complicated. I cannot just build up surfaces of colour against each other. My work contains many technical considerations. A painting can be a long, complicated journey towards the final shaping, and there is a lot of money on the line because the process is very expensive. It isn't something you can play with on an art course at evening classes."

Story

Q: What role do the stories in your paintings play?

"Many people ask me that. The storytelling is very important, and may be the element that separates me from other contemporary pop artists. I always have a story or universe I would like to present. Not like an idol, to which I want to pay tribute. More like a story that I would like to tell. It can be the big, overall story about the relationship between media and reality and the beauty of the big city, and sometimes more specific stories. I can always work out and explain why I have done certain specific things, simply because I constantly consider the compositions of my painting and what my personal interpretations are. I must admit, however, that the complete story often doesn't appear to me until the very end of the painting process. Then I find the fragment of text that expresses the essence of the painting.

To me it is very important that the aesthetics never dominate. I follow and challenge aesthetics, as all painters do. But without the story, I would find Pop Art hollow and empty."

Little Wing 31 × 23 inches



I'm an Old-fashioned Girl (Me and My Remington)
29 × 47 inches



My First 100-Dollar Girl 47 × 39 inches

ALL THE MONEY OR THE SIMPLE LIFE HONEY

HOW TO BE THE BEST DRESSED MAN IN AMERICA

Es lebe Berlin

GOD, THIS IS A GREAT COUNTRY

Campbell's BEEF NOODLE SOUP

NEUSTÄDTISCHE KIRCHSTRASSE

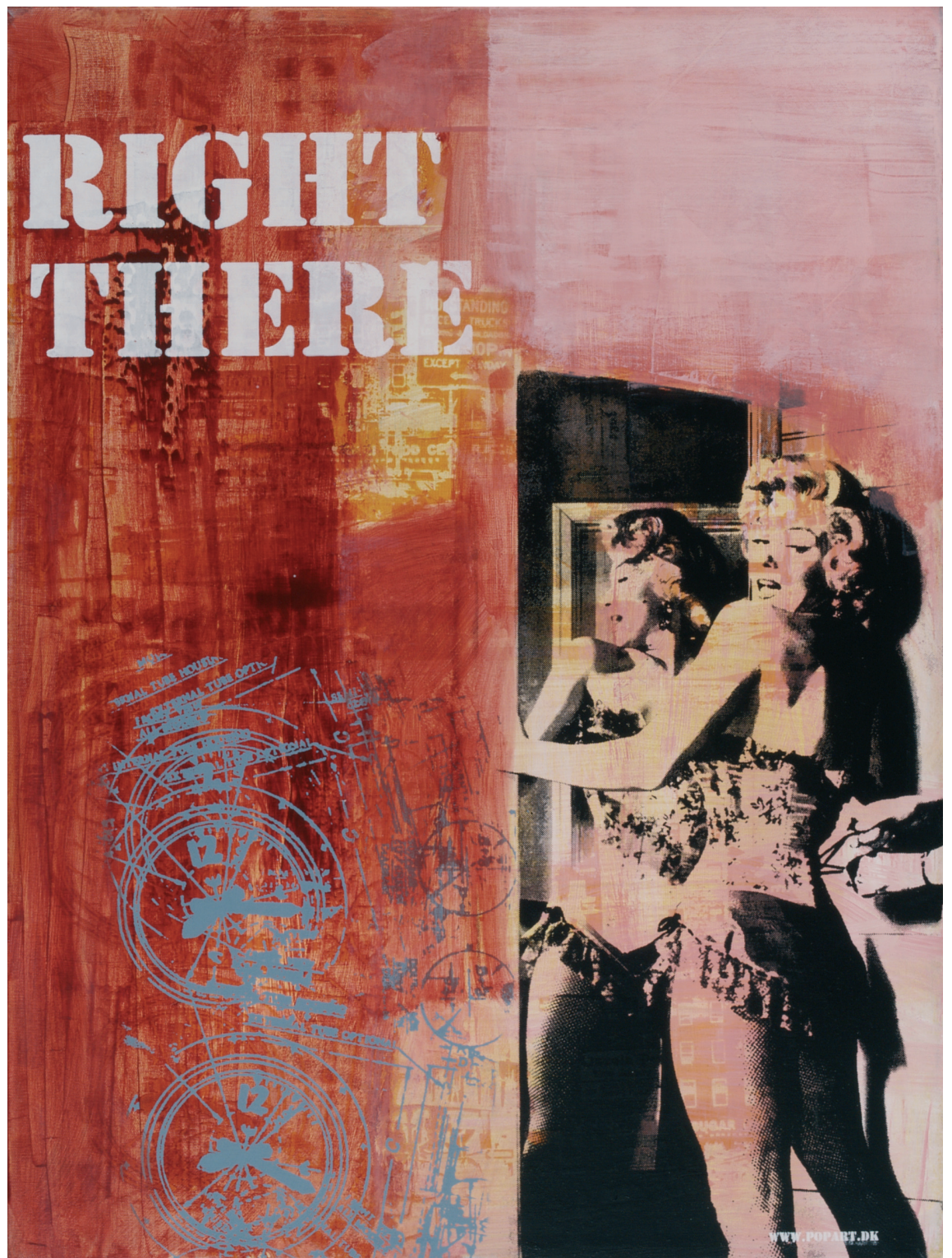
STEFANIE

FESTBLANKE

ONE POSTER

ONE MARK

At The Bon Bon Bar in Berlin, Las Vegas Style
29 × 47 inches



Reflection on Reflections
31 × 23 inches

ART IN ITS TIME



Abracadabra dedicated to Boeing
Capital Corporation and Steve Miller
Band (Living In The USA)
19 × 47 inches

All art is a child of its time and must be understood in that context. Art in its time is therefore a banal assertion. Important art always reflects its own time in some way, even if the work reaches for the past or aims at the future; or consciously employs a particular genre.

Christian Tango's works are no doubt contemporary, not just as regards their contents, but also in their form.

In literature, there are many good examples of writers who mix fiction and documentary. American writers such as Tru-



In Cold Blood, the Inventor of New Journalism dedicated to "Dawn" and Capote 47 × 39 inches



man Capote, Tom Wolfe and James Ellroy all do it in their own specific way. The recently deceased Hunter S. Thompson did it in his own crazy, surreal way: one might say that he short-circuited the connection between reality and art. Maybe that is exactly what Christian Tangø does – within his own field of expression.

Christian Tangø cannot shuck off his past as a journalist. He has a somewhat seismographic, restless and curious drive in everything he does. This has to get out; it has to reach out – and not only that, because then he would merely be a good journalist. Besides all this, he is both extremely sensitive and highly receptive, taking his works far beyond simple journalism.

Reality as fragment

He consciously uses fragments, in order to show how the world is splintered and torn. The big picture is a great big lie, and coherence is a postulate. God might be dead, according to Nietzsche, but this does not mean that Tangø denies either the spiritual or the divine. He would hate the statement “He let God guide his paint brush”, but he would not deny that it could happen.

For Tangø, it is about minimising his own ego when he paints. It is not only up to the artist whether he ends up with a superb painting or not. There are also higher powers at work.

Any artist must be careful not to think that he is painting the world more beautiful than it really is, or depicting the world better than God created it. Any artist should see his work in a greater perspective. If good, art is always greater than its creator.

Reality and representation

For Tangø, there is another, more important point – the connection between reality and representation.

Not Married Yet, Still Eating Right Out of the Can
31 × 23 inches



GOD WRITES THE SCRIPT,
SWEETIE. I JUST SAY THE
LINES.

The Divine Perspective of the Cleaning Man courtesy
of Lasse Jäger, Sweden 35 × 47 inches



The Birth and the Machine
29 × 47 inches

Art can postulate that it mimics reality. No matter how realistic it appears, art can only represent reality. It is edited reality, constructed by the artist at work, who cannot avoid influencing it via his personal interpretation of reality.

We normally assume or think that the further away from realism the style is, the more abstract it becomes. However,

an abstract painting can sometimes actually tell us more about reality than realism. Cubism might say more about the modern urban landscape than photography, and surrealism more about the human thought (with its many associations) than the scientific approach to the human mind. This reasoning is not at all easy.



"Pixels in my Laundry (Won't Dry off My Tears) dedicated to the "King of Photography", Helmut Newton. 39 x 55 inches



But Remember: No Politics 15 × 15 inches

To Tangø, the relationship between reality and representation is the most important character trait of art. From a logical point of view, good art defines itself by an awareness of this relation.

Reality as fragment

Christian Tangø's works often move in the areas where perception and reality begin to encroach on each other. They are fast and slow at the same time, fragmented just like our own consciousness.

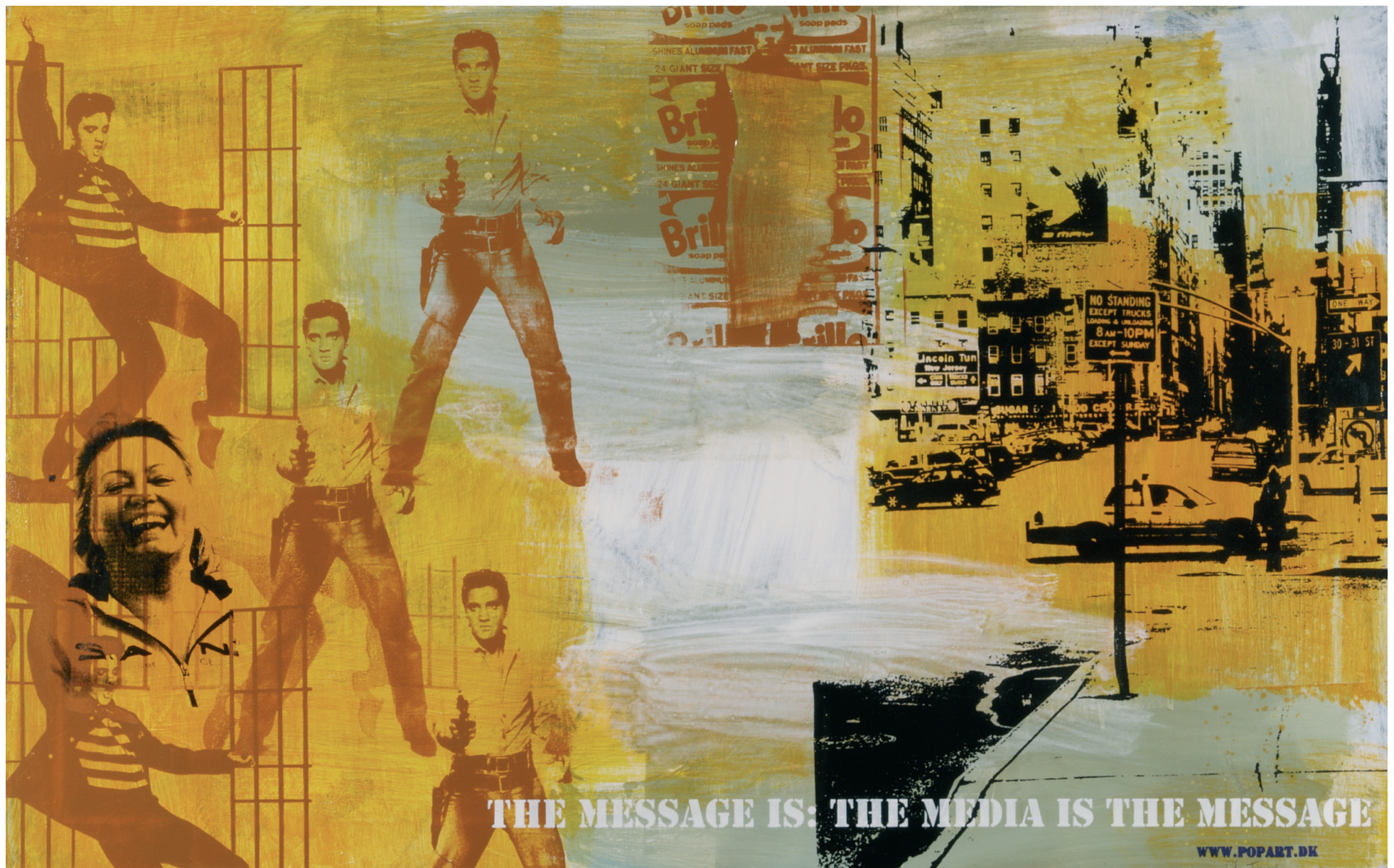
They confirm the fact that the plethora of information from reality passes through our senses faster than our consciousness can process it. Consciousness is behind – or rather beside – us. In many cases, we cannot work out exactly which of our senses is reacting to what we are experiencing. We are a long way from knowing exactly how all our senses actually interact. Some scientists say that the sense of smell creates the most vivid memories, while others note that the senses play different roles from one person to the next.

Our senses are like a camera that takes hundreds of pictures every second, but only remembers a fraction of these.

The visual chock

Many people assume that the current focus on the visual aspects of reality is the most influential factor of our time. "A picture says more than a thousand words," as the saying goes. Whether or not this favourising of the visual sphere will mean the end of the word is an open question, but there is no doubt that media featuring images have more power than ever.

McLuhan's original thesis and his prophecy that "the medium is the message" have once more proved to be true. Today, the amount of information stemming from film, television and commercials has established a noisy position in the flow of information. In politics, the golden photo opportunity is more important than a clear political statement. In advertisements, it is style rather than consumer informa-



Hunting for Truth 29 × 47 inches



Exaggeration, Perfection and the Lost Smell of Real Rubber 39 × 31 inches

tion that sells the product. In movies, images more than dialogue determine the impact on the audience.

Recent research demonstrates that the many pictures and information engender stress in the human brain. We respond by cutting off reality. As a result, only the most powerful images actually reach our consciousness. Images that can evoke hidden or unconscious emotions within our mind possess this power.

Christian Tangø is well aware of this element of visual chock. This is why the choice of photos in his works is anything but random. The most important parts of the paintings should be significant: a naked woman, helicopters screaming across the sky, brash city advertisements, love, war, consumption.

Art as a commodity

Art in the modern world is very much a commodity. Tangø often maintains an ironic distance to this fact, for instance by placing oversized barcodes in his paintings. Or, as a recent example, permitting a company name to appear on the canvas. He is not embarrassed to admit that his paintings should be entertaining. "Boredom should never be a quality in itself," he states, and adds, "Entertainment and deeper meaning are not automatically opposites. Entertainment just enhances the way we communicate in the modern world. We no longer cast the type in lead, we do layout using In-Design software. But that does not change the medium itself – it is still a book. My paintings contain aspects of modern entertainment, but they are acrylics on canvas. To be relevant and influential, art must adapt and utilise new means of communication."

Photography as a tool

Photography is fundamental for modern media, including television, film and video. The film is just another manipulation of our senses, creating the illusion of motion by showing individual frames in a rapid sequence. It is therefore not surprising that photographic art has now become avant-garde.



Investigative Journalism (Follow the Money)
35 × 47 inches



Between Two Ages featuring Katrine and Ida Marie, property of the artist.

Photography is still – essentially – a documentation of reality. We are well aware that one can manipulate pictures, especially using digital photography. We also know that any photo represents the photographer's angle or subjective choice. Yet photography still retains a certain aura of authenticity.

The staged photo has been quite dominant on the art scene in recent years, resulting in many provocative pictures.

Pop and photography

Photography was, from the beginning, fundamental to Pop Art. Early in its history, Andy Warhol used photos that were enlarged and projected onto huge canvasses to produce his paintings. For Robert Rauschenberg, the photographic process has been central to his collage-like paintings.

For Christian Tangø, too, photography is a natural element in his paintings. The photo signifies reality. At the same time, he teases the viewer, showing him that photography is just a piece of edited reality.

It is this special mix of photography and painting that creates the dual effect. It gives a glimmer of truth and fable, reality and subjective sensory perception at the same time.

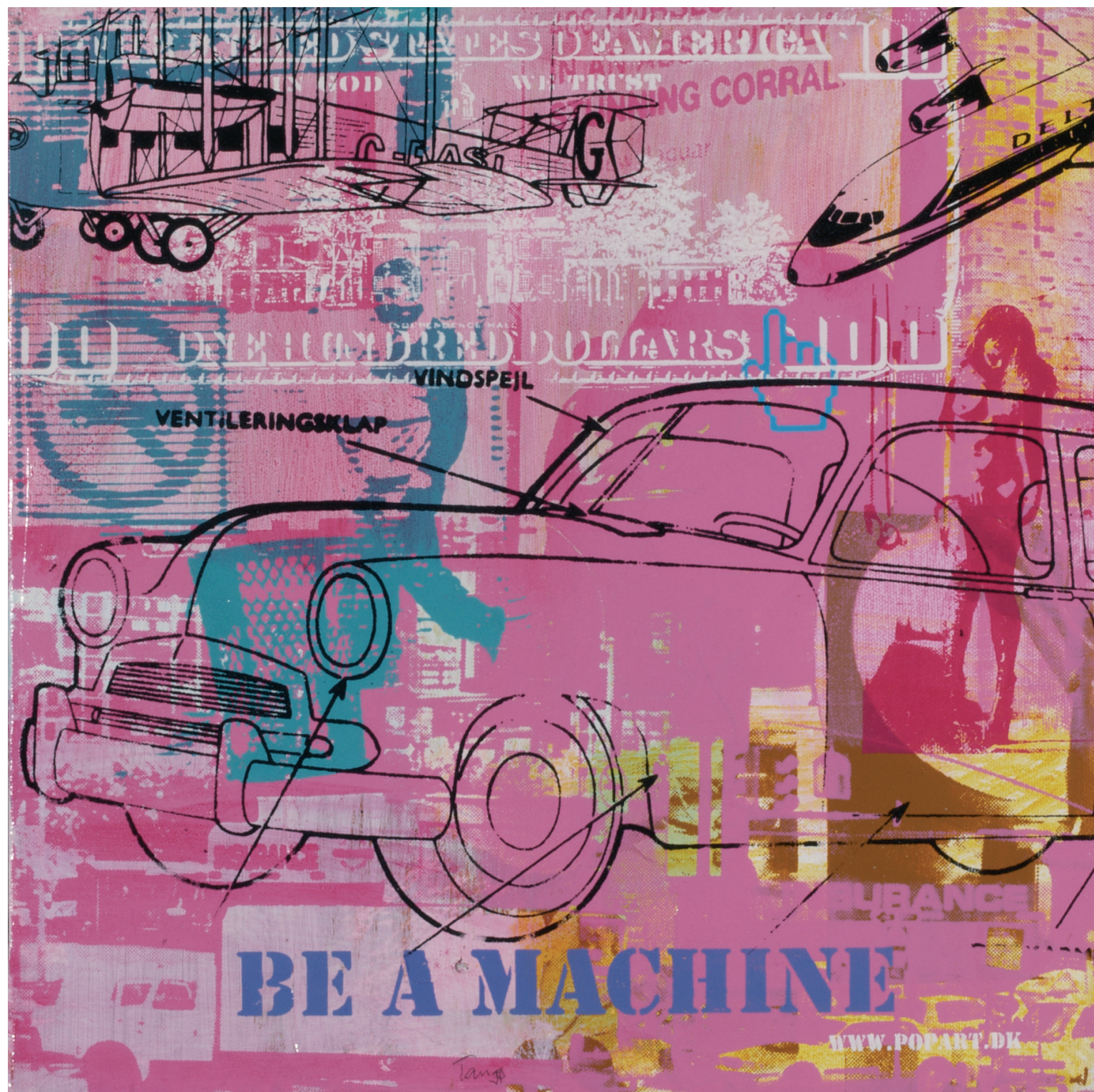
It is as though every single painting admits that reality has been its offspring, but that at some point, the artist took over and turned reality into an inner stream of consciousness. After all, who can tell the difference between the world itself and our perception of the world?

Not to say that the paintings of Christian Tangø give us any answers. They both do and do not.

It is for the audience to decide.



A Tribute to Lawrence Alloway
39 × 31 inches



It is a Man's World
15 × 15 inches

STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN



The canvas is – no matter what is depicted on it – a slow medium. You can take in a painting with a quick glance, but that is in some sense cheating. Its true nature is to be looked at repeatedly, revealing its content slowly.

It is no coincidence that Christian Tangø often works in mixed media, paintings that combine screenprint and traditional painting. What he does is paintings that combine art and reality, and the authentic element is prevalent in everything he does. He first whispers and then screams: “Reality is risky; it is evil and beautiful at the same time. It is angelic and demonically seductive.”

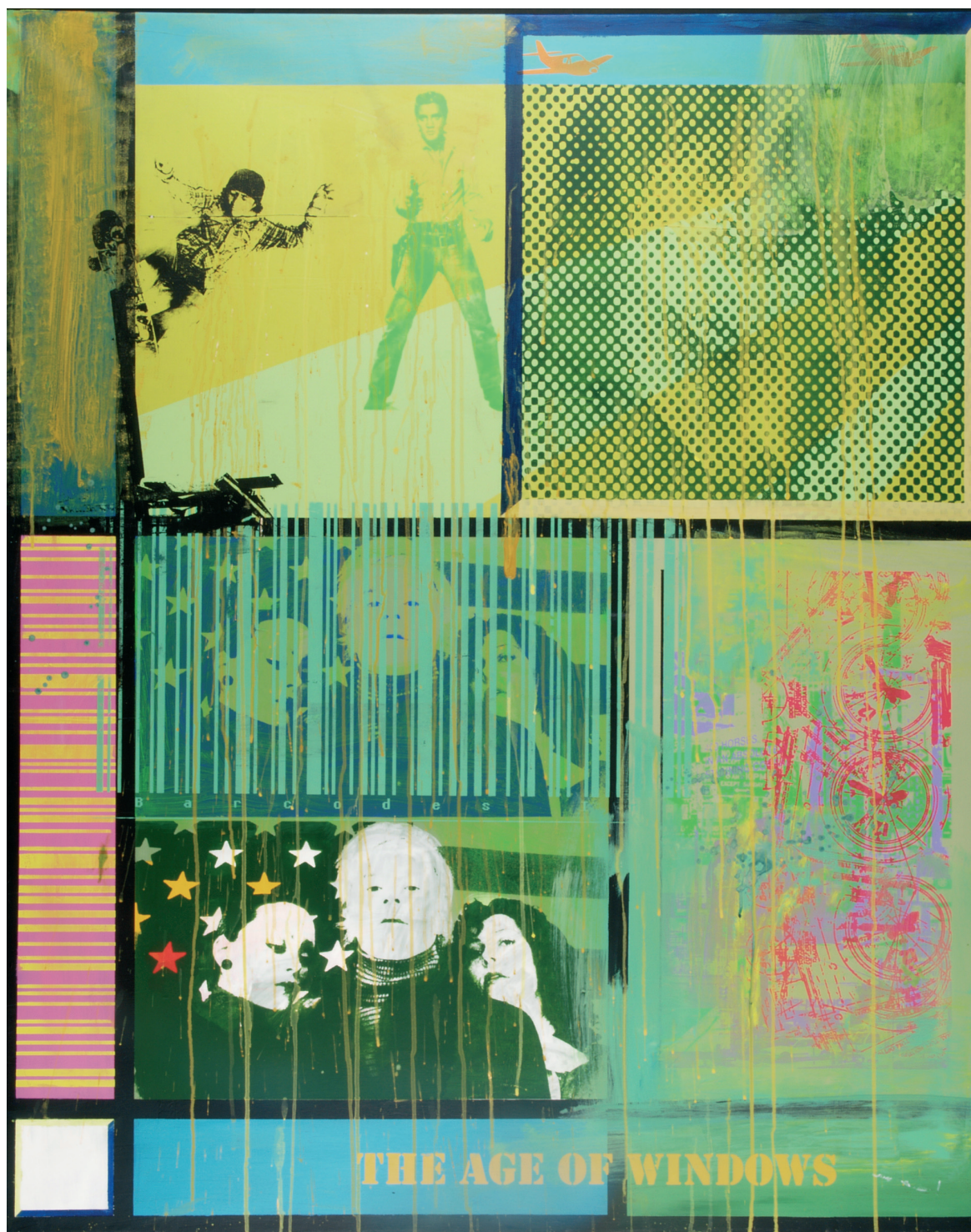
What you think is just surface may be the whole truth. What you think is depth might just be mere surface, pretending there is more hidden beneath than what you can perceive at first glance.

Our world is a huge remix, a sampling of what we fear and hope. The world as we see it is under constant change. Don't look back.

Scientific Documentation Provided
dedicated to the Nikon D 70
70 × 47 inches



Butterflies on the Moon to Neil and His Royal
Highness Frederik of Denmark, 35 × 47 inches



Reality is – seen in a critical approach – a special sense of delusion and deceit. Evil and goodness lie side by side, and this is what art is trying to mirror and interpret.

The classical idea of art as something noble, absolute, beautiful and truthful is a fading picture from a forgotten photo album. Art has jumped head first into the cesspool of reality, which serves up both glamour and garbage on the same plate.

There is no point in screaming “Stop art, I want to get off”, as there is no point in worshipping escapism.

There is only one solution left: stop, look and listen. Reflection must appear whenever the need for it is strong enough.

Stop, Look and Listen!
59 × 47 inches



Newton, Newton and Beyond... 39 × 47 inches



What Would You Do if I Sang Out of Tune?
35 x 47 inches

LITERATURE

Lawrence Alloway: *American Pop Art*, Whitney Museum of American Art 1974.

Niels Frid Nielsen and Ole Lindboe (ed.) *Medieeksplosionen*, Gyldendal 1999.

Stephen Hughes: *Pop Culture Mania*, McGraw-Hill 1984.

David McCarthy: *Pop Art. Movements in modern art*. Danish edition, Forlaget Søren Fogtdal 2001.

Marshall McLuhan: *Understanding Media*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1964, reprinted 2001.

Kjetill Rolness: *Vulgær og vidunderlig. En studie i utsøkt dårlig smak*. Aschehoug 1993.

Christian Tangø: *Black Jack – A House of Illusion*. Manifest. 2004.

John Russell and Suzi Gablik. *Pop Art Redefined*, Thames and Hudson 1969.

Steven Henry Madoff: *Pop Art, A Critical History*, University of California Press 1997.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Christian Tangø born 1959, journalist 1990. Has always been fond of drawing and painting – except in elementary school and in high school.

Exhibition venues (a selection)

Galleri Miva, Malmö

Galleri Azellermayer, Berlin

Illums Bolighus, Copenhagen

Galleri Bach Møller, Randers

Galleri Kragh-Halling, Charlottenlund

Galerie Bogø, Århus

Gallerie Helth, Copenhagen

Galleri X, Rungsted

Galleri art So To, Ålborg

Art Copenhagen

Art Herning

ICFF, New York

Performances/happenings (a selection)

Holte Hovedbibliotek, *How to become an artist*

Galleri X, Rungsted, *Back to the sixties* with Troels Trier

Galerie Bogø, Århus Festival week, *Black Jack*, installation.

Works sold to

Collectors of art in Denmark, USA, England, France, Italy and Sweden.

Microworld A/S

Novo Gentofte

Lån & Spar Bank

Rambøll

Service Gruppen A/S

Midtjylland State Prison

Municipality of Hørsholm

www.popkunst.dk

POSTSCRIPT BY THE ARTIST

Thanks to Lars Jaeger, www.gallerimiva.com, for making this book possible.

No book can describe the life of an artist in full. Had I written the book myself, it would have been stuffed with intellectual gossip. Thanks to Ole Lindboe, because it did not turn out that way. Thanks also to Peter Bogø Jakobsen of Bogø Design, who has been my partner in making art for many years.

It can seem absurd to thank one's mother and grandmother, but I intend to do so anyway. Apart from the monster they created, they both star in some of my paintings. So do my two children and their mother – Katrine, Ida and Sanne.

Continuing the list of models, starring, to greater or lesser degrees, Camilla, Helle, Lasse's Karin, Tina and Peter, Esther ... I must have forgotten someone ... Marilyn, Elvis, Brittney, Diora Baird, Madonna, Andy Warhol, myself ...

Special thanks to the photographers Preben Kirkholt and Martin Dam Kristensen, who have been very close to my artistic universe. Thanks to my friend Søren "Nice Little Penguins" Møller, who assisted me as spin doctor and promoter on several occasions.

In no particular order: 3-screen, Malmö, Henrik, Inge, Erling, Bent, Ingelise and Peter2, Preben Kæseler, Rasmus from k-card, and my good friend Mohammed, also known as "Majiid", who owns Café Vestergade and was among the very first to exhibit my art.

A special thanks to Bo Overgaard from Illums Bolighus and an apology for cancelling the 2006 exhibition. Morten Bom, Tomas T. (Don T), Arne Helth, Kent Wolfesen, Martin and Helle Munkholm, colleagues Troels Trier and Rebecca and architect Mikael Høilund, artist and teacher Tina Sonnichsen, Helle Koldsøe, Nicolas Barbano, Lars Møller Witt: I thank you all for your patience and help.

Special thanks to artist Poul Pava. Suck you!

Lyrics from *I Got You on Tape* used by permission of Jakob Bro.

This book is dedicated to Charlotte Bovin Lütken and all the troubled souls out there.

In loving memory of my father and my grandmother.

Before and After,
"It is all in the Family"
 Samples of Reality, 2006
 39 × 31 inches



