

# The Hotel's Secret Rooms

Kirsten Dehlholm's sublime exhibition at Gl. Strand is a high-impact concentration of 30 years of performances by Hotel Pro Forma

By ANNE MIDDELBOE CHRISTENSEN

One of Kirsten Dehlholm's finest qualities is that she can be brief. Her performances for Hotel Pro Forma seldom last longer than one hour. Despite this, the sense impressions are usually so intense and completely surprising that they stay alive in you physically for years afterwards.

At Kunstforeningen Gl. Strand, Kirsten Dehlholm is now celebrating her own theatre company with an exhibition that boils down 30 years of exploration into installations in eight rooms. It is nothing less than sublime. One's senses are so strongly under attack that one sweats and freezes at one and the same time. And here there are sounds that cause the body to shift suddenly before one's thoughts register it – and images that cause the body to lose its footing. The intellect is quite simply stabbed in the back by the senses – and so everything is as it should be.

## Woman in yellow

One starts by entering in front of a mirror. Of course. For Hotel Pro Forma's works are always about how we see the world – and how we view ourselves in the world. The mirror is yellow and strangely dusty, and next to it sits a woman in yellow, knitting. From time to time she says something. But she does not answer questions. For she is inside the world of the theatre – in fragments of lines from the opera performance *War Sum Up*. At the same time, she has a wonderful appearance of not being a person but just a human body in the service of greater sensory perception – and most of all, just a female body in a yellow dress. On the wall a video flickers, and operatic voices rumble. And now one's sensitivity is up and running!

In one room there are slender photostats from a number of the hotel's performances. Each image gives rise in itself to amazement – both the photo of the woman who has something gleaming in her open mouth, and that of the girl twins who stand asymmetrically and yet are completely identical. But above the photographs videos are shown that change the photos beneath – and suddenly the strange mixture of standstill and motion is created that is Hotel Pro Forma's hallmark: precisely when one thinks that nothing is taking place, one realises that everything has turned round or become mirrored.

In another room, everything is bathed in phosphorescent lighting. Props from *The one who whispers* are laid out like some grotesque buffet: What would you prefer? A sip of the gleaming-blue liquid in a plastic beaker or a kiss from the shining-red cat-candle? Or a finger-mark of the tiny orange string that lies luminous in a window-sill on its way out of the colour claustrophobia?

In the large rooms facing the Thorvaldsen Museum the windows have been blocked out by a huge painting – of the view of the Thorvaldsen Museum! Even the construction chaos and cranes of the Metro are included in this painting by Jacob Petersen, Anne Metter Fisker Langkjer and Aleksandra Rakic. The title is quite simply 'The view has been painted'. And in front of the picture a

number of performers stand reciting texts from Hotel Pro Forma's various performances. One hears Søren Ulrik Thomsen's 'The trees don't grow into the sky', from *Why does the night come, mother?*

On the floor below, one can see some of the same quotations in print. The words have been printed on long paper scrolls that tumble down from the walls and unfold across the floor in soft piles. 'I grow old. You grow old. We grow old,' is one of Morten Søndergaard's lines from the performance *Ellen*. The only one who apparently does not grow old is Kirsten Dehlholm. One feels, at any rate, that she can place herself behind you in the mirror with her red hair at absolutely any moment – and with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. Challenging and frightening.

### **The ghost entices**

In spite of this, the body feels an attraction from behind. It is as if it wants to go back to an overlooked room at this exhibition. Which is the case. Beyond the entrance there is a narrow room. There are strange noisy machines there, and on the wall hang ferns that wave in a wild, improbable gust of wind in here at the foot of the hotel.

At the back of the room, a ghost flutters. No, not an ordinary ghost of course – it is just a piece of loosely hanging material with a video of a woman. But she looks so sinister in her thin dress and long hair. Her eyes stare pleadingly, and her arm sinks so slowly that it invites you to go up to her and hold her – and glide into the stormy fiction along with her. Then your body feels that the hotel's power is getting the upper hand. Your senses bleep red. And your body steps back and rushes down the hotel staircase.