

# **Queer Figurations in the Sculpture of Elmgreen & Dragset**

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Elmgreen & Dragset take what we presume to be unchangeable and show us how it need not be that way. In their work, they inhabit structures and institutions from within as a means to expose the limitations of how power is assumed and wielded. Deploying a straightforward naturalism, their works unsettle familiarity and frustrate a singular interpretation. Conventionally accepted meanings are questioned, and new uses are proposed. Rather than accept “common” sense, they offer willful misuses of buildings, spaces, objects, and social situations. Theirs is a strategy for demonstrating how those things we easily accept as natural can be recast as unnatural, can be made to be subversive, or can be seen differently. This is a strategy, in other words, of making things queer. They have often foregrounded queer lives, gay couplings, and homoerotic desires. A central question has been how these erupt into public spaces that try to render them invisible. More broadly, Elmgreen & Dragset draw on queer experience in their work to undermine institutions and structures that disallow difference, that promote universalism, or that assume consensus.

Despite the extensive writing on Elmgreen & Dragset, there is remarkably little sustained analysis of the queer content or queer strategies in their work. It is often mentioned but rarely investigated in detail.<sup>1</sup> This exhibition of their sculpture at the Nasher Sculpture Center, however, allows for a fresh opportunity to see how queer attitudes infuse their practice. As a medium, sculpture has been historically tied up with questions of universality, whether that be in the individual statue that is made to stand for all or the monument put in a public square. Elmgreen & Dragset’s work in the medium of sculpture uses these conventions and histories as an opportunity to invoke and question universalism. In what follows, I will discuss a handful of works in three different categories of sculpture—the sculptural object, the statue, and the monument. In each of these, they have made works that *figure* a queer stance toward the universal, toward power, and toward normativity.

Elmgreen & Dragset do not want their work to be understood *only* in relation to the politics of sexuality, but it is nevertheless a major theme and a grounding resource. Across their practice, they expand upon the potential that arises from the “wrongness” experienced by a queer individual who falls outside of society’s expectations of them. I borrow this term from the Danish sociologist Henning Bech, whose 1987 book *Når Mænd Mødes* [*When Men Meet*] offered a detailed account of the cultural and individual development of homosexuality. In it, he describes an imposed feeling of wrongness as:

<sup>1</sup> An important exception is Aaron Betsky, “Scenario Planning: Elmgreen & Dragset’s Queer Agitprop,” in Anita Iannacchione, ed., *Elmgreen & Dragset: Performances 1995–2011* (Cologne, 2011), pp. 141–56. See also Emily Colucci, “Failure May Be Your Style: Undetectable Queer Time in Elmgreen & Dragset’s ‘Changing Subjects,’” *Filthy Dreams*, October 16, 2016. <https://filthydreams.org/2016/10/16/failure-may-be-your-style-undetectable-queer-time-in-elmgreen-dragsets-changing-subjects/> (accessed March 24, 2019).

*a chronic state. In his world of experience, the others are always there as a disapproving shadow; he inhabits this antagonism, pinched in this unease of wrongness and distended in this network of reactions. In this way, the homosexual's form of existence is preceded by a negative sign, without which it would not be, and by which no part of it remains unaffected, but from which the remainder does not simply follow.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Quotations are from the English translation: Henning Bech, *When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity* (1987), trans. Teresa Mesquit and Tim Davies (Chicago, 1997), p. 94. A comparative argument about the impact of normativity was made by French intellectual historian Didier Eribon in *Insult and the Making of Gay Self* (1999), trans. Michael Lucey (Durham and London, 2004).

As Bech details in his important study, such a feeling of being out of sync and never meeting the conventional expectations of society or family initiates a process of distancing, critique, and the formation of new communities and ways of living. Elmgreen & Dragset explore this wrongness in two ways: first, as the content of many works and second, as a strategy for unseating and unsettling normative accounts of society, relations, and power. They draw upon the wrongness that the queer child feels when realizing they do not fit into the standard set for them, and they have looked to the ways in which this experience produces a skeptical remoteness from the presumed normal. Elmgreen once gave the example of reading Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* as a teenager. He was told by teachers this was a universal story, but he realized even then that he could not fit into its calculus. Such experiences accumulated and led to the realization that "you approach universal truths as something you can't believe in," as he said. He continued, "Early on, you teach yourself that there are other possibilities, other angles."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Elmgreen & Dragset, public talk at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, February 5, 2019.

Images of children are central to Elmgreen & Dragset's work because of this exploration of the ways in which societal expectations are imposed and ill-fitting. They imbue complex psychological lives to the children they make as statues—such as those wearing clothes that do not match the gender to which the child was ascribed [*The Experiment*, 2012, p. 141], sitting neglected [*Invisible*, 2017, pp. 74; 76–77], or contemplating a future in which violence will feature [*One Day*, 2015, pp. 80–82]. As with all of their works, these sculptures draw on queerness as a resource but extend beyond the specificity of that experience to address and complicate wider questions about what we expect from one another.

One should not take the consistent and unwavering commitment to queer themes and tactics as an excuse to narrowly categorize their art. This work volubly and proudly speaks from queer experience, but its aim is not merely to address LGBT audiences. It does do that, but Elmgreen & Dragset's concerns are more expansive. They are interested in the workings of power, and they seek to build a skepticism toward the ways in which institutions direct us. Their infiltration tactics and

pointed humor are aimed at showing how a view from awry—that is, a queer perspective—exposes and gives shape to the often invisible ways in which such ideas as the “natural,” the “common,” the “consensus,” and the “normal” become defined and deployed. Their *Powerless Structures* series embraces queer tactics as a means to show how institutions operate. As Elmgreen has said,

*In Foucault’s History of Sexuality, he writes that no structure is able to suppress anybody—not the structure itself. It’s only how you deal with the structures already being there, and all structures can be altered or mutated. That was very much an inspiration for us ... to discover that everything is just structures that could be something else ... the patterns could be different.*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Elmgreen, interview by Hans Ulrich Obrist, in *Powerless Structures: Works by Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset*, exh. cat. Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art and Galleri 18 (1998), p. 38.

## Queer Patterns

To call something “queer” is to cast it as improper, deviant, or abnormal. This slur has historically been used against any who loved or desired differently. Its violent force sows doubt and distrust about anyone who is its target. This adjective overtakes any noun to which it is attached, and it causes others to regard that noun (be it a person, an object, an act, a gesture, etc.) with suspicion and scrutiny.<sup>5</sup> Test this out. See what happens when you say that your street, your shoes, or your mood is “queer.” Use this adjective to describe an adolescent. Think about what happens to the adolescent when this word is applied to them. Regardless of who they are, those in earshot will henceforth suspect that there is more than what they see. They will question whether what they assumed was natural is, underneath, unnatural to them.

It is this performative operation that Elmgreen & Dragset use as a method. In this, they are in accord with queer activism and thought prevalent since the first decade of the ongoing AIDS crisis. It was at that time that the reclamation of this word became a badge of honor. It was self-applied as a means to declare that one was outside of the “normal.” What does it mean when this insult is embraced? Not only does it diffuse its harm, but it also reflects its suspicion back at the presumed consensus about the normal or the natural. This reversal helps to highlight how power is dispensed and “common” sense is inculcated. Analogously, Elmgreen & Dragset enact queer protocols in their quest to expose and undermine the invisible workings of power structures—be they architectural, institutional, economic, political, or social.

<sup>5</sup> For a more extensive accounting of this term and its usage in contemporary art and activism, see my “Introduction: Queer Intolerability and Its Attachments,” in David J. Getsy, ed., *Queer* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 12–23.

A recurring tactic of theirs is to lure the viewer into a deceptive sense of familiarity only to upend it. That is, they often take something (an object, an image, a concept, an architectural form, a habit) and look at it askew in order to reveal its meanings and potential. The 2004 sculpture *Marriage* [pp. 164–165] is a useful example. Two identical sinks with mirrors sit side by side. This is a common enough arrangement that can be seen in many homes or hotels. Spilling out onto the floor are tortured curves that link their drains together, so that the waste from one will erupt in the other's basin. Any humor we might register soon fades as we realize the connection between the two means a constant recirculation without the possibility for independence.

Many could see themselves in these mirrors. While speaking broadly to the conditions of marriage, however, this sculpture also incorporates a queer potential. Even though side-by-side sinks are often described as “his and hers” or “Jack and Jill,” the sinks are two of a pair. When isolated as a sculpture that encourages us to look at these objects allegorically, the two side-by-side fixtures present a marriage of sameness rather than difference. They are, after all, alike, and this helps to illustrate how arbitrary the naming of them as “Jack and Jill” really is. Elmgreen & Dragset's focus on the familiar and the everyday is a means of challenging presumptions about how things are and asking what else they might be. They slowly draw out the queer possibility of *Marriage*, and of marriage, by soliciting such parallel identifications and open options.

Later iterations of this sculpture extend these questions in different ways. *Second Marriage* [2008, p. 163] adds soap dispensers. This simple change shifts the readings of the work. While *Marriage* carries a domestic connotation, *Second Marriage* evokes a less private bathroom, with more people coming and going. This allows the sculpture to comment on the impermanence of marriage and its ideal of life-long vows. *Gay Marriage* [2010, pp. 160–161], the third iteration of this sculpture, more decidedly invokes the public bathroom but shifts the scene away from mirrors and sinks to instead present two urinals connected by the tangled tubes.

With *Gay Marriage*, Elmgreen & Dragset became more explicit about the erotics of sameness that hovered around *Marriage* and *Second Marriage*. The public bathroom is conjured as a scene in which standing side by side has a sexual charge. Whatever relations we might have imagined at the twinned sinks of the earlier two iterations are now focused into a scene more directly about sexual possibilities afforded

by the intimate pairing of the two fixtures. As a consequence of replacing sinks and mirrors with urinals, the question of gender is no longer left generic (and capacious) but becomes confrontationally displayed through the invocation of a gender-exclusive space. (Where else would two urinals be? There are no “Jack and Jill” urinals, nor do urinals feature in most homes.) The shift of scene from domestic to public bathroom is profound. Whereas *Marriage* conjured a domesticity that could be in any home, the mise-en-scène of *Gay Marriage* ushers in the possibility of others’ entry into the space, emphasizes the vulnerability to exposure of the imagined protagonists, and makes impossible the presumed privacy of the earlier work’s paired mirrors and sinks. In these ways, *Gay Marriage* reminds us of what has been disallowed and contested for same-gender individuals. Simple privacy cannot be guaranteed for couples whose right to love, to be parents, and to cohabitate is under constant pressure, scrutiny, and debate. While the more generic *Marriage* and *Second Marriage* made space for the same-gender couple, the decidedly undomestic scene of *Gay Marriage* reminds us that no same-gender couple can ever expect that they will be free from the pressure of public discussions about whether their ability to marry is tolerable, problematic, unnatural, natural, or permissible. The year of this sculpture, 2010, was not so long ago. At the time this sculpture was made, same-gender marriage was, in most countries, illegal, unsanctioned, disallowed, or contested. The right to marry was (and continues to be) a publicly discussed issue for same-gender couples or for couples in which one or both have transformed their gender. *Gay Marriage* limits its protagonists to the couple who would enter the gender-segregated space of the public bathroom and choose to stand abreast. Even though this creates a particular picture of “gay marriage,” the work nevertheless speaks more broadly to the intrusions on privacy that all non-normative sexual or gender couplings endure. Their relationships are inescapably a topic of public debate and dissent.

Across the three iterations of *Marriage*, Elmgreen & Dragset allegorize the challenges that couplings face, and the interdependent drains of the three sculptures each differently symbolize the entanglements (both positive and negative) that constitute partnership. Throughout this series, the stability or sanctity of marriage is never taken for granted, and instead Elmgreen & Dragset succinctly use visual humor to contest a restrictive account of coupling. That same humor, however, makes these works both more accurate in their account of entwined psychology of the couple and more open in thinking about whom that couple might be.









The third in the series is more directly political than psychological in its claims, but it makes more explicit and straightforward the queer themes that were in the series from the first. All three sculptures afford a queer identification, even if only the third in the series makes that inescapable and confrontational.

## Queer Sculptures

Architectural spaces and their uses are frequent concerns for Elmgreen & Dragset, and many of their sculptures evoke rooms and their typologies (as with *Marriage* and the domestic bathroom, and *Gay Marriage* and the public bathroom). This critical examination of rooms extends to exhibition spaces themselves. Elmgreen & Dragset have sought to expose and complicate the supposedly neutral white-walled gallery or museum space as a structure imbued with power.<sup>6</sup> This began with such works as *Twelve Hours of White Paint/Powerless Structures*, Fig. 15 (1997), in which they repeatedly repainted a gallery white, but it also extends to other works—in which a gallery space is submerged [the 1998 *Dug Down Gallery/Powerless Structures*, Fig. 45, pp. 38–39], or when those same wall forms are used to make the *Cruising Pavilion/Powerless Structures* Fig. 55 [1998, pp. 195–197; 320] in a park in Aarhus. In this work, they created an architectural structure that legitimized and enabled the already existing cruising for sex that was happening in the park. As an enclosed structure, it had different legal rules than the public park did, and it could be used as a haven from police harassment.<sup>7</sup> The artists have also reorganized the expectations of space within museums and galleries, for example with their introduction of cubicles with glory holes into a gallery space with *Powerless Structures*, Fig. 29 [1998, p. 174]. As with the *Cruising Pavilion*, they uphold the act of cruising for sex and look to its long and pervasive history of using public spaces in subversive ways (both to find episodes of individual connections and to forge larger communities of those whose desires or loves are not sanctioned in public). Cruising is a queer and intentional occupation of public space, and it offers a mode of resistance to a culture that denies the legitimacy of same-gender desire—and that polices or persecutes its pursuit.<sup>8</sup> Elmgreen & Dragset have often pointed to cruising as a way in which individuals and communities have forged sites of resistance against a culture that would seek to erase them. It is, like their work, a means of taking a structure and showing how it can be adapted into a site of subversion, sustenance, or survival.

<sup>6</sup> An important study by Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica, 1986), has been influential on Elmgreen & Dragset. This book reprints a series of articles by O'Doherty from 1976.

<sup>7</sup> As Dragset explained, "The thing is that the gay men cruising in that area had previously been harassed by the police, but inside our 'public sculpture'—the pavilion—the law against public sexual activity didn't apply any longer, since it was, after all, in a sculpture that was made by and belonged to us." Interview by Alex Freedman, in *Art 21 Magazine* (December 17, 2010), [http://magazine.art21.org/2010/12/17/lives-and-works-in-berlin-stage-your-melodrama-an-elmgreen-and-a-dragset/#.XN7Ayi\\_Mwl4](http://magazine.art21.org/2010/12/17/lives-and-works-in-berlin-stage-your-melodrama-an-elmgreen-and-a-dragset/#.XN7Ayi_Mwl4) (accessed March 24, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> There is a long literary tradition that examines cruising as a cultural form (of resistance, of survival, of pleasure, of community, and of sedition). For accounts of these traditions, see, for instance, Mark Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London, 2003); Ben Gove, *Cruising Culture: Promiscuity, Desire and American Literature* (Edinburgh, 2000); Scott Herring, *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History* (Chicago, 2007); and Pat Califia, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex* (San Francisco, 1994). For discussions of the dynamics of cruising and their import, see Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago, 2009); Liz Rosenfeld, "My Kind of Cruising," in Mattilda a.k.a. Matt Bernstein Sycamore, ed., *Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender Conformity* (Emeryville, California, 2006), pp. 149–158; David J. Getsy, "Mourning, Yearning, Cruising: Ernesto Pujol's Memorial Gestures," *PAJ: A Journal of Art and Performance* 90 (2008), pp. 11–24; and Philip Brian Harper, *Private Affairs: Critical Ventures in the Culture of Social Relations* (New York, 1999).



Previous spread:

**Gay Marriage, 2010**

Porcelain urinals, taps, stainless-steel tubing  
43 1/3 x 17 x 48 1/2 in. (110 x 43 x 123 cm)

This page:

**Second Marriage, 2008**

Metal knot, sinks, mirror, soap dispensers  
71 1/4 x 78 3/4 x 15 3/4 in. (181 x 200 x 40 cm)

Next spread:

**Marriage, 2004**

Mirrors, porcelain sinks, taps, stainless-steel tubing, soap  
70 x 66 1/4 x 32 in. (178 x 168 x 81 cm)







They apply this lesson through their work, compelling us to acknowledge that spaces have multiple uses and different categories of inhabitants. They foreground the divergent relations that architectural forms encourage. This happens both in the rooms they create and in the rooms they evoke through their sculptural objects. Perhaps the best example of this is the series of Queer Bar sculptures created over the space of two decades.

These sculptures are among Elmgreen & Dragset's most iconic, and they encapsulate a number of key themes for their work. First manifested in 1998 as *Queer Bar/Powerless Structures*, Fig. 21 [pp. 169; 222], the sculpture was of an enclosed square bar in which inside and outside had been inverted. The stools for the patrons, normally in front of the bar, were now in the interior space of the sculpture. In their version, the handles of the beer taps (that would normally be behind the bar) faced outward. Elmgreen & Dragset reprised the work as a linear, room-dividing structure with *Queer Bar/Powerless Structures*, Fig. 121 in 2005 [pp. 222–223] and again in 2018, as an oval shape, with *Queer Bar/Powerless Structures*, Fig. 221 [pp. 220–221].

Elmgreen & Dragset have repeatedly said that their sculptures often invite participation only to frustrate it, and the Queer Bars are a prime example. The Queer Bars block conventional use by making it impossible merely to inhabit the sculptural space or sit on its stools. They offer no place to sit. Any promised relaxation of being at the bar is denied. Instead, the sculptures place the visitor to the exhibition in the role of server, not served. This flipping of expected positions raises questions of who is seeing and being seen — and who needs whom. Visual dynamics are central to bars' architectures and operations; depending on your point of view, the workers or the patrons are on stage. The Queer Bar sculptures activate such questions of looking in both directions. (This is even more heightened when performers occupy the interior of the Queer Bars both to be looked at by and to look at the museum visitors.)

This sculpture *depicts* a bar, and the unfolding visual dynamic of patron and server spins out from the cognizance of that architectural form and its conventional uses. While this sculpture has recognizable elements and can be seen as 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, artists such as Robert Morris, Tony Smith, and Donald Judd created reductive, geometric abstract sculptures that, like the Queer



**Queer Bar/Powerless Structures, Fig. 21, 1998/2018**

MDF, paint, beer taps, drip cups, metal,  
footrests, bar stools  
59 x 118 x 118 in. (150 x 300 x 300 cm)

Installation view,  
National Gallery of Singapore, 2018



Bars, were made to fill and obstruct space with objects that were scaled to the human body in order to activate a bodily engagement with the standing viewer.

Minimalism has been 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 the address to the constructed space of the white cube. Elmgreen recalled how he shared with Felix Gonzalez-Torres a desire to infiltrate Minimalism. Speaking of a time they were at a conference together at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, he recalled:

*So we hung out and spoke a lot about how gay people suddenly discovered the use of Minimalism as the ultimate kind of infiltration into the history of high art. Minimalism was always the thing that was shown in large scale in the most important American art institutions ... after they had had a tiny little group show of young artists, just to give the institution some credibility, to give the impression of not being conservative. Then the museum director could feel safe having this huge [Richard] Serra exhibition afterwards, that would cost, say, twenty times as much as the young art show. So, dealing with Minimalism was a kind of challenge for a gay person—also to break the stereotype image of gay people being, you know, interested in camp and being very feminine in their ways of expressing themselves.<sup>9</sup>*

<sup>9</sup> Elmgreen, interview by Obrist, in *Powerless Structures: Works by Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset*, exh. cat. Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art and Galleri I8 (1998), p. 31.

Gonzalez-Torres and Elmgreen & Dragset share an invested use of Minimalism, and they capitalize on the ways in which it activated the viewer's embodied encounter. Through its uninflected, regular, and geometric forms, Minimalism (broadly speaking) sought to direct the viewer's attention away from visual incident toward their shared co-presence with the object in the space of the gallery. Consequently, the viewer's engagement with the Minimalist object is more self-consciously spatial, temporal, and relational. Elmgreen & Dragset have often injected content into the Minimalist staging of encounter by adapting the regular geometries into recognizable objects or architectural elements. The torso-high Queer Bar sculptures, in white, do just that.

Elmgreen & Dragset overlay the scene of the queer bar (with its implication of desire, of connection, and of community) onto the Minimalist legacy of bodily and spatial address to the viewer's co-presence. This canny move both relies and comments on that tradition. In his

widely discussed 1967 critique of what would become known as Minimalism, Michael Fried had attempted to discount what he termed “literalist” work, that which seemed to use human scale to solicit the viewer’s attention and participation. Minimalist art foregrounded such bodily relations, and they were heightened through the reduction of formal qualities such as composition, incident, and, often, color. As Fried argued:

*Someone has merely to enter the room in which a literalist work has been placed to become that beholder, that audience of one—almost as though the work in question has been waiting for him. And inasmuch as literalist work depends on the beholder, is incomplete without him, it has been. And once he is in the room the work refuses, obstinately, to let him alone—which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him.*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967), p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Christa Noel Robbins has recently traced such analogies in Fried’s wider art theory and examined how Fried once candidly described “Art and Objecthood” as demonstrating how literalist art’s “corrupt sensibility is par excellence faggot sensibility.” See: Christa Noel Robbins, “The Sensibility of Michael Fried,” *Criticism* 60, no. 4 (Fall 2018), pp. 429–454. For further discussions of the psychodynamics of Fried’s encounter/cruising scene, see Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, 1998), pp. 111–113; Jennifer Doyle and David J. Getsy, “Queer Formalisms,” *Art Journal* 72, no. 4 (Winter 2013), pp. 63–64; Hannah B. Higgins, “Reading Art and Objecthood While Thinking About Containers,” *nonsite.org* 25 (October 2018); and David J. Getsy, “Acts of Stillness: Statues, Performativity, and Passive Resistance,” *Criticism* 56, no. 1 (Winter 2014), pp. 1–20. The implications of Fried’s text have also been registered and responded to by artists, and I would single out Scott Burton and Tom Burr in this regard.

Much can be and has been said about Fried’s gymnastic characterization of the relationship between active and passive in this text. For him, the active viewer is made subordinate (and solicited) by the passive object that waits. The beholder, in Fried’s terms, is cast as an object of desire for the sculpture, the *raison d’être* of which is to produce a relation. The psychodynamic scene that Fried conjured is analogous to the fear of being cruised, and such a reading of his imagery is reinforced by the ways in which Fried criticized literalist work as “theatrical,” in a move that implies dissemblance, artificiality, and queer connotations of the theater.<sup>11</sup> Much as the actor needs an audience, Fried implied, the literalist object desires the beholder’s participation. As he also wrote in that essay:

*In fact, being distanced by such objects is not, I suggest, entirely unlike being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another person; the experience of coming upon literalist objects unexpectedly—for example in somewhat darkened rooms—can be strongly, if momentarily, disquieting in just this way.*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967), p. 16.

Wryly, Elmgreen & Dragset take the dynamics of the “somewhat darkened,” dimly lit space of gay bars (and cruising) and bring them into the light of the museum or gallery’s white cube. The flipping of active and passive that Fried warned against is enacted in *Queer Bar*’s reversal of the visual dynamics of the bar.

In this way, the geometric, mid-torso-high Queer Bars activate a history of Minimalism and take on some of its key terms. Elmgreen & Dragset cite such art-historical precedents and use the spatial and experiential possibilities of sculpture (and the ways in which viewers circumambulate it) to heighten the experience of encountering this object in relation to histories of both literalist art and cruising. That is, their infiltration of Minimalism (and the power accorded to it in museums and in histories of art and design) draws out the ways in which queer relations have always been part of Minimalism's potential. They encourage the possibility for use, misuse, and discrepant relations. This is, after all, the idea of their Powerless Structures series—that given structures (and structures imbued with power) always contain the possibility for their queer adaptation, seditious employment, and the refusal of the proper and of consensus about how things are.

These wider histories and interpretations of Minimalism and the flipping of the visual dynamic of patron and server are reinforced by the title of the work. Elmgreen & Dragset name their bar “queer,” and they employ this term's performative ability to alter what it names. Here, queer implies not only “odd” but also, more specifically, the sociality of gay and lesbian bars and other queer spaces. For just as the word overtakes nouns to which it is attached, any person (patron or worker) going into a gay bar is seen as potentially lesbian, gay, queer, or otherwise non-heterosexual. Such a semiotic engulfing of the patron does not occur in a straight bar to the same effect and with the same social consequences and weight.

The 2018 oval version (*Fig. 221*) emphasizes this through its rounded corners that evoke the imagery of the round Panopticon that Michel Foucault used as his prime example in talking about the disciplinary regime of visibility.<sup>13</sup> Inside the closed oval, those who sit in the Queer Bar are put on display as being (or as being potentially) queer, and this offers an allegory for the daily navigations of public space and surveillance that queer individuals endure. Ever present are the questions of visibility. (How visible? To whom? Blend in? Look out for? Et cetera.) The experience of wrongness that is central to queer experience manifests itself as a self-consciousness with regard to being visible, being seen, and reading codes. No matter how well-adjusted, assimilated, or supported a queer individual's life may be, there is nevertheless the negotiation of how difference is made apparent. Bech talked about the endurance of constant scrutiny by queer individuals as “observedness,” saying, “One cannot be homosexual, therefore, without feeling potentially monitored.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), trans. A. Sheridan, 1977 (New York, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Bech, *When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity* (1987), trans. Teresa Mesquit and Tim Davies (Chicago, 1997), p. 99.

Queer Bar, especially in its oval form, speaks to that condition, since any patron at this bar (who by their very presence there is queer) is both on display and trapped. Every museum visitor to the sculpture circles this trap in the subordinate role of watchful server, waiting for a patron to beseech them.

With just a few modifications of the everyday structure of the bar (and the name we give it), Elmgreen & Dragset open up a conversation about seeing and being seen, and their relational effects. As with the artists' other works, however, this is not just celebratory. Rather, this work raises questions about queer experience and its activated relationship to surveillance, scrutiny, and the visual coding of bodily language in the form of cruising. Elmgreen & Dragset make all viewers of Queer Bar complicit in this scene of desirous waiting and watching.

In thinking about Queer Bar's play with the sanctioned space of the white cube and its injection of queer themes, it is helpful to draw a comparison to another work, contemporary to the first Queer Bar sculpture. *Powerless Structures*, Fig. 29 (1998), made for the Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg, comprised two booths "that you normally find in the back room of gay bars or in porn kinos," which Elmgreen & Dragset placed within the white-cube setting.<sup>15</sup> They explained:

*A trained art audience may feel on a safe playground going into a gallery space, but they will be totally alienated going into the back room of a gay bar, whereas, a lot of the gay crowd who are, uh, consulting the back rooms will be totally alienated going into a gallery space. Combining these two kinds of architecture seemed for us interesting, because it points out that you don't have spaces such as queer spaces, and you don't have spaces such as art spaces. You only have spaces that are, say, occupied for a certain period with artistic behavior, and you have places that are occupied by queer activity for a certain time. The borderlines are not that strict. They're much more fragile than we imagine them.*<sup>16</sup>

The fragility of those borders is the point, and both *Powerless Structures*, Fig. 29 and the Queer Bar enfold the museum viewer into a performance of looking, looking at, and looking for queer in the sculpture that has been waiting for them.

<sup>15</sup> Dragset, interview by Obrist, in *Powerless Structures: Works by Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset*, exh. cat. Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art and Galleri I8 (1998), p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Elmgreen, interview by Obrist, in *Powerless Structures: Works by Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset*, exh. cat. Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art and Galleri I8 (1998), p. 39. This statement is echoed by the important historian of queer culture George Chauncey, who remarked, "There is no queer space; there are only spaces used by queers or put to queer use." George Chauncey, "Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets," in Joel Sanders, ed., *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* (Princeton, 1996), p. 244.



**Powerless Structures, Fig. 29, 1998 (detail)**

MDF, paint, stools, mirrors, paper towels

Each box: 86 5/8 x 27 1/2 x 27 1/2 in. (220 x 70 x 70 cm)

Installation view,

Halle für Kunst, Kunstraum Lüneburg, 1998



## Queer Statues

Elmgreen & Dragset have also made the statue a central area of investigation in their practice. Since the beginnings of Modernism, the genre of the freestanding statue has been a site of contestation, and the word “statue” is rarely even used these days. (The more open “sculpture” is now far more common.) The category of the statue—the life-size, freestanding, three-dimensional representation of the human form—has its own rules and limitations. In fact, it is because of its canonical status in the art histories of Europe that the statue has seemed too fraught for many twentieth- and twenty-first-century artists to take on. While they are by no means the only artists to do so, Elmgreen & Dragset do stand out for their willingness to plumb the statue’s conventions as a means of engaging with these histories. Historically, a statue was meant to convey exemplarity, and statues were placed in city squares, outside important buildings, and inside museums in order to stand for something to be aspired to or to be remembered. The statue format is wrapped up with a universal address, and it is for this reason that it became a target of many modern and contemporary artists and critics. Elmgreen & Dragset take up this mantle, but—like so many of their other infiltrations—expose its workings of power from within. They create statues that encourage divergent interpretations rather than aim, like the statuary tradition, to consolidate the meanings of the freestanding figure into a singular message of authority.

*Pregnant White Maid* [2017, pp. 74; 124–127], for instance, is a life-size freestanding statue that complicates attempts to read it as ideal or as exemplary, which are undermined through the work’s citations of class, of sex, and of power. The maid’s body and features are monochromatic white, in a move that implies both the race of the represented person but also the long history (or, rather, imagined history) of white marble statues from Ancient Rome onward. Whiteness is activated in this work as a means to invoke and at the same time undercut that exemplarity often ascribed to it. With the addition of clothing on top of that statue, class becomes part of this work in its representation of a domestic laborer. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that statues—with all of their expense and the space that they occupy—began to take on working-class subject matter.<sup>17</sup> This history is too complex to go into here, but suffice it to say that Elmgreen & Dragset’s representation of a working-class subject is part of that contested story of how class has struggled to be registered in the statuary tradition.

<sup>17</sup> For discussion, see John Hunisak, “Images of Workers: From Genre Treatment and Heroic Nudity to the Monument to Labor,” in Peter Fusco and H. W. Janson, *The Romantics to Rodin: French Nineteenth-Century Sculpture from North American Collections* (New York, 1980), pp. 52–69; Marie Bouchard, “Un Monument Au Travail: The Projects of Meunier, Dalou, Rodin and Bouchard,” *Oxford Art Journal* 4, no. 2 (1981), pp. 29–35; Sura Levine, “A Life of Labor,” in *Hommage à Constantin Meunier* (Brussels, 1998), pp. 8–35; David J. Getsy, “The Difficult Labour of Hamo Thornycroft’s Mower,” *Sculpture Journal* 7 (April 2002), pp. 44–57; and Andrew Eschelbacher, “Gendering Modernity/Modernizing the Worker: Jules Dalou’s Monument to Labourers and Industrial Virility,” *Sculpture Journal* 23, no. 3 (2014), pp. 331–348.



Most important in this sculpture, however, is the activation of the depicted maid's sexuality through the description of her as pregnant. 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. There are very few representations of pregnant women in the history of statuary, but one important example is in the Nasher's collection. Auguste Rodin stopped working on a life-size statue of *Eve* when he realized that his model was pregnant. Both the rigors of posing nude for hours on end and the gradual bodily changes compelled them to cease their work on the statue. The Nasher *Eve* (1881, cast before 1932) is a later bronze cast of the unfinished, abandoned sculpture that shows the faintest signs of a growing belly. Like Rodin's *Eve*, Elmgreen & Dragset realized that the statue format—with its focus on bodily ideality—was disrupted when processes of life or evidence of sex was conveyed. In a move related to their more explicitly queer content, they have, in *Pregnant White Maid*, brought to light a sexuality that is often kept from public view. Even when heterosexual content is signaled (as with the act that caused the maid's pregnancy), Elmgreen & Dragset still draw on queer attitudes by seeking to unsettle the idea of the proper or the normal—and to address questions of power. While not a depiction of a queer subject, *Pregnant White Maid* nevertheless depicts a sexual dynamic (here, of class and power) normally excluded from the statuary tradition and its ideals.

Queer themes are often implied but not made immediately apparent in Elmgreen & Dragset's freestanding statues. *One Day*, with its combination of a statue of a boy and a framed sculpture of a rifle, is a case in point. Elmgreen & Dragset's references can be buried or slight. *One Day*, with both its title and its content, conjures the work of artist David Wojnarowicz, whom they have also cited in one of their Self-Portraits based on artwork labels. One of Wojnarowicz's most famous works—and, indeed, an iconic work for queer art and culture—is his 1990 *Untitled (One day this kid...)*, which combines a photograph of a young Wojnarowicz with a fearless text about the obstacles, violence, and prejudice faced by a queer child. The title *One Day* by Elmgreen & Dragset similarly asks us about the life to be faced by the represented adolescent. The rifle may be the weapon this child will bear, but it may also be a symbol of the weapon that will endanger him. As with so much of Elmgreen & Dragset's work, *One Day* operates through a kind of queer code-switching—that is, speaking differently to different constituencies. From one



Auguste Rodin  
**Eve**, 1881 (cast before 1932)  
 Bronze  
 68 x 17 1/4 x 25 1/2 in. (172.7 x 43.8 x 64.8 cm)  
 Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection,  
 Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas



David Wojnarowicz  
**Untitled (One day this kid...)**, 1990  
 photostat  
 30 3/4 x 41 in. (78.1 x 104.1 cm)  
 Edition of 10  
 Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz  
 and P•P•O•W, New York

perspective, we can see this sculpture as raising questions about the march to adulthood, and the rifle may lead us to think about citizenship, about hunting and bonding, or about gun violence. None of these possible readings is allowed to dominate, however. Beyond these ostensible interpretations, the clue of the title (and Elmgreen & Dragset are always precise with their titles' references) draws in the possibility of homophobic violence and even, as Wojnarowicz often advocated, the need for rebellion as a means of self-defense. This more queer reading of the child's relationship to the gun need not be available to all viewers, and there is value in speaking in code (as any queer person knows). The equal availability of all of these interpretations of the sculpture, however, is precisely the point of Elmgreen & Dragset's aim to open up meanings and to enable subversive identifications in their freestanding statues.

Elmgreen & Dragset draw upon the connotations of the statuary tradition and their introduction of subjects not normally depicted in it (pregnant women and precarious children, for example), but they also make works that adapt its most iconic and power-laden forms. The statuary tradition is composed primarily of images of male-identified heroes, with the intention of holding up these images as symbols of virtue, nation, duty, and so on. Elmgreen & Dragset complicate that tradition by adopting the male-identified statue as a means to question its presumptions of universality. For instance, their 2013 statue *The Weight of Oneself* [p. 325], in Lyon, appears, at first, to be heir to a tradition of war memorials and statues that depict a hero carrying a wounded soldier or youth. These two nude bodies, however, are identical and share the same face. Much the way that *Marriage* used sameness to open up to queer identifications, this statue uses the equivalence of the two figures to facilitate readings of the tenderness of the action, the love or duty that underwrites it, and the tragedy that it represents. It also projects these possibilities back onto the traditions of the hero statue that it cites. Neither wholly critical nor celebratory, *The Weight of Oneself* points to the narcissism of the traditions on which it draws but also asks us to consider how the selfless act is self-edifying. It keeps queer possibilities near in its display of valor and care. Elmgreen & Dragset's figurative sculptures such as this one intervene in the long-standing tradition of the statue, asking both what it has excluded but also what it can come to include.

The statue has historically been posited as an ideal to which we should aspire. Be it a hero, a politician, or a martyr, statues are intended to condense that aim into a single figure and to proclaim the values of those who created (or commissioned) them. Elmgreen & Dragset subvert

**The Care of Oneself, 2017**

Polished stainless steel, stone pedestal  
106 1/3 x 82 2/3 x 55 in. (270 x 210 x 140 cm)

Permanent installation,  
the Donum Estate, Sonoma, California















the universalist presumptions of that tradition with statues that draw out polyvocality and the contestations of meaning. A telling example of this intent is their 2010 performance *A Sculpture Speaks No Evil* at White Cubicle Gallery, an experimental art space that, for many years, was operated out of a toilet stall in a gay pub in Shoreditch in London.<sup>18</sup> For the performance, the artists and two volunteers were bound in black bondage tape and hoods for two hours. Here, the four performers became mute abstract statues. Crammed into the four-and-a-half foot by four-and-a-half foot space, they performed the inverse of the figure that stands for all. Instead, they became immobile and passive statues, unable to speak back to those who might use them. This, itself, is a commentary on how the creation of statues is wrapped up with exercises of power.

<sup>18</sup> White Cubicle Gallery was conceived by artist Pablo Leon de la Barra and started operating in 2005. See: Elias Redstone, "The White Cubicle," *T: The New York Times Style Magazine* (March 28, 2010), <https://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/03/26/london-underground-the-white-cubicle/> (accessed March 24, 2019).

### Queer Monuments

In addition to their engagements with such categories as the Minimalist sculpture or the figurative statue, Elmgreen & Dragset have also taken on the form of sculpture that most closely aspires to the universal: the monument. They have worked with its conventional subgenres, such as the equestrian monument with *Powerless Structures, Fig. 101* [2012, pp. 135–137; 324], in which a boy riding a rocking horse was placed on Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth in London. The monumental toy served as a critical parody of the conventional memorial of the war hero commanding troops from his horse. Their recent *Forventning* [2018, p. 327] addresses the meanings and public assumptions about how monuments function. "Forventning" means "expectation" in Norwegian, and this sculpture represents a memorial that waits to be unveiled. In this way, it becomes a monument to all the events—whether tragic or horrific—that have yet to happen.

They have also addressed the embrace of monuments as national symbols. Their *Han* [2012, pp. 183–187; 324] generated public debate when it was installed near Kronborg Castle in Elsinore because of its supposed homoeroticism. This work appropriated Edvard Eriksen's *The Little Mermaid* (1913) in Denmark's capital city, Copenhagen. Recasting this work for the smaller city of Elsinore, they shifted the signified gender of the main figure from female to male (and dispensed with the fish tail) in reference to Kronborg Castle's famous role in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In high-polish stainless steel, this naked male youth looking out at the water was initially criticized by locals for being "gay." This was the result of its intertextual reference to the Eriksen sculpture, and











**Han, 2012**

Polished stainless steel with  
mechanical eye movements

74 3/4 x 55 1/8 x 35 3/8 in. (190 x 140 x 90 cm)

Permanent installation,  
Kulturværftet, Elsinore







viewers could see only the replacement of an idealized female with a male protagonist as similarly passive and receptive. In other words, the placement of a male body in a female role short-circuited the conventional reading of the Eriksen statue as an allegory of the city. Instead, the sculpture in Elsinore read as passively derivative to Copenhagen's prototype (a source of anxiety for the Elsinore populace) and, by extension, homoerotic in its placement of a nude, male-signifying youth in a female role. Dragset remarked, "We got the most incredible letters to local newspapers, saying, 'First we had the Swedes coming over drunk, and now we're being invaded by gay people!'"<sup>19</sup> Residents compared the sculpture's arrival to the Swedish tourists who come to Denmark for cheaper liquor, and they saw this work as reinforcing their secondary status to Copenhagen. Eventually the town came around to appreciating the sculpture (and the technical expertise of its creation), but only after Elmgreen & Dragset responded to these claims by reminding them that a statue of a single figure "can't be gay, only people can be gay."<sup>20</sup> This witty retort was a manifestation of their deeper strategy of showing how all structures and rhetorics of power (here the monument) are also sites of contestation and debate. Just like the white walls of the *Cruising Pavilion*, there is nothing inherently gay about the sculpture of a male-identified figure. It is all in the use and the meanings one brings to these works.

A different direction, however, was taken with Elmgreen & Dragset's most important monument, the 2008 *Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime* [pp. 190–191; 193; 323]. While most all of their other work has been invested in the proliferation of possible identifications and alternate meanings, with this work they set themselves in opposition to such variability. Their monument is about refusing such misappropriation, and they enacted this refusal on visual terms. The weight of the history they addressed demanded this approach, and it was articulated in specific response to another nearby memorial that also dealt with the history of Nazi persecution.

Elmgreen & Dragset's *Memorial* takes the form of a rectangular block about twelve feet tall in the Tiergarten in Berlin. It does not sit on the ground perpendicularly but rather leans to one side. This lean recasts the rigid geometries of Peter Eisenman's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (2005), which Elmgreen & Dragset's *Memorial* faces across the street. Eisenman's work is a five-acre field of concrete pillars (stelae, or, in German, *Stelen*) arranged in a grid. At varying heights, these stelae create an internal space in which visitors to the memorial are meant to feel the vastness of the loss of the Holocaust through imposing scale and

<sup>19</sup> Dragset, interview by Tim Jonze, in *The Guardian* (September 24, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/sep/24/elmgreen-dragset-whitechapel-gallery-london-gay-urinal-prada-texas-fourthplinth> (accessed March 24, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Elmgreen & Dragset, public talk at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, February 5, 2019.

visual occlusion, which create feelings of anxiety. The work starts out as low plinths and benches, but the ground goes deeper and deeper to give a sense of the gradual loss of perspective and human scale. Whatever the intentions of Eisenman's work, however, it has been used in rogue ways by many tourists and visitors, who have treated it more like a playground. Most disconcerting is the ways in which this memorial has proven to be a popular spot for cell-phone photographs ("selfies") because of its visually striking geometric regularity that serves as a dynamic backdrop. The *Memorial's* manipulation of site and sight have produced an effect counter to the intended commemoration of loss, and the work (and its photo-readiness) has been criticized as aestheticizing the Holocaust.<sup>21</sup> Early on, the artist Marc Adelman made an artwork that tackled this situation. In his *Stelen (Columns)*, 2007–11, Adelman appropriated 150 profile pictures taken from gay connection websites (such as GayRomeo) in which Eisenman's *Memorial* was used as a photo opportunity.<sup>22</sup> This work witheringly criticizes the historical amnesia that enabled gay men to promote themselves against the backdrop of the Holocaust and the atrocities of the Nazi regime. That same regime, of course, also targeted homosexuals and those suspected of being such, and Adelman's work drew out the contradiction of these men advertising themselves in this context.

Unveiled a year after Adelman began his project, Elmgreen & Dragset's *Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime* was intended to address this difficult history and its invisibility in some accounts. Their monument's leaning form is a "queer" version of one of Eisenman's stela, singular and alone at the edge of the Tiergarten (a location that has been a cruising site in Berlin's past). Cut into this massive concrete block is a small aperture within which a video can be seen playing. The original video showed two men kissing, but it is now changed out at regular intervals (and commissioned from different artists). The initial video was shot at the site of the memorial itself so that viewers could compare and contrast their experience at looking at this moment in relation to the surrounding landscape. The screen is only big enough for one person to look comfortably, and viewers have to peer inside one by one. The visual experience of the interior is limited to an audience of one (or, with effort, two). This sets up a visual dynamic between the public exterior and the private interior which we must pry inside to see. In this way, the *Memorial* complicates the conventionally public address of the monument genre through the introduction of a representation of intimacy and a restricted encounter with it. That is, the monument's form stages a distinction by making the encounter with

<sup>21</sup> Both Eisenman's intent and the response are discussed in Quentin Stevens, "Visitor Responses at Berlin's Holocaust Memorial: Contrary to Conventions, Expectations and Rules," *Public Art Dialogue* 2, no. 1 (March 2012), pp. 34–59.

<sup>22</sup> On Adelman's *Stelen*, see: Ben Valentine, "Gays, Grindr, the Holocaust Memorial, and Art: An Interview with Marc Adelman," *Hyperallergic*, December 21, 2012, <https://hyperallergic.com/62106/gays-grindr-the-holocaust-memorial-and-art-an-interview-with-marc-adelman/> (accessed June 12, 2019).











the public monument one of (limited) privacy. In order to see the intimacy and the humanity being memorialized on the interior, we must do so by sacrificing a shared and public experience upon entering the restricted viewing position. As we look inside, we become vulnerable to being watched by others in the area, who see our solitary attempt at a private and intimate encounter from the outside. This dynamic is a means of allegorizing the complicated ways in which private lives become the targets of public homophobia and persecution.

Perhaps more important than this differentiation between collective and individual experience, however, are the ways in which Elmgreen & Dragset's *Memorial* is *resistant to photography*. It offers no visually engaging backdrop for tourists, and the encounter with it (from the mute exterior to the tender moment one can only dimly perceive within) cannot be readily reduced to a single image or photograph. Its performance of guarded intimacy does not translate to the tourist snapshot, the photographic backdrop, or the visually engaging scene. Elmgreen & Dragset do two important things with this move. First, they oppose (and rebuke) the spectacle of Eisenman's neighboring memorial; second, they complicate and criticize the expectation of the monument form itself. Monuments (and memorials specifically) aim to symbolize and make visible a historical event or person, and they are predicated on the desire to produce an image that will allegorize that event. By contrast, the queerness of Elmgreen & Dragset's *Memorial* lies in the mute form's opposition to serving as a recognizable symbol. Indeed, the problem of recognition (and of "observedness") is key to queer experience and the navigation of normativity, so any attempt to clearly and singularly signify queer experience is problematic. Visibility and recognition benefit the protocols of surveillance, let's not forget.<sup>23</sup> Elmgreen & Dragset's memorial to queer loss thwarts being easily or comprehensively represented. Unlike the Eisenman, it is resistant to becoming merely an image (or an appealing backdrop), and it does this as a subversion of not just the neighboring memorial but of the genre more broadly. As in so much of their work, Elmgreen & Dragset decidedly and concisely adopt universalist discourses imbued in sculptural traditions only to reveal their partiality and contestations. They effectively made a memorial to queer loss by critiquing how memorials have conventionally functioned (and how Eisenman's dominating work failed because of its embrace of spectacle). For Elmgreen & Dragset, queer experience is more than just content. It also grounds the method of their unpacking of power and the structures through which it operates.

<sup>23</sup>I discuss queer experience and the relationship of visibility to scrutiny in more detail in David J. Getsy, "Ten Queer Theses on Abstraction," in Jared Ledesma, ed., *Queer Abstraction*, exh. cat. Des Moines Art Center (Des Moines, Iowa, 2019), pp. 65–75.

Across these three main genres of sculpture—the abstract sculptural object, the statue, and the monument—Elmgreen & Dragset have drawn on dominant conventions only to contest them from within. While their work in relation to architecture and to performance has more often been discussed, it is also the case that sculpture has been a recurring and important reference. (Their 2007 *Drama Queens* also demonstrates this.) Elmgreen & Dragset engage with the history of sculpture and tackle its problems of universal address, of exemplarity, of the one standing for many, and of the public. They see the sculptural tradition's themes of the body, the exemplary figure, abstraction, the monumental symbol, and the spatial encounter as avenues of dissent. In this, their queer methods for refusing universalism have been crucial, and I have discussed only a small number of sculptures that make queer themes manifest as content and as a method of critique. Through these works, Elmgreen & Dragset demand recognition of queer difference but also show how it can be a foundation from which to launch a wider analysis of how we deal with power. In Dragset's words, the aim for their work is that those who encounter it “no longer believe in structures being able to suppress them or in spaces being predestined for a specific purpose.”<sup>24</sup> That desire to contest normativity and question universals is queer in its origins, and Elmgreen & Dragset figure that queer potential in sculptures that ask us to embrace “wrongness” for the perspectives it offers.

<sup>24</sup> Dragset, interview by Obrist, in *Powerless Structures: Works by Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset*, exh. cat. Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art and Galleri 18 (1998), p. 39.

**Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime, 2008**  
Concrete, glass, film projection  
144 x 74 3/4 x 193 1/3 in. (366 x 190 x 491 cm)  
  
Permanent installation,  
Tiergarten, Berlin





Opposite page and next spread:

**Cruising Pavilion/Powerless Structures, Fig. 55, 1998**

Wooden boards, cherry wood, paint,

Perspex, rubber matting

90 1/2 x 157 1/2 x 157 1/2 in. (230 x 400 x 400 cm)

Installation view,

Marselisborg Forest, Aarhus, 1998

Pages 198–199:

**Powerless Structures, Fig. 255, 2003**

Stainless steel, paint, glass, tiles, pissoirs

94 1/2 x 94 1/2 x 47 1/4 in. (240 x 240 x 120 cm)

Installation view,

Skulptur-Biennale Münsterland, Warendorf, 2003

















**Queer Bar/**

**Powerless Structures, Fig. 21, 1998**

MDF, paint, beer taps, drip trays,  
metal, footrests, stools

59 x 118 x 118 in. (150 x 300 x 300 cm)

Installation view,

Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, 1998



**One Day, 2015**

Aluminum, lacquer, glass, wood, fabric, clothes

Figure: 41 x 15 3/4 x 15 3/4 in. (104 x 40 x 40 cm)

Vitrine: 21 5/8 x 57 1/8 x 7 7/8 in. (55 x 145 x 20 cm)

Installation view,

Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2018–19



**Pregnant White Maid, 2017**

Aluminum, stainless steel, lacquer, clothing, shoes  
66 1/4 x 17 3/4 x 26 in. (168 x 45 x 66 cm)



**ELMGREEN & DRAGSET**

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