

**Ursula Reuter Christiansen
Henning Christiansen**

THEY WON'T SURVIVE WITHOUT THE BIRD SONGS

November 16 – December 21, 2019

Opening reception: Saturday, November 16, 6 – 8 PM

Performance: *SAVE THE NATURE - USE FLUXUS*

Sunday, November 17, 3 – 9 PM

In 1980 the Danish Fluxus artist and composer **Henning Christiansen** staged a ten day action titled *Die grosse grüne Zelt-Symphonie (mit Vögeln)*, outside the Düsseldorf opera house with a group of young artists and activists, including Joseph Beuys and Johannes Stüttgen, as a 'kind of propaganda' for the early *Green Party*, of which Beuys was co-founder. This happening was one of several collaborations between Beuys and Christiansen that engaged the concept of *Social Sculpture* – performances and gestures that embody an understanding of art's potential to both shape society and the environment. For ten days they lived together in a tent, holding conversations, making performances and cohabitating in close proximity. Simultaneously, Christiansen blasted continuous music, field recordings and sounds out into the public space. When describing this he said: "underneath it all was a recording of bird song... The people in the tent would not have survived if it weren't for the bird song."

THEY WON'T SURVIVE WITHOUT THE BIRD SONGS brings together historical works from **Ursula Reuter Christiansen** and **Henning Christiansen** for their Los Angeles debut, investigating two disparate practices that grew and developed alongside one another. While Reuter Christiansen's paintings and films draw from archaic symbolism and myth, Christiansen played with a tension between structure and chaos in kinship with the international Fluxus movement of which he was part. Still, they made several profound collaborations and came together through a mutual ongoing investigation of 'nature'. A selection of paintings, scores, sound installations and sculptures, as well as Reuter Christiansen's seminal psychedelic feminist film *Den Røde Skov* (1986) will be on view, working as an introduction to the prolific, life-long practices of these two artists.

On November 17, a six hour durational performative happening will take place from 3 PM to 9 PM at The Box, LA. *SAVE THE NATURE - USE FLUXUS* will include new actions and compositions from **Thorbjørn Reuter Christiansen**, artist and founder of the **HC Archive** which houses a vast collection of compositions, scores and correspondence of the late Christiansen, and **Mark Harwood**, founder of the expansive experimental independent label **Penultimate Press**, archival sound from original actions will be incorporated. **Bjørn Nørgaard**, pioneering Danish artist and long-time collaborator and friend of Henning Christiansen will present *Homage to Henning and Joseph*, as well as enact an iteration of *Manresa*, a piece he first collaborated on with Henning Christiansen and Joseph Beuys at Galleri Schmela in Düsseldorf in 1966. **Mai Dingsøe Hansen** will perform *EURASIENSTAB fluxorum organum* op. 39. **Ursula Reuter Christiansen** will make a live painting action as *Two Brooms*. Special guests from Los Angeles will also take part.

Curated by Chiara Giovando and Thorbjørn Reuter Christiansen.

Please visit www.theboxla.com or email info@theboxla.com for more information about this exhibition. These events are free and open to all.



DANISH ARTS FOUNDATION



MUSIC
NORWAY



Ursula Reuter Christiansen
Henning Christiansen

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Ursula Reuter Christiansen, *Den Røde Skov* (1986), 16mm film still.

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A. MAIN GALLERY (FRONT)

This exhibition marks the first major showing of **Ursula Reuter Christiansen** in the United States and gathers thematically around the seminal psychedelic feminist film *Den Røde Skov (The Red Forest)* (1986). Three large canvases suspended from the ceiling, *Red Born Daughter #1*, *Red Born Daughter #2* and *In the Red Forest*, were all painted in 1986 as part of this film. These works act simultaneously as historical film sets and as the residues of performances. *Den Røde Skov* explores Reuter Christiansen's own tenuous relationship with her (then) teenage daughter, exploring archaic themes concerning motherhood, female adolescence and sexuality through striking imagery and elaborate sets all made by Reuter Christiansen. We see her painting them while floating on a raft, reflections of sunlight bouncing off the water, the figure of Reuter Christiansen's as she balances the precarity of the situation, and the round ass of a young naked Danish girl swimming joyously around the entire scene. The three ceramic sculptures on view also appear in *Den Røde Skov*; *Wounded Skull* (1985), *The Mouth* (1985) and *Blue Woman* (1985).

B. MAIN GALLERY (BACK)

Visitors are welcome to enter the hay-covered structure and listen to the composition *Scharfe Statt Geigen, (Sheep Not Violins)* (1988), playing inside. This piece was first constructed in Linz, Austria, for the *Ars Electronica* festival. Christiansen had been invited to make a new composition for orchestra, but instead he moved his work outdoors, collaborating with thirty sheep and a local shepherd. Transforming the shepherd into a conductor for an orchestra of sheep, the sounds heard are of the shepherd directing and coercing sounds from his herd. Christiansen made several pieces with animals including a famous work, *Teifland* (1986), a collaboration with Bjørn Nørgaard, Emmett Williams and Philip Corner. *Teifland* was organized by curator and collector René Block at the symphony hall in Düsseldorf. The artists filled the orchestra pit with chickens and, above, onstage, artists from the international Fluxus movement—including John Cage and Nam June Paik—called in via telephone to make long-distance sound actions.

Hung on the walls surrounding *Sheep Instead of Violins* is *Symphony Natura* (1985), a set of nine hand-painted scores that use graphic musical notation – an extended form of expressive markings and symbol systems that instruct the players. The dominant sound in the gallery was recorded in Rome in 1985. Christiansen conceived of *Symphony Natura* as a piece of music made for animals. Over the course of several weeks he would play the music of *Symphony Natura* to the animals at the Rome zoo, recording their reactions. What we are listening to is a composition made by Christiansen that combines both the original music as well as sounds from the animals.

C. HALLWAY

Running down the back hallway is the two-channel sound piece, *Canary Music* (1992); this includes large-scale scores, works on paper and assemblage with found objects, as well as a live canary hanging at the top of the stairs. This series consists of several works not shown here. Frequently, Christiansen obsessively explored an idea through multiple mediums and iterations, collecting all of the material under a single concept, using the musical term “Opus” to designate eras in his practice.

D. BACK GALLERY: MUSIC AS GREEN

The green room exhibits a selection of historical pieces from Christiansen's *Musik als Grün* period (*Music as Green*). For one year Christiansen painted his ear green as a reminder to listen to nature. This era of composition, installation and visual art making extended from 1969 to 1970. Although there are clear designations to this period, the influence of both the idea and color of green never completely fades from Christiansen's practice. In many ways Christiansen's repeated use and fascination with the natural world often appears in the form of field recordings, but also his direct collaboration with animals can be seen as an extension of the tension within Fluxus art making between structure and chaos. On the monitor

is *Musik als Grün* (1969). Hung in the window are pages from the handmade collaborative publication *Tå* (1969). Additional *Tå* publications can be seen in the HC archive room.

E. SCREENING ROOM

The screening room hosts:

SKARPRETTEREN (THE EXECUTIONER), Ursula Reuter Christiansen (1972), 35 min, digital (new preservation of original 16mm), color, in Danish with English subtitles

DEN RØDE SKOV (THE RED FOREST), Ursula Reuter Christiansen (1986) 34 min, digital (new preservation of original 16mm), color, in Danish with English subtitles.

Reuter Christiansen came of age in the 60's and 70's, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf, Germany under Professor Joseph Beuys, where she met and married her husband Henning Christiansen. At that time when many of her male contemporaries were calling for the collapse of the boundaries between life and art, Reuter Christiansen was obliged to do precisely this as she continuously balanced the duties of mother, family and her career, integrating the realities of traditional female work into a fierce feminist practice. Family photos hung around the Christiansen house in Denmark pictured Reuter Christiansen painting with small children left in baskets beside her. One can almost imagine her rocking the child with her foot as she continues, determined to make her work. Steeped in a historical feminist movement that rejected traditional female qualities, early on Reuter Christiansen proposed a feminism that does not react to or simulate patriarchy, but rather presents a new female perspective on art, family and life. Her film, *SKARPRETTEREN (THE EXECUTIONER)*, now seen under a more complex light, received fierce criticism from the feminists of the 1970s. It was even booed during its screening at the first *International Women's Film Festival* in Berlin in 1972.

F. HC ARCHIVE LA (FRONT LIBRARY)

In 1961 Nam June Paik was invited to perform in Copenhagen. Among an eager audience comprised mostly of young students from the Royal Danish Music Academy was Henning Christiansen. During that performance Paik made a series of actions on a grand piano: whaling against it with food, found objects and his own body. At the time Christiansen had been studying clarinet and formal composition and was thought of as one of the institutions young, promising great talents. However, after the Paik performance everything changed. For the next several months Christiansen took Paik's piano and continued to make actions with it in classrooms and the concert halls around the Music Academy. Finally the head of the academy gave Christiansen an ultimatum: either the piano goes or Christiansen is expelled. He chose the latter and took with him both Paik's piano and a handful of fellow students to form the dutt, the young Danish Composer's Society. This marked a new era for both music composition as well as Fluxus and performance art in Denmark. Christiansen and Paik remained lifelong pen pals. Much of their correspondence can be found in the Henning Christiansen archive.

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