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EN KILDE TIL INDTRYK OG UDTRYK, INSPIRATION, NETVÆRK OG OPLEVELSER. SKREVET AF KUNSTNERE, DESIGNERE, FOTOGRAFER OG KREATIVE PERSONLIGHEDER FRA HELE DK.

COBRA DAGBOG #3: BUILDING UPON THE COBRA HERITAGE

FREDAG 24-07-2015

ANDRE BLOGGERE



Reinder Oldenburger, New York | Photo by Tammy Cedar.

CoBra Dagbog #3 Building Upon The CoBra Heritage

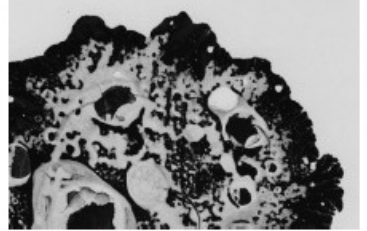
Since [the meeting](#) at the Château of Leyduin, back in February between [Ben Haveman](#), [Menno Baars](#) and myself, the Danish/Dutch groupings [Neo-Expo](#) and its globally aimed [Neo-CoBra](#) movement, has in several discussions problematized the lack of humane values, that we as representatives of our individual nations have seen deprived. The humane responsibility is somehow missing in modern Europe. On this occasion, I have taken upon myself the task of collecting conversations and questionings by various young painters, poets, musicians, critical thinkers and associates to the Neo-CoBra idea.



KATRINE FINNICH



MARIA & LOUISE



NINA WASLAND



PUK EWDOKIA



LINE REFSTRUP



CAMILLA KONRADSEN

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Johannes Holt-Iversen, 2015.

The Danish scepticism

The [Neo-CoBrA manifesto](#) opened up the artistic debate back in April 2014, an artistic debate that occurred on the internet due to the evolving extremism inside Europe in the form of a populist right wing and outside Europe in the form of right-fascistic Islamism, both suddenly affected the daily lives we as modern Europeans were living.

[Martin Elsborg](#) and I recently had a correspondence about the problems mentioned above. We have particularly talked about the Danish election campaign and slanderous rhetorical political game it spawned. It has been an eye-opener for those of us who have dealt with it in our work and how to become aware of our lack of humane expression in modern Europe. Furthermore the specific Danish election result that came as a conclusion to the worries Danes are having when it comes to the global refugee issue.

In continuation with the Neo-CoBrA manifesto that emphasizes the problems with the refugee flow-analysis, previously mentioned in the [UNHCR global trends report](#) from 2014. The inhumane political opinions have increased. And after a walk in the media mill the European politician, and their urge to use mass media spin, have become twice as inhumane.



Reinder Oldenburger, 2015.

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Reinder Oldenburger, New York, 2015 | Photo by Tammy Cedar.

Dutch/American painter [Reinder Oldenburger](#), a Neo-CoBrA painter that I have also corresponded with through mail, puts the political issues and by that also the refugee issues this way; *"Many of today's issues are global issues. Conflicts not only affect the region but the entire world. As do the recent economic crisis and global warming."* Meaning that the European idea of dealing with these issues on a national continental level only, can cause a fatal outcome, our distance from the rest of the world can become much bigger than it perhaps could've been if we dealt with this in the open.

But Martin Elsberg also wisely pointed out that when the realities seriously are knocking on the European doorstep, humanity often steps in. *"I, myself come from a small border city (Gedser). Last year we were visited by approximately 100 refugees from Syria, and all members of our community embraced them and helped as best they could, even those who voted for the populist right-wing at the general election,"* Martin explains. He also emphasizes its incomprehension facing the tough political rhetoric.

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Martin Elsborg, Rejsen Ud I Det Blaa, 2013.



Martin Elsborg, Skeptiske Danskere / Sceptical Danes, 2014.

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An example describing the modern Danish state of mind well, is also Martin Elsberg's painting "Sceptical Danes" which includes a variety of shapes, one more filled with envy or concern than the other. Martin explains that when he painted the work "Sceptical Danes" at the beginning of 2014, he could just sense that there was something brewing. Elsberg contributes "... I can only conclude that DF (right-wing political party) has been the most successful in utilizing the Danish scepticism about primarily the Syrian refugee issue. Of course I am sorry for that political development, but as I mentioned earlier in our conversation, we must respect our political system and that people are voting different from ourselves ..."

Both do we agree that the sceptical aspect and thus xenophobia, does not happen only to foreigners heading towards Europe but also between European citizens. It is a clear sign of our destabilization and our enclosed mind-set we are heading towards.

"I deliberately painted two of the characters with crowns on their heads, to show that we go and live like little kings in our own little limited world, a world where fear of the unknown has taken control..." concludes Martin Elsberg about his painting.

But how can we through our small global artist community, embrace or simply ignore scepticism as if it weren't so rampant among European citizens? A [good example](#) of pure curatorial and artistic scepticism, which also can become an issue, is the Danish Artists' Autumn Exhibition. For years they have "banned" colourism and the new CoBrA aspect completely, they have had several judge-committees that deliberately rejects the growing amount of popular new-CoBrA and neo-expressionistic art submitted because this is not to aim for in a Scandinavian context, that builds upon the French institutionalized art-traditions of [Duchamp](#).

In the judge-committees eyes Neo-CoBrA should not be attributed to have any contemporary value, unless it plays on some sort of Neo-DaDa conceptualized art appreciation leaving all heritage and cultural grounding behind. But where are we heading when part of the same European cultural heritage is being judged old and out? Marcel Duchamp did live at the same time as CoBrA, Henri Matisse and Picasso but no one is questioning the so-called "art experts" judgement anymore apparently.



Reinder Oldenburger, New York, 2015.

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The timeless aspect of free expression

Dutch/American painter [Reinder Oldenburger](#) and I had furthermore a conversation about the aspect and influences arising from the CoBrA heritage and the urge towards free expression, when living and working in New York City, outside Europe.

Reinder came with an important point, that free expression and the urge hereof is **timeless**. And that particularly fed my curiosity upon how free expression, when living in one of the biggest and most dynamic cities, can evolve. *"In a more direct way New York City undeniably influences the way I work. The architecture, the high pace and emotions that go with living in this electrifying metropolis. I find myself working in a highly energetic way, feeding off the buzzing energy of the city,"* explains Reinder Oldenburger and furthermore concludes my questions about how NYC and the aspect of living abroad has influenced his work; *"My art and my studio have become my refuge. It is my way of processing the impressions that as a New Yorker, I am bombarded with every day."*

When it comes to the aspect of connectivity between human beings Reinder Oldenburger elaborate on some of the topics I myself have been commenting upon in my own work. Through our exponential use of technology, we are more connected than ever before, but the vast speed of the very same technology separates and sort of disconnects us even more than the connectivity we were aiming towards. According to Reinder it is our challenge as artists to retain certain humanity. *"In our art we must above all retain humanity which we can achieve by using the powerful methods that the CoBrA founders developed: freedom of color, shape and pure child-like expression. By creating a feeling of connectedness there will be less conflict and more acceptance,"* as Reinder Oldenburger concludes it in our transatlantic e-mail correspondence.



Johannes Holt-Iversen, Searching Srebrenica, 2015.

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Johannes Holt-Iversen, Copenhagen, 2014.

No religious boundaries

As the 1980s artist groups such as "[Neue Wilden](#)" explained to us; neo-expressionistic art (and modern art after the 1970s in general) has no religious boundaries. Now we have to take neo-expressionism to the next level, because right now self-censorship is flourishing throughout Europe, Asia and in the Middle East. This self-censorship is worrying me more than ever before. Art has to be free of boundaries it has the function of regulating our modern societies and keep us aware of our responsibilities as human beings. Art keeps us humane when there are no other places to go, when religious houses and spiritual sanctuaries are getting darker and when political structures tempts to keep us under control. Art can break all these boundaries on multiple levels, and that is specifically why expressionistic art such as Neo-CoBrA has contemporary societal value and a voice of today.

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