

**ELMGREEN & DRAGSET: *USELESS BODIES?*
FONDAZIONE PRADA, MILAN**

Fondazione Prada presents “Useless Bodies?”, an exhibition by the artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset taking place in Milan from 31 March to 22 August 2022.

Spanning more than 3,000 square meters, “Useless Bodies?” is one of the most ambitious thematic investigations realized by Fondazione Prada to date. Conceived for four gallery spaces and the courtyard of its Milan venue, the exhibition explores the present condition of the body in the post-industrial age in which it seems that our physical presence is losing its centrality or is even completely superfluous. This shift impacts every aspect of our lives: from our working conditions to our health, our interpersonal relationships, and the way we retain information. The exhibition “Useless Bodies?” also explores how we physically adapt to a world increasingly based on two-dimensional imagery, not least in the light of the current pandemic.

As stated by Elmgreen & Dragset, “our bodies are no longer the main agents of our existence. They don’t generate value in our societies’ advanced production methods as they did in the industrial era. One could claim our physical selves have even become more of an obstacle than an advantage. In the 19th century, the body was the producer of daily goods, whereas, in the 20th century, the body’s role became more that of the consumer. Twenty years into the 21st century the status of the body is now that of the product – with our data gathered and sold by Big Tech. With the publicly available knowledge surrounding the harvesting of data from tech companies being so inane, and the rapidly accelerating rate at which such companies are expanding into every aspect of our lives, it does sometimes feel a little scary to think about our bodies’ future role.”

Perception of the body is an underlying theme that connects many aspects of the sculptural and performative work of Elmgreen & Dragset, who throughout their career have explored subjects such as growing up, intimacy, identity, different modes of living and how we navigate the public sphere.

Following the exhibition path from the Podium, to the Nord gallery, to the Cisterna, the audience will encounter several immersive installations. The Milan premises of Fondazione Prada are transformed into a series of different universes, each with its own atmosphere, theme, and aesthetic.

On the ground floor of the Podium, classical and neoclassical sculptures meet works by Elmgreen & Dragset in a synchronic constellation. Inspired by Fondazione Prada’s inaugural exhibition “Serial Classic,” curated by Salvatore Settis and designed by Rem Koolhaas in 2015, this juxtaposition of contemporary and historic sculptures shows both similarities and differences in how artists have mediated the male body through sculptural practices spanning centuries. In this section the artists have developed a complex system of cross-references creating a dialogue between old and new that demonstrates that, “the past is

never dead. It is actually never past,” as stated by the American writer William Faulkner.

The second floor of Podium is transformed into a vast, abandoned office landscape which focuses on the changed role of the body in the context of labor. The installation consists of a repetitive pattern of seemingly endless rows of workstations, referencing the geometric formats of 20th century minimal sculpture. This environment also evokes dystopian movie sets from films such as Jacques Tati’s *Playtime* (1967) and Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil* (1985).

In the Nord gallery, the audience enters a futuristic vision of a domestic setting—an eerie fusion of a bunker, a spaceship, and a science lab, portraying an unlivable home of extreme vanity. The immaculate, dehumanized appearance of this space, emphasized by clinically designed objects, raises questions about how we exist in our homes today, especially now that we share them with technology to such a high degree. Like a detective or an uninvited guest, the visitor is free to wander the space, gather clues, and make up stories in an alienating environment, similar to a sci-fi movie set in which the only moving presence is that of a robotic dog.

In the Cisterna, the artists look into how the wellness, leisure, and health industries pressure us to conform to new body ideals. The three rooms of this building are turned into a forsaken spa-like environment, including an abandoned swimming pool and a locker room. As our bodies are being rendered useless by technological innovations, the ever-expanding wellness, leisure, and health sectors are offering countless new ways to “solve the problem of the imperfect body”. The central room of the Cisterna features a new work titled *What’s Left?*, which can be interpreted as a representation of the body that today struggles to find its role as a political actor or instrument of social change.

The way our bodies are physically regulated in the public sphere is explored by a number of sculptures by Elmgreen & Dragset presented in the outdoor spaces of Fondazione Prada. These works are subtle alterations of everyday objects, none of which can be used as we would expect them to be. They encourage a re-evaluation of the ordinary and highlight how we negotiate the control mechanisms embedded in public spaces.

A 500-page publication, titled “Useless Bodies?” and published by Fondazione Prada, is conceived as a thematic extension of the exhibition rather than a conventional catalogue. It is a reader with multiple perspectives from over 35 authors —philosophers, artists, writers, scientists, and thinkers— addressing our changing perceptions of the body and its status today.

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Elmgreen & Dragset – Biographical note

Michael Elmgreen (born 1961 in Copenhagen, Denmark) and Ingar Dragset (born 1969 in Trondheim, Norway) are based in Berlin and have worked together as an artist duo since 1995.

They have held numerous solo exhibitions at art institutions worldwide, including EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Espoo (2020); The Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2019-20); The Whitechapel Gallery, London (2018–2019); Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2016); UCCA, Beijing (2016); PLATEAU, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul (2015); Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (2014); Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2013–14); Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2011); ZKM Museum of Modern Art, Karlsruhe (2010); Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (2009); Serpentine Gallery, London (2006); Tate Modern, London (2004); and Kunsthalle Zürich (2001).

Their work has been included in the Bangkok (2018), Istanbul (2013, 2011, 2001), Liverpool (2012), Singapore (2011), Moscow (2011, 2007), Venice (2009, 2003), Gwangju (2006, 2002), São Paulo (2002), and Berlin (1998) biennials, and in 2009 they received a special mention for their exhibition “The Collectors” in the Nordic and Danish Pavilions at the 53rd Venice Biennale. Elmgreen & Dragset curated the 15th Istanbul Biennial in 2017.

The artists were shortlisted for the Hugo Boss Prize, Guggenheim Museum, New York (2000) and won the Preis der Nationalgalerie, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2002). In 2012 Elmgreen & Dragset were selected for London’s Fourth Plinth Commission in Trafalgar Square. In 2015 the artists received honorary doctorates at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and in 2020 they were awarded the B.Z.-Kulturpreis in Berlin. In 2021, Elmgreen & Dragset were awarded the 14th Robert Jacobsen Prize of the Würth Foundation, Künzelsau, Germany.

**USELESS BODIES?
ELMGREEN & DRAGSET**

List of exhibited artworks

PODIUM

Elmgreen & Dragset
Bogdan, 2020
Bronze, lacquer, clothes, wheelchair
Courtesy the artists and KÖNIG GALERIE,
Berlino, Londra, Seoul

Runner, 1st century BCE
Bronze
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples

Elmgreen & Dragset
Point of View, Part 1, 2019-2021
Epoxy resin, lacquer
Courtesy the artists / Kistefos Museum,
Norway

Elmgreen & Dragset
Dirty Socks, 2019
Polished bronze, steel, lacquer, socks
Courtesy the artists and KÖNIG GALERIE,
Berlin, London, Seoul / Yoram Roth
Collection, Berlin

Athlete with Strigil, 1938
Plaster cast
Museo dell'Arte Classica Sapienza
Università di Roma, Gipsoteca, Rome

Elmgreen & Dragset
Cell for Sculpture, 2022
Steel, lacquer, plaster cast
Courtesy the artists and Museo dell'Arte
Classica Sapienza Università di Roma,
Rome

Filippo Albacini
Achille morente, 1854 [Dying Achilles]
Marble
Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Rome

Elmgreen & Dragset
Flo, 2020
Bronze, lacquer
Courtesy the artists and Pace Gallery

Bertel Thorvaldsen
Hyrdedreng, 1822-1825 [Shepherd boy]
Marble
Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen

Elmgreen & Dragset
Pregnant White Maid, 2017
Aluminum, stainless steel, lacquer, clothing
Courtesy the artists and Perrotin /
Collection of Bancrédito, Puerto Rico

Elmgreen & Dragset
Invisible, 2017
Bronze, marble, wood, lacquer, clothing
Courtesy the artists and Perrotin / Nicola
Erni Collection, CH

Elmgreen & Dragset
The Painter, Fig. 2, 2021
Bronze, stainless steel, aluminum, lacquer
Courtesy the artists and Pace Gallery

Elmgreen & Dragset
He (Silver), 2013
Epoxy resin, silver lacquer
Courtesy the artists and Perrotin / Private
collection, Paris

Luigi Secchi
Al lido, post 1893 [At the beach]
Plaster cast
Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, in storage
at Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan

Farnese Antinous, 2nd century
Marble
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples

Elmgreen & Dragset
Multiple Me, Fig. 2, 2022
Steel, lacquer, mirrors
Courtesy the artists

John Börjeson
Kägelspelaren, 1871 [Skittle player]
Marble
Gothenburg Museum of Art, Götaplatsen,
Göteborg, Sweden

Bertel Thorvaldsen
Ganymedes rækker skålen, 1804
[Ganymede offering the cup]
Marble
Villa Tasca, Famiglia d'Almerita, Palermo

Pietro Tenerani
Fauno in atto di suonare la tibia, 1859
[Faunus playing an aulos]
Marble
Villa Tasca, Famiglia d'Almerita, Palermo

Elmgreen & Dragset
The Observer (Umbro), 2021
Epoxy, aluminum, steel, lacquer, clothing
Courtesy the Artists and KÖNIG GALERIE,
Berlin, London, Seoul

Elmgreen & Dragset
For today I am a child, 2016
Gilded bronze, textile, metal, fabric, glass,
wood, paint
Courtesy the artists and Massimo De Carlo,
Milan, London, Hong Kong / Collection of
Keith Fox and Tom Keyes

Farnese Gladiator, Roman copy of 190-199,
Greek original c. 460 BCE
Marble
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples

Elmgreen & Dragset
This is How We Play Together, 2021
Bronze, lacquer
Courtesy the artists and Perrotin / Christen
Sveaas Art Collection

Elmgreen & Dragset
Elevator, 2022
Steel, lacquer, stainless steel
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Watching, 2021
Gilded bronze
Courtesy the artists and Perrotin / Yaacov
Gorsd Collection, Art consultancy Idit Orni

PODIUM+1

Elmgreen & Dragset
*It's The Small Things in Life That Really
Matter, Blah, Blah, Blah*, 2006
Wood, door handles, hinges, paint,
electronic number display, number
dispenser, plant, pot, seating arrangement
with 4 seats
Courtesy the artists / ZKM | Center for Art
and Media Karlsruhe

Elmgreen & Dragset
Flint Water, 2022
Watercooler, Flint water
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Garden of Eden, 2022
MDF, aluminum, fabric, monitors,
keyboards, computer mice, office chairs
Courtesy the artists

NORD

Lucio Fontana
Concetto spaziale. La fine di Dio, 1963
[Spatial concept. The end of God]
Oil, gashes, holes and graffiti on canvas
Private collection

Elmgreen & Dragset
Doubt, 2019
Stainless steel, Oriol, aluminum, bronze,
lacquer
Courtesy the artists and Pace Gallery /
Sunpride Foundation

Elmgreen & Dragset
Humanized Architecture, 2019
Stainless steel
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Tailbone, 2019
Aluminum, lacquer, Oriol, stainless steel,
steel
Courtesy Kukje Gallery / KyungTak Kim
Collection, Seoul

Nancy Grossmann
Black, 1973-1974
Leather, wood, paint, epoxy, cast aluminum
and metal hardware
Courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC,
New York, USA

Elmgreen & Dragset
The Bed, 2019
Sterling silver, fabric, cellphones
Courtesy the artists and Georg Jensen

Elmgreen & Dragset
Looking Back, 2022
Stainless steel, aluminum, paint, easel
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Untitled (After The Lovers), 2015
Zellan, stainless steel, MDF, lacquer
Courtesy the artists and Perrotin

Elmgreen & Dragset
Powerless Structures, Fig. 282, 2022
Transparency, lightbox, plastic tube, rubber,
hole drilled into the wall
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Circulation, 2019
Stainless steel
Courtesy the artists and Pace Gallery

Elmgreen & Dragset
Pollarded Tree, 2022
C-print on aluminum
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Untitled, 2011
Steel, wood, silicone male figure, fabric
Courtesy the artists and Perrotin

CISTERNA

Elmgreen & Dragset
Marriage, 2004
Mirrors, porcelain sinks, taps, stainless steel
tubing, soap
Courtesy the artists and KÖNIG GALERIE,
Berlin, London, Seoul

Elmgreen & Dragset
The Touch, 2011
Massage bench, silicone, fabric
Courtesy the artists and Perrotin

Elmgreen & Dragset
Powerless Structures, Fig. 19, 1998
Underwear, blue jeans
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Spogliatoio 2 / Powerless Structures, Fig. 128, 2022 [Changing room 2 / Powerless Structures, Fig. 128]
Teak door, metal handles and hinges
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Powerless Structures, Fig. 137, 2015
Wood, door handles, hinges, safety locks, chain
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Superstars (Gold), 2019
Bronze, goldleaf
Courtesy the artists and Massimo De Carlo, Milan, London, Hong Kong

Elmgreen & Dragset
What's Left?, 2021
Silicone, clothing, wire rope, balancing pole
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Too Heavy, 2017
Aluminum, lacquer, stainless steel, fabric
Courtesy the artists and KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin, London, Seoul

Elmgreen & Dragset
Free Play, 2018
Wood, stain, paint
Courtesy the artists and KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin, London, Seoul

Elmgreen & Dragset
A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall, 2021
Bronze, patina
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Piscina di Largo Isarco, 2022 [Largo Isarco pool]
Mixed media

Courtesy the artists
Elmgreen & Dragset
I must make amends, Fig. 2, 2019
Bronze, patina
Courtesy the artists and KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin, London, Seoul

COURTYARD

Elmgreen & Dragset
Adaptation, Fig. 16, 2020
Stainless steel
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Statue of Liberty, Fig. 2, 2018–2021
Original section of the Berlin wall, cash machine, stainless steel
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Adaptation, Fig. 19, 2020
Stainless steel
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Powerless Structures, Fig. 117, 2001
MDF, iron, paint, silk-screened letters
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Marbella Beach, June 21st, 1989, 2015
Bronze, paint
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
Adaptation, Fig. 9, 2020
Stainless steel
Courtesy the artists

Elmgreen & Dragset
The Outsiders, 2020
Mercedes W123, silicone, clothing, packed artworks
Courtesy the artists