

## **Interview SUPERMARKET June 2021**

### **Juxtapose Art Fair**

#### **A new gathering for artist-run projects**

#### **Aarhus, Denmark**

Juxtapose Art Fair is a brand new non-commercial art fair that debuted in August 2021. The art fair is not focused on sales; instead the goal is to celebrate the diversity of the artist-run sector, and to support the artists behind this sector. The fair showcased 31 Danish and international artist-run projects that are led and organised by visual artists and/or independent curators. All kinds of projects were on view, including artist-run exhibition spaces, artist collectives, independent art publications, and other projects that fall outside the walls of museums and commercial galleries. By bringing very different artist-run projects together in one space, Juxtapose Art Fair hopes to highlight the unique profile of each initiative (hence our name: “juxtapose” means to place close together for contrasting effect). The public was able to learn more about each initiative and the larger artist-run sector through a series of talks, panel debates, and tours to local initiatives in Aarhus. Altogether, Juxtapose Art Fair aims to strengthen the artist-run sector and hopes to shine new light on this vital, yet often overlooked, corner of the art world.

#### **By the time this interview will be published, the very first edition of Juxtapose Art Fair will have just finished, but what are your expectations and impressions so far?**

It has been a great experience working with all these artist-run initiatives over the past months/years. There is a really cool DIY vibe in this whole sector - everyone has been really helpful and supportive, both the exhibitors, our partners and others who have been willing to share their experiences with us, like Supermarket Art Fair! We are really looking forward to seeing all these people in one room at the same time. We think there is going to be a fabulous atmosphere.

#### **It is not so common that new art fairs for independent galleries and projects pop up. What motivated you to take on this challenge?**

Two main things had our attention. We have seen a lot of artist-run initiatives popping up over the last few years and the national funding body in Denmark has been really great about focusing on this part of the art world. But unfortunately we haven't seen a big surge from the broader public into artist-run spaces, because they are not common knowledge yet. We feel people are really missing out if they are not finding these hidden gems.

At the same time we are seeing a lot of organizational innovation from artists who are thinking outside the box when it comes to how/what/where they show art, how they self-organize, think about inclusion, and make stuff happen. This makes us very proud and curious at the same time. We see the fair as an opportunity for artists working in this sector to learn from each other and share creative solutions, and hopefully to create a more self-sustained way of running independent platforms.

**How has it been to introduce a new art fair for artist-run initiatives, for example in terms of collaboration or competition with other similar fairs, funding opportunities, interest in participation from the initiatives or the Covid-19 situation?**

We have had nothing but goodwill from other people in the field, especially from other artist-run fairs. There seems to be a shared sense that when it comes to visibility for the artist-run sector, more is better. More of these kinds of art fairs means more support for the artists, more audience engagement, more appreciation and understanding for how the artist-run sector feeds into the larger arts ecosystem. So even though there are not many independent fairs out there, we don't feel like we are competing against them because we share many of the same goals and values. Everyone we have reached out to who could potentially see us as competition has received us with open arms; we are really in awe and very thankful for that.

Regarding funding it seems we slip in between two categories - a regular curated exhibition and a commercial art fair - which has made it a little hard to get support. Thankfully we got enough funding to do the fair this year and we are hoping that private foundations will follow the Danish Arts Foundation's example and shift focus towards supporting the artist-run scene over the next few years.

We have been in contact with our exhibitors for almost a year now and we have felt a big commitment from them and a great will to make this fair happen. They have really embraced our core concept and ran with the idea of showcasing their organizations in different ways, for example by planning performances, screenings, debates, and other activities that will form a large part of our public program. Their enthusiasm was especially palpable in the months leading up to the fair, when everyone was looking forward to travelling and meeting new people after the relative isolation and quiet many of us have experienced over the past year.

COVID-19 has definitely made it a challenging time to start up a new fair, especially because we feel that gathering in-person is crucial for spreading awareness about the artist-run

sector and strengthening the sector itself. But our exhibitors and partners have been super understanding and supportive, which has made it way easier for us to navigate all the uncertainties and ever-changing circumstances around the pandemic.

**Do you already have plans for the second edition of Juxtapose Art Fair? What comes next?**

It is our plan to make Juxtapose Art Fair a biennale if the funding opportunities and sponsor agreements allow for another edition in two years. But remember, this is our first time! We have learnt so much over the past three years and will continue to learn and grow and develop moving forward. Future editions of the fair may look pretty different based on our growing understanding of the artist-run sector, evolving needs of the exhibiting artists, etc.

**Why is the artist-run scene important to you?**

We are coming from different backgrounds as the group consists of one artist (Jacob) and two curators (Sasha and Pam). Jacob was part of an artist-run space for a couple of years and really enjoyed the freedom of doing his own thing, and moving swiftly outside of the constraints of big organizations and their 4-year planning schedules. But gaining visibility in this game is hard and the whole structure is very fragile, so Jacob and a colleague (Lars Bang) wanted to just DO something to create a platform for artist-run spaces.

Sasha and Pam first became familiar with the artist-run sector through their work at Aarhus Billedkunstcenter, which is a municipally-funded artist resource center that supports the professional artist community in Aarhus and Central Jutland. It quickly became obvious how artist-run galleries, studio collectives, and project spaces fill a vital role for local artists. When they later started working as an independent curatorial duo, Sasha and Pam organized many exhibitions, residencies, and event programs in artist-run spaces throughout Aarhus, and experienced first-hand how the sector functions as a welcoming space for experimental projects.