

MICHAEL KVIUM

HORSSENS ART MUSEUM



Michael Kvium

The Danish artist Michael Kvium (b. 1955) has for more than four decades created art that in various ways depicts the dark and unpleasant nooks and crannies of human existence. In art, we are confronted with our own cruel humanity, the one that we do not want to be seen, but would rather keep hidden from the outside world. Michael Kvium is the artist who orchestrates what we already know exists but do not want to see. The stage curtain is torn away in front of us, and we are presented with life's diverse narratives that unfold from birth to death. Horsens Art Museum holds Denmark's largest collection of the artist's works. The collection follows Michael Kvium from the very beginning of the 1980s, and especially the artistic breakthrough in the mid-1980s, all the way to the present day with several of the artist's leading recent paintings. From the first experimental years of performance and video art in the artist group WORST in the early 1980s and until today, a consistently persistent artistic expression is seen, through which Michael Kvium has illuminated and processed countless styles, subjects and motifs.



Michael Kvium's figurative language is based on recognition. But it is a recognition that can be as realistic as it can be abstract. The artist uses many recognizable symbols and motifs in his universe, but often changes them and their context so that we as spectators never feel completely sure of what we are confronted with in the encounter with his art.

Michael Kvium paints the privileged Western man. It is among these people that he himself grew up and has his daily life. He often mixes gender, age and body types in such a way that one can rarely be sure whether the motives are one or the other. The figures often represent all or none, and it ultimately depends on the eyes that see how the human deformities appear.

Horsens MC, 1983

The American road movie *Easy Rider*, with Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda as outcasts riding around the American countryside on their motorcycles, inspired the young Michael Kvium, who like all other young boys of that age wanted to be free on the country road outside the norms and rules of society.

Michael Kvium saved up and realized his dream of buying a motorcycle. He was 18 years old when he became part of Horsens MC-Klub and then drove down through Europe and participated in MC meetings. While Michael Kvium was in the motorcycle community, he completed his training as a magazine illustrator after a three-year apprenticeship with Mogens Schou Christiansen at Horsens Folkeblad. Here he learned to use his eyes in a whole new way to get the right proportions into his illustrations.

Towards the end of his time at Horsens Folkeblad, he began painting and drawing motifs from the motorcycle world, often meetings and portraits of friends. Michael Kvium had always wanted to be an artist, but now the idea came closer. It was also paintings and drawings of his time in the motorcycle community, which he sent to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts when he was admitted as a student in 1979. Michael Kvium painted predominantly hyper-realistic the first time at the Academy of Fine Arts. This can be seen in the painting *Horsens MC*, in which the motorcycle environment at home from Horsens still lingers and gives the artist great inspiration in exploring the painting's many possibilities. In the early 1980s, there was a great desire for a showdown with modernism. Artists, like Michael Kvium, were tired of art always having to be defined and legitimized through language. He did not want philosophy to be used as a guideline for art, but instead to set art free, and through this Michael Kvium found a great interest in reading especially George Bataille, and he began to explore the human shadow sides; those which could not always be fully explained through language, but which could be explored through transgressions of artistic boundaries.



For Men Only, 1983 & Self-portrait, 1985

When Michael Kvium leaves the Academy of Fine Arts after a difficult period and then returns again, it is with a more radical approach to his own art. He feels like painting everything he is not allowed to do. He wants to paint cynically and persistently in his new insights into the human dark sides. It turns into pictures, which he compiles in a number of collages, as seen in the series *For Men Only*. Here the body is seen bare and excessively reproduced. Postmodernism's 'loss of the great narratives' means that the body is almost left as the only manageable at the same time as painting again becomes a popular means of expression. Nudity is given free rein to provoke the viewer, and the series is in many ways the starting point for a change in Michael Kvium's artistic style, which suddenly has the opportunity to unfold more bluntly. The supernaturalist style is disintegrating more and more, and in the mid-1980s Michael Kvium's style has shifted to what we see in the painting *Self-portrait* from 1985. *Self-portrait* becomes the first work that museum director Claus Hagedorn-Olsen buys for the collection of Michael Kvium works for Horsens Art Museum, and the work is the starting point for a more than 30-year-long connection to Horsens Art Museum. *Self-portrait* is a painting in dark greenish shades, where a bald man (apparently from the title of the work the artist himself) stands and rests his arms on a window sill to look out at a world we as spectators do not have access to. A composition that has likeness to works by Danish artist Vilhelm Hammershøj and J.F. Willumsen and American artist Edward Hopper by virtue of the work's gloomy but quiet atmosphere and dark morbid color composition. On the wall is the man's shadow, which with its broad shoulders and thin arm gives the impression of something dangerous and ominous.



U.T., 1986 & *Souvenir*, 1987

In 1987, Michael Kvium shows the series *Souvenir* in the exhibition *Women* at the Prague Gallery. *Souvenirs* along with other works and series such as the etchings *Engle eksisterer skam* from 1987, receive enormous criticism for displaying a perverted misogyny. But Michael Kvium has no desire to appear misogynistic, but simply to showcase all that we do not normally see or turn a blind eye to. Many of the works depicted classic fantasies about women that could be found in porn magazines or taboos found in society.

U.T. depicts a naked woman sitting cross-legged on a chair and examining her own gender in a hand mirror. The work sheds light on topics and taboos around female sexuality, self-examination and satisfaction. The motif relates to the legendary handbook *Kvinde kend din krop*, first published in 1975. *U.T.* presents an intimate and private scene that we as spectators witness when the stage curtain is pulled off and exposes the woman to us.

Souvenir is a series of eight pictures (of which Horsens Kunstmuseum has one of the pictures) of cut, bleeding body parts on a brownish backgrounds, which together make it look like a woman's body, right next to the torso. The series was inspired by an event where one parted female was found in Christianshavn Kanal, a cruel incident where even the woman's severed head in its time appeared on the front pages of newspapers, but when Michael Kvium himself took up the subject it brought even greater furore. The paintings are cross-border because, in the same way as the media in their time, they showed and wrote about the various truncated body parts, help to remove the human from the body. One by one, they make the gruesome human tragedy newsworthy. With the *Souvenir* series, Michael Kvium crossed a kind of moral limit for what one can actually afford to paint, and then art is free to take any form when the worst limit is reached. As long as there is a necessary narrative in relation to art and man, then there are no subjects that Michael Kvium will not move towards.



Patent I-V, 1987 & Fleshandbloodimage 1-4, 1989 & Untitled Image no. 12, 1990 & Wastelanded, 2011

Many of Michael Kvium's works revolve around the deformation of the human body. In both Patent I-V, Kødogblod picture 1-4, Untitled image no. 12 and Wastelanded see motifs that bring to mind something bodily that has become so deformed and distorted that it is almost difficult to identify whether it is actually human or not. The works contain all objects resembling a symbiosis of preparations and dissolved human and animal bodies. It can already be seen in Self-Portrait all the way back from 1985, how the human body becomes the subject of distortion in the portrayal. However, the deformation is not only found in the purely bodily, but just as much, the deformation in Michael Kvium's works is an expression of major societal problems. Society is being deformed, both physically and spiritually. Many of the works deal with our own human dealings with nature and how we have done more and more damage over time. Michael Kvium depicts what he himself sees in society, and the deformations are a reaction to the many ways in which we are destroying the world we depend on. The paintings are therefore almost horror visions of what might end up if we as humans continue to act without reflection and thoughtfulness.

The entire collection of Michael Kvium works at Horsens Art Museum can be seen on the website, www.horsenskunstmuseum.dk.

