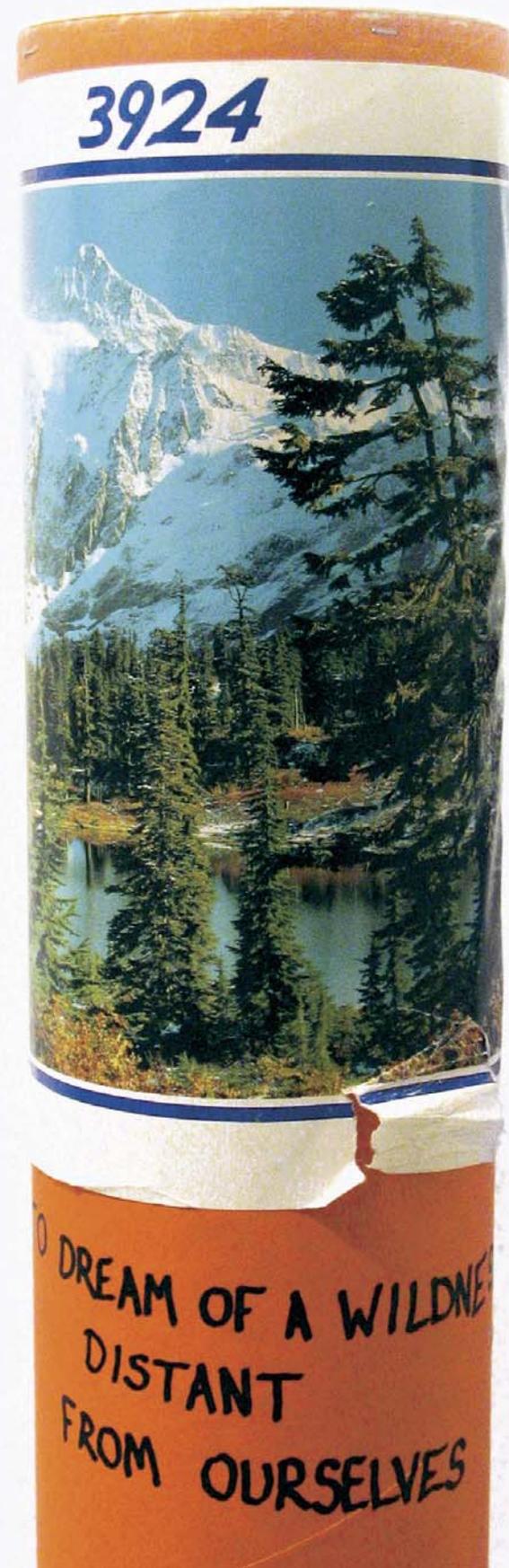


IT IS IN VAIN TO DREAM OF A WILDNESS DISTANT FROM OURSELVES

AN INTERVIEW WITH TUE GREENFORT BY FRANCESCA PAGLIUCA





FRANCESCA PAGLIUCA: Your studio is in Berlin but you seem to be more interested in working outside of it. Daniel Buren stated that the studio 'is the first frame, the first limit, upon which all the other ones will depend'. Would you agree with him?

TUE GREENFORT: I do to a certain degree, but I would define the sphere in which I work as my 'studio'. I work mostly in very diverse places, and the travelling to the sites where I am invited to exhibit is also part of the working process. I have been working for several years from my office in a two-room apartment in Berlin. The chance to have a studio came up only recently, and when I saw the spaces I decided to take it. So it's the first time that I've had a workshop, which gives me the opportunity to produce differently and experiment.

I work spontaneously and in a non-linear way – I don't sit with a nice white sheet of paper in front of me and then make perfect sketches for new projects. I don't believe in the studio as the only production place for art, and artists shouldn't be defined by these classical terms of artistic production. Artists can work from wherever they are.

FP: Why Berlin?

TG: My main gallery is there, and I am closer to my family in Denmark than in Frankfurt am Main where I was living before. Also many of my friends live there. It's a good place to be. The city has some huge economic problems and this makes it an interesting place to live for artists because within western Europe it's one of the bigger cities with lower rents – as an artist you can live cheaply here.

FP: What is your daily routine in your studio?

TG: I am not working that much in my studio at the moment because I've been, and still am, travelling a lot. Actually there is hardly any routine in my life at the moment!

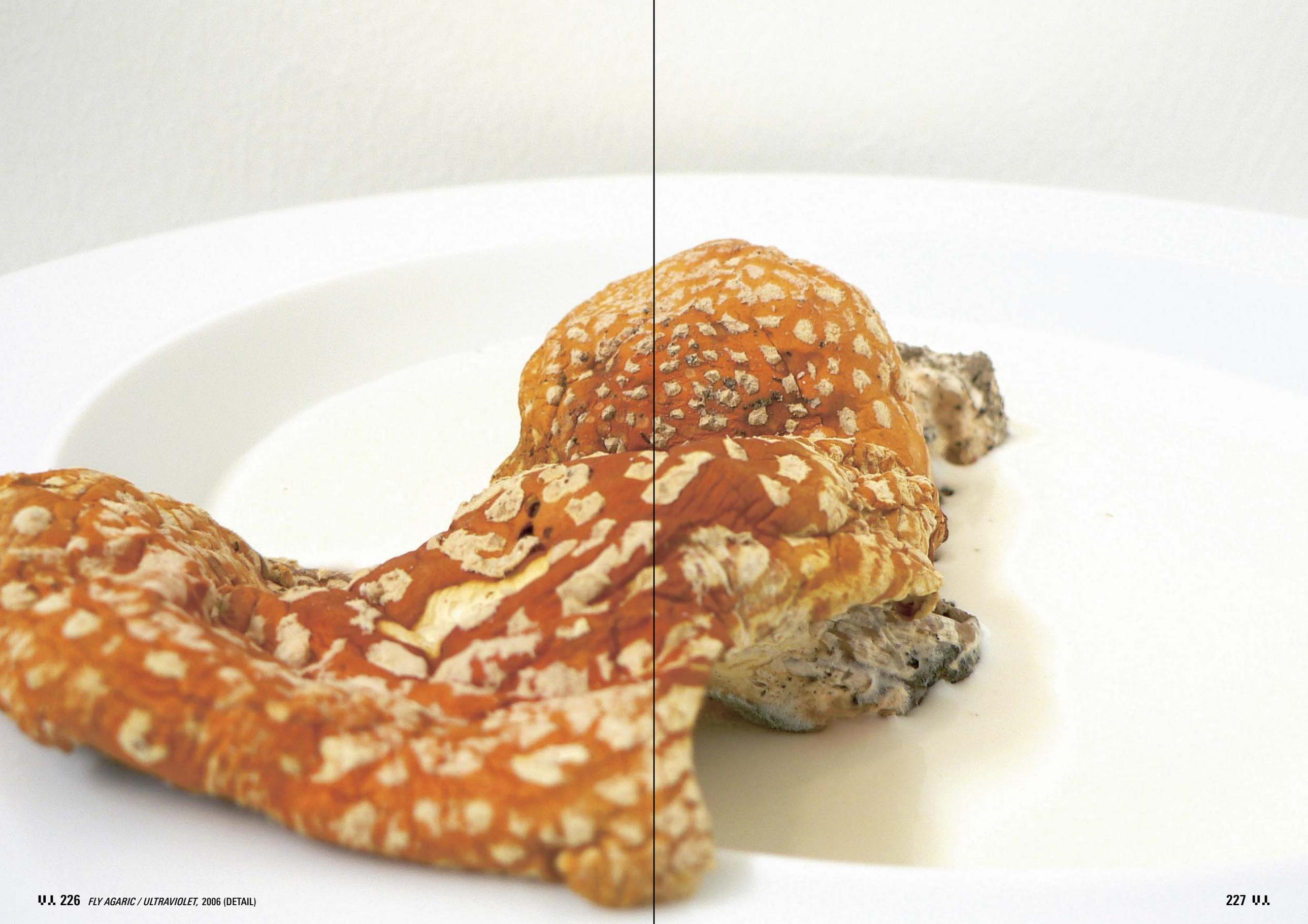
FP: In the last decade much contemporary art practice has focused on specific contexts, with the aim of reflecting on environmental issues and public space. How would you position your artistic research in terms of this tendency and are there artists who have served as a model for your working method?

TG: A whole range of artists are of great importance to me: Asger Jorn, Constant, Robert Smithson, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Andrea Fraser, John Knight, Martha Rosler, Nils Norman, Thomas Bayle, The Copenhagen Free University (Jacob Jacobsen and Henriette Heisse), Simon Starling, Lawrence Weiner, Hans Haacke, Douglas Huebler, Robert Barry, Dan Peterman, Dan Graham, Adrian Piper...

I see my own work as being rooted in, dividing off into, or overlapping between, contexts like urbanity, environmentalism, architecture, design and art.

That sounds so structured, which I'm mostly not, I follow these different interests – by reacting to and finding challenging solutions to the curatorial concept of the different exhibitions I am involved in, and of course their physical framework.





FP: Your work often structures itself as a process through a series of actions directed to modify or interact with reality. Would you feel comfortable being defined as a 'process artist'?

TG: Yes that would be quite precise for the way I work. I like the idea of change and especially the fact that it's so hard to deal with in a commercial and museological structure. For example, I am currently having some problems with a work related to yoghurt that I just showed in January in Paris. To describe it briefly: it's a fridge with 10 litres of yoghurt from different multinational food manufacturers such as Danone. After the exhibition, the work was shipped back to my gallery in Berlin. And now it's beautifully decaying in storage. I have had some inspiring talks about what to do with this work – finally it is all about the limits of time and value. How can something that changes keep its value?

FP: You often explore recycling, pollution, sustainable development, gentrification and the politics of urban planning. Where did the interest in these kind of issues come from?

TG: I think it comes mostly from my background – growing up in the countryside with parents who took part in a left-wing grassroots party in the 1980s. I was also active in various youth environmental organisations, and problems such as global warming and the resource wars have been on my agenda since my childhood. At that time the problems with finite resources and the ideology of growth and how they were fundamentally changing the surface of the earth and the human condition became more widely known. However, it was only after studying art and reading about artists who actually had an approach and work that was concerned with some of these issues that I began to develop my own position.

In my experience, in the 80s and even into the late 1990s, talking about recycling or sustainable development made you a radical and blue-eyed lefty. Now this has changed fundamentally – not in the sense that people in general have changed their beliefs, but being a responsible consumer is now the height of fashion. If this fashion becomes more than an attitude and maybe even part of an everyday consciousness, it could really effect change.



FP: You grew up in Denmark. How did the landscape of your childhood influence the way you make art? How did you relate to and interact with nature?

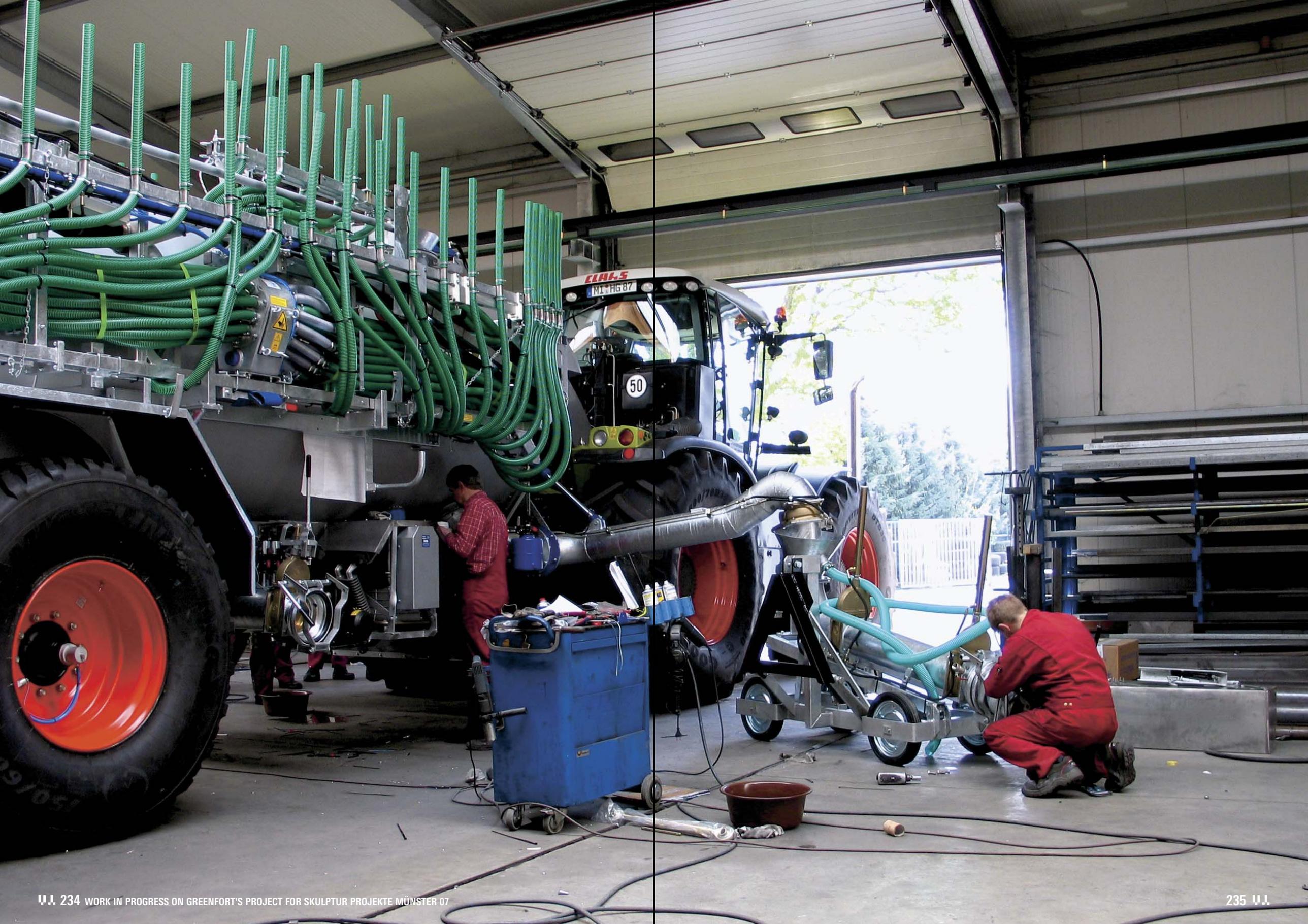
TG: I think that childhood experiences are the basis for the way we later see, act in and understand the world we are in. I spend most of my childhood fishing and making expeditions into the rural, cultivated agricultural Danish landscape – you can hardly find anything close to wild nature in Denmark. I often had my 'pure' experience of nature altered by a farmer, hunter or nature conservationist, each of whom had a different set of rules for how you ought to behave on their property. From early on I had a clear understanding that

nature was a battleground of different interests. **Nature is not something outside us, something that's beyond the city or beyond human activity. We are embedded in nature because we are living organisms as well, and each of our actions has an impact on, and is part of, so-called nature.**

I think experiencing theories of ecology and examining them in real life had a big impact on me. I have seen how landscapes have changed dramatically in a very short time. The lakes near where I grew up were a paradise to me, and a fantastic playground. But I also realised how much they had changed – that they used to be much richer in life, much cleaner and more stable high-end ecosystems. My parents and farmers have told me how the lakes were once totally clean and that they would enjoy swimming in them when they were my age. But because of factories and changes in agricultural production, the lakes have lost this clarity. I became aware that something dramatic was happening to my surroundings and it wasn't good.







FP: Do you think artists have a pivotal role to play in generating social and environmental responsibility?

TG: Art definitely has an important role to play in our culture and it can be an important catalyst for societal changes. I think art can be something very special because it is not part of an already-defined political language. Art has the ability to approach problems in a very different way, and to make changes possible that could not occur within a traditional understanding of societies that are shaped through a political system.

FP: Could art make a critical difference?

TG: Sure! Art has always had this ability. It might not always be on the agenda or very visible, but you can see how it has effects that move like waves through society. If you mean critical in terms of revolutionary change, I doubt it.

Personally I am not sure if I want to change society radically through my art – like a revolution. But I think the very subtle and highly specialised language of contemporary art there can effect some very important changes of perception and understanding that can feedback into behaviour.

This is the way I would like to work with and think of art – not necessarily as a form that directly approaches everyone, but as part of a highly developed cultural language that prolongs the history and theory of art.





FP: In June this year you are taking part in the fourth edition of the Skulptur Projekte Münster. This event, which takes place every ten years, is directed to point out major changes in the relationship between art and the public, with special projects in a specific urban context. You have a primarily site-specific vocation, but how do you relate to the public?

TG: I think this question is defined by the nature of the 'site-specific' itself.

As an artist you cannot operate and make art without thinking about your role and position within a public realm. Art is after all public unless it's produced in secret! Public space is the most interesting of places in which to work because you get a totally different reaction from people who are not that trained in looking at art. You have a possibility to make a public statement by actually using your citizen's

right to do so. **The term 'public space' should be constantly accentuated and proclaimed to exist. Any action – from a demonstration to a happening, or even just saying your opinion out loud – is of importance, because that moment of conflict constitutes public space.** You can see how everywhere, even deep within more institutional public space, private economic interests are changing these civil rights to favour them. Art is not a neutral category and it is often used as well to change and control public behavior.

For Münster I am trying to address issues concerning the outcome of subsidised intensive agricultural production, which pollutes in the name of dirty profit and threatens ground water resources. Münster is a centre of a big farming industry that shapes the political power of the city. I hope to make an alternative vision to the one of Münster as this most perfect happy city (it even won a prize some years ago for having the most happy citizens in Europe). Being in Münster you have this feeling that most citizens are extremely proud of their city – and that it's a city without problems. This gives me a slightly uneasy feeling when I walk through the city and I think, if it succeeds, Skulptur Projekte 07 will be able to make a much-needed crack in this illusion of perfection.







FP: The title of one of your works states 'it is in vain to dream of a wildness distant from ourselves'. What is your view of the current state of the human condition?

TG: Nothing worse, nothing better. We still have to solve some of the major problems that we have been dealing with for thousand of years – war, hunger and greed. Something big (and it's not Al Gore) will change our global condition, and this might be such a serious threat to even the people in power that radical changes will occur. Change has been possible for a long time but it has not happened mostly because of powerful interests keeping a certain level of status quo and making a profit from that. Unfortunately, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

FP: You seem to be interested in exploring the environment through reference to what appear to be scientific strategies. What has been the role of science and theoreticians for your research?

TG: I don't have a scientific approach in my art. I am not making empirical facts, but tend to intervene in a scientific language or form. It is not my goal to make proofs – my work sometimes consists of contradictions and confusions. I would like to say that I follow a trial and error method in my work, but as I am not so good at counting I seem to fail a lot. I am making what you might call research-based art and I do want to evoke a certain degree of *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment). We live within a set of constituted values that are the product of specific interests and powers. We should not take things for granted and lose belief in change. I hope to raise questions and evoke change through my art without saying what you should believe in, or not. That's all. I am not a radical.

FP: Which one of your works could be considered a kind of 'self-portrait'?

TG: I once did a series of images of foxes from Frankfurt – foxes from an industrial area. I could maybe see that as some sort of self-portrait if I had to. Within the last decades (along with a whole range of mammals) foxes have moved further and further into urban areas. They have gradually learned to adapt to the habitat of cities. Though they live shorter lives, they have easy access to a steady food supply that mostly comes from human waste.

I remember as a child one occasion when I was face-to-face with a fox. We had a coop for chickens and ducks and one night it was robbed – hardly any bird had survived and feathers were all over the place. In the morning dead birds lay awkwardly all around, but most of them were just gone. I was determined to find out what animal had this blood lust and where it might live. So I followed the trail of feathers to a forested hill not far from our farm. I slowly discovered more feathers and went into the forest. It was probably a nice summer's day and I soon forgot about the fox – maybe because of a Red Admiral that suddenly flew off from some nettles.

As I walked around the branches of a huge conifer tree, a fox suddenly stood right in front of me. I was totally surprised and frozen by this meeting. The fox too, and for a split second we just stood there, only a metre or so between us, and this image of a surprised fox has never left me. Much later, as I made the fox photo series in Germany, I didn't really know what I would see but I was quite thrilled by the fact that I recognised the surprised and wild expression on the foxes' faces.

TUE GREENFORT is a Danish-born Berlin-based artist. He has recently shown at the Witte de With, Rotterdam and participated in Momentum, Moss (both 2006). In 2007 he will be participating in the Sculpture Projects Münster, have solo shows at the Secession, Vienna and Johann König, Berlin, and develop a public art commission for London, an initiative of the RSA Arts & Ecology programme curated by Latitudes.

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