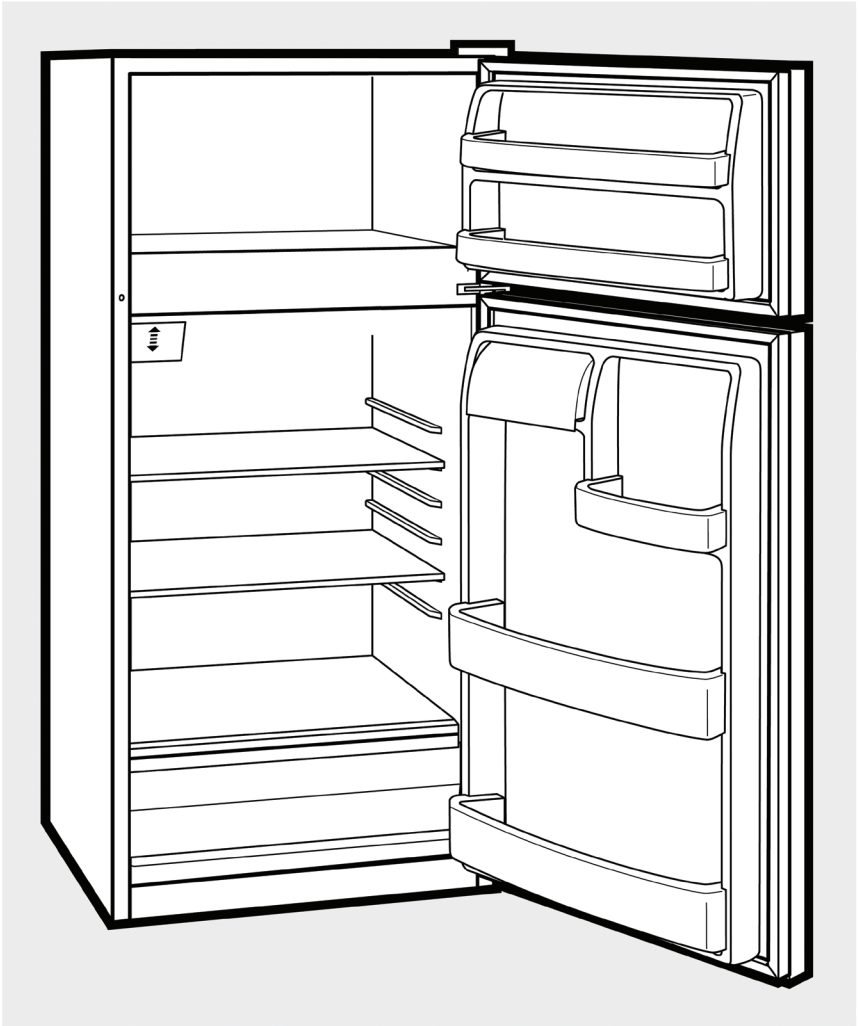


HEIDI HOVE



The Refrigerator

ISOLATION ROOM/GALLERY KIT

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Heidi Hove: The Refrigerator

Nov. 8 - Dec. 5, 2013

Isolation Room/Gallery Kit (IR/GK) is a white cube exhibition space situated in the dining room of a private residence in St. Louis, MO. The concept of IR/GK is to focus on a single artwork per exhibition cycle.

My contribution to IR/GK will consist of the simple act of relocating the refrigerator of the house from its ordinary position in the kitchen to the exhibition space in the dining room. This gesture highlights the appliance often described as 'the heart of the house,' as a somewhat private, closed, withdrawn and obscure place.

Placing the refrigerator on public display in the white cube, complete with spotlights, and revealing the stored contents for this specific household reverses everyday life. How will the viewer, and not least the proprietor, act in relation to the exhibited fridge? Will I, as a guest, get a better understanding of my host by looking into their fridge?

Danes like their fridges and recent media attention has focused on the power of the refrigerator. On a national television show titled, "Vis mig dit køleskab" (transl. Show me your fridge), Danes were entertained by looking into the refrigerators of different people. But what can you actually find out about a person or family by looking into their refrigerator? And as a foreigner, can one get a better insight into another culture through their fridge?

- Heidi Hove, 2013.

The Refrigerator
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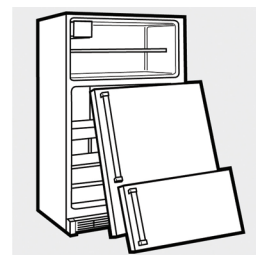
Isolation Room/Gallery Kit • 5723 Dewey Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63116

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INTRODUCTION

QUESTIONING THE BANAL



From hotel door signs to common street trash, the objects used and referenced throughout Heidi Hove's conceptually-driven practice could be generally categorized as banal, so lacking in distinction they remain unquestioned. However, it is just this commonplace quality that charges each object, each subject, with unconsidered significance that is ready to be unleashed as soon as she recontextualizes it – exposing the cultural, social and political norms that we regularly take for granted.

In 2007, Heidi produced an exact replica of a sign she stumbled across at The Wharf in Santa Cruz, CA and had it installed outside the Odense Airport in Denmark. The text on the sign included common phrases seen all across America:

“Do not feed the birds”

“No dogs”

“No alcohol”

In our individualistic society, we do not question these signs as much as we ignore them. However, placed in a Northern European context where social consciousness is the norm, these signs become absurd statements of prohibitive control. They imply the reader has no common sense, or at least cannot (and should not) think for themselves. Our relationship to these signs, whether they are commonplace or out of place, tells us a lot about our cultural politics. These complex dynamics can be illustrated by the famous Karl Marx quote (referring to Lustgarten in Berlin during the revolutions of 1848):

“It is impossible to have a revolution in a country where people ‘stay off the grass’.”

Many times, Heidi's actions take the form of poetic gestures. For a later project, she imported a common park bench (also from the United States) inscribed with the title "IN MEMORY OF YOU" and placed it in Sundholm, Copenhagen – a mixed neighborhood that includes a shelter for homeless drug addicts, a kindergarten and a conference center. With this new juxtaposition, she asks:

"Is the bench in memory of you, me or the area of Sundholm?"

A few years later, she installed a gas station-scale solar powered "WELCOME" sign in the middle of the West Texas desert and a permanent brass plaque with the engraving "I am not here - I am somewhere else" outside of a gallery in Los Angeles. More recently, she has (literally) framed the defects of an industrial toilet paper roll, installed abstract banners in rural Denmark that resemble the common Derma "FAMILY" brand of liquid hand soap, relocated a giant stone her grandfather pulled from his field to a history museum in Finland, and brought an everyday street scene from Dubai to downtown Aarhus. With each new form she asks:

"Is it possible we might encounter these things without any notice?"

Located in a working class neighborhood in South City St. Louis, Isolation Room/Gallery Kit is a unique exhibition venue that consists of a modular "Gallery Kit" built inside of founders Daniel McGrath and Dana Turkovic's dining room. The Kit is meant to "isolate" a work of art for each exhibition and encourages the viewer's experience to be one of depth over breadth. Openings or gallery visits usually include a long chat with one or both of the organizers – many times over a fresh cup of tea.

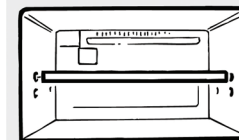
Considering this domestic setting, it is then perhaps no surprise that Heidi has chosen their household refrigerator as the focus of this current exhibition. According to a U.S. Department of Energy, Residency Consumption Survey (2005), 99.9% of American homes have a refrigerator – making it the single most common appliance. Refrigerators, as such, are something we don't give much thought to, but considering they have only been mass-produced since the late 1940s, this technology has arguably had the quickest and broadest impact on our modern daily life.

For this exhibition, Heidi's subtle act is to relocate the refrigerator from its normal location in Dana and Daniel's kitchen to the Gallery Kit. In the following essay, "Feeding the Cube," art critic Carl Martin Faurby discusses what it exactly means "to take a fridge and put it into a white cube." Additionally, two social scientists examine the contents of the refrigerator. Anthropologist Mette Krog asks, "But how did it end up in there?," and sociologist Ulla Holm asks, "What's in a bottle of pre-made Hot Wing Sauce?" To underscore the importance of asking these seemingly mundane questions, consider that St. Louis is also the world headquarters of Monsanto, the leading producer of genetically engineered seeds and an equally potentially devastating pesticide, Roundup. The GMOs grown from Monsanto's seeds have been banned in many countries and this tension is brewing to become one of the most prominent global issues of our lifetime.

What is in a refrigerator? - indeed.

With this catalog, Heidi creates yet another container to enclose many contents of the exhibition and invites us to consider the cultural, social and political norms revealed by reframing a common refrigerator. I invite you now to look inside.

FEEDING THE CUBE



A couple of years ago I got the assignment to entertain a Chinese artist doing an exhibition where I was working. He, a Buddhist, and I, a fallen Catholic, quickly fell into talking about religion. He believed that humans were descendants from beings from outer space: ephemeral entities of energy most likened to spheres of light. Struggling to survive on earth, they started eating from it: plants, animals and so forth. The remnants started sticking to them and they grew physical bodies with earthly needs like sex and sleep. I kind of found the story silly, but both being art lovers we found a kinship in the enjoyment of entertaining the notion. We did what people in the so called “art world” usually do: we continued the discussion.

The constant contestations and discussions revolving around art and the white cube seem to make the notion of contemporary art seep through the frantic grip of our concepts. Instead of delineating a core concept, we are left with a cloudy construction that we continue to feed with the production of artworks, texts, talks and images. So the outline of the white cube and contemporary art must naturally be this – the continuous discussions of it. This is its core product – its body. Only through discussion can it keep its constant contemporary relevance – morphing into new sensical forms that perform and sustain the production of art.

Heidi Hove has decided to take a fridge and put it into a white cube. She had an idea and decided to act on it: an act that really wouldn’t make a lot of sense without the ideology of the white cube. But what a wonderful thing to do: Perform an act, turn it into a sculpture, rendering it manifest, giving it a body, and offering it as a conundrum to the visitors of the home where the cube is set.

On entering the space, the ideology of the white cube turns the everyday kitchen object into something worth contemplating. It opens up an array of cognitive dimensions. One of which allows the symbolic meaning of the objects surrounding us, to spill over and into each other. The symbolic (and in this case deconstructed) white cube space turns the everyday and private object into a sculpture that again turns the contents of the fridge into sculptures and so forth, but also the other way around: The white cube is turned into a container, that, with the symbolic support of the fridge, seems to artificially uphold its contents.

Hove's act creates a situation where the space and the object seem to feed on each other in a reciprocal action – a kind of cannibalistic mode of production. The situation seems both full of life and ready to die the moment the walls drop and we go on with our everyday lives. And so the ephemeral act grows a body that feeds and tweaks the cube: a sphere of light momentarily stuck on earth.

HOW DID IT END UP IN THERE?



“You are what you eat.” This saying has been a part of dietary advice campaigns in both Denmark and the US. It basically means that if you eat healthy you will become healthy. But there is a deeper meaning to this saying...

What we eat has always been a part of our identity – whether we have had to hunt or gather for it in our surroundings, grow it ourselves or just buy it in the nearest supermarket. In a society where nearly everything is available to us, our choices become a construction of our identity. But what is it that forms our food choices? And why does the refrigerator feel private? Why do we think we can tell so much about a person, family or culture by having a quick look inside this particular appliance?

A selection of choices

What ends up in our bellies is determined by a long list of factors – some of them conscious choices, others unconscious. These choices are based on different kinds of knowledge – some days we might buy fish because we know we need vitamin D, sometimes we use our knowledge of diverse dietary advice like eating “5 a day,” and sometimes we just buy a turkey because that is what we eat on Thanksgiving or ice cream simply because we are craving it. These are different types of knowledge that can be contradictory, but which coexist side by side and are brought into play in different contexts.

The French sociologist Émile Durkheim describes these different forms of knowledge as Science, Practical Theory, and Art. It might not seem as if we use a lot of scientific knowledge in our everyday food choices, but it has become pretty much the

norm now that most people have quite specific microbiological knowledge about food. We might not understand how our house is constructed or how our car can run on gas, but we know which minerals and vitamins we need in our diet and where to find them. And naturally, the dietary advice, we (sometimes) follow, is based on science. Dietary advice is, however, part of the knowledge type Durkheim calls Practical Theory. It falls between Science and Art incorporating all theories about food and health.

To me Art is the most interesting of the knowledge types. It has to do with cultural norms, tastes and habits. It is those actions that we do not really think about or question. When it comes to food, we call this knowledge type “the art of cooking” or “eating patterns” or “food tradition.” In Denmark, for example, liver paste is eaten on rye bread topped with cucumber or pickled beets. Never marmalade. Marmalade is, however put on cheese. Why? Because that is the way it is.

If asked about this, we might try to explain it with the notion that some tastes go better together than others, but the truth is that we never really question these food preferences. Just like we never really wonder why we do not eat cat or snake like they do in other parts of the world.

How free, then, are our food choices?

There is always a reason behind our choices. This is why it is possible to say something about us just by looking into our refrigerators. If it feels so private it is because we are not in full control of the signals it sends – because we are not always conscious of our selections and we are not alone in deciding what possible choices we have. Our cultural and social background affects us and forms both our possible choices and our preferences.

In the social science study of food, Denmark and the US fall roughly into the same category – both are industrialized, Western, postmodern societies where food overuse often leads to health problems. In fact, many food trends, products and problems that start in the US eventually find their way to Denmark. When it comes to knowledge about consumption, if you want to foretell the future in Denmark, all you have to do is look at what is going on in the US. Whatever is trending there will certainly come along shortly.

In both countries, culture serves as a social force that gives moral power to our food choices. You could try to resist, but there would be consequences. You can eat (almost) anything you want, but if your practices do not fit with social norms, you risk, for example, social exclusion. In Denmark, there is also a tradition of the state imposing economic consequences on citizens who do not eat according to social food moral as taxes are put on unhealthy food that contains a lot of fat or sugar.

So, what ends up in the fridge is not just a question of preferences and taste. And our choices are not just formed by dietary advice or political views either. Culture, tradition, public views and state regulations all affect, or even dictate, our choices. And without knowing it, we do not single-handedly decide what goes in our shopping bags, our refrigerators and eventually our stomachs.

WHAT'S IN A BOTTLE OF PRE-MADE HOT WING SAUCE? REFLECTIONS ON THE SEMIOTICS OF FOOD



Over the last couple of years the national Danish broadcaster "DR" has run a popular prime time show called "Show Me Your Fridge." In every episode, two anthropologists are assigned the task of identifying a particular person with the help of cue cards consisting of food items which that person keeps in his or her fridge. Can by can, jar by jar, the identity puzzle unfolds until it is partly or entirely solved. The underlying rationale of the show is that what we eat can and does provide access to some deeper truth about who we are. Opening someone's fridge is like a biopsy that let's us diagnose who we're really dealing with.

On a broader level, this way of thinking is perfectly in line with those widely accepted social scientific theories of consumption, according to which our lifestyle choices are inextricably linked to social background categories – whether they be class, gender, or race, etc. So the logic goes, every single product that we own or fancy – be it alimentary or otherwise – is a carrier of profound meaning that is bound to reveal the basic characteristics that define our person: who we vote for, how much we earn, what we think of illegal immigrants, whether we went to college or not, etc. If we follow this logic then, for example, if your fridge contains no vegetables, white bread instead of wholegrain, Budweiser instead of Beaujolais, and pre-made hot wing sauce, it is an indication that you're not into modern art, never read a book in your life and probably grew up in a white trash neighborhood.

Not only do many social scientists take this to be common sense knowledge; somehow our intuition tells us that it is true, that our surface is a mirror that never lies about our true selves. Thus, no matter what we stuff into our fridge, it will betray us.

You can run, but you cannot hide!

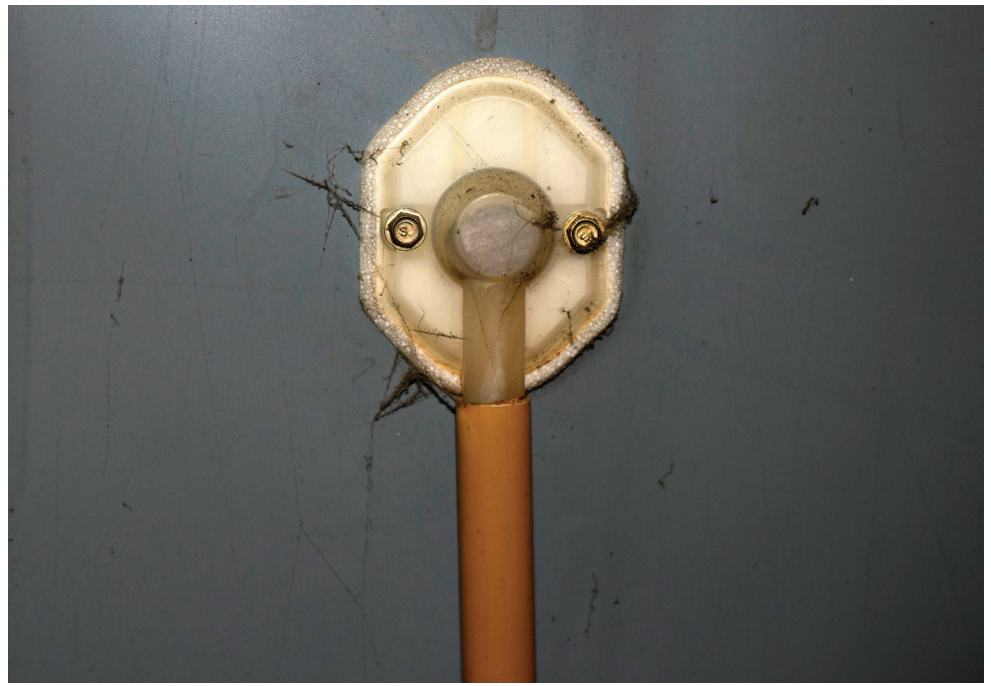
Except, what if the person in question just happens to like pre-made hot wing sauce or a particular brand of mayonnaise for no other reason that they stimulate his or her taste buds – how much does that really “say” about who that person is? And what happens to all the meanings and messages that these products are supposed to convey? Or, let’s take another example: What if the Muslim head scarf is not a “symbol” of religious repression and female submission, but may be worn by some Muslim women as a fashion accessory, as pure embellishment?

This exhibited performance seeks to address these types of questions. It examines the surface/depth relationship and asks if, and to what extent, we can rely on the objects around us to transmit true insights about other people’s personality, views and identity.

Also, the relocation of the refrigerator from its usual habitat in the kitchen into the exhibition space in the dining room is an essential part of the performance. The dining room is the very center of intimacy of a house; it is where the masks come off. But, at the very same time, it is also the center of staging; it is where we put our finest silverware and china on display and where we engage in impression and appearance management. The dining room, then, has a highly ambivalent function as both front and backstage. Thus, placing the fridge in this particular room is a gesture intended to emphasize the question of how much food – and other artifacts in general – can really tell us about our true selves.

THE ENCOUNTER







ABOUT THE ARTIST

Heidi Hove (b. 1976) is an interdisciplinary artist, who lives and works in Copenhagen (DK). In 2007, she graduated from Funen Art Academy (DK) and California College of Arts (US). She has exhibited her works in various contexts in Europe and the United States and has also produced a number of public artworks. Additionally, she is the co-founder of two artist initiatives in Copenhagen (DK); Sydhavn Station (since 2012) and Koh-i-noor (since 2004). Recent awards include working grants from the Danish Arts Foundation (2012-2013) and winner of the Turku Biennial 2013 (FI).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Carl Martin Faurby (b. 1981) is a curator and writer, based in Copenhagen, Denmark. He is the co-founder of *Object This Picture* - an ongoing research platform for contemporary image culture and [ift.] (transl. in accordance to), a mobile artistic tool and space for art exhibitions in public spheres.

Ulla Holm (b.1979) holds a Master of Science in Sociology from the University of Copenhagen in 2013 with a thesis on the rising trend of sustainable food co-ops. She is also a writer, a media figure, and weekly columnist at the Danish newspaper *Information*. She has written extensively on food-related issues from a sociological perspective and was the first person to publicly criticize the concept of New Nordic Food and the world famous restaurant *Noma* back in 2011 - which led to an interview with *Time Magazine* in 2012.

Sarrita Hunn (b. 1978) is an interdisciplinary artist, who lives and works in Berlin (DE) and St. Louis (US). She received a BA in Studio Art, Art History and Philosophy from Drury University in 2001 and a MFA in Fine Arts from California College of the Arts in 2004. Her work has been exhibited internationally over the past decade and recent awards include a Danish International Visiting Artists Exchange Program (DIVA) grant in 2012. Additionally, she is a co-founder and managing editor of *Temporary Art Review* and the Residency Program Director at The Luminary Center for the Arts.

Mette Krog (b. 1980) holds a MA Research Degree in Ethnography and Social Anthropology from the University of Aarhus in 2009. Having a particular interest in food and how people construct identity through consumption, she conducted her fieldwork in an organic village participating in their community dining, studying their food habits, health discourse and meal practices. She revisited and elaborated on these topics in her master's thesis on dietary advice and health knowledge. After graduating, Mette chose a career in advertising and works today with consumer insights, concept development and copywriting.

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