

Sex rules! Springtime for Stifler and sexuality

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With springtime comes love, so the saying goes, or at least sex! The annual Spring Exhibition at Charlottenborg does not disappoint in the way of sexual content, featuring a large amount of artworks with sexuality, from the intelligent to the vapid, as their focus. Red lips, naked men, gyrating dancers in scarves, and grainy YouTube videos populate this huge group exhibition - an annual tradition in the Copenhagen art world.

The Spring Exhibition is one of Europe's largest juried art shows, boasting 69 artists this year, ranging in age from 22 to 63. The largely unknown artists are from several different countries, including Russia, South Africa, France, the United States, Britain, and of course those in Scandinavia. Each year, the jurors select a winner: a best in show artwork. This year's winner is South African artist Nkule Mabaso.

Mabaso's two pieces, Red Hot Lips (2011) and Sta-Soft-Fro "Conspicuous Individualism" (2011), explore contemporary black femininity and sexuality through artificial hair. Using herself as a model, the artist poses in the style of a pin-up girl in leopard-print clothing wearing a wild, wind-swept wig and bright red lipstick. Posing in a post-apocalyptic landscape, she stares fiercely at the camera. Mabaso also displays three sculptures braided from synthetic hair. Her work is visually striking and forward-thinking in its attempt to open up a discussion about race and cultural stereotypes; however, it could benefit from a more polished presentation format.

Mabaso's artwork tries to complicate sexuality while the work of Diego Agulló and Dmitry Paranyushkin is unabashedly uncomplicated in its blatant sexuality. From Spain and Russia respectively, the artist duo showed their video and performance piece, The Humping Pact (2011). The Humping Pact features a mass of naked men simulating sex with inanimate objects in an industrial urban landscape. The artists say they are trying to build "an intimate and personal relationship with space". At the very least, after seeing this piece, one will never feel the same about industrial waste. The Humping Pact's pile of undulating man parts would benefit from being shown in larger format than the tiny video monitor it plays on at Charlottenborg.

However, if artistic references to large-scale manhoods are what you are after, you don't have to go far at the Spring Exhibition. Visitors walking into the exhibition's next room are greeted by Défense de touches (2010) by the French artist Gilles T Lacombe, a giant model of an elephant tusk hung like a phallus from the ceiling of the museum. Lacombe's sculpture, made from over 4000 discarded piano keys, is a stunning memorial to elephants poached for their ivory tusks. A cornerstone piece in this year's sprawling Spring Exhibition, it weaves together themes of ethnicity, cultural history, and sexuality that run throughout.

Finally, in the same exhibition hall as Lacombe's giant tusk, Finnish artist Jan Ijäs's Sweet Mov(i)e (2011) can be seen. Sweet Mov(i)e features recycled web video footage of aficionados of bounce music, a hyper-sexualised genre of dance music that originated in the city of New Orleans and features the 'booty bounce' as its signature move. As an artist, Ijäs appears unaware of the original context of his source material, referring to it only as footage of people simulating sex. The Spring Exhibition is open until May 6 and visitors are able to vote for the Audience Award winner until May 2.

Charlottenborg Spring Exhibition

Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Nyhavn 2, Cph K; ongoing, ends May 6;

Open Tue-Sun 11:00-17:00, Wed 11:00-20:00;

Tickets: 60 kr, concessions: 40kr, under-16s and Weds after 17:00: free adm;

www.kunsthallcharlottenborg.dk

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