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More than a thousand words

MAY 2 – JUNE 14, 2025

2112, Holbergsgade 20, 1057, Copenhagen

As the second edition of the *Imaginary Collection*, this exhibition marks the ongoing collaboration and deep friendship between two gallerists, Caroline Bøge and Stefan von Bartha, both who are continuing the legacy of their own family businesses as art gallerists.

The first edition in 2021, hosted in 2112's previous location in Birkedommervej 31, was titled TAKE THE STAGE, and was curated by Caroline Bøge, a former dancer with the Royal Danish Ballet. The title reflected Bøge's experience of performing on stage in which she describes the stage as a platform of unknowns and endless possibilities—likened to the ongoing journey of the appreciation of art throughout a collector's lifetime.

Yet when I was invited to curate this edition, I erroneously imagined I could attempt to create a cohesive theme that would reflect both the depth, breadth and legacy of the vast von Bartha collection. Impossibilities aside, I also assumed that a contemporary collection that blossomed over 50 years would take on a particular character, and that too could inspire a theme—as if it were a conclusive chapter summing up the journey to date.

Yet, hang on—I quizzed—*is a theme absolutely necessary?*

Yet just like journeys in life, journeys with art can evolve from otherwise unrelated moments—chance encounters, arbitrary happenings, even whimsical decisions—as opposed to being predestined or bound to one destination. This is how my own imaginary collection would be, formed from numerous singular, inspiring encounters with artists and artworks.

Yet we (as curators) often succumb to creating dialogues between works creating our own bigger picture within the artist's oeuvre or art history. We look for connections, patterns, or associations—instead of embracing gaps and ambiguities. Contrary to this, as Neil deGrasse Tyson, the contemporary astrophysicist and science presenter, concludes “The universe is under no obligation to make sense to you.”¹

¹ deGrasse Tyson, Neil (2017). *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York/London, p. 13.

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So here it is—a theme as an anti-theme of sorts: *Flash Fiction*.

As a concise form of storytelling, flash fiction, also known as short fiction (or shorts), ranges from just a few words up to a thousand. Whilst brevity is its form, focus and impact are its method. From the word go, shorts throw us straight into the thick of it, zooming us into compelling depths of observation created from fleeting moments, or seemingly banal or insignificant facets, trivialities or technicalities. In their wordery too, they often conjure up rich and complex, highly-sensory imagery.

Due to their brevity, shorts are often published in a collective of unrelated works by diverse authors—in other words, an anthology. In flash fiction, our reading or interpretation of the singular works is not dependent on our knowledge of a wider narrative, of what came before or what could come after that given moment in time.

In this exhibition *Flash Fiction* at least, I wish the artworks to be viewed each as a singular encounter or read as a single chapter, separated from the series, or artist's oeuvre. The works are, after all, a mere slice of each artists' oeuvre unpacked from the von Bartha loaf. Thus, this exhibition is intended to stray you from the desire to make sense of it all, or find connections between artworks and the collection. Yet, it is not a mere glimpse into the chapters of the collection to date, but also a taste of what is to come.

My reference to literature is not also without chance. The adage „A picture is worth a thousand words.“ suggests that the visual arts can express complex and sometimes multiple ideas conveyed by a single work. Yet there are many instances in the visual arts and spoken word, or written language play an animated ping pong. Not only in works that combine image and text, but also in how we view the artworks. Things we have read and thoughts we have thought can create images, and images can prompt words.

Yet perhaps the most compelling analogy for me is the potential in the expansion of the reader's imagination to something beyond the words published. The formal limitations in shorts have their analogies in the visual arts too—as a single frame, or form. They too have the power to take our imaginations on a journey beyond those thousand words. So beyond the words on the page or surface of the artwork we can imagine and journey on, surpassing that form and moment, as we form a sequel or reset the margins.

Cast your mind to Claude Monet's depictions of water lilies. From that brief moment captured in the painting by Monet, our imaginations are expanded—taking us beyond the canvas and to the surrounding landscape and the ephemeral changes in light evolving from that fleeting moment. Then cast your mind to Georgia O'Keefe's largescale flower paintings of the 1950s. The magnified detailing closely cropped on the canvas immerses us in something beyond our physical selves, expanding also our optical realms.

When this happens artworks can meet us on a path, to form a new journey, blossoming from our own insights, life experiences, knowledge, memories, sensitivities. Yet might be purely formal, oscillating between representation and abstraction, in which lines become horizons, and horizons become lines. We can also shift perspectives, as there is no one way to read an artwork. There is no arc of narrative to observe—from the beginning, middle to end.

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This nonlinearity of an artwork's conception and correlation leaves is often unrevealed to us. It can be as if only final words are revealed to us; the most visible layers of colour, collage or brushstrokes, or a sculpture's surface and form. But when seemingly only witnessing the finale, gaps, and the possibility for our imagination to re-imagine its beginnings, how it all began, and how it evolved. You might encounter lines or juxtaposing shapes emerging into another allusive submerged space, profound cumulative yet unfathomable layers of colours or a sculpture's form and material that appears magically incomprehensible.

At this moment too, the artwork takes on a new journey too, in the encounter with you.

To conclude, there is something engaging and inspiring when something does not make sense—when we cannot join the dots, read between the lines, or understand the genius of how an artwork evolved. At least I see the unfathomable as a blessing—a generous bestowal. With it our curiosity can navigate new vantage points. Through the unknowns, gaps, ambiguities, but also inconclusiveness. *After all, would life and experiencing art be so inspiring if everything was so connected, understandable, easy to resolve, or conclusive?*

Thus, this exhibition is in no way *My Imaginary Collection*. Rather *Yours*. Yours, as you encounter each work as a single chapter. Yours, as you experience the gaps and ambiguities. It's Your journey into the unknown—the endless possibilities of your imagination. *Your* more than a thousand words.

Claire Gould,
Interim Gallery Manager
von Bartha Copenhagen

Opening

Friday, May 2nd, 5-7 p.m.
2112, Holbergsgade 20, 1057, Copenhagen

Artists

Caroline Achaintre
Christian Andersson
Emilia Bergmark
Terry Haggerty
Mike Meiré
Ursula Reuter Christiansen
Francisco Sierra
Barbara Stauffacher Solomon
Bernar Venet
Claudia Wieser

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