

MIRIAM KONGSTAD: DAWN COMES AFTER DARKNESS

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I vores samtid opfattes kroppen ofte som en enhed, der skal optimeres og kontrolleres som betingelse for et langt, succesfuldt liv. Men kroppe drives på én og samme tid af både sårbarhed og styrke. Vores fysiske og mentale sundhed er tæt forbundet og påvirkes af alt omkring os fra klima, mennesker og samfundsstrukturer til kost, materialer og æstetik. Kroppen er i konstant forandring, den ældes, bliver syg, påvirkes og ændrer karakter. Dét er Miriam Kongstads kunstneriske afsæt.

Efter skumring bryder daggry, efter mørke kommer lys, i smerte søges lindring. Titlen *Dawn Comes After Darkness* a af ligevægt kaldes *homeostase*. I menneskekroppen reguleres fx temperatur, blodtryk og væskebalance automatisk af nervesystem og hormoner.

For Kongstad er kroppen imidlertid også langt mere end et maskinel, stabilt system. I sine værker kredser hun om det at være en krop – at bebo, bære og miste kontrollen over den. Om skæringspunkterne mellem nydelse og smerte og de utallige modsatrettede og sameksisterende følelser og processer, vi indeholder.

I *Dawn Comes After Darkness* spiller materialerne hovedrollen. De er ladet med betydning og symbolik. Med kirurgisk præcision og poetisk slagkraft stilles der skarpt på, hvordan fysiske materialer påvirker vores krop og sind. En stoflighed, der både tiltrækker og forstyrrer, er fascinerende og voldsom, blød og kølig, og som danner en æstetisk og taktile sanseoplevelse.

Miriam Kongstad (f. 1991, DK) er uddannet koreograf og billedkunstner fra hhv. Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz Berlin (HZT) og Sandberg Institute i Amsterdam. Hun har performet og udstillet nationalt og internationalt på bl.a. Gwangju Biennalen [KR], Gl. Holtegaard [DK], Statens Museum for Kunst [DK], Centre Pompidou [FR] og modtog i 2024 Carl Nielsen og Anne Marie Carl-Nielsens Legats talentpris for billedhuggere.

Udstillingen realiseres takket være støtte fra Ny Carlsbergfondet, Knud Højgaards Fond, Dansk Tennis Fond, Aage og Johanne Louis-Hansens Fond, Arbejdernes Landsbank, Den Obelske Familiefond, Statens Kunstfond, Statens Værksteder for Kunst og Frederiksberg Kommune.

Kunstneren retter særlig tak til Anders Toft Pedersen, C. Lavender, Helena Fridan Pedersen, Ida Katinka Fridan Pedersen, Irene Carbonari, Mette Kongstad, Mikkel Holm Torp og Yan Yan Li.

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In contemporary society, the body is often perceived as a unit that must be optimized and controlled as a condition for a long, successful life. But bodies are driven, at one and the same time, by vulnerability and strength. Our physical and mental health are closely intertwined and influenced by everything around us, from climate, people, and societal structures to diet, materials, and aesthetics. The body is in a constant state of transformation, it ages, falls ill, is affected, and changes character. All of this is Miriam Kongstad's artistic starting point.

After dusk comes dawn, after darkness comes light, in pain, we seek relief. The title *Dawn Comes After Darkness* reflects a dynamic approach to the body and to health. The body's intuitive drive to maintain balance and restore equilibrium is called *homeostasis*. In the human body, temperature, blood pressure, and fluid balance are automatically regulated by the nervous system and by hormones.

For Kongstad, however, the body is far more than a mechanical, stable system. In her artworks, she focuses on the experience of being a body – of inhabiting it, carrying it, and losing control over it. She explores the intersections between pleasure and pain and the countless contradictory yet coexisting emotions and processes we all hold.

In *Dawn Comes After Darkness*, the materials take centre stage. They are charged with meaning and symbolism. With surgical precision and poetic force, the exhibition highlights how physical materials affect the body and mind. A materiality that both attracts and disturbs, fascinates and overwhelms, is soft and cool, creating an aesthetic and tactile sensory experience.

Miriam Kongstad (b. 1991, DK) is trained as a choreographer and visual artist from Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz Berlin (HZT) and Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam, respectively. She has performed and exhibited nationally and internationally, including at the Gwangju Biennale [KR], Gl. Holtegaard [DK], Statens Museum for Kunst [DK], Centre Pompidou [FR], and in 2024, she received the Carl Nielsen and Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen talent award for sculptors.

The exhibition is made possible thanks to support from Ny Carlsbergfondet, Knud Højgaards Fond, Dansk Tennis Fond, Aage og Johanne Louis-Hansens Fond, Arbejdernes Landsbank, Den Obelske Familiefond, Statens Kunstfond, Statens Værksteder for Kunst, and Frederiksberg Kommune.

The artist extends a special thanks to Anders Toft Pedersen, C. Lavender, Helena Fridan Pedersen, Ida Katinka Fridan Pedersen, Irene Carbonari, Mette Kongstad, Mikkel Holm Torp, and Yan Yan Li.

DAWN COMES AFTER DARKNESS

ART WORK OVERVIEW

Texts by Miriam Kongstad

ENG

1.

Suspension/Submersion, 2025

17:52 / 20:16 min

2-channel sound composition

Conceptualised by C. Lavender and Miriam Kongstad

Produced by C. Lavender

Sound travels faster and farther in water than in air. As the human body is composed of 55-78% water, sound penetrates the body, not only as an audible sensation, but also as a physical vibration. This concept is the point of creative departure for Miriam Kongstad and composer and sound healer C. Lavender.

The first audio channel includes singing bowls combined with underwater recordings of various organic materials featured within the exhibition. The second channel consists of a steady, low-frequency rumble, evoking sounds of the interior body, or deep outer space. Together, they create a sense of scale, from inner body to cosmos, while inviting listeners to move through the sound and experience the physical impact on the body.

2.

Hookup, 2019

243 x 140 x 37 cm

Steel, buoy, glass dildo, rose quartz, carnelian stone, vetiver essential oil, leather

Hinduism and yogic philosophy are based on a chakric approach to the body. Chakras are energy centres connected to the body's physique and psyche. The word 'chakra' comes from Sanskrit, meaning wheel, which refers to a rotating energy within the body. There are seven chakras, each associated with a specific colour, located along the spine to the top of the head. Each chakra is connected to specific emotions, organs, and life energy (prana). When a chakra is out of balance, it affects both the body and mind.

Hookup is composed to stabilise the body's second chakra - the sacral chakra - located around the lower abdomen. The sacral chakra is associated with the element water and represented by the colour orange. In the artwork, this is balanced by a blue buoy, an object that floats on water, while blue is the complementary colour to orange. The sacral chakra is associated with creativity, sensuality, and pleasure, like the qualities attributed to the rose quartz crystal, which is hanging encapsulated on one side of the piece, with thick drops of fragrant vetiver oil dripping onto the floor.

3

Convex/Concave, 2025

200 x 110 x 40 cm

Steel, oak, smoked oak, shungite stone, acupuncture needles, tarragon essential oil, bergamot essential oil, vaseline oil, vaseline balm

Acupuncture is a form of medical treatment based on Traditional Chinese Medicine, which approaches the body as a network of vital energy named Qi. The body is organized around meridians, pathways where Qi flows through. If a meridian is blocked, Qi gets stuck, causing illness and pain. Acupuncture restores the flow and balance of Qi, through needles inserted into the skin along the meridians. Acupuncture is also a primary method for balancing yin and yang within the body. Originating from ancient Chinese philosophy, yin and yang is a concept that describes how opposite forces are to be seen as complementary, interconnected, and interdependent.

Placed on a steel plateau, two wooden structures in convex and concave shapes are resting covered in protective vaseline balm mixed with tarragon and bergamot oils. The convex structure pierces through a Shungite stone. Black Shungite consists of uncrystallized carbon, said to ward off electromagnetic radiation. Studies show that electromagnetic fields might have an effect on the central nervous system and act as a source of stress in living organisms.

4

Rapunzel, 2020

Approx. 300 x 100 x 35 cm

Steel, glass, human hair, green fluorite, chrysocolla stone, bergamot essential oil, leather

The sculpture exemplifies the interconnected relationship between mental and physical health, based on the condition Rapunzel Syndrome. Rapunzel Syndrome is a condition where individuals eat their hair as a reaction to anxiety, ultimately leading to a complete blockage of the stomach. The sculpture consists of an 8,5m metal chain, the same length as an average human digestive system. The chain is lubricated with bergamot oil and attached to various objects, including a green fluorite crystal and a chrysocolla stone, with properties said to calm anxiety and unite the mental and physical body.

5

Hard on Hard [med ondt skal ondt fordrives], 2025

Dimensions variable

Uranium glass, circular saw blade, granite, miscellaneous stones, horse hair, leather, uv-lamps, aluminum, steel, natural rubber

Uranium glass is a type of glass that has uranium oxide added during the melting process, giving it a yellow-green colour and a distinct neon aura. The glass was popular from the late 1800s until the Cold War, when the United States imposed a ban due to the demand for uranium for nuclear weapons.

Uranium, named after the planet Uranus, is the 92nd element in the periodic table. Uranium is a radioactive substance that in very small amounts occurs naturally in rocks, soil, and water. It is a heavy metal primarily used as fuel in nuclear power plants and in the manufacturing of nuclear weapons. Exposure to radioactive radiation can cause cell death, tissue damage, organ failure, genetic mutations, and increases the risk of developing cancer.

However, uranium and other radioactive substances are also used in the healthcare sector under controlled conditions and play an important part in modern medicine. Radioactive pharmaceuticals are used for both diagnostics and treatment, such as radiotherapy of cancer cells. Radiotherapy is a localised treatment that only kills the cells in the targeted area.

[The concentration of uranium in the exhibited uranium glass poses no health risks.]

6

Purgatorium [skærsild], 2025

Approx. 361 x 34 x 34 cm

Cubic sandstone from the Copenhagen church Vor Frelser Kirke, tar, salt, steel, aluminium, leather

In the early 20th century and up until around 1972, tar was used as a binding agent in asphalt. In this way, tar helped pave the roads of the global infrastructure we know today. Tar has also traditionally been used to protect wood on buildings and ships as it forms a barrier that shields against water and ageing. Tar is produced through distillation and is a byproduct of charcoal production. Tar is also one of the oldest remedies for treating skin diseases such as psoriasis and eczema as it reduces cell division in the skin. Today, tar is used in salves or in its pure form as tar baths.

Purgatorium, from Latin, means 'place of purification' and refers to the Christian belief in an intermediate space between death and salvation. The souls of the dead are here punished and either cleansed of sin before entering the kingdom of God or condemned to hell. The word 'purgatory' derives from 'purgatorium' and is used as an image of purification, both in religious contexts and as a cultural symbol.

7

Detox, 2025

Approx. 365 x 75 x 24 cm

Burned wood, amethyst, steel, stainless steel, aluminum, leather

Wood turns into charcoal when heated in the absence of air. Charcoal can be used to purify water and air by attracting pollutants and trapping them within the pores. Charcoal can remove gases, chemicals, odours and tastes, and is commonly used in respiratory masks, car filters and as an agent to purify drinking water. As Charcoal is indigestible it can be used detoxification in medical emergencies such as overdose and poisonings.

Amethyst is a violet variety of quartz, which receives its violet colour from irradiation and impurities from iron and other metals. The name derives from the Greek *amethystos*, meaning 'not intoxicate'. This is a reference to the belief that the crystal protected its owner from drunkenness. Ancient Greeks wore amethyst and carved drinking vessels from it in the belief that it would prevent drunkenness.

8

Devotion, 2025

280 x 80 x 45 cm

Wood, steel, stainless steel, natural rubber

Skin heals differently depending on the size and depth of a wound. Minor, superficial wounds may heal within a few days, while deeper wounds can take months. First, a scab forms, and the skin underneath heals by growing from the edges inwards towards the centre and from small islands of skin within the wound area. When a wound appears, it triggers an inflammatory response. Blood vessels contract to stop the bleeding and white blood cells enter the wound to fight bacteria and remove damaged tissue. New tissue then forms and the scar contracts and becomes elastic.

The brain processes both pain and pleasure, and the brain areas that are activated overlap. Endorphins serve as the body's natural painkillers and mood enhancers and thus have a dual function. Endorphins are released in response to pain, but also during pleasurable experiences such as physical activity, sex, laughter, and touch.

9.

Cranial X, 2025

Approx. 460 x 13 x 6 cm

Aluminium, industrial components, horse hair, electrical cables, freshwater pearls, silver fulminate (bang snap grains), transparent laboratory tubing

Cranial X, also known as the vagus nerve, is the tenth of twelve cranial nerves in the human body. It's the longest and most widely distributed nerve, consisting of two branches extending from the brain stem. By regulating essential functions such as heart rate, breathing and digestion, the vagus nerve contributes to the body's "rest and digest" response, helping to regulate the body after stress. A dysregulated vagus nerve can manifest as both mental and physical symptoms such as depression, anxiety, digestive issues, low or high blood pressure and irregular heart rate.

10

Axis Mundi/Unus Mundus, 2025

dimensions variable

steel, stainless steel, aluminium, copper, granite

Axis Mundi is a Latin term for 'world axis', a symbolic representation of the center of the world, found in various cultures and religions including Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Native American traditions. It is a crossroad between realms of existence and a source of energy. Axis Mundi could be a tree, a mountain, or a location, but also social constellations such as marriage, family, or friendship. The human body is also regarded as Axis Mundi. Both the sefirot in Jewish Kabbalism and the chakra system in Hinduism and Buddhism approach the human body as a pillar between heaven and earth. The most well-known depiction of the body as Axis Mundi is the Renaissance drawing *The Vitruvian Man* by artist and scientist Leonardo da Vinci.

Unus Mundus is the Latin term for 'one world' and is an underlying concept of Western philosophy and theology. It is the idea of a unified reality from which everything derives, dating back as far as Plato's allegory of the cave. The notion of Unus Mundus was popularized in the 20th century by psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung, who defined the term as the Western equivalent of the concept of Yin and Yan as found in traditional Chinese philosophy. Unus Mundus represents a realm beyond the human categories of space, time, matter, and spirit, where apparent opposites are reconciled, suggesting a deeper, interconnected reality.

