

Christiania 50 Years
VAR-ER-BLIR
21 Sep – 14 Nov 2021

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Freetown Christiania in 2021, Kunsthal Charlottenborg exhibits a large selection of the many posters created by the commune through the years – a visual testimony to the freetown's history, ideologies and creative forms of expression.

The exhibition is curated by Ole Lykke and the posters are kindly lent by Christiania's Local History Archive.

The origin of many of the posters is still unknown. If you have information about any of the posters, you are more than welcome to send an e-mail to mkm@kunsthalcharlottenborg.dk

Among the creators of the posters are:

Bjørn Nørgaard & Eks-skolen Svend Christensen Per Løvetand Hannah Carlsen René Jalford Trine Sørensen	Ole Sol Jørgen Tulipan Peter Petersen Tine Schmedes Peter Sørensen Laurie Grundt Stine Hurtigkarl Nils Vest	Anna Tengberg Ole Lykke Dorthe La Cour Ranveig Persson Annie Hedvard Claus Deleuran Poul Brandt Lars Helveg	Malene Ravn Lars Nordmand Jakob Bue John Ravn John Snedige Snyder
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The films in the cinema are created by Nils Vest.
All texts are written by Ole Lykke.

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The beginning of Christiania

The two posters created by the squatter movement and the Eks-skolen movement's poster about a 'Warm Winter in Copenhagen' are from 1971. Together with two records from the summer of 1971 – published by the left-wing publishing house Demos, Slumstormersange (Squatters' Songs) and 1. Maj Sange (May Day Songs), featuring a song stating that 'We dream of a place ... where everyone is free because we are together on the inside, you and me' – they speak eloquently of the prevailing mood and zeitgeist leading up to the time of Christiania's founding.

Locals from the surrounding slums of the Christianshavn district were the ones who facilitated access to the disused Bådsmandsstræde Barracks, but it was the youth revolt movement – originating in Projekt Hus, the Thy camp, the hippie movement and the squatters' movement – that created the Freetown of Christiania in the autumn of 1971.

The people who settled in the more than a hundred empty buildings were very different and had widely varying motivations for doing so. From drug addicts, homeless people and non-resident aliens who just wanted to find somewhere they could be left alone, to politically aware squatters, architects, students and artists full of ideas of creating an alternative to established society based on hippie ideals of collective ownership and maximum individual freedom while observing one's responsibility to the community.

The communal meeting became the supreme authority of Christiania. The firmly established approach of everyone having equal access to participate and speak has often made it impossible to make clear-cut decisions. Hence, many decisions have been made and a great deal of action taken according to the anarchist slogan that you can do what you want, as long as you do not bother others.

The two posters featuring hugely long lists of suggested topics for the communal meeting – one from around 1975, the other from the late eighties – pokes mild fun at what the meeting can be used for, but also offer real insight into some of the frustrations and challenges found in the Freetown. The calls for a communal meeting on violence and another on the Danish State's demands for normalisation, both from 1982, showcase the two issues that have attracted the most attention in Christiania in the last forty years.

The posters about 'The Breach of Promise' and 'The Crucifixion' concern a lawsuit that Christiania, spearheaded by the ageing, but spry communist lawyer Carl Madsen in top form, filed against

the Danish state in 1975, holding the authorities accountable for failing to keep their promise to launch a competition inviting architects to submit proposals on possible uses of the area. Christiania lost the lawsuit in February 1978, but the Danish Parliament extended the Freetown's deadline until it eventually, in 1982, decided to let Christiania continue indefinitely on the condition that an ongoing process of legalisation was undertaken.

Birthday posters

Every year, one or more birthday posters are produced to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of Christiania on 26 September. There are no rules or restrictions. Everyone is welcome to submit design proposals, and while the posters display varying degrees of artistic intensity and imagination, they are all suffused by an obvious love for the birthday child.

Election posters

In December 1973, a few years after Christiania was founded, one of its residents, Hans Løvetand, ran for election to the Danish parliament as a non-party campaigner. He subsequently formed 'Afvigerpartiet', literally 'The Deviants' Party' or 'The Divergent Party', which for the local elections on 7 March 1974 joined eleven other lists of candidates in an electoral alliance called 'Valborgs Favn' – 'Valborg's Embrace'. The Women's List received the most votes, and Christiania resident Tine Schmedes received the greatest number of personal votes, so when the Valborg alliance won enough votes for a seat on the Copenhagen City Council, Tine Schmedes become its representative.

She quickly became popular among the people of Copenhagen and unpopular on the City Council when she, in true Christiania fashion, insisted on bringing her six-month-old child to the meetings, and she made front-page news when she breastfed her baby in the middle of negotiations. After some time she was replaced by Elisabeth Bock, another Christiania resident from the Women's List.

At the 1978 local election, Valborg once again won a seat, which went to Thorkild Weiss from the Christiania List. After this, Valborgs Favn disbanded, and since then the Christiania List has maintained an electoral alliance with left-wing parties Venstresocialisterne, SF and, from 1989, Enhedslisten. The Christiania List lost its seat in 1981, but will run for its twelfth local election in November 2021. The list typically attracts two or

three thousand votes, which are passed on to the other parties in the electoral alliance.

The Valgborg period in particular prompted a wealth of artistic and colourful posters in which the lotus flower became one of the most widely used symbols for the Freetown, but the Christiania List years have also resulted in posters that continue, every local election year, to brighten up the rather monotonous street gallery of retouched portraits of politicians.

The Gay House

The Danish Gay Liberation Front (Bøssernes Befrielsesfront, BFF) was founded in the summer of 1971, and in 1973 the movement set up a large commune for gays in the Karlsvognen building near Den Grå Hal.

In Christiania and in actions outside the Freetown community, the BFF represented a radical new departure from all previous strategies in the fight for recognition and equal rights for homosexuals. The BFF replaced the former low-profile approaches and adaptations to prevailing standards with extreme visibility in terms of dress and mannerisms, and the activist attitude among the gay community benefited Christiania in many ways, finding expression in projects, companies, and theatrical formats such as the Christiania Girls' Marching Band.

When the AIDS epidemic set in in the mid-1980s, the gay community in Christiania was hit hard. Externally, the BFF had achieved most of its political goals, and the Gay House became more of a cultural venue focusing on gay politics. In the former horse stables in the lower floor of the Karlsvognen building, the commune set up 'Bøsseteateret' (The Gay Theatre), which has formed the setting for countless plays, performances, variety shows, lectures, exhibitions, support group meetings and unforgettable parties. The popular singing troupe 'Schwanzen Sanger Knaben' was formed here, and the late 80s saw the launch of a new tradition, the 'Frøken Verden' (literally 'Miss World') drag show, which proved so popular that it relocated to Den Grå Hal for the 1996 Gay Pride in Copenhagen and has packed the place to the rafters several times since then.

Christiania and indigenous peoples

Right from the outset, Christiania has greatly sympathised and felt a strong affinity with the Greenlandic, Sami and Native American struggle for political independence and cultural equality, and the Greenlanders remain a prominent group within Christiania's rich and diverse demographic.

The first street theatre action staged by the theatre group Solvognen in 1973 was enacted in support of the Native Americans' occupation of Wounded Knee, and after the Rebild action in 1976, which called attention to the US oppression of the nation's indigenous peoples, the profits from the subsequent support party were sent to what was at the time called 'our own Indians' in the Greenlandic independence movement, which launched its annual cultural and political summer rallies Aasivik that same year. Prominent Danish singer Kim Larsen played in support of Aasivik in Den Grå Hal the following year, in 1981 Christiania backed the Sami in their conflict with the Norwegian state at Alta, and 1986 saw the launch of a new tradition: an annual support party for Aasivik, where Greenlandic bands and actors from the Tuukkaq Theatre provided most of the entertainment.

In 1995, the first Greenlandic rock group SUMÈ reunited, and like most other touring groups from the thriving Greenlandic rock community they began with a warm-up concert in Christiania.

The largest event in Christiania for indigenous peoples took place in Den Grå Hal in April 1986: a three-day festival in support of Navajo and Hopi people threatened by forced relocation to make way for coal and uranium mining at Big Mountain in Arizona. Approximately twenty music and theatre groups, including several from Latin America and Greenland, played for free, prominent Danish rock band Savage Rose got 1,000 people to dance a chain dance, and it all ended with a protest rally complete with horses and feathered headdresses in front of the American embassy, a protest so peaceful that the police went home before the protesters.

Claus Deleuran designed a poster that sums up the entire Big Mountain conflict in a single picture. Another poster shows a 4 x 10 metre tapestry created by ten women under the direction of artist Annie Hedvard and used as a backdrop in Den Grå Hal. The third Big Mountain poster shows the space shuttle Challenger, which exploded a few months before the festival. The huge tapestry was sent to Arizona along with the total proceeds, which came to DKK 60,000.

Cannabis and hard drugs

Cannabis arrived in Denmark in earnest in 1966–67. Bob Dylan sang about 'Mr. Tambourine Man', Donovan about 'Mellow Yellow', and the Beatles got 'high with a little help from my friends'. In Copenhagen, Danish singer Peter Belli was convicted for possession of pot, and Cæsar sang about a place where it could be bought: 'the big, bad

Stork Fountain'. Sales moved on from the fountain to the youth community centre known as Projekt Hus in Magstræde. The venue eventually had to close down to get rid of the drug trade, which in turn moved to Projekt Fabrik in Christianshavn. When that too closed, drug dealing moved just across Bådsmadsstræde to the newly opened Christiania, where it became firmly established.

Cannabis was not the only drug sold in Christiania. Towards the end of the 1970s, cocaine came along, as did cheap heroin, which caused a series of deaths. After unsuccessful efforts to cooperate with the police, the Christiania community took matters into its own hands and implemented a successful blockade against hard drugs in the autumn of 1979. The 'People's Movement against Hard Drugs' was formed shortly afterwards. In 1983, the movement carried out a blockade in the Christianshavn district, which became saddled with the problem after Christiania got rid of it.

Now free of hard drugs, the Christiania cannabis market attracted the attention of the biker gang Bullshit in 1981; the gang disbanded in 1988 after seven of its members had been killed by rival gang Hells Angels. After this, Hells Angels and Bandidos both got involved in Pusher Street, where they have now, thirty years later, been joined by various gangs.

Despite countless police raids, the criminal cannabis trade continues. Christiania has made multiple attempts at closing down Pusher Street, most recently under the slogan 'Enough is enough!', which saw 200 Christiania residents signing a petition stating that they want Pusher Street closed. When the street was in fact briefly closed down, the criminal marijuana trade moved out into the city, leading to an increase in violence. After fifty years of unsuccessful efforts, most Christiania residents believe that the only lasting and long-term solution is to legalise cannabis.

For several years, the Copenhagen City Council have wanted a pilot scheme for legal cannabis sales in Copenhagen. The poster bearing the legend: 'Support Christiania, buy your pot somewhere else' was first put up in 1983, when the Bullshit gang was active. It was reprinted in 2016 when two officers were wounded by gunfire.

The theatre group Solvognen

The phenomenon of group theatre arose in the 1960s as a rebellion against elitist, highbrow, star-worshipping traditional theatre which tended to go right over the heads of the majority of the population. Group theatre performances were created through collaboration between the actors,

with everyone having an equal say. The actors wanted to step down from the stage, out into schools, town halls and the streets, addressing topical issues in plays that turned passive spectators into active actors. In the case of Solvognen (literally 'The Sun Chariot', named after one of Denmark's most important archaeological finds), performances tended to count on attracting the active involvement of the police, too.

Solvognen originally began by producing theatre lighting and light shows in Vesterbro, but upon moving to Christiania in 1972 the group quickly developed into the most talked-about, high-impact action theatre group of the 1970s. Things took off in earnest in 1973. In the spring, the group produced the theatre action 'Wounded Knee', which transplanted the Native American struggle in the Dakota reserve to Copenhagen at Nørreport and Rådhuspladsen, and in June followed 'The NATO Army', which set out to 'accustom the civilian population to NATO's intensified efforts against society's subversive and anarchist elements'. Among other things, the 'army' occupied the Danish broadcasting house to ostensibly 'clear out the communist lackeys in the editorial offices'. The NATO Army's Base Camp was Den Grå Hal, where Solvognen's women members performed a NATO cabaret. In the autumn, the project evolved into another cabaret, this time focusing on gender roles. The cabaret became Solvognen's first stage show and went on to tour Denmark.

In the days leading up to Christmas 1974, Solvognen carried out its best-known action, a protest against unemployment and the commercialisation of Christmas. For four days, the Copenhagen streets were filled by a hundred Santa Clauses walking along in three rows with a five-metre goose taking the lead. The Santa Army visited nursing homes and sang Christmas carols to the elderly, reopened closed factories, handed out presents in a major department store, and eventually went on the attack the labour court with drills. There was ample opportunity to get the desired pictures of policemen holding Santas in a headlock as they were being bundled into prisoner transport vehicles.

In the autumn of 1975, Solvognen ventured indoors in Den Grå Hal, playing Elverhøj (Elves' Hill) to sold-out houses. The play addressed the youth revolt's inherent conflict between the city-based struggles in labour and housing movements, against the hippie dream of life in the countryside in harmony with nature. The play was re-enacted in the lead-up to 1 April 1976, when Christiania mobilised its forces against the looming threat of eviction. Another group, Christianias Aktionsteater,

also entered the fray with a play called April Fools' Day. Between the two performances of Elverhøj, the Solvogren Women's Group performed a play, Spil om Kvinder (literally 'Play about/for Women'), in connection with an exhibition at Charlottenborg in Copenhagen. The play is about four female factory workers experiencing an awakening and rising up to fight against the oppression of women.

Solvogren's largest and most spectacular theatre action took place on the 200th anniversary of the United States on 4 July 1976 during the Rebild Festival, a celebration of Danish-American friendship held in the Rebild Hills. Queen Margrethe was in attendance, and the proceedings were broadcast on live TV to the United States. Disguised as Native Americans and other peoples oppressed by the United States, a few hundred Solvogren participants rose up among the crowd and moved down, singing, among the thousands of festively dressed spectators while half a hundred riders also dressed as Native Americans appeared over a ridge as in a John Ford western. The riders and their horses managed to escape while the police chased and apprehended, with great force, the Solvogren cast among the audience. Approximately forty participants were arrested and subsequently fined in the city court in Hobro. The year 1978 saw the last major street theatre action: Dyrehæren (The Animal Army), which featured some fifty animals protesting against pollution in Copenhagen and the Swedish nuclear facility Barsebäck.

In 1977, Solvogren split into two groups. One dreamed of touring and presenting plays in a large circus tent while the other preferred to continue in Den Grå Hal. The groups produced Købmandsliv (Merchant's Life) in Den Grå Hal and Soldaterkammerater (Brothers in Arms) in a circus tent by Christiania's main entrance. Each in their own way, both plays portrayed the disarray of capitalist (dis)order and the necessity of fighting for a more humane social system.

Following Christiania's blockade against hard drugs in November 1979, Solvogren once again took over Den Grå Hal in the autumn of 1980 with Det Hvide Slot (The White Castle), a play about the international drug trade and how hard drugs break down their victims, and 1982 saw the very last Solvogren performance, Chartertour Amour, by which point Solvogren had moved to the Boulevardteateret in Vesterbro. The group disbanded in 1983.

In the summer of 2006, a group of performers formerly associated with Solvogren gathered again under the name 'Trundholm Mose', a sly reference to the place where the Bronze Age Sun Chariot was

found. Together, they created yet another colourful army to march through the Copenhagen streets, protesting against the United States' violation of human rights and international law in their war against terror. Approximately 300 participants dressed in orange suits of the kind used in the Guantánamo prison camp, black caps covering their heads and their hands and feet in chains, moved in silence from the Danish Parliament to the US Embassy, where they broke their silence by singing the American anthem 'Amazing Grace'. After a few more minutes of silence, the gloomy scene dissolved as the prisoners dispersed to discard their suits some distance away from the embassy.

Crafts and design

Christiania moved into very dilapidated buildings, and infrastructure at the site was either non-existent or characterised by stop-gap solutions. Craftsmanship, recycling and creative solutions were necessary to transform former warehouses, stables and weapons factories into housing and businesses. Pallets and beer crates were popular for furniture, and beds raised on tall posts became a staple of Christiania homes, ensuring that you slept where the heat lingered.

Christiania companies catered primarily to the community's own residents. The flea market, which took up half of Løppebygningen, provided clothing and furniture, the Genbrugshallen (Recycling Hall) handled building materials, Snedkeriet (Woodwork Shop) renovated wooden furniture and antique stoves, and Smedjen (The Smithy) produced new wood-burning stoves and bicycle trailers for easier transport in the car-free community. The trailer was unsuitable for transporting children, prompting the creation of the cargo bike instead.

The tall, elegant Pedersen bicycle, based on an eighty-year-old patent, entered production in 1978, and Glasværeriet made glass from old beer bottles while the ceramics workshop provided cups, egg cups and plates and the candlemaker provided light for the many homes that had no electricity. The Energiværkstedet experimented with wind turbines and solar panels, but it turned out that the winds around Christiania's ramparts are too changeable for wind turbines, and the solar panels could not keep up with out-of-town mass production.

Circus posters

In the 1970s, Danish acts like 'Røde Mor' and 'Clausen og Petersen' were instrumental in incorporating funfair artistry and classic circus

numbers in the left-wing palette of artistic modes of expression. In Christiania, the circle around Månefiskeren formed 'Cirkus Sindssyg' ('Circus Crazy') in 1978 and also founded Månefiskercabareten, laying down the foundations for an unbroken tradition of variety shows and cabarets.

In the 1980s, the performances moved to the more suitable stage in the Opera and in the 1990s the venue Rockmaskinen became the place where the fun unfolded in a series of wild Gong Shows.

While the Opera still presents two or three variety shows each year, a new generation emerged in the 2000s. They created Cirkus Spektaculum in a circus tent on Fredens Eng, set up the traveling troupe 'Brunette Brothers', and breathed new life into the cabaret tradition with the flamboyant 'Cooku Nest Cabaret' and psychedelic shows with 'Melancholics Anonymous'.

Music

Music venues and rehearsal rooms began popping up just a few weeks after Christiania's inception. The Multimediehuset and Electric Ladyland were the first. Then followed Rockmaskinen and in 1973 Musikloppen. Ever since, these venues have – alongside the Freetown's largest concert hall in Den Grå Hal – hosted a wide range of concerts and charity events featuring the cream of Danish rock and beat music. From the 1980s, the venues have also presented major international names like Bob Dylan, Patti Smith, Bo Diddley, Dead Kennedys, Rage Against the Machine and others. Månefiskeren became a music venue around 1978, Operaen in the 1980s, and in the 2000 Christiania's jazz club took over what was formerly the children's theatre, and Nemoland built its permanent outdoor stage.

Christiania, you have my heart

The tradition of arranging a Christmas market and a free Christmas celebration for the Christmas-less in Den Grå Hal began in the Christmas of 1975, when the so-called peasant army from communes on Djursland set out for Christiania to support the fight against the looming threat of the freetown being cleared out on 1 April 1976.

Both initiatives proved to be great successes, and for more than forty years now, each December has seen Christiania host a ten to twelve-day Christmas market with approximately a hundred different stalls selling food and drinks, design, crafts, jewellery, imports from exotic countries and live music. By the entrance, a collection raises funds for 'Christmas for the Christmas-less', an initiative where

approximately a hundred volunteers spend four days decorating Den Grå Hal and making vegetarian and traditional Christmas food for 1,200 people.

Although the tradition is so well known and firmly established that no advertising is required, posters are still made for every Christmas market and Christmas Eve celebration. These are made by a new person every year, so the Christmas posters vary greatly in their aesthetics, just like the anniversary posters.

For the past twenty years, John Snedig Snyder has produced murals and a large number of posters with clear inspiration from the Dutch artist M.C. Escher.

The posters Grønsagen (a pun on the Danish words for 'Vegetable' and 'The Green Cause') and Fælleskøkkenet (The Communal Kitchen) are part of a series of twelve posters showcasing Christiania's various enterprises, from Den Grå Hal and Indkøbscentralen to Pusher Street.

The poster advertising a communal meeting is from the 1970s, but conveys a universal message: How do we make Christiania work, how do we implement our decisions and what do we do with the outside world?