

life 2

simon dybbroe møller

solo exhibition

22 august — 26 september 2026

1.

It's hard to imagine what could be more sentimental than a father-daughter duo sitting side-by-side at a piano, playing the "saddest" melody they could think of. A recording of this private performance is the earnest but self-consciously saccharine basis of Simon Dybbroe Møller's *(Gitte Skjødt Madsen) aging* (2024), which, for the length of this exhibition, will soundtrack the titular gallerist's time at work. The rough, documentary quality of the recording captures the slow, cloying, slightly clumsy melody along with the contingencies of the moment: domestic acoustics, passing cars, obscure rustling, breathing. These non-musical sounds lose their relationship to happenstance and become predictable as the song is repeated over and over. Madsen's time, on the contrary, continues to flow.

Music is a machine for sentiment, but also, in an even more overtly mechanical operation, it also makes the passing of time palpable. This isn't an abstract or secondary quality: it's common to listen to music in order to feel time differently, as when one dons headphones on a flight, in a gym, or in a waiting room. The sentimentality of a melody is inextricable from the temporal experience of it. *(Gitte Skjødt Madsen) aging* pushes this obvious fact to the brink. No one will feel that brink as keenly as Gitte Skjødt Madsen herself, who must endure the incessant repetition of this recording as well as its most personal implication: her slow progress toward death. The work not only wastes the gallerist's time, it asks her to count the minutes ticking by as oblivion approaches, while prodding the visitor to perceive her aging.

The relationship between artist and gallerist is already performative. Many artists don't like to think of their work as commodities or their exhibitions as the sites of banal monetary transactions; to that end, gallerists perform the role of salespeople so that the artists can continue to perform their freedom. Like an act of dubiously good-natured revenge against the gallerist for acting out the truth of the market, *(Gitte Skjødt Madsen) aging* pits Madsen's mortality against the ceaseless—and seemingly eternal—repetition of a digital file. No one likes to be reminded that their time is slipping away, though sometimes this thought is impossible to suppress, especially at work.

2.

The brothers Lutz and Heinz Heck were directors of the Berlin and Munich zoos, respectively, before and during the Nazi regime. Today, they are mostly remembered for attempting to recreate a wild ancestor of domestic cattle that was believed to roam Europe, Asia and North Africa before going extinct in 1627. Adhering to a goofy nationalist ideology, they imagined this breed, known as "aurochs", was sturdier, more aggressive, and purer than contemporary cattle. Basing their understanding of these animals entirely on a few anatomical drawings and cave-paintings, they embarked on a project of "back-breeding"—that is, breeding different cattle species together, each of which supposedly displayed characteristics of the "original" animal.

In this way, they attempted to reconstruct a cow based on paintings from 35,000 years ago, which, today, are widely seen as the birth of representational art. Taking that representation far too literally, the Heck brothers treated those paintings almost like photographic documentation, as if they provided indisputable anatomical information. Their project reduces the animal to an imitation of an image at the same time as it reduces painting to a document, shaving off the expressive qualities that are essential to our current understandings of art and its origins. Simon Dybbroe Møller's three works, *Poster I-III* (2026), feature photographic representations of these biological representations. Each poster presents a different black-and-white photograph of the descendants of the Heck brothers' cattle roaming in a nature park in Southern Denmark, where they've recently been introduced as part of a rewilding project. The animals are depicted as part of the landscape—partially hidden by foliage and mist, blending into the scenery. Somewhere between landscape photography, portraiture, and parody, the posters play chicken with both anachronism and authenticity.

Pushing against the conventions of nature photography, each image is overlaid by a graffiti tag announcing the name of the exhibition: *Life 2*. Like most sequels, the cattle pale in comparison to the original (even though the original, in this case, is imaginary); far from representing the glory of undomesticated nature, they basically look like big cows. And far from the fantasy of an original wild nature, the tags are conspicuously urban, marking human presence. Through the layering of techniques that indicate genuineness, the works both elicit and repel the viewer's trust: the black-and-white photos signal documentary reality, the animals signal nature and ancient history, and the supposed rawness of the tag signals human immediacy. All of these elements are derived from contemporary realist aesthetics, but they are all constructions. There has never been, of course, an original "Life"—there's only *Life 2*.

text by Steven Zultanski