

## Exhibition on drug abuse - seen with a relative's paintbrush

Posted by Hanne BjørtonHanne Bjørton



Leah Robb fortæller om sit maleri 'Døden'. Misbrugeren lader sig lokke af den farverige dragt og en smilende maske, men i hånden bærer Døden en sprøjte. Foto: Martin Sørensen

EXHIBITION. Artist Leah Robb has created an exhibition based on a person she loves who relapsed back into drug addiction.

CHRISTIANIA: David Bowie's 'Heroes' is on a loop on a speaker while we wind our way through the labyrinth's canvas corridors. Along the way, we encounter plaster bodies and statements written on the walls, and should we outright, stoop or push through a door or barrier to move on?

The labyrinth is part of the artist Leah Robb's exhibition in the gallery, Galopperiet - The City's Museum of Art in Christiania. The exhibition revolves around substance abuse, and the confusion in the maze symbolises the chaos, the drug abuser experiences in the urge for the drug, the struggle to be clean and the pitfalls along the way.

The exhibition also expresses experiences as seen through a relative's optics, where powerlessness may seem even greater. Leah Robb herself knows that role too well.



The entrance to the maze is festive and filled with flicker, and to the right a pusher lures with glittering drugs. Inside, confusion and chaos awaits.

### Common experiences change

»This part of the exhibition is most inspired by a particular person who is fighting a brave battle against a hard drug. When I met him, he was clean and in recovery and one of the most beautiful people I had met. We made all kinds of projects together, but then he relapsed, and that is something you do not understand. It turns your world upside down - it's like entering a fog, like drowning in a sea, like you're in a whirlwind of confusion. And then you ask yourself whether you have some dependencies, and why you get them? "Says Leah Robb.



Inner Scream, A canvas copy of an important painting in the exhibition, which shows the relative's inner screams and powerlessness, can be seen in an installation at Christiania's main entrance while the original is inside the Gallopperiet. Photo: Martin Sørensen

### Is it about a friend or a family member?

"No, it's not a family member, but it's one I love hugely. Sometimes love is a choice, and when things are particularly hard, then you can remember back to the beautiful sides and say: That's what I love. I have heard from others who have been close to someone with an addiction that when a relapse comes, a defeat ensues and to deal with it, they change the story. The story you had together you no longer have together. You remember it yourself, but the addict is somewhere else, and that's what hurts most. The fact that you stand alone and have been pushed away and feel abandoned, it has led to many of these paintings. It was actually easier for that person to let go of a person I am pretty sure he loved than it was to face them. But I do not blame the person - it is important to say, "says Leah Robb. She prefers to keep the person anonymous. She has begun to have little contact with him in recent months.

"You mustn't have any expectations. But he has actually helped to design this work (the labyrinth, ed.), And the person has seen the exhibition. So it's been great."

### Diamonds in the dust

Leah Robb originally came from Scotland, where she was educated as an artist at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art.

Her first major art project took place in Christiania, where she made portraits of various people. One of the portraits - of Acid-Kim who saw his portrait back in 2008 shortly before he died - is in the current exhibition.

"When I came to Christiania I noticed that there were these diamonds in the dust - beautiful people who might be suffering a little and in a bit of trouble. But in order to make a project where you portray people, you actually have to keep your mouth shut, listen and not be prejudiced. It was something I just had to learn; not having an opinion right now. And I decided I shouldn't start smoking cannabis and drinking myself drunk. That way I can preserve my different perspective on things, "says Leah Robb.



A diamond in the dust - a piece of concept art in the exhibition. Photo: Martin Sørensen

Acid-Kim came to the exhibition in 2008.

"He said, "Wow, it's a cool way to paint, man. You could have painted anyone else... It looks like me when I'm ugly." So he was both challenged by the painting, but also honoured. And that's what art can - talk to people without using words."

Leah Robb's social perspective on art is not about having to "help" anyone.



Leah Robb shows the portrait of Syre-Kim from 2009.  
Photo: Martin Sørensen

"I have a heart for these people and understand what is going on for them because I myself have been bullied and felt like an outsider. And I have felt healing here in Christiania because I felt accepted as I was and that matters. I never thought it should be that now I have to help you, you are a poor man. No, it must be about seeing each other at eye level. And if that means we both have to get on our knees, well, we can just do that."