

**PETER JOHANSSON**  
**FEATURING NIKE KARLSSON**

# **IN THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS**

**23 March - 3 June 2001**

Swedish artist Peter Johansson has ironically entitled his large travelling exhibition *In the Best of all Possible Worlds* after Voltaire's satirical roman *Candide* (1759). In a humoristic yet critical way, he captures both good and bad in Swedish society with equal measures of hate and love.

The 36-year-old Peter Johansson was born in Sälen and grew up in Transtrand, a town in Dalarna near the Norwegian border. In the last 15-20 years, this area has turned into a tourist destination with all that follows in its wake - a situation that has provided the artist with endless inspiration. The exhibition contains humour and considerable seriousness. Key themes in the installations and sculptures in the exhibition are nationalism, identity, racism, culture and religion. Visitors also find in the outdoor space of Pori Art Museum a ten meter high wooden church, which Peter Johansson together with architect Nike Karlsson has constructed and built. The church project has developed from his fascination with the church as an ambiguous space - a worldly and sinful exterior contra a spiritual inner sanctuary. In many of his works, Peter Johansson explores the character formation and identity of the Nordic cultures.

In Sweden people think with pride of their rich tradition of folklore painting and continue to market it as old, original Swedish arts and crafts. Peter Johansson points out that many national customs, which we today claim are several hundred years old, are in fact not much more than hundred years or less. The powerful nationalistic trends in the early 1900s and the extensive tourist industry later on created artificial visions of an idyllic state.

For the exhibition Peter Johansson has created the installations like *Excellent Taste - Our Reward!*, a gigantic sculpture constructed out of 250 pieces of IKEA furniture, an overwhelming chaos decorated with felt-tip markers, embroideries and hand-painted Swedish patterns in rustic style: kurbits decorations and modern flame patterns. The installation *Stiga Territorium* is based on the idea "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence". We wish to reassure ourselves or others that this place is good enough, even though we long for and imagine the neighbour's is better. In the centre of the installation a lawnmower is suspended, which is automatically activated with some intervals making it toss grass across the small fence and thus providing the neighbour with fresh greenery.

One image symbolizes today's Swedish "folkhemmet" milieu. Interior of the house in the installation *Home at last* is furnished with a three-piece suite. People shut themselves inside the house with TV to look at the others on the screen, and the others "look" back. In Sweden most immigrants own a parabola so they can watch all programmes from their own countries. They never watch Swedish TV, and the Swedish never watch TV from Turkey, Iran or Pakistan: a total lack of communication. A veritable wall. This dilemma has inspired Peter Johansson to the sculpture *Things We Don't Understand*.

Pori Art Museum has produced the exhibition as a Nordic travelling exhibition with Borås Kunstmuseum, Sweden and Kunsthallen Brandts Klædefabrik in Odense, Denmark. The catalogue is printed with four languages as three versions: English-Finnish, English-Swedish and English-Danish.