

# Kunsthalle Zürich

## PRESS RELEASE

**Henrik Olesen**

**Copies of real-life objects, tools and food**

13.06.–06.09.2026

Press tour: Friday 12 June 2026, 11.40 am–12.20 pm

Exhibition opening: Friday 12 June 2026, 6–9 pm

Introduction by Fanny Hauser, Curator and Director Kunsthalle Zürich: 6 pm

Zurich Art Weekend: 12–14 June 2026



Henrik Olesen, *Food chain incl prehistoric animals*, Den Frie, 2025. Image: David Stjernholm

## Exhibition text

With *Copies of real-life objects, tools and food*, Kunsthalle Zürich presents the first solo exhibition by Henrik Olesen (b. 1967 in Esbjerg, Denmark) in Zurich for nearly two decades. Featuring new productions as well as a selection of existing works, the exhibition offers an insight into the artist's multifaceted working method and his longstanding exploration of normative systems of categorisation.

Since the 1990s, Henrik Olesen has been grappling with questions of identity, language and bodies, and their construction, in his work in order to describe power relations and social norms. In doing so, he draws on a wide range of visual and material sources – from specific works of art and stylistic languages to simple

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materials and everyday objects – and incorporates a broad spectrum of (art) historical, subcultural, political and literary references in his work.

For the exhibition at Kunsthalle Zürich, Olesen pursues his ongoing interest in food chains as well as processes of production, consumption and digestion. Exemplifying this approach at the beginning of the exhibition – and at the top of the food chain – are the two predators, *Crocodile, 2023*, and *The earliest crocodilian, circa 95 million years ago, 2024*, constructed in plaster, jute, wood and wire mesh, and evoking a time before the emergence of humans. Making reference to their long evolutionary history – early ancestors of crocodiles emerged on earth around 200 million years ago – the works indicate their ambivalent role within the food chain: both threatening and threatened, hunters yet also part of a larger ecological system in which they can become prey.

Developed for this exhibition, the installation *Copies of real-life objects, tools and food, 2026*, fills the room with tables of differing heights and white plinths on which an array of small- to medium-sized objects are arranged. Casts of food items such as eggs, chicken, apples, fish, canned goods and milk cartons are displayed alongside replicas of tools such as paintbrushes; some are packed in transparent plastic bags. Assuming the sleek modes of display found in shops or department stores, the arrangements are inevitably reminiscent of still lifes – a genre that can be traced throughout art history from murals in Pompeii to Dutch painting of the 17<sup>th</sup> century or to Modern and contemporary art, thus challenging and suspending concepts of time across centuries. Olesen's works likewise superimpose different periods of time, by bringing classical still-life motifs like asparagus and lemons (Édouard Manet), fish (Gustave Courbet) or chickens (Francisco de Goya) into dialogue with everyday objects of contemporary consumer culture such as laptops and keyboards.

Translated into a variety of materials including plaster, silicone and acrylic and epoxy resins, some of the casts in the installation are painted, while others are left untouched. This cadence is interrupted by occasional painted readymades, increasingly dissolving categories of original and copy, representation and object. Form no longer appears as something abiding and unequivocal, but rather as something that can continually be digested and reconstituted through repetition, reproduction and material transformation.

The works presented on the upper floor of Kunsthalle Zürich invert the logic of the lower level. While the white walls downstairs remain empty and untouched, the exhibition upstairs unfolds around an empty centre, limned by 24 hand-made glass vitrines on the walls. If the works on the lower floor investigate processes of production and consumption as well as the plasticity of objects, the upper floor turns the focus towards the supposed neutrality of methods of presentation and display.

Yet instead of protecting objects or artefacts the vitrines appear – with a few exceptions – to be empty. Mounted with hefty brackets to the walls of Kunsthalle Zürich, they frame no more than the air inside, the white wall behind each and their own means of suspension, thereby becoming images of themselves. Marked by worn surfaces, fingerprints, scratches and imperfect joints they no longer function as simple containers. Instead, traces of production together with notes on Post-its and adhesive tape transform them into carriers of information about their own making.

With their serial logic, the transparent glass structures recall the austere formal language of Minimal Art. While some of them follow the sober naming conventions of the 1960s and '70s with titles such as *Untitled*

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*11, 2021, or As yet untitled 3, 2026, other titles including Depression, 2026, Dispossession 1, 2021, or Madhouse, 2019, open up a field of subjective meaning, invoking bodily or psychological states that were typically omitted from the vocabulary of Minimal Art.*

If Olesen's works on the upper floor of the exhibition offer themselves as surfaces for physical and affective projection, the reproduced objects on the lower floor, rendered in different colours and materials, continually undermine fixed categories and attributions. Taken together, *Copies of real-life objects, tools and food* proposes an open network of associations and relations in which bodies and things merge, and meanings continually evolve, shift – or collapse into one another.

Curated by Fanny Hauser.

The exhibition is made possible thanks to the support of the New Carlsberg Foundation.

With special thanks to Galerie Buchholz.

## Image

Henrik Olesen, *Food chain incl prehistoric animals*, Den Frie, 2025

Image: David Stjernholm

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## Artist's biography

Henrik Olesen (b. 1967 in Esbjerg, Denmark) lives in Berlin. His solo exhibitions have taken place at Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein (2025), Den Frie, Copenhagen (2025), Reina Sofia, Madrid (2019), Wattis Institute, San Francisco (2017), Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2012), MoMA, New York (2011) and at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich (2007). In addition his works have been seen in group exhibitions at venues including the Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg (2026), New Museum, New York (2026), MASP - São Paulo Museum of Art (2024), Kunstverein Graz (2024), Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2023), KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2021), Bienal de São Paulo (2018, 2017), Punta della Dogana, Venice (2015), La Biennale di Venezia (2013) and the Generali Foundation, Vienna (2012).

## Publication

A monograph accompanying the exhibition with new essays by Annie Ochmanek and Dieter Roelstraete is planned for publication by DISTANZ in winter 2026.

## Edition

The t-shirt *Food Chain* (2026) made for this exhibition is available in the Kunsthalle Zürich shop, alongside a new limited production run of Olesen's t-shirts *Self Sex and Patriarchal Sex* (both from 2013) as well as the designs *Un Captif Amoureux* and *Yes/No Future* (both 2016) created in collaboration with artist Gerry Bibby.

## Art mediation

Henrik Olesen's exhibition is accompanied by an extensive art mediation programme, including workshops for schools, free public tours and 'Afternoon for all' workshops. Please see our website for the full art education programme.

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## Events

Several events take place during the exhibition, including:

Saturday 5 September 2026, 6 pm–2 am: Zürich's Long Night of Museums

Details of all events are available on our website.

## Press contact

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