



# **BUTTERFLY!**

– an essay by Esben Weile Kjær

When I was twelve years old, I bought a skateboard. Not to actually use, but to walk around with it. Down by the ramps at the local skate park, I often sat on my board and watched the big boys fly around. Up and down, then taking off and – just for a few seconds – becoming weightless. It was fascinating to see all the work that went into being able to be weightless for a moment. I was never a part of it; I just sat and watched. Maybe I was too lazy, or simply cautious. Or maybe it interested me more to experience it like a movie set. I knew it all from television. The skate ramps were the backdrop to the music videos I liked. An undulating architecture combined with speed. I loved looking at the entire scenario. The colours of the graffiti, and the stickers that merged with the prints on the clothes. I also bought spray cans, mostly because I liked the sound of them rattling when I walked. The repetitions and routines were important. For me, it was all super-symbols and attitude. Neither real nor fake.

I collected keyrings. I had hundreds at home in my room, but on the keyring I used day to day there were always only the same two motifs. One with a butterfly and one with an eagle. After school, if I wasn't at the skate park, I would go to the local amusement park. Many of my keyrings came from there; I either won, found, or bought them with money I had earned by selling lemonade to football fans on their way to the stadium on the road where I lived. I loved climbing over the fence into the fairground after it shut down at the end of the summer season. I thought the closed rides were beautiful, especially at sunset when the reddish light of the sun came in at a slant and hit the glass bulbs that decorated the rides. Then all the dead machines stood and glittered completely analogously in the autumn. Like diamond backdrops without a function. Sunsets are so moving and kitschy. Every day ends with a sunset, so something new can happen in the dark. A sunset is a sunset is a sunset is a sunset.

A few years later, I helped occupy a bunker that had originally been built to be a command

centre during the Cold War. It was large and very luxurious and had been occupied by young people before us. I had read about it in the newspaper, had seen pictures from the concerts down there and heard many stories from people who had been there. When we broke down the doors, I saw all the graffiti I had already seen in pictures. It felt a bit underwhelming to see it in real life. I fell asleep spooning my friend to keep warm. We froze, even though we had my big motorcycle leather jacket spread over us. I don't remember much else – only that there was a butterfly. I remember it because I wondered how it could live down there in the enclosed space. The next morning, we went to the supermarket across the street and bought some food to bring to the others. When we got back, the police were already clearing out the bunker. Our friends had been arrested and taken away.

The butterfly was everywhere. It was tattooed on what seemed like everyone's lower backs or ankles when I was growing up. It was on dresses and tops, and appeared as graphics on CDs. When I first came to ARKEN, I was fifteen years old, I think. I remember the collection extremely clearly. Damien Hirst's butterfly painting, Wolfgang Tillman's photograph of vegetables and cigarette butts, Micha Klein's *Crystal Powder from God*. Pop, but dystopian at the same time. The butterfly has always been a favourite creature. This is undoubtedly because it is the product of a true transformation. Changed, but still the same.