

# Jesus Christ Supermarket

**Follow Kirsten Dehlholm and her faithful disciples in Malmö. At the end or beginning of the impressive walking tour 'jesus\_c.\_odd\_size' awaits divine light, no less.**

## Theatre

"Meet Jesus!" We normally slam the front door when one of these lustrous-eyed saints bearing small pamphlets attempts to sell us salvation one deadly Thursday evening around dinner time. Now it is certainly not salvation that Kirsten Dehlholm and her divine minions from the "pro forma bible society", specially created for the occasion, promises us—for starters, 195 Swedish kronor and three hours of lodgings with Malmö University provide insight into a "worldly Jesus", his life and times, as seen slightly from one side: In best Pro Forma style the show is called 'jesus\_c.\_odd\_size'. Despite the studied secularity combined with performance-aesthetic distance, the reader should be warned: after a while in this calmly pulsating Jesus installation, the mind invariably edges towards informal devotions.

*You pays your money and you takes your choice*—start with the crucifixion, take an introductory course in the lecture theatre, where the man of the cloth and the man of science are alternately doling out videos, or begin by having your conscience salvaged in the virtual confessional. A flickering green sea of letters envelops the kneeling sinner—buzzwords are always a good cue for coaxing repressed matter along! The show begins and ends, in other words, wherever the wanderer him/herself wants; the biblical highlights have been arranged as a self-service smorgasbord, a spiritual yet sensual supermarket for the modern political consumer. Kirsten Dehlholm and her more than 50 assistants—including dramatist Gritt Uldall-Jessen, Belgian installation artist Lawrence Malstaf and

lighting designer Jesper Kongshaug—accommodate this sceptical shopper by taking both the New Testament raw materials and the high-tech refining process seriously.

At Golgotha, for example, the Saviour and his fellow sufferers are hanging, gasping for the last of the air in their giant see-through plastic vacuum packs. "Please feel free to touch, carefully," says one of the art college students piously. But the arms are hanging kind of limply away from the body. Powerless in the encounter with contemporary sterile suffering.

In the library, that classical temple of enlightenment and knowledge, the light has been turned off and the librarian has vanished. In his place stands the disfigured—the really badly disfigured—man, behind his long hair, handing us soup in small white polystyrene foam chalices. "Love is patience, love is goodness". The Christian bons-mots suck the doubt out of the doubting, the soup warms up the barren. And the dark is really not that dark at all—the unfathomable gleam of the Transfiguration seeps out of the lecture theatre's trembling blue computer screens. Where was it beauty comes from?

The show's complete avoidance (unlike this review, perhaps) of the unctuous and hollowly pathetic—a Swedish Salvation Army choir from Ystad keeps time and keeps up the happy Christian note—is due not least to Kirsten Dehlholm's uncompromising 'sense of the material'. A cripple is a cripple, a stone is a stone, and yes, a Sally Army choir is a Sally Army choir. No sign of dummies in Ms Dehlholm's temperance hotel. But what do you do when the person you want cast in

your credibility project is none other than Jesus? You take a living martyr from Florida, dress him in a loin cloth and innocent ankle socks. Cartoonist Mike Diana has been in jail, convicted for his 'obscene' cartoons and since denied access to the drawing board in his homeland. Here, at the educational establishment of the free arts, sits little Jesus, in the middle of the floor, drawing peacefully with his coloured chinks. That is, when he's not actually seated around the communion table with his twelve sculptural and well-and-truly tattooed disciples. God's good little children? Luckily, the show's jury is still out on that one. But on the third floor a brace of

posh Swedish ladies has been installed, imbibing coffee and saying nice prayers for the young men.

Dehlholm and Uldall-Jessen thought the Bible had too few women, so they introduced the disciples' grandmothers and an expansive text on Maria Magdalene. Ulla Henningsen, together with Göran Dyrssen as the martyr Stephen, represents well the theatre of speech and the alternative-interpreting Sunday school. But perhaps it is the mute image of wan Jesus with his coloured chinks that becomes most deeply imprinted. An odd size in an oddly moving world.

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