

PRESS RELEASE

ELMGREEN & DRAGSET

STILLEBEN MIT GEMÜSE

20 MAY 2026–17 JANUARY 2027

Städel Museum

Frankfurt am Main, 19 May 2026. Elmgreen & Dragset (Michael Elmgreen, b. 1961 and Ingar Dragset, b. 1969) have been collaborating since the mid-1990s and are among some of the most influential contemporary artists working today. While often being referred to as sculptors, the artists work in an expanded field that also includes installation, performance and architecture. Their works challenge familiar spatial structures and imbue both public and institutional spaces with a distinctive atmosphere. From 20 May 2026 to 17 January 2027, the Berlin-based artist duo will transform the Städel Museum into a fascinating interplay of reality and illusion. The exhibition “Stilleben mit Gemüse” presents sculptures and installations by the artists that enter into a dialogue with the architecture and the permanent collection of the Städel Museum, which spans over 700 years, opening up new perspectives.

Elmgreen & Dragset situate their figurative sculptures in such a way that they invite the audience to participate in an active game of storytelling. By redirecting and shifting the visitor’s gaze, the artists bring everyday moments that are easily overlooked into focus and turn these into poetic scenes charged with both criticality and humour. Through their elaborate sense of display, they are able to deal with serious questions about social structures, behavioural patterns rooted in conventions and institutional routines in an engaging rather than didactic way. The artist duo also examines how the museum itself shapes our perception of art history. They subtly subvert traditional forms of presentation and play with the rules of exhibition-making.

Unlike other exhibitions, “Stilleben mit Gemüse” extends across the entire Städel Museum. Two immersive installations in the Contemporary Art Collection form the core of the presentation, which unfolds throughout the historic collections and into the neighbouring Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung. The exhibition places the visitors at the centre by inviting them to embark on a treasure hunt where artworks can be discovered in unusual places, often in almost absurd dialogue with the works from the collection.

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The exhibition has been made possible thanks to the sponsorship of Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain gGmbH, SEB and the Städelischer Museums-Verein. Additional support has been provided by the New Carlsberg Foundation and the Danish Arts Foundation.

Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum, on the exhibition: “The Städel Museum is internationally renowned for its outstanding collection, which since 2020 also includes the bronze sculpture *Si par une nuit d’hiver un voyageur* by Elmgreen & Dragset, currently on display in the garden. I am therefore even more delighted that we are now able to present this internationally acclaimed artist duo with a comprehensive exhibition at the Städel. With subtle humour and the ability to unfold grand narratives through minimal interventions, Elmgreen & Dragset transform our view of the collection—from the Old Masters through Modernism to the present day—and offer our visitors truly extraordinary moments as they make their way through the museum.”

“Contemporary art, in particular, can provide a powerful stimulus that opens up new perspectives on the familiar. With their exhibition at the Städel, the artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset invite visitors to rediscover the museum’s collection in unexpected ways. It is a great pleasure for us to support this internationally significant presentation and thereby also to reaffirm Frankfurt’s importance as a venue for outstanding contemporary art projects,” **says Susanne Völker, Director of the Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain.**

Svenja Grosser, curator of the exhibition and Head of Contemporary Art:

“Elmgreen & Dragset succeed in making familiar museum structures experienceable anew through nuanced shifts. Through their targeted interventions, they open up interstitial spaces and question habitual perspectives and expectations. The exhibition centres around two large-scale installations, *The Cloud* and *Garden of Eden*, which cast a critical eye on the tensions between labour and luxury, ambition and illusion. The museum becomes a stage for their artistic practice, where nothing is as clear-cut as it first appears.”

Everyday Environments

At the heart of the exhibition are the two large-scale installations, *The Cloud* (2026) and *Garden of Eden* (2022), which, through a change of scene, recreate mundane everyday environments situated between work and luxury, ambition and illusion. On their way to the Garden Halls and the permanent exhibition of the Contemporary Art Collection, visitors pass through *The Cloud*, a minimalist restaurant setting or a posh airport lounge, where a silicone figure of a woman sits alone at one of the tables (*The*

Conversation, 2025). Her smartphone displays a FaceTime call in which her conversation partner endlessly talks about his work as an artist and a failed romantic relationship. Six circular paintings from the series *Sky Targets* (2025) and *Flight Trackers* (2025/26) decorate the restaurant walls. These are paintings on mirror-polished stainless steel plates that partly reflect the surroundings and engage in a dialogue with the permanently installed mural *Mosaic Mirror Wall Piece* (1991–2012) by John M. Armleder. Personal identity and a sense of place seem to dissolve in *The Cloud*, leaving behind only a smooth, generic stage for high-end gastronomic consumption or maybe a place to be seen, a place for taking selfies and documenting one's visit on social media. One floor below, in the entrance area of the Garden Halls, Elmgreen & Dragset present an empty office landscape with rows of identical cubicles that structure the space in a strict, symmetrical manner. Through these cramped, deserted workstations, *Garden of Eden* addresses the stress factors of today's wage labour, characterized by repetition and anonymity, and hints at the promise of social mobility and advancement as a fragile construct. The cycle of leisure and work is resonated in *Uncollected* (2005), a baggage carousel transporting a solitary travel bag in a never-ending loop beneath the stairs that connects the two floors.

The Museum Visitor

Throughout the Städel, sculptures and interventions by Elmgreen & Dragset invite visitors to reflect on their own role and behaviour. *The Visitor* (2025), for example—a life-size bronze figure of a young man—shows the very act of viewing artworks. In the permanent Old Masters exhibition, the sculpture stands in front of Cornelis de Heem's painting *Stilleben mit Gemüse und Früchten vor einer Gartenbalustrade* (Still Life with Vegetables and Fruit in Front of a Garden Balustrade, 1658), which lends the exhibition its title. With his introvert posture, *The Visitor* refers to an idealized understanding of contemplative viewing in the museum, one that many naturally adopt. In the work *The Examiner, Fig. 2* (2023), the question arises as to who is actually observing whom in the museum. The white-lacquered bronze figure of a man in shorts, standing in the stairwell, points his camera at Marc Chagall's painting *Commedia dell'arte* (1959). Whether other visitors enter his field of vision remains open, creating a multi-layered situation of mutual observation. The vulture in the work *Si par une nuit d'hiver un voyageur* (2017) in the Städel Garden also fixes its gaze on the visitors, whilst being scrutinized by them in turn. As a recurring motif in the works of Elmgreen & Dragset, the scavenger has been referred to by them as "The Critic" since 2012 and offers new perspectives on the art world, evaluation and power. The bronze sculpture has been an integral part of the sculpture garden since being acquired by the Städel Museum in 2020.

On certain days, another visitor appears in the form of a female live performer in the museum's Modern Art Collection. In front of a still life depicting an open shell painted by Louis Eysen, the performer speaks about her personal relationship to this small-scale painting, which she seems to visit repeatedly. The monologue, written by Elmgreen & Dragset, is a tribute to regular visitors to museums such as the Städel who have picked their own favourite artwork in the collection with which they create a special bond.

Deceptively Real

Elmgreen & Dragset's hyperrealistic sculptures add a further dimension to the multifaceted realm of perception. The work *The Drawing, Fig. 2* (2023), for example, draws on the principle of deceptively realistic imitation—comparable to *trompe-l'oeil* in painting—to depict a familiar scene from everyday museum life: a young boy draws on the floor of the Modern Art Collection in front of Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein's *Goethe in the Campagna* (1787). *Forgotten Baby* (2005), lying in a carrycot on the floor in front of Franz von Stuck's *Pietà* (1891), also plays with visitors' perceptions whilst simultaneously provoking confusion and unease. In dialogue with the painting, the sculpture of the abandoned infant evokes associations with Christian iconography, recalling both the infant Jesus and the story of Moses, who was rescued from the Nile as a foundling. Visitors touring the Städel Roof will encounter the *Artist* (2026). With the Frankfurt skyline in the background, he hangs from the ceiling between the spiral staircases, seemingly in danger of losing his grip and falling.

Traditional Art Genres

The Modern Art and Old Masters Collections also feature works by Elmgreen & Dragset, in which the artists explore the distinctive characteristics of various art genres, including *Still Life (Bullfinch)* (2024). The sculpture consists of a pair of white-lacquered bronze hands protruding from the wall next to Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin's *Still Life with Partridge and Pear* (1748), holding a replica of a small bird. The bullfinch is fitted with a motor that causes its body, lying on its back, to pulsate, thereby setting the classical still life in motion. With *60 Minutes* (2025), Elmgreen & Dragset subvert the traditional presentation of sculptures: the black-patinated bronze sculpture depicts a pensive boy in shorts sitting on a washing machine rather than on a plinth. Situated in close proximity to Auguste Rodin's *Eve* (1881), who modestly covers her body, the work raises questions about viewing habits regarding unclothed sculptures from art history. The medium of the self-portrait is deconstructed by the artist duo in *Portrait of the Artists* (1999/2026). The title refers to two spots on the wall whose outlines have faded and where the artists' portraits apparently once hung.

Here, Elmgreen & Dragset question their own significance within their artistic partnership, as well as the conditions of authorship and self-presentation in contemporary art, where the self-portrait is increasingly viewed as a conceptual enquiry.

The Digital Realm

In addition to the physical space, the digital realm also plays a role in the works of Elmgreen & Dragset. In the permanent exhibition of contemporary art, a terrier spins on a carousel, whose black-and-white spiral evokes art-historical references, such as Marcel Duchamp's Rotoreliefs and the illusionist Op Art of the 1960s. Titled *Social Media (Terrier)* (2022), the work refers to the mechanisms of social media, whose algorithms trigger a constant search for validation and orientation, as well as longing, but also despair and exhaustion. The sculpture *This Is How We Play Together, Fig. 3* (2023) explores the consequences of an increasingly digitalized everyday life and today's understanding of reality, interaction and coexistence. The sculpture features a boy wearing a VR headset, his attention entirely focused on a virtual simulation invisible to outsiders. In the historic villa of the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, it forms the conclusion of the exhibition.

Michael Elmgreen (b. 1961 in Copenhagen, Denmark) and **Ingar Dragset** (b. 1969 in Trondheim, Norway) are based in Berlin and have been collaborating since 1995. They have held numerous solo exhibitions worldwide, including at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris (2024–25), the Centre Pompidou-Metz (2023–24), the Fondazione Prada, Milan (2022), the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2019–20), the Whitechapel Gallery, London (2018–19), the UCCA, Beijing (2016), SMK – National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen (2014), the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2013–14), Serpentine Gallery, London (2006) and the Tate Modern, London (2004). Their works have also been presented at numerous biennials, including the Bangkok Biennale (2024, 2018), the Istanbul Biennale (2013, 2011, 2001), the Liverpool Biennial (2012), the Venice Biennale (2009, 2003), the São Paulo Biennial (2002) and the Berlin Biennale (1998). In 2017, Elmgreen & Dragset curated the 15th Istanbul Biennial.

Their best-known public artworks include *Prada Marfa* (2005), a full-scale replica of a Prada boutique in the middle of the Texan desert, and *Van Gogh's Ear*, which was first presented by the Public Art Fund at Rockefeller Center in 2016 and is now installed at K11 in Wuhan. In Berlin, the artists won the German government's competition to design a "Monument to Homosexuals Persecuted under National Socialism", which was inaugurated in the Tiergarten in 2008. The artists have received numerous awards, including the 14th Robert Jacobsen Prize from the Würth

Foundation in Künzelsau (2021) and the National Gallery Prize for Young Art from the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin (2002).

STÄDEL INVITES ELMGREEN & DRAGSET

Live event with the artists, with music & drinks

On Friday, 12 June 2026, the curator Svenja Grosser will talk to the artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset about their exhibition “Stilleben mit Gemüse”. Short guided tours in German and English invite visitors to discover the fascinating connections between the works of Elmgreen & Dragset and the Städel Collection, spanning over 700 years of art. Drinks and music round off the evening. The talk will be held in English.

Tickets cost €10 (€5 reduced) and can be purchased at staedelmuseum.de/tickets. Any remaining tickets will be available at the box office. Doors open at 6.30 pm, with the event beginning at 7 pm.

The STÄDEL INVITES event series takes place in partnership with BMW on the occasion of exhibitions by selected contemporary artists.

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Curator: Svenja Grosser (Head of Contemporary Art, Städel Museum)

Project Manager: Maja Lisewski (Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art., Städel Museum)

Exhibition Dates: 20 May 2026–17 January 2027

Press Preview: Tuesday, 19 May 2026, 11.00 am

Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Information: staedelmuseum.de/en/

Visitor Services: +49 (0)69-605098-200, info@staedelmuseum.de

Opening Hours: Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun + holidays 10.00 am–6.00 pm, Thur 10.00 am–9.00 pm

Special Opening Hours: For up-to-date information on special opening hours, please visit staedelmuseum.de/en/visit

Tickets: €19, reduced €17, Tuesday Special: every Tuesday from 3.00 to 6.00 pm, €10; admission free for children under 12. Groups of at least 10 persons who would normally be charged the full admission fee: €17 per person. Registration is generally required for all groups, by telephone +49 (0)69-605098-200 or info@staedelmuseum.de.

Sponsored by: Gemeinnützige Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain GmbH, SEB, Städtelscher Museums-Verein e.V.

With additional support from: New Carlsberg Foundation, Danish Arts Foundation

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