

## **BURN OUT**

By Jes Brinch and Henrik Plenge Jakobsen.

### **First project : The burned out kindergarten.**

The first project realised by BURN OUT was the installation of a totally burned out kindergarten in Gallery Nicolai Wallner in Copenhagen, Denmark, from February 13. to March 13. 1994. The gallery space was arranged as a complete day-care centre. The aim was to make the staging as authentic as possible, so that one would doubt whether one was in a real kindergarten or in a gallery.

The installation consisted of wall paintings of animals on lavender, peach and sky-blue coloured walls; crocodile, trumpet-mouth fish, budgerigar, dinosaur, octopus, teddy bear, butterflies and ladybirds, painted as if the kindergarten teachers had tried to draw and paint in "childish" style, the same style as in normal kindergartens in Denmark. The curtains hung in the galleries large street windows continued this doll-zebra-snowman-theme. The room was furnished with authentic children's furniture from Danish day-care-centres; little tables, chairs, pull out cots with pee-mattresses and quilts, children's toilet and washbasin, a children's nestling room with cushions and a small entrance in children's height, shelves with clay sculptures made by the children, a wardrobe with identification tabs with pictures of animals instead of names, children's wear and shoes, push-carts, a small sliding pond, a rocking horse, a play carpet, and so on. In this setting there was lots of toys, paint boxes, crayons, children's drawings, stuffed animals, dolls, children's books, song books, all of it spread in the room as if there had been children in the room a moment ago, and nobody had time to tidy up. All in all the installation gave a good impression of a complete Danish kindergarten.

A large part of the furniture and the other objects in the room was burned, soothed and in some instances melted and charred, to make the room look like a sudden fire had started during the children's midday nap. Everything was more or less destroyed and ravaged, but only to such a degree that one still had the impression of being in a kindergarten. To amplify the effect a smoke machine spread a constant fog in the room, as if the fire had just been put out, and one had arrived immediately after the fire brigade had finished their work. The work did not include any scorched children bodies, since the work would had a stronger effect when it was empty and sombre, and something was left to the viewers imagination.

The intention with the burned out kindergarten was to give a experience which could shake the viewer out of habitual thinking for a moment, and through maximum chock effect draw attention to the fact that the catastrophe could happen anywhere, anytime, that everybody eventually have to die, and nobody knows when. Awareness of the fact that nothing is permanent, forces one to confront ones own life, since nobody and nothing can help. A lot of people find this unpleasant, since they suffer from fear of death. But death does not go away just because we do not talk about it.

The installation had a redeeming feature in its deadpan humour; there was a humouristic element in the completely absurd action of furnishing a kindergarten in a gallery, on one hand, and on the other hand to do something as evil and cruel as to burn it down. The intention with the work succeeded quite well, even though the exhibition had by-effects as fits of anxiety and a debate in the Danish press based on a misunderstanding of the basic concept of the work.