

Per Kirkeby

Per Kirkeby
Processing Nature

Per Kirkeby (1938-2018) var og er en ener i dansk og international kunst, og hans oeuvre er så omfattende, at man må spørge sig, om der virkelig kun var én Per Kirkeby? Eller hvor mange Per Kirkeby'er findes der egentlig? Hans arbejde bevægede sig inden for så mange kunstneriske medier og felter i samfundet, at det forekommer uldsiggørligt. Han blev uddannet geolog med speciale i det arktiske i 1964, men en geolog, der sideløbende arbejdede med grafik, tegning og maleri, som han havde forsøgt sig med siden barndommen i Københavns Nordvestkvarter, og sidenhen fandt sin kunstneriske livsbane med et ophold på Den Eksperimenterende Kunstscole (EKS-skolen) i begyndelsen af tresserne. Den eksperimenterende holdning, som han kendte fra videnskaben, og hans utrolige intellektuelle nysgerrighed førte til et seriøst arbejde som forfatter, navnlig af essays og digte. I samme årti blev han filmmager og fortsatte i halvfyrdserne som instruktør med at give publikum et væld af dokumentarisk værdifulde film om de motiver og verdener, der optog ham. Grønland var et omdrejningspunkt, men også arkitektur, kunst og kunstnere blev sat i scene. Arkitekturinteressen udmøntede sig i arbejde med murstensskulpturer, og i firserne med bronzeskulpturer. Murstenene formede sig efterhånden til hele bygninger. Han kunne skrive arkitekt og billedhugger på visitkortet, men holdt hele livet igennem fast i maleriet som sin egentlige metier. Det var i maleriet, hans kunst bestod sin prøve. De mange Per Kirkeby'er var én og den samme hele vejen igennem.

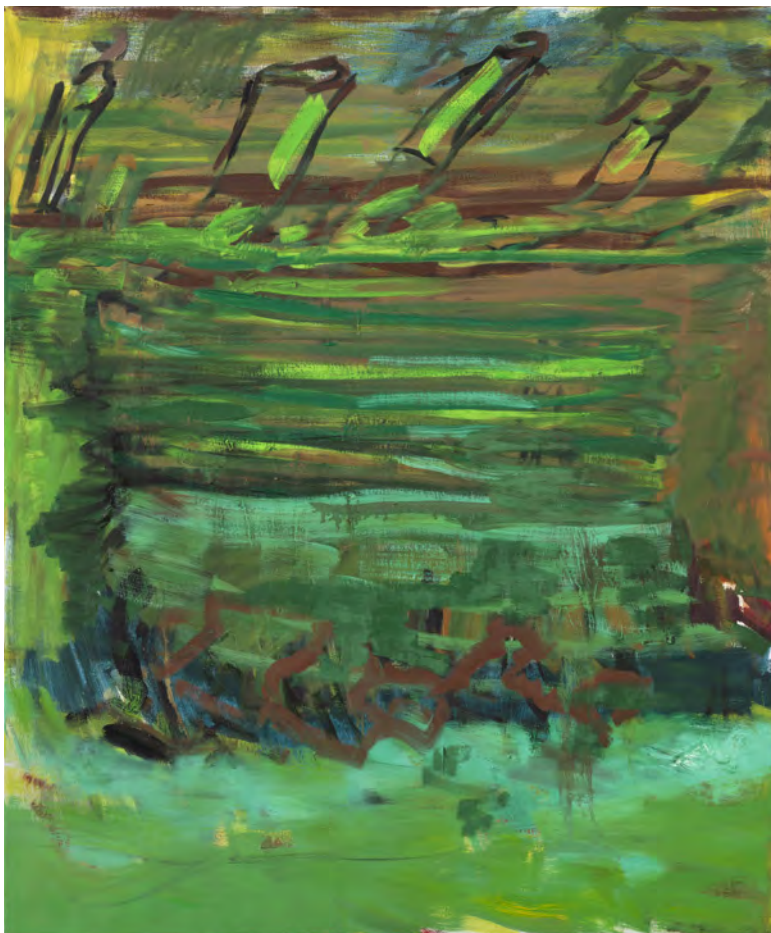
I Per Kirkebys maleri er der også mange veje der fører til den samme ophavsmand. Kunstneren udfoldede et stort repertoire; hans maleriske værk er et prisme, der ligesom en krystal er ordnet i gentagne former i alle mulige rumlige dimensioner. I det tidlige værk var kvadratet det element, Kirkeby benyttede mest. Han malede på masonitplader med målet 122 x 122 cm og afprøvede alle mulige collageagtige og maleriske former indenfor det format. I det modne værk fortsatte han disse afprøvninger på samme format, men på sortmalede tavler, som han så kunne bemale eller forsyne med farvekridtmotiver, eller i nogle tilfælde, skabelonbilleder eller påklistrede udklip. Hans grundige måde at undersøge maleriets muligheder skyldtes i høj grad den videnskabelige tilgang, han havde med sig fra geologistudiet, med dets opmålinger og krav om nøjagtighed, tegn og beskrivelser. I Per Kirkebys tidslinje som kunstner er der perioder, hvor der sker brud, og noget nyt kommer til syne. Et stort brud var midt i halvfyrdserne, da han forlod masonitmaleriet og begyndte at male med oliefarve på lærred. Det klassiske forhold, at han nu skulle måle sig med andre end avantgardisterne og sine egne udflipede eller ekspressive ungdommelige afprøvninger af materialet, gav hans værk en ny målestok. Kunstshistoriens store malere var i den grad en samling olie-på-lærred-sheiker. Fra El Greco til Edvard Munch. Fra Van Gogh til Willumsen og Weie. Fra Turner til Delacroix og Manet for at nævne nogle af de kunstnere som Per Kirkeby har skrevet bøger om. Alt imens hans egne lærreder voksede og den internationale bevågenhed og berømmelse tog til. I firserne er det maleriet og skulpturerne, der for alvor sætter Per Kirkebys arbejde på verdenskunstens kort.



Sommer ved stranden, ca. 1965
[PKI-65-006]

Et modent værk som *Nature Morte 3* eller det landskabelige *Ghosts* viser en kunstner der har mod til at udfordre og udfolde sit ekvilibristiske maleri. I halvfemserne konsoliderer han sin position blandt andet med store separate udstillinger på Tate i London og andre førende museer rundt omkring i verden. Per Kirkebys kapacitet og billedformater er vokset i en grad, så han også udsmykker lofter i offentlige bygninger og skaber bagtæpper til balletten. Han ekspanderer indtil år 2000, hvor kronen på værket er en række store bronzeskulpturer opstillet på taget af Bundesrats bygning i det centrale Berlin. I nullet opsummerer han sit værk, f.eks. i skulpturserien *Inventory*, og finder en ny vej efter helbredsmæssige problemer. Maleriet *Neuzeit II* er et godt eksempel på den nye tid, han går i møde, ligesom mindre malerier af ikon-karakter udført på Læsø viser den spartanske inderlighed eller ydmyghed over for maleriet, der er kommet til efter sygdommens svære livskrise. Det næste årti, indtil sin død, fortsætter han med at intensivere sit værk, og selvom skalaen bliver mindre og indsætserne sporadiske, forsøger han disciplineret at fastholde maleriet, tegningen, collagen, grafikken og skulpturen som en mulig bonus i det store værk, han har skabt gennem livet.

Erik Steffensen



Untitled, 2009
[PKI-09-030]







Ghosts, 1986
[PKI-86-012]



Untitled (Læsø), 2007
[PKI-07-018]



Untitled, 2010
[PKI-10-037]



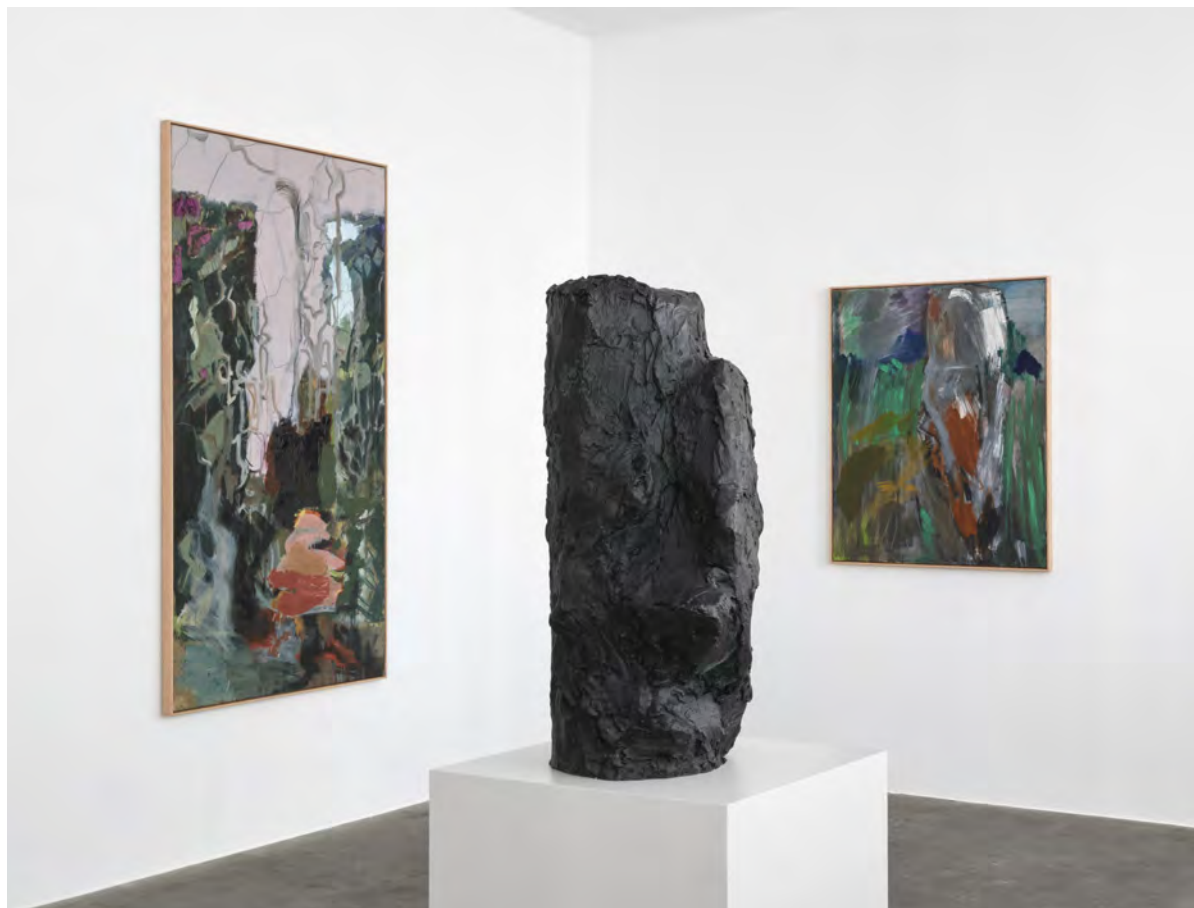
Untitled (Læsø), 2007
[PKI-07-017]



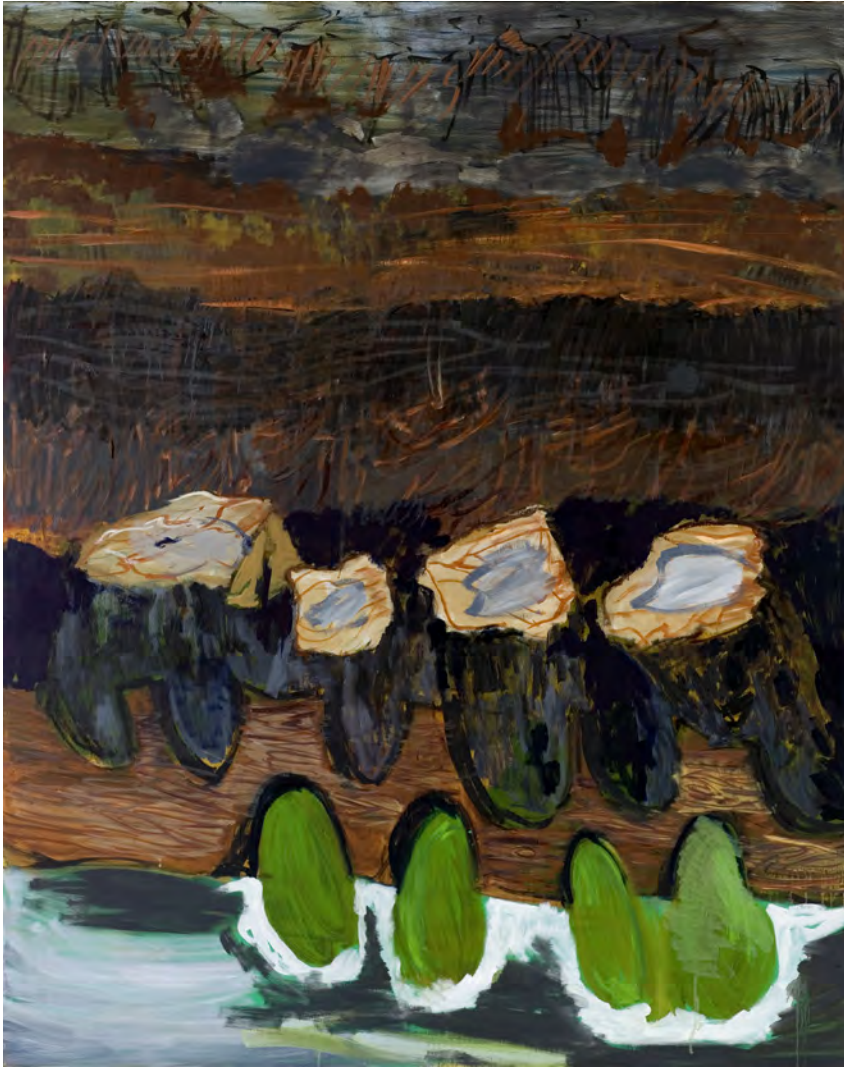
Untitled, 2009
[PKI-09-007]











Neuzeit II, 2003
[PKI-03-010]



Nature Morte 3, 1987
[PKI-87-004]



IV, 1981
[PKI-81-010]



Salzburg III, 1984
[PKI-84-003]



Inventory XIII, 2002
[PKB-02-093]



Untitled, 1982
[PKI-82-029]



Inventory III, 2002
[PPKB-02-083]



Inventory III, 2002
[PPKB-02-083]



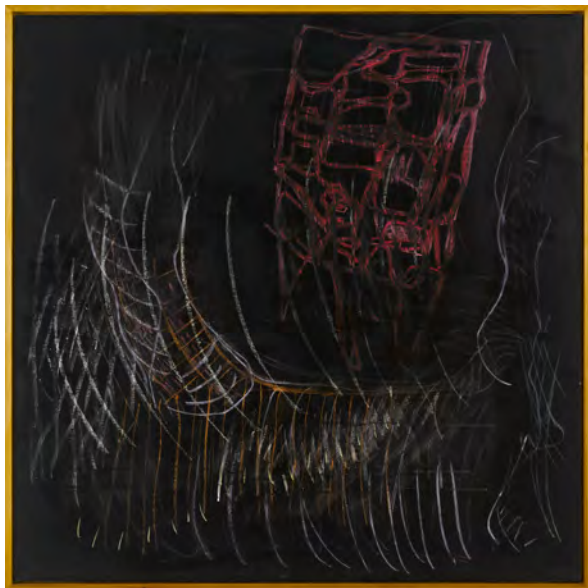
Inventory XIV, 2002
[PKB-02-094]



Inventory XIV, 2002
[PKB-02-094]







Untitled, 1987
[PKI-87-014]



Untitled, 1987
[PKI-87-016]



Untitled, 1987
[PKI-89-030]



Untitled, 1989
[PKI-89-032]



Untitled, 1987
[PKI-87-018]



J.P. Jacobsen, 2012
[PKB-12-001]







Untitled, 1998
[PKP-88-005]



Untitled, 2007
[PKP-07-008]



Förskjutning II, 2011
[PKP-11-049]



Förskjutningar I, 2011
[PKP-11-048]

Per Kirkeby (1938-2018) was and remains a unique figure in both Danish and international art, his oeuvre so extensive that one might wonder if there really was just one Per Kirkeby. Or, indeed, how many Per Kirkebys were there? His work spanned numerous artistic media and societal fields, making it seem almost impossible. Trained as a geologist specializing in the Arctic in 1964, he simultaneously explored graphic arts, drawing, and painting, which he had experimented with since his childhood in Copenhagen's northwest quarter. He found his artistic calling during his years at The Experimental Art School (EKS-school) in the early sixties. The experimental mindset he knew from science, combined with his incredible intellectual curiosity, led to serious work as an author, particularly of essays and poems. In the same decade, he became a filmmaker and continued in the seventies as a director, offering audiences a wealth of documentaries valuable for their insights into the motifs and worlds that fascinated him. Greenland was a focal point, but architecture, art, and artists were also featured. His interest in architecture materialized in work with brick sculptures and, in the eighties, bronze sculptures. The bricks eventually shaped into entire buildings. He could have listed architect and sculptor on his business card but maintained a lifelong commitment to painting as his true *métier*. It was in painting that his art truly stood the test.

In Per Kirkeby's painting, there are also many paths leading back to the same creator. The artist developed an extensive repertoire; his painterly work is a prism, like a crystal, arranged in repeated forms across all possible spatial dimensions. In his early work, the square was the element Kirkeby most utilized. He painted on Masonite boards measuring 122 x 122 cm, experimenting with various collage-like and painterly forms within this format. In his mature work, he continued these experiments on the same format but on black-painted boards, which he then adorned with chalk motifs or, in some cases, stencil images or pasted clippings. His thorough approach to exploring the possibilities of painting owed much to the scientific method he brought from his geology studies, with its measurements and demands for precision, signs, and descriptions. In Per Kirkeby's timeline as an artist, there are periods of exploration and breaks so something new emerges. A significant shift occurred in the mid-seventies when he abandoned Masonite painting and began using oil paint on canvas. The classical challenge of measuring himself against not just the avant-gardists but also his own youthful, outlandish, or expressive material experiments gave his work a new standard. Art history's great painters were indeed a collection of oil-on-canvas sheikhs. From El Greco to Edvard Munch. From Van Gogh to Willumsen and Weie. From Turner to Delacroix and Manet, to name a few artists about whom Per Kirkeby has written books. All the while, his own canvases grew, and his international attention and fame increased. In the eighties, painting and sculptures were what truly put Per Kirkeby's work on the map of world art. Mature works like *Nature Morte 3* or the landscape-themed *Ghosts* show an artist daring to challenge and expand his equilibristic painting. In the nineties, he consolidated his position, with significant solo exhibitions at Tate in London and other leading museums worldwide.

Per Kirkeby's capacity and picture formats grew to such an extent that he painted ceilings in public buildings and created backdrops for ballets. He expanded until 2000, when the crowning achievement was a series of large bronze sculptures placed on the roof of the Bundesrat building in central Berlin. In the 2000s, he summarized his work, for example, in the sculpture series *Inventory*, and found a new direction after health problems. The painting *Neuzeit II* is a prime example of the new era he embraced, as are smaller, icon-character paintings painted on Læsø, showing the spartan intimacy or humility towards painting that emerged after a severe health crisis. In the next decade until his death, he continued to intensify his work, and although the scale became smaller and the efforts sporadic, with discipline he tried to maintain painting, drawing, collage, graphics, and sculpture as possible bonuses in the great work he created throughout his life.

Erik Steffensen



Vibeke, juli, 1983
[PKI-83-030]

PER KIRKEBY (1938 - 2018)

1938	Born 1 September in Copenhagen
1957 - 1964	Studies geology at the University of Copenhagen
1965	Kirkeby's first solo exhibition at Den Frie, Copenhagen
1978 - 1989	Professorship at the Academy of Art, Karlsruhe
1989 - 2000	Professorship at Die Städelshule, Frankfurt
2018	Died in his home in Hellerup on 9 May

Selected Public Collections

Ackland Art Museum at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, USA
ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, Aarhus, Denmark
Art Institute Chicago, Chicago, USA
Astrup Fearnley Museet for Moderne Kunst, Oslo, Norway
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA, USA
Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Torino, Italy
Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, USA
Haags Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag, Netherlands
K20 Kunstsammlung NRW, Düsseldorf, Germany
Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden
Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark
Magasin 3, Stockholm, Sweden
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA
Moderna Museet Stockholm, Sweden
MoMA, Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA
Musée des Beaux Arts, Nantes, France
Musée National d'Art Moderne
Museum Folkwang Essen, Germany
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA
National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark
Neue Galerie, Kassel, Germany
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Tate Modern, London, UK

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16 January – 2 March 2024

Værker / Works

Per Kirkeby
Inventory III, 2002
Inventory
Bronze
102 cm x 55 cm x 68 cm. Edt. 2/4
PKB-02-083

Per Kirkeby
Inventory XIII, 2002
Inventory
Bronze
107 cm x 49 cm x 37 cm. Edt. 3/4
PKB-02-093

Per Kirkeby
Inventory XIV, 2002
Inventory
Bronze
114 cm x 31 cm x 61 cm. Edt. 3/4
PKB-02-094

Per Kirkeby
J.P. Jacobsen, 2012
Bronze
210 cm x 85 cm x 60 cm. Edt. 2/5
PKB-12-001

Per Kirkeby
Neuzeit II, 2003
Oil on canvas
202 cm x 162 cm x 4 cm
PKI-03-010

Per Kirkeby
Untitled (Læssø), 2007
Tempera on canvas
63 cm x 33 cm x 4 cm
PKI-07-017

Per Kirkeby
Untitled (Læssø), 2007
Tempera on canvas
63 cm x 33 cm x 4 cm
PKI-07-018

Per Kirkeby
Untitled, 2009
Oil on canvas
72 cm x 68 cm x 4 cm
PKI-09-007

Per Kirkeby
Untitled, 2010
Oil on canvas
63 cm x 33 cm x 4 cm
PKI-10-037

Per Kirkeby
IV, 1981
Oil on canvas
203 cm x 133 cm x 4 cm
PKI-81-010

Per Kirkeby
Untitled, 1982
Oil on canvas
119 cm x 98 cm x 4 cm;
PKI-82-029

Per Kirkeby
Salzburg III, 1984
Oil on canvas
122 cm x 102 cm x 4 cm
PKI-84-003

Per Kirkeby
Ghosts, 1986
Oil on linen
204 cm x 134 cm x 5 cm;
PKI-86-012

Per Kirkeby
Nature Morte 3, 1987
Oil on canvas
203 cm x 113 cm x 4 cm
PKI-87-004

Per Kirkeby
Untitled, 1987
Mixed media on blackboard
125 cm x 125 cm x 4 cm
PKI-87-014

Per Kirkeby
Untitled, 1987
Mixed media on blackboard
125 cm x 125 cm x 4 cm
PKI-87-016

Per Kirkeby
Untitled, 1987
Mixed media on blackboard
125 cm x 125 cm x 4 cm
PKI-87-018

Per Kirkeby
Untitled, 1989
Mixed media on blackboard
125 cm x 125 cm x 4 cm
PKI-89-030

Per Kirkeby
Untitled, 1989
Mixed media on blackboard
125 cm x 125 cm x 4 cm
PKI-89-032

Per Kirkeby
Untitled, 2007
Monotype
240 cm x 134 cm x 4,5 cm
PKP-07-008

Per Kirkeby
Förskjutningar I, 2011
Monotype
183 cm x 115 cm
PKP-11-048

Per Kirkeby
Förskjutningard II, 2011
Monotype
183 cm x 115 cm
PKP-11-049

Per Kirkeby
Untitled, 1988
Monotype
223 cm x 117 cm x 4 cm
PKP-88-005

Reference Works

Per Kirkeby
Sommer ved stranden, ca. 1965
Synthetic paint on masonite
125 cm x 125 cm x 3 cm
PKI-65-006

Per Kirkeby
Vibeke, juli, 1983
Oil on canvas
119 cm x 98 cm x 4 cm
PKI-83-030

Per Kirkeby
Oil on canvas
118 cm x 98 cm x 4 cm
PKI-09-030

GALLERI BO BJERGGAARD

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