

ANN-CHRISTIN KONGSNESS &
MARTE REITHAUG STERUD

A Butch Is a Butch Is a Butch Is a Butch

THE COVER IMAGE is a still from the performance *A Butch Is a Butch Is a Butch Is a Butch*, which is a part of the performance series *Butch Tribute*, with and by choreographers and performers Marte Reithaug Sterud and Ann-Christin Kongsness. The term “butch” is used to describe masculine women in the queer community, an often marginalized and ignored group. *Butch Tribute* is an artistic and political work that explores what a butch is and can be. With this performance series, Sterud and Kongsness aim to demonstrate different representations of queer, female masculinity, and thereby contribute towards diversifying the representation of butches.

A Butch Is a Butch Is a Butch Is a Butch focuses on language’s role in creating identity, in the range between the personal and the political. The title refers to author Gertrude Stein’s famous phrase “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” from the poem “Sacred Emily” (1913). The text moves between the abstract and the explicit and is a weave of queer and lesbian references. Sterud and Kongsness engage in queer, female masculinity in all its manifestations throughout history until today, and highlight connections between queer and feminist struggles.

Butch Tribute contains the three dance performances: *Roses*, *Flirt*, and *Flannel Dream*.

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As female dancers, Sterud and Kongsness have been trained in conventional dance techniques with feminine ideals. This has to a large extent influenced their movement language, even in situations where they “choose” how to move. The feminine has been associated with exaggeration and artificiality and stands in close relationship to performativity. The masculine has a neutral position, and to perform masculinity is therefore a different practice than performing femininity. As a consequence, in *Butch Tribute* Sterud and Kongsness establish a presence and performativity based on masculine qualities like restraint and understatement, gravity and explosivity.

Sterud and Kongsness (NO) connect through their personal and theoretical interest in the relationship between dance and the body, gender and performativity. In their previous production, *Soft Manifesto*, premiered at Black Box Theatre in Oslo in 2015, they explored the androgynous and ambiguous body. The performance exhibited a playful and fluid relationship to gender expression and moved in and out of different bodily states. In June 2018, they organized Queer Dance Art (Skeiv dansekunst) – a conversation series (www.skeivdansekunst.no) during Oslo Pride, with contributions from sixteen dance artists who actively take a stand on issues concerning gender expression and sexuality. In 2021, they premiered the ongoing performance series *Butch Tribute* at Teater Innlandet, and the work has since been presented throughout Norway and abroad. Sterud has also written a master thesis about lesbian performativity at Center for Gender Research in Oslo, and Kongsness is a founding member of the drag king collective Gutta.

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