

Tanja Nis-Hansen
Cogito Ergonomic Sum
09 January – 28 February 2026

For the office worker in pain or at risk of computer-related injury, ergonomic furniture offers just enough support to sustain work, while holding out the promise of improved health, comfort, and productivity. In a series of new paintings shown alongside a sculptural installation, Tanja Nis-Hansen (b. 1988, Faxe; DK) evokes the absurdity of this functional allure, exploring the ways in which shifting attitudes towards work influence our understanding of the body and the possibilities for intellectual discovery.

René Descartes' self-directed career of philosophical enquiry seems inaccessible for anyone who needs to reconcile their work with the economic realities of everyday life. With *Up to and Including her Limits* (*2 Minuten Betrieb, 18 Minuten Pause*), Nis-Hansen presents a portrait of the French philosopher, set into the wipe-clean faux-wood surface of an impossibly tall standing desk. Hovering just above the eye-level of most viewers, the painting remains out of sight until the desk descends to reveal his confronting gaze, gesturing hand and coffee break mug, all emerging from the subconscious depths of a pool of unknown liquid.

Following the logic of a theatre curtain that reveals and conceals, the painting is visible for only 2 minutes at a time before it rises again to rest for 18 minutes, preventing the desk's electronic motor from overheating and burning out. Underscoring the work that any artwork must perform, the installation evokes the impossible expectations of constant visibility for artists and their labour inside an attention economy. At the same time, the sculpture offers a meditation on accessibility – in terms of design bias in the set-up of the working world, but also economic gatekeeping and how access to knowledge is limited by the resources available to people balancing work with everything else.

The artist's interest in the physical requirements of work feels more acute in several small-format paintings that show office chairs in different states of bodily transformation. In *Chair 3*, a pair of alluring padded lips emerge from a contoured lower backrest, acknowledging the attraction of perfect lumbar support but also the uncanny ways in which professional lives contain and regulate the personal. *Chair 2*, shows a pair of insect-like eyes and antennae emerging from a headrest, like an alternative version of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* in which an office chair transforms into a beetle, instead of Gregor Samsa. In Tanja Nis-Hansen's painting, a dehumanising transformation has already taken place, with the office chair becoming a stand-in for the body it supports and restrains.

The notion of body as furniture finds a different expression in *Mother Chair*. Here, Nis-Hansen depicts the head of Whistler's mother in the painting *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1* emerging from an upright seat back. Here, the suggestion of the equivalence between woman and prop in Whistler's conspicuously anonymous 'Arrangement' is made explicit, as well as the undeniable visual similarity between her formless torso and a chair. Nis-Hansen's painting also projects the way in which worlds of creative thinking emerge inside the workplace, namely the idea that a working self becomes intertwined with other selves informed by life outside the office, cultural consumption and daydreaming or fantasy. This effect is compounded in several other works that merge similar office fixtures with art historical references ranging from Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* to Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, Holbein's *Dead Christ* and Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse*.

The cumulative effect of these works is both surreal and mildly horrifying, like the staging of a temporary office in the afterlife. What resonates most is this feeling of being caught in-between, where the body is simultaneously object and subject, attention is perpetually divided, and the self is suspended between multiple demands and identities. In this employment limbo, the logic of constant productivity collides with the impossibility of full presence, reflecting an existential condition at the heart of contemporary working culture.