

I found- I found!

Hanne Hammer Stien

In the Norwegian fairy tale “The Princess Who Could Not Be Silenced,”¹ hero Askeladden values everyday things. Similarly, in the art project *I found I found - not everything is what you think it is you see*, artist A K Dolven finds value in the materials she more or less came across or found. These materials might include an old family photograph, boulders, daylight, Sami folktales and legends, the shape of a street lantern or voices of people from Bodø. Together, they form an art project created specifically for Stormen, the new Cultural Quarter in Bodø, in four installations.² In these installations, found materials are either processed or deposited directly into an artistic context. Because the material now has new contexts and features which displace their material meanings, its artistic contextualisation makes us newly aware of the material: it will come to us.³

Through the use of found materials in this project, Dolven relates back to a well-known artistic method. Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) is perhaps the artist most known for using everyday objects in an artistic context, and the term “readymade” first appeared in an artistic context in relation to his art.⁴ But where “readymade” usually denotes mass-produced, everyday objects that do not have an intrinsic artistic purpose, Dolven expands the traditional meaning of the term when she uses mass-produced objects, items from nature, heritage, and ideas and forms in her installations.⁵ For Dolven, it is mainly the significance of displacement where it takes place that is important. Because the found material relates to Bodø and other places in northern Norway, the significance of this offset changes our consciousness not only relative to the material, but also to the places that the material refers to. In this way, Dolven’s project has a site-specific dimension, which on one side is about the individual installations in their physical environment, and on the other side works discursively. By recontextualising

¹ In the fairy tale “The Princess Who Could Not Be Silenced,” Askeladden picks up things he finds along the way and shouts out “I found it, I found it!” These things, which his brothers overlooked and dismissed as worthless, among them a dead baby magpie, a ram’s horn and a shoe sole, contribute to Askeladden’s spellbinding of the princess, thus winning her and half the kingdom. Asbjørnsen and Moe 2012 (1841).

² The Cultural Quarter in Bodø was designed by architects Daniel Rosbottom and David Howarth at DRDH Architects in London, and is titled “Urban Shapes.”

³ Heidegger 1996 (1926): 96

⁴ Duchamp is best known for his piece *Fountain* which was first shown at the Armory Show in New York in 1917. The fountain consists of a pissoir set upside down on a shelf and signed “R. Mutt.” Fincher-Rathus 2004: 201

⁵ The terms “object trouvé” and “found object” are also used to describe the same method of art production.

found materials related to places in northern Norway, Dolven examines her cultural understanding of the region, and in so doing emphasises northern Norway as a dynamic, changeable, and also imaginary form.

Scuff marks

On the end wall of the library's main hall, one finds a black-and-white photograph which has been enlarged (3.5 x 5.25 m.) The point of departure for this installation, *skrapa komager*, is a family photograph which Dolven found to be interesting. The family photograph, part of a collection owned by photographer Rune Johansen, comes from Johansen's family in Beiarn, Nordland County, and was originally taken around 1900.⁶ In the installation, the photograph is transferred to canvas and placed in a light box. Since it was Johansen who originally brought the photograph to Dolven's attention, he is listed as her partner in its creation. This is significant to Dolven's way of working, where collaboration with people with special skills or people related to her individual interests or contexts becomes an important part of her process of preparing the final artwork.

The photograph in *skrapa komager* shows an elderly couple sitting on a stone staircase in front of a notched wooden house.⁷ Because it is immediately seen that the photograph is of a historical character, the viewer's direction is primarily on the photograph as a historical document. Upon closer examination, there is a detail in the photograph which, not immediate at a distance, catches the viewer off guard: where the man's moccasins were once depicted, now the image has been scratched away, leaving only the back surface of the photograph. In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), Roland Barthes uses the terms *studium* and *punctum* to describe how photographs affect us. When faced with most photographs, he argues that we feel what he calls a "medium-affect." The photographs evoke universal, almost polite interest.⁸ In some cases, a disruption of this *studium* occurs, and our attention is

⁶ Rune Johansen was born in Bodø in 1957. He is a self-taught photographer and broke through as an artist after attending the Autumn Exhibition in 1990. After he received the State's guaranteed income for artists in 2013, he began working as an artist full time. Along with exhibitions, Johansen has, since 2004, released 6 photography books through Forlaget Press.

⁷ Hanna Margrete Bendiksdatter (1850–1929) and Kristian Albrigtsen ("Oskrestian") (1846–1931) are the subjects of the photograph.

⁸ "It is by *studium* that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or as good historical scenes: for it is culturally (this connotation is present in *studium*) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions." Barthes 2001: 26

sharpened. This is what Barthes calls the photographic *punctum*.⁹ He describes, for example, how a detail in a photograph can cause our interest to change intensely, “(...) as a lightning strike.”¹⁰ Scratch marks on a family photograph work just like an interruption, and the title, *skrapa komager*, points toward the photograph’s “punctum”: image wounds. The action behind the hard and violent scratches occurs, in all its simplicity, in contrast to the soft and comfortable *komager* he was wearing, which were a traditional type of Sami leather shoe for summer wear.¹¹

Dolven’s appropriation of a family photograph in *skrapa komager* helps to make the photograph a public concern. The dimension of the work emphasises the transformation that happens when moving from a private to a public context. There is something else which makes *skrapa komager* remarkable in addition to the picture’s context as a general historical reference: After World War II, the assimilation of the Sami people began.¹² This led to Sami markers, such as clothing, language and other symbols being increasingly removed, and an attempt was made to delete Sami culture from both individual and collective memory.¹³ Beyond that, *skrapa komager* also examines the general mechanisms related to the production of memory, identity, and history. Which memories are captured and which are discarded? And who among us is given the authority to make these choices? As libraries, museums and archives are understood as memory institutions, whose task is to safeguard society’s cultural heritage – its collective memory – the memory theme in *skrapa komager* becomes particularly relevant.¹⁴ For without a collective memory, people lose the ability to understand the past, acknowledge the present and to create the future. The idea of the library’s importance in the future is also relevant, given that the modern public library is a community’s cultural meeting space, living room and knowledge centre, and therefore through these features has a role in integration and social inclusion.¹⁵

⁹ “This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. (...) A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me). Barthes 2001 (1980): 26-7

¹⁰ Barthes 2001 (1980): 63

¹¹ *Komager* are made from birch-tanned reindeer leather soles, with the sides made from seal or cow leather.

¹² Minde 2005: 13–17

¹³ For more on the concepts of individual and collective memory, see Erll 2008.

¹⁴ Salvesen, <http://www.nbbs.no/bibliotekhistorie.htm>, retrieved 10.11.2014, publication date unavailable, unnumbered.

¹⁵ Aune 2012: 3

Memory technologies

The themes of memory that are present in *skrapa komager* also have relevance when it comes to *eventyrsteinen*. The installation, which is placed in an outdoor atrium on the top floor of the library, consists of a five-tonne boulder donated by Gunn Helmersen in Gildeskål, as well as sounds. The sounds are based on a joik and a selection of Sami folktales and legends belonging to northern Norway, as collected from Just Knud Quigstad's *Lappish Fairy Tales and Legends* (1927) and read by actress Marit Adelaide Andreassen in the local Nordland accent.¹⁶ The *joik*, performed in Sami language by mother and daughter Biret Elle Balto and Laila Somby Sandvik, is a message to the next generations, urging them to help the needy, and not support the rich or serve the great.

According to techno-philosopher Bernhard Stiegler, people operate with three memory systems: a biological memory system based on genetic information transfer via inheritance, a mental memory system involving the nervous system's network of memories and impulses, and a technical memory system covering memory aids such as writing and other tools, including photography.¹⁷ When it comes to the technical memory system, archaeologists extend this to include all kinds of objects.¹⁸ Given such an extension, the use of stone, for example, in burial customs becomes a memory technology. It may therefore be difficult to distinguish between natural accumulations of stone and boulders, and man-made defences, weapons storage or burial mounds.

eventyrsteinen can also function as a kind of memory stone.¹⁹ Even if the stone does not bear traces of use or inscription, it is not difficult to imagine that it may have had a memory technology function. Sounds seem to come from within the stone – it's as if *eventyrsteinen* was talking to us. In a geological sense, the boulder is also a bearer of biological memory. This memory feature, underscored by *eventyrsteinen*, is in constant flux due to external influences on the installation. For example, the lichen growing on the stone alters its character, and rain and snow contribute to the installation changing with the seasons. Since *eventyrsteinen* simultaneously confronts both nature and culture, it therefore calls their

¹⁶Fairy tales and legends were collected in the early 1900s. In connection with the recording of the sound, the featured fairy tales and legends are recorded using contemporary Norwegian.

¹⁷ Stiegler 2010

¹⁸ Røssaak 2013: 145

¹⁹ Eriksen 2007: 93ff

complex relationship into question. While modernity contributed to establishing, in Western thought, a distinction between nature and culture, today's thinkers, such as socio-anthropologist Bruno Latour, attempt to dissolve such distinctions.²⁰ *eventyrsteinen* can be seen as a contribution to this particular mode of inquiry and discourse.

The installation's thematisation of the complex nature/culture relationship leads our attention to the traditional Sami culture and nature religion, where rocks and mountains have an important position, and *sieidis* – sacred sacrificial grounds – are often placed adjacent to natural accumulations of stones or boulders. As the traditional Sami cultural landscape in this way blends with the natural landscape, it makes no sense to distinguish between nature and culture; the boundary between material and immaterial culture is constantly shifting. Nature and its location in the importance of culture, as conveyed through fairy tales, legends, joiking, and naming, has great significance. In such a context, the Qvigstad Archives, and Biret Elle Balto and Laila Somby Sandvik's joiking preserve the special value of that heritage. Through enabling this heritage with *eventyrsteinen*, Dolven reminds us to take care of the narratives that surround us all, even as she encourages us to place our ears against the stone and listen.

Interactive monument

bodøstemmer 2014 is all about listening, and the theme of memory is again present in this work. The installation, which is located outside the part of the library facing down towards Bodø Harbour, is shaped like an oversized lamppost (18 m.) – similar lampposts may be found along any harbour in Norway. The lamp's circular beam becomes a spotlight – creating an outdoor stage for the city's population. A Cry Baby pedal is placed on the spot where the light hits the ground. This type of pedal is normally used together with an electric guitar to create a “wah-wah” effect, but here, instead of guitar sounds, the sounds heard when someone steps on the pedal is based on the voices of people from Bodø in 2014: footballers from local team Bodø/Glimt, a great-grandmother in conversation with her two great-grandchildren, a boy born in 2014 and a young blogger. Small sound files have been made from the voices that have been selected, each lasting from 2-5 seconds. With reference to other works by Dolven, among them *Untuned Bell* (2010), it is tempting to think of these small sessions of sound as the sounds of a bell; stepping on the pedal works like ringing a bell. The clock used to create *Untuned Bell* was removed from the Oslo City Hall because it was seen as out of tune

²⁰ Latour 2003 (1993)

compared to the other 49 bells in the bell tower, and until Dolven reclaimed it, it lay soundless on the ground. Dolven temporarily reinstalled the bell at Tullinløkka²¹, just a few hundred metres from the City Hall, and let the audience play the bell by stepping on a Cry Baby pedal. Tullinløkka, which was once a central meeting place in Oslo, used among other things for political meetings and speeches, was thus reactivated, and the audience had the opportunity to use the bell to report – or write – history. Similarly, *bodøstemmer 2014* in the future might even come to serve as a kind of time capsule of 2014. The installation's dimensions and verticality reminds one of a monument, a memorial. But unlike a traditional monument, the aesthetics of *bodøstemmer 2014* are of the everyday, and those who are remembered by it are everyday people, in contrast to the monuments of kings, generals and explorers.

Landscape

What we hear and what we see always depends on the perspective we adopt, whether consciously or unconsciously. For example, the way in which we understand the northern Norwegian countryside is influenced by the treatment of it in artists' landscapes.²² With the installation *change my way of seeing seeing is about thinking*, Dolven places herself within the specific landscape art tradition of northern Norway, while clearly considering and referencing the modernist abstract painting tradition. The installation consists of 272 paintings in the same format (20 x 40 cm.), as well as a 19-tonne stone, donated by Gunn Helmersen of Gildeskål. Two of the paintings have a dark palette, while the remaining images have a soft – nearly white – palette. The paintings' horizontal orientation, as well as the horizontal transparent fields in the paintings, which themselves are reminiscent of the horizon, help evoke the landscape painting tradition. In this context, the romantic northern Norwegian landscape motifs of painter Peder Balke (1804-1887) become an interesting point of reference.²³ While Balke's paintings focused on the beauty of nature, his and Dolven's paintings are also comparable when it comes to their subdued colour palette and painterly technique. Balke, educated as a decorative painter, felt largely liberated from traditional painting methods. When it comes to Dolven, she has painted in daylight, and as a performative gesture, used the same painting process for each individual painting. To begin

²¹ The 1.5-tonne bell was hung on a rope 20 feet above the ground between two steel columns, which were placed 30 metres apart.

²² For more on northern Norway in the arts, see Høydalsnes 2003.

²³ For more on Balke, see Ljøgodt et al. 2014.

with, Dolven used aluminium as the foundation for her paintings, and then anodised the aluminium to create an adhesive layer on the paintings. After laying a foundation of gesso onto the aluminium, she used broad strokes to add oil paint with a faint cadmium orange colour onto the near-white paintings. The effect of Dolven's painting technique is that the viewer feels as though light emanates from within the images. The abstract, expressive images in each painting, along with their staging of quiet landscapes, with rocks at bottom and open skies above, compel us to consider the modernist painting tradition, particularly the works of abstract expressionist Mark Rothko (1903–1970), whose strongly-coloured rectangular fields might be described as meditation images.²⁴

Located in the foyer / entrance hall of the concert hall, the installation *change my way of seeing seeing is about thinking*, creates a larger collage-like landscape – a composition where no one element is more important than another. The title, which is taken from a piece by composer and visual artist John Cage, underscores this balance.²⁵ Throughout the installation, and with its ambitious title, it is understood that imprints of light, or memories of past artwork, show us the way back to an Askeladden-like way of understanding the world – where everything has its importance, and where what seems insignificant can make us look more closely and think again.

Translated by Jessica Allen Hanssen

References

Asbjørnsen, Per Christian and Jørgen Moe: *Norske folkeeventyr*. Aschehoug Press: Oslo 2012 (1841).

Aune, Karianne Joelsen: “Biblioteket i et multikulturelt samfunn. En studie av bibliotekets institusjonelle rolle fra et kulturvitenskapelig perspektiv”, Master's thesis. University of Bergen 2012.

²⁴ For more on Rothko, see Fichner-Rathus 2004: 495–496.

²⁵ The USA composer and artist John Cage is perhaps best known for his 1952 composition *4'33"*. The composition is performed while the musicians do not do anything except to be present for the amount of time that the work's title indicates. Although the composition is often described as 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence, it is the sounds of the environment in which the composition is performed which make up the work. Cage thus stressed that all parts of a composition are equally important. For more on John Cage, see Ross 2010.

- Barthes, Roland: *Camera Lucida: Thoughts on Photography*. Trans. R. Howard. FSG: New York 1982 (1981).
- Eriksen, Anne: *Topografens verden: Fornminner og fortidsforståelse*. Pax Press: Oslo 2007.
- Erl, Astrid: "Culture Memory Studies: An Introduction", in Erl, Astrid, Ansgar Nünning and Sara B. Young, (eds.): *Cultural memory studies: an international and interdisciplinary handbook*. De Gruyter: Berlin: 2008. pp. 1–15.
- Ficher-Rathus, Lois: *Understanding Art*. Thomson Wadsworth: Belmont 2004.
- Heidegger, Martin: *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Stambaugh. SUNY Press: New York 1996 (1926).
- Høydalsnes, Eli: *Møte mellom tid og sted. Bilder av Nord-Norge*. Presset Bonytt: Oslo 2003.
- Store norske leksikon: «Just Knud Qvigstad», https://snl.no/Just_Knud_Qvigstad, retrieved 10 November 2014, published 27 July 2012, forfatter ikke oppgitt, unummerert.
- Latour, Bruno: *We Have Never Been Modern*. Pearson Education: Harlow 2003 (1993).
- Ljøgodt, Knut, Marit Lange og Christopher Riopelle (red.): *Peder Balke: visjon og revolusjon*. Art Museum of North Norway: Tromsø 2014.
- Minde, Henry: "Assimilation of the Sami – Implementation and Consequences", i *Gáldu čála: Journal of Indigenous Peoples Rights* No. 3 2005, pp. 6–33.
- Ross, Alex: "Searching for Silence. John Cage's Art of Noise", <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/searching-for-silence>, retrieved 4 November 2014, published October 2010.
- Røssaak, Eivind: "Bexells talende steiner. Kunst, arkivet og selvet", i Eriksen, Anne, Mia Görán and Ragnhild Evang Reinton: *Tingenes tilsynekomster. Kulturproduksjon, materialitet og estetikk*. Novus Press: Oslo 2013. pp. 145–165.
- Salvesen, Helge: "Bibliotekhistorie – hva og hvorfor?", <http://www.nbbs.no/bibliotekhistorie.htm>, retrieved 11 November 2014, publication date unknown.
- Stiegler, Bernard: "Memory", in Hansen, Mark B. N. and W.J.T. Mitchell (eds.): *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. Chicago University Press: Chicago 2010. p. 64–87.
- Thorhauge, Sally og Ane Hejlskov Larsen: *Museumsgrundbogen. Kunsten at læse et museum*. Systime A/S: Århus 2008.
- Ydse, Tone Fredriksen: *Museum, arkiv og samfunn. Kunnskapsbehov og utfordringer*. Norwegian Arts Council/Fagbokforlaget: Oslo 2007.