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Museet for Samtidskunst

Museum of Contemporary Art

Bankplassen 4

<http://www.nasjonalmuseet.no>

November 7 2014 – March 8 2015

Rameau's Nephews: Sofie Berntsen and Karl Holmqvist

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The title of the series is a reference to a manuscript by the French Enlightenment philosopher Denis Diderot (1713–1784) entitled *Rameau's Nephew, or the Second Satire (Le Neveu de Rameau, ou La Satire Seconde)*, which was published posthumously. This somewhat contradictory and satirical text tells the story of Rameau's nephew and his fictitious dialogue with a narrator taken to represent philosophy. Diderot casts Rameau's nephew as an ironic and, at times, inconsistent agitator.

The first nephews in the series

Sofie Berntsen (b.1968) and Karl Holmqvist (b.1964) are the first artists to present their work in this exhibition series. They have never collaborated before, but they share an interest in language and literature.

Language can be seen as the subject's lowest common denominator. It is through language that we make ourselves understood and communicate with the world. But what happens when language cannot guarantee a mutual understanding between those who are attempting to communicate with each other?

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Liberated from grammar and conventional interpretation, Berntsen and Holmqvist manipulate words and phrases in the same way artists use mediums such as painting, video or sculpture. In their work, language gains a new dimension as a sensual and visual experience, and at the same time it can be read, at least partly, as text. Established conventions about words and their meaning are subordinate to ambiguity and a critical attitude to semiotics.

Sofie Berntsen

The spoken and written word represents both traditional and unorthodox science, popular and high culture. Sofie Berntsen uses textbooks on art and science as the foundation of her new paintings. The carefully selected textbooks have been found in second-hand bookshops. She uses the book covers as a canvas for her oil and pastel paintings, in which small gaps in the painted surface hint at the nature of the book. The brushstrokes, which respectfully spread paint across the book covers, demand that the readers change their approach to leather-bound knowledge. Colours and shapes devour the book's content and transform it into pure form. Past and present dissolve into one. The subject stands over the object and shows that knowledge *per se* is in constant flux. In many of Berntsen's works she investigates the historical association between spiritualism and art, and draws parallels between the justification of alternative scientific approaches and the demands for the autonomy of the art object.

Karl Holmqvist

Karl Holmqvist includes a broad spectrum of mediums in his artistic practice, including performance, text, posters, installation and sculpture. Visually his black and white imagery is reminiscent of the Concrete Poetry of the 1950s and 1960s, in which the typographic arrangement of text was as important for the overall experience as phonetic sound effects and the actual meaning of words. By giving words their own lives within a visual creation, they could be liberated from their circumscribed existence as signifiers. However, Holmqvist also takes inspiration from Beat generation artists such as Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs and the cut-up technique they developed in the late 1950s.

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Sofie Berntsen (b.1968) and Karl Holmqvist (b.1964) are the first artists to present their work in this exhibition series. They have never collaborated before, but they share an interest in language and literature.

Language can be seen as the subject's lowest common denominator. It is through language that we make ourselves understood and communicate with the world. But what happens when language cannot guarantee a mutual understanding between those who are attempting to communicate with each other?

Liberated from grammar and conventional interpretation, Berntsen and Holmqvist manipulate words and phrases in the same way artists use mediums such as painting, video or sculpture. In their work, language gains a new dimension as a sensual and visual experience, and at the same time it can be read, at least partly, as text. Established conventions about words and their meaning are subordinate to ambiguity and a critical attitude to semiotics.

Sofie Berntsen

The spoken and written word represents both traditional and unorthodox science, popular and high culture. Sofie Berntsen uses textbooks on art and science as the foundation of her new paintings. The carefully selected textbooks have been found in second-hand bookshops. She uses the book covers as a canvas for her oil and pastel paintings, in which small gaps in the painted surface hint at the nature of the book. The brushstrokes, which respectfully spread paint across the book covers, demand that the readers change their approach to leather-bound knowledge. Colours and shapes devour the book's content and transform it into pure form. Past and present dissolve into one. The subject stands over the object and shows that knowledge *per se* is in constant flux. In many of Berntsen's works she investigates the historical association between spiritualism and art, and draws parallels between the justification of alternative scientific approaches and the demands for the autonomy of the art object.

Karl Holmqvist

Karl Holmqvist includes a broad spectrum of mediums in his artistic practice, including performance, text, posters, installation and sculpture. Visually his black and white imagery is reminiscent of the

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Concrete Poetry of the 1950s and 1960s, in which the typographic
arrangement of text was as important for the overall experience as

phonetic sound effects and the actual meaning of words. By giving words their own lives within a visual creation, they could be liberated from their circumscribed existence as signifiers. However, Holmqvist also takes inspiration from Beat generation artists such as Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs and the cut-up technique they developed in the late 1950s.

Holmqvist has published several books, but insists that he is not a poet. He is, instead, an artist who writes poetry. In addition to the written word, the spoken performance of the text is a central part of his artistic practice.

I AM YOUR TELEPHONE, AND I LOVE YOU!

As a sidekick to the exhibition we are presenting the project *I Am Your Telephone, and I Love You!*

For the duration of the exhibition anyone can call a toll-free number, 800 400 50, from anywhere within Norway and listen to art and poetry. You are invited to call any time, day or night, and there will always be someone answering at the other end. From a varied menu you can select what you would like to listen to.

The physical component of this project can be experienced in the Museum of Contemporary Art. A classic red telephone booth is equipped with a screen where you can watch video and listen to audio recordings.

Twelve artists working with text have contributed answering machine messages: Sofie Berntsen / Nils Bech, Caroline Bergvall, Lars Mørch Finborud, Marthe Ramm Fortun, Iselin Linstad Hauge, Ebba Moi / Anna Carin Hedberg, Karl Holmqvist, Kristian Skylstad, Vibeke Tandberg and Arne Vinnem.

The project is an homage to the American poet and performance artist John Giorno's (b. 1936) work *Dial-a-Poem* from 1969. Giorno's objective was to bring poetry to a wider audience. People throughout the USA could call a number free of charge and listen to poems. In the museum's café you can listen to Laurie Anderson, Frank Zappa, William Burroughs, Patti Smith, Allen Ginsberg, Diane Di Prima, John Cage and many others.

I Am Your Telephone, and I Love You! has been produced in

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collaboration with Telenor Kulturarv.
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Curator: Stina Högvist

- See more at:

http://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/en/exhibitions_and_events/exhibitions/the_museum_of_contemporary_art/Rameau%E2%80%99s+Nephews.+Sofie+Berntsen+and+Karl+Holmqvist.9UFRnYWe.ips#sthash.pRwnlgZs.dpuf