

MeetFactory, o.p.s.

Ke Sklárně 3213/15, 150 00, Praha 5

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Based on a True Story

text by Eva Riebová, curator of the exhibition

The story begins in frosty docks on the outskirts of Reykjavik, where, for several hours, a group of men monotonously unloads tons of cardboard boxes with frozen goods. On the other side of the Norwegian Sea on the snowy polar plains, a young ranger is, right now, herding his reindeers. Tomorrow, he will lead them to slaughter. Many years earlier, in the environment of the deepest Estonian socialist depression, a perverse love story between a party leader and a young Russian soldier in a white undershirt unfolded..

The exhibition essay is based on a study tour across Northern Europe and the Baltics. It was not long-term research that would serve as a basis for a representative show of contemporary Nordic art. The exhibition also doesn't have the ambition to present the whole range of diverse artistic approaches in the area. I called the format an essay because, being enlightened by good old-school style analysis of art history, I focus on one tendency that, in my view, stands out in the Nordic countries: a narrative and documentary approach to creation.

Whether it is due to magical realism, Ingmar Bergman's films or the recent boom of the Nordic detective thriller, the notion of Nordic art is associated with so-called Nordic Noir: darkness, depression, melancholy, boredom, myths and crime. Such generalizations, like any other, more often than not border with rooted clichés. As remarked by the Swedish theorist and curator Jonatan Habib Engqvist, "We should feverishly promote the understanding of the 'Nordic region' as a mental, cultural and discourse sphere rather than as a geographical area with a very few connecting flights." The authors represented at the Based on a True Story exhibition do exactly that: their works deal with social and cultural themes that go beyond the local character. The stories conveyed by Máret Anne Sara, Jaanus Samma and Huldos Rós Gudnadóttir in their works come from the environment of social groups that are on the verge of social recognition and present a report on the state of society.

I admit that universally popular stories based on truthful events make me oddly curious too. Not surprisingly, the so-called "Truth-based labelling" resulted in several sociological-psychological research studies. The study Based on a True Story: Making People Believe the Unbelievable from the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology demonstrates that the likelihood of popularity of stories that are "atypical" in nature, increases when they are labelled "Based on a True Story". On the contrary, in the case of "typical" stories, this labelling has no effect on their popularity: who would be interested in the title "True story: Tomato sauce was served for dinner".

Over the past two decades, an extensive discussion on documentary in art has taken place primarily in the western world of contemporary art, which was substantially fuelled by the 11th World Show Documenta in Kassel (in 2002) under the baton of curator Okwui Enwezora.

Galerie, Rezidence, Divadlo, Hudba.

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Documentary strategies began to emerge in art at the beginning of the 20th century in connection with the emerging Soviet communism and the debates on productivism and factography. In the introduction to the anthology "The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art," its authors Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl state: "Historically, the documentary is a form that emerges in a state of crisis: it is no coincidence that many documentary art works remind us of quests for suitable forms and provide methods for the discussion of social content. They often aim to mirror the effects of past or recent political upheaval."

Together with the rise of conceptual art in the 1960s and even more in the 1970s, documentary strategies became a common part of artistic practice, primarily also thanks to the mass availability of recording technologies. The art experienced another wave of documentary in the period of political upheaval just after 1989. Nowadays, authors face new challenges with regard to the Internet, fake news and social networks. Regardless of the era, the authors try to, in various forms, do the same: to touch the reality.

But how can a visual artist whose work is essentially subjective communicate the reality? And how can he/she work with the facts?

Sami artist Máret Anne Sara, originally a journalist, has essentially an activist approach. The aim of her monumental installations is clear: to highlight the critical situation of the traditional Sami way of life, which revolves around reindeer breeding, caused by the Norwegian government's legislation and the exploitation of the territory for development purposes.

Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir on the other hand, acts in her project as an external observer. She has spent several years in the Reykjavik docks, where she has studied work, everyday life and the social status of port workers. Her artistic and anthropological research has a number of outcomes, from photography and film to object creation and performance.

Jaanus Samma connects an objective, historical view of the life of the minority group he is part of: in his works he has long been involved in the history of homosexuality. Within the search for self-determination, he processes historical stories that reveal the roots of hatred of the majority society.

Although the approaches of these authors are different, they meet at one point: each of them incorporates a piece of the real world into their installations. Whether these are cardboard boxes, sliding hooks, historical medical instruments, or herdsman's lassos, these objects, "objets trouvés", are the guarantors of truth within the exhibition installation, the proofs that the presented work, no matter how subjectively depicted, is "Based on a True Story".

Based on a True Story

24. 11. 2018–27. 1. 2019

Opening: 23. 11. 2018 v 19:30 the part of Public House

MeetFactory Gallery

Artists: Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir, Máret Anne Sara, Jaanus Samma

Curator: Eva Riebová

Galerie, Rezidence, Divadlo, Hudba.

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