

Working Aesthetics – Local Struggle – Happiness

Sørfinnset skole / the nord land, Gildeskål, Nordland, Norway 2003-∞



From the workshop, "Looking at Life" 2009

After one and an half hour drive, south from Bodø, through Salten to Gildeskål municipality, we arrived at the abandoned village school at Sørfinnset. Here the mayor, the head of culture and people from the local citizens association, welcomed us with flowers and bachalao in one of the classrooms. Geir Tore Holm and Søsja Jørgensen from Norway, Kamin Lertchaiprasert and Rirkrit Tiravanija from Thailand, the invited artists. We were asked to come to the village through Artistic Interruptions, an initiative from Nordland County, as a following up to Artscape Nordland. We were a bit nervous, struck by the mighty landscape, but felt we were in safe hands by the honor of the invitation, this day in March 2004. In the following years more than hundred artists and other contributors have been staying and working with us.

We began with a peoples meeting. Some ideas came up; a power plant in the local stream, an intervention where the local and the county roads are crossing, social events, growing of herbs, making of local foods. There had been artists in the village before, a sculpture by Jan Hofström titled "The Forgotten Town" ("Den glömda staden") has its place by Lake Kjellingvatnet. The title has been understood as a bad omen. The villagers did not want to become the forgotten people. "Why don't we make it alive?" was Kamin Lertchaiprasert's remark, as he looked over the sculpture. Step by step the making of an infrastructure of functional buildings that will serve as a village for visiting artists, a meeting place for both local and traveling people is becoming reality. The place is an experimental site for ecological and spiritual living and thinking – as a parallel activity to *the land* by Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand.

Showing the values that exists

In addition to the ongoing building processes we work with different things in the village of Sørfinnset. Activities revolve around gardening, hikes, harvesting, food and crafts combined with discussions, exchange of knowledge about plants, animals, climate, crafts, cooking, tourism and contemporary art. Contributions to local festivals and making of local radio broadcasts, workshops, and concerts are all realized in an open social atmosphere.



Gutting fish, at the annual Fishingfestival, 2010

Looking like art?

In this context it is not always important to state that what we do is art. The activities discuss the content of the notion *art* and make it inhabit new practices. When we listen to people's experiences of us staying and working there, to measure the response to the activity going on in the village, it gives us an understanding of what we do. It can be stories of very different character. For some is just that something is going on, noise or action, enough. Other people get inspired to start up farming or get married, or find out that they love experimental music or hate it, get inspired to cook or to tell stories. Other important responses are the ideas that people come up with, and how we together can find a way to work with them.



Kamin Lertchaiprasert serving the soup at the Summerparty, 2009

The framework

In one way the project is born out of the art institution, the *extended* institution that give economical support and a framework of knowledge. A starting point, with in this case a map with hubs of art-initiatives all around the municipalities in the county of Nordland. But in our project we have a commitment not to return the project to the institutionalized room in the shape of exhibitions, not even as documentation. The reason for this is that the project *Sørfinnset skole/ the nord land* is alive at the place, and doesn't fully function outside this context.. It exists as a part of and in a response to the village of Sørfinnset. Here and now. But collaborative works born out of the project are as fruits of Sørfinnset. Groups of people that learnt to know each other at Sørfinnset, collaborate outside the village frame on other projects. At every moment in Sørfinnset there is work to be done, for us it is far enough to be there and contribute, bringing the world together digging, cooking, carpenting, harvesting potatoes, picking berries, spreading information. Our skills as trained artists are making sure that the dramaturgy is good, posters fine, colors right, compositions great, being critical, searching for solutions, have discussions and enjoying small things.

Time perspectives

Everything is conducted on a rising speed in our lives. For us to have the chance to engage in a lasting project was an interesting challenge. We decided that the project is with an open end. This gives us an opportunity to se how relationships change over time, and how this changes influences our ideas and way of working at the place. So far it seems like some people feel a closer ownership to the project, others contribute indirectly. Maybe they say something that is brought on, or they come, after having passed the school and it's activities in the car for some years to the fifth years summer party, and admit that it is their first time. But inform us that they have followed the project on a distance. Others again connect to one of the artists for personal reasons or because of a special common interest in horses, gardening, fishing or music etc.

The roles of the artists

To bring different experiences and practices from our diverse activity in the art world into one project was one of the tempting thoughts, in the beginning. The goal for us has been to test out what kind of values these experiences would have in new contexts. For an audience that do not have an art institution within a few miles, like in Sørfinnset, and even do not consider this as a problem. It is then not only the role of the artists that is changed. The audience is in this situation not just spectators but contributors and collaborators also.



The Thai house, at Lake Kjellingvatnet

The project is a way of elaborating with a language that normally is in use inside a form of understanding, securing the correct reading of statements, according to the art world. It takes some experience to learn to use and adapt this language to a new, rural, yet international context. It demands flexibility and persistence with understanding and aesthetics. Our different forms of communication are understood, sometimes in a free way, with new associations. Or fruitful misunderstandings are appearing. We meet obstacles that demand for use of diplomatic strategies, and strictness. The situation is such were we can't read the impact of what we do directly. We have to let time work for us to see the achievements.

Sørfinnset skole/ the nord land
by Søsja Jørgensen