

MEDIA RELEASE

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osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024

A five-year programme of art in public space

Curated by Eva González-Sancho Bodero and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk

Oslo, Norway

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Public Sounds

A selection of encounters with art in public space and the public sphere

OSLO, Norway — Over the course of history, our cities have been shaped by disease, by war, by migration, by weather, by trauma, and the twenty-first century is no different. Curated by Eva González-Sancho Bodero and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024 has set out, through a five-year programme, to explore the unusual contexts and questions deriving from art in public space.

With all of us now living in socially distanced self-isolation and taking into consideration official guidance related to Covid-19, the biennial programme continues to investigate the subtle and myriad ways in which people encounter art in public space and the public sphere. The spring programme will start with an exploration of sound environments with works by Norwegian artists Alexander Rishaug and Øystein Wyller Odden.

The curators note: *“With the current situation, we are experiencing a sort of paradox; while national borders are closed or restricted, people are reaching out to one another around the globe via the internet. This reminds us that public space supersedes physical space, and also emphasises that a city like Oslo, and the art produced and disseminated here, can enter into conversations with audiences all over the world. Several art institutions are embracing these possibilities in interesting ways, with guided tours in exhibitions streamed online, videos of artworks accompanied by stories and knowledge, live artists talks, and more. For the first edition of osloBIENNALEN, it has always been essential to find a way to work with platforms other than the physical public space of the city, and from this reflection, to begin work on the setting up of production units that allow us at a later stage to produce radio, film, television, together with internet, mail art, among others. The sound works by Alexander Rishaug and Øystein Wyller Odden have a quality that lends itself to direct experience, and, interestingly, were recorded in buildings that*

represent political power in Norway: the offices of Oslo's power (City Hall) and the former offices of the prime minister and government (H-blokka)."

Y (59 ° 54'54.76 " N 10 ° 44 ' 46.03 " Ø)

What does a building sound like after a terrorist attack? This is what Norwegian artist Alexander Rishaug explores in his sound recordings captured in different spaces in H-Blokka, a building targeted by the car-bomb that tore through Oslo's government quarter on 22 July 2011, killing eight people. The coordinates in the title refer to the geographical position of its adjoining highrise, Y-blokka, which is scheduled for demolition. Since 2011, Y-Blokka and H-Blokka sit empty, a poignant reminder of the city's collective trauma. The destruction caused by these terrible explosions was devastating and what fills these buildings now is a silence that surpasses its spatial dimensions, a silence that speaks of a before and an after.

Described by literary scholar Tore Stavlund as a "psychoacoustic landscape in the empty Høyblokka as it stands today, tottering above the Government Quarter—a monumental memorial to the persistence and perhaps also helplessness of the bureaucracy" (a description that also resonates with contemporary political criticism), Y (59 ° 54'54.76 " N 10 ° 44 ' 46.03 " Ø) was recorded over the course of two nights in October 2017 and creates a sonic portrait of the abandoned building's current state of haunted emptiness, irrevocably connected to the past.

Rishaug's audio artworks capture both memory and place. Through acoustics, resonance, frequencies, vibrations and sub/ultrasounds that are not typically audible to the human ear, the artist reveals how absence is evoked by the sound of silence, a reminder of both earlier human activity and how it ceased.

"Rishaug is part of a tradition of audio art with its origins in the works of the Canadian composer and audio theorist R. Murray Schafer, whose 1977 book Our Sonic Environment and The Soundscape. The Tuning of the World is a central work in the ecophilosophical tradition of making recordings of audio environments. It was necessary, Schafer thought, to preserve authentic sound environments, both urban and rural, and thus contribute to a wider understanding of how sound environments evolve over time. A relevant example in this context is the Spanish audio artist and ecologist Francisco Lopez' recordings from the World Trade Centre in New York, made in February and March 2001, that is, not long before the terror attack in September, in which recordings from machine rooms, elevator shafts and ventilation systems form the raw material for a sonic portrait of the buildings—not that the recordings were meant to be an authentic representation. Lopez categorically rejects the idea that a sound recording is just a representation of its source, and argues that it is an independent creative act with an autonomous result... We can say the same about the concrete results of Rishaug's work with Y (59° 54' 54.76" N 10° 44' 46.03" E)... All the tracks open with silence before a gentle white noise is allowed to grow, becoming louder and louder until it has achieved an all-encompassing presence, which then fades out again."

Y (59 ° 54'54.76 " N 10 ° 44 ' 46.03 " Ø) will be released as a vinyl LP [with a suite of eight tracks](#), each lasting exactly eight minutes and accompanied by a booklet with photos from H-Blokka and a text by Rishaug. The booklet and LP will be

distributed by [Motto](#). The project was carried out in collaboration with Hagelund / Christensen and with the support of KORØ / URO. The release will coincide with a special online launch, hosted by osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024, which will take place on May 25, marking the anniversary of the biennial’s first public launch.

Compositions for Oslo City Hall

Øystein Wyller Odden’s work addresses the relationship between technology, architecture and people, investigating and exposing their underlying structures. These two pieces were conceived for the first edition of osloBIENNALEN and performed in Oslo City Hall, home to the annual award ceremony of the Nobel Peace Prize, as well as immense frescoes by Alf Rolfsen and Henrik Sørensen’s enormous painting. A controversial space—“No building divides the city more”—it is, [as described by Norwegian critic and writer Arve Rød](#), a space that is at once “*monumental and ostentatious... sombre and unapproachable... truly a cathedral dedicated to profane forces.*”

Power Line Hum (Composition for the Organ in Oslo City Hall) takes as starting point the history of the pipe organ in Oslo City Hall. When the building was raised, the elaborate pipe organ that was originally planned was deemed too expensive and was replaced by a Hammond organ. However, the pipes remained as decoration, a “silent facade,” and, for *Power Line Hum (Composition for the Organ in Oslo City Hall)*, several were made functional by the organ builders Ryde & Berg. A wind system was installed to give air to the pipes and the Hammond organ was refurbished. The work contains the sound of these two organs, the previously silent and its electronic replacement, each playing the same chord. It was played over the course of several months in Oslo City Hall and reproduced the low humming bass sound made by electricity at a frequency of 50 Hz. This low hum, with the resonances and harmonics it creates in the fuse box, has been transcribed by the artist for reproduction on the organ.

“Wyller Odden selected five organ pipes which had been damaged and restored by experts in the Netherlands. These have been put back in their original place in the City Hall, and made playable by being connected to a simple wind system. The idea is then to let the pipes play together with the instrument which back in time replaced them—that is, the Hammond organ—in a musical transcription of the sound of the electrical power in the hall, and to let the composition build on the difference between the two sounds. How the composition is performed in purely technical and physical terms is not as interesting as the fact that the result, a drone or so-called ‘bourdon’—an unchanging note that can play below a melody, as on the bagpipes or the Norwegian Hardanger fiddle—is an expanse of sound that is just as suggestive and marked by mysticism as it is minimal and static in expression.”

The reproduced hum of the current is the sound of modern society and enters into a dialogue with the social-realist art of previous eras presented in the City Hall.

Kraftbalanse [Power Balance] (Composition for Piano, Alternating Current and Orchestra) was co-composed with Jan Martin Smørdal, and performed twice over the course of the biennial in Oslo City Hall. In this monumental space, a dramatic

soundscape of a grand piano and a string orchestra responded to fluctuations in current frequency, creating a portrait of power distribution, both of the transmission of electrical power to the country by Statnett, Norway's state-owned company responsible for the power grid, and, ultimately, the income of the City of Oslo.

“Here the strings accompanied a grand piano programmed by voltmeters which read off the grid frequency in real time, as well as a score that describes how the musicians are to react to changes in this frequency. The piano, like the organ pipes, was tuned to resonate with the power grid's relatively constant pulse of 50 Hertz which, translated into sound, lies close to a low G. The grand piano then had two vibration elements screwed into the body of the instrument. These, like the voltmeters, were connected to the power sockets in the building, so that the current frequency was converted into vibrations propagated to the strings of the piano.”

Video and audio material from Øystein Wyller Odden's sound compositions, *Kraftbalanse* and *Power Line Hum*, will be broadcast online in May. *Power Line Hum* will be accessible online from 5–10 May, while *Kraftbalanse* will premiere online on 12 May, and will play every day until 16 May. Each will be accompanied by a series of special online events, including a live-streamed conversation with the artist and curators.

Further to these encounters, we also invite you to follow the biennial by subscribing to our newsletter [here](#), where we will share updates on artists' projects and public programmes as these evolve within the public sphere, as well as details on the resources the biennial is making available, including artists' residencies, and our film and radio units. Past and current documentation on the activities of the biennial can be accessed via the [website](#).

The biennial offices and artists' studios at Myntgata 2 are closed to the public temporarily until further notice.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Alexander Rishaug: Y (59° 54' 54.76" N 10° 44' 46.03" E)

Alexander Rishaug (b. 1974, Norway) is a sound artist and composer working in the field between art and experimental music. Rishaug creates site-specific sound projects that investigate time, memory, space/place and acoustics through the use of extended field recording techniques and advanced speaker technology, analogue synthesizers, computers and generative sound manipulations. As an active solo artist and frequent collaborator, this has led to numerous performances and projects within the field of sound art, contemporary music, visual art, film, dance and theatre. For further details on his work, we invite you to read Tore Stavlund's essay, commissioned for osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024, *The Haunted Emptiness of Absence—A Sonic Portrait of Høyblokka*, which can be [accessed here](#).

Øystein Wyller Odden: Compositions for Oslo City Hall

Øystein Wyller Odden (b. 1983, Norway) was educated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Oslo and works with installations and objects, often in connection with sound and music. His work addresses the relationship between technology, architecture and people, and attempts to investigate and expose their underlying structures. Wyller Odden has previously held solo exhibitions at Fotogalleriet (2011), Nordnorsk Kunstnersenter (2016), Telemark Art Center (2018) and the Artists' Association (2018), and has participated in group exhibitions at Henie Onstad Art Center, Tegnerforbundet and Akershus Art Center. For further details on his work, we invite you to read Arve Rød's essay, commissioned for osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024, *City Hall Electronica — The Low G of the Power Grid*, which can be [accessed here](#).

Eva González-Sancho Boderó has been director and curator of several art institutions and initiatives: MUSAC, Leon (ES) [2013]; FRAC Bourgogne, Dijon (FR) [2003–2011]; and Etablissement d'en face projects (Brussels, 1998–2003). She has curated numerous projects and exhibitions, usually involving the production of new work. González-Sancho Boderó was also co-curator of Lofoten International Art Festival (LIAF) 2013 (alongside Anne Szefer Karlsen and Bassam El Baroni), and curator of Dora García: *Where characters go when the story is over?* (CGAC, Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporáneo, Spain, 2009). Over the course of 2015–2017, González-Sancho Boderó worked as co-curator together with Eeg-Tverbakk, developing and concluding OSLO PILOT, an experimental two-and-a-half-year research project to conceive the format for the first edition of osloBIENNALEN.

Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk co-initiated and was director of Kunsthall Oslo from 2010–2012. He was project manager for Artistic Interruptions – Art in Nordland, Nordland County from 2003–2005 and was co-curator of the 2004 Nordic Art Biennial Momentum, Moss (alongside Caroline Corbetta). Eeg-Tverbakk was deputy director of the Kunstnerens Hus in Oslo from 2000–2001; co-curator of the 1999 Lofoten International Art Festival (LIAF) (with Tor Inge Kveum); exhibition manager at the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art in Helsinki in 1999, and director of the Otto Plonk Gallery in Bergen from 1995–1998. Over the course of 2015–2017, Eeg-Tverbakk worked as co-curator together with Eva González-Sancho Boderó,

developing and concluding OSLO PILOT, an experimental two-and-a-half-year research project to conceive the format for the first edition of osloBIENNALEN.

Ole G. Slyngstadli, Executive Director

Throughout his career, Ole G. Slyngstadli has worked on the management, construction and setting up of diverse cultural projects centred in the field of contemporary art. Amongst other projects, Slyngstadli was special adviser to the City of Oslo (2013–2018); festival director of the Nordic Festival of Contemporary Art - Momentum – (2006); head of communication for the Office for Contemporary Art Norway - OCA (2004–2006); and head of communication at the Henie Onstad Art Center (2001–2003). Slyngstadli has been the editor of a series of publications, among others Henie Onstad Art Centre's publication, *Prisma*, and Office for Contemporary Art Norway's *Verksted* series. He has also edited a series of monographs and exhibition catalogues.

Institutional partnerships in Norway and further afield

In addition to the projects unfolding within and across the Oslo area, osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024 will extend its activities to include other contexts in response to the works of art, their development and the collateral reflections that arise from them. Partnerships to date have involved Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milano (IT); Deichman Oslo Public Library (NO); Ekebergparken, Oslo (NO); Kunstneres Hus (NO); Kungliga Konsthögskolan, Stockholm (SE); Le Magasin des horizons, Grenoble (FR); Matter of Art Biennial, Prague (CZ); NMBU-Norwegian University of Life Sciences: Faculty of Landscape and Society (NO); Nordic Black Theatre (NO); OsloMet, Faculty of Technology, Art and Design (TKD), Department of Art, Design and Drama (NO); Oslo domkirke/Oslo biskop (NO); Oslo Open (NO); Oslo kulturskole, Oslo (NO); Pikene på Broen, Kirkenes (NO); Prosjektskolen kunstscole (NO); Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm (SE); Sporveien Oslo AS (NO); Stiftelsen Edvard Munchs Atelier (NO); Publics Helsinki (FI); U.F.O.— Exhibition Guide for Oslo (NO); Ultima (NO); Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton (UK); Interkulturelt museum Oslo (NO); Kunsthall 3.14 (NO); Karmaklubb* (NO), and Sámiid Searvi/Oslo sameforening (OSS) (NO). Additional partners will be announced as the programme evolves.

About osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024

Curated by Eva González-Sancho Boderó and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024 has set up a specially conceived infrastructure to support a ground-breaking new five-year format, with artists invited to work with the city, public space and the public sphere. The programme includes diverse arts projects, concerts, performances, readings, workshops and symposia. The biennial is the outcome of OSLO PILOT, a two-year experimental and research-based project, curated by Eva González-Sancho Boderó and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, which laid the groundwork for the biennial. Both the current Biennial and its grounding pilot have been financed by the City of Oslo, Agency for Cultural Affairs, Norway.

About the City of Oslo's Support for the Arts

osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024 is a further example of the municipality of Oslo's commitment to art in public space. The cultural agency strives to ensure

that professional contemporary art forms part of Oslo municipality's buildings and outdoor spaces to the benefit of the general public. By supporting the arts in their various forms, its goal is to increase the interest in, commitment to and reflection on art and its relevance.

In this context, the biennial has grown out of Oslo's long-standing dynamic of art in public space. For many decades, the city has had an active and supportive attitude to art initiatives that benefit the wider population. This mind-set, based on democratic and egalitarian ideals, remains at the heart of every initiative. The current art scheme ensures that 0.5 percent of funds invested in the Oslo municipality are earmarked for art, which makes it possible for the city to maintain an ambitious agenda in terms of art in the public space. The main objective of the biennial is to strengthen all of the arts in Oslo, while providing local, national and international visibility to Oslo as a city that supports art.

