

# Music for Plutocracy

## Exhibition essay by Erik Meling, S12 Gallery

An alluring light reaches us from the winter darkness of Bontelabo, the harbor of Bergen and S12 Gallery and Workshop. Attractive neon. Powerful and challenging. Partly sparkling, partly glowing. The body of work that we will literally enter is the fifth edition in a series that has till now been shown in such places as Shenzhen in China, Jeddah in Saudia Arabia, Tallin in Estonia and in New York. The art we will participate in consists of different distinguishable parts forming a whole. Architecture, electricity, acrylics, neon lights, colors and a soundscape by the composer JG Thirlwell.

Ten slim acrylic columns constitute the installation that occupy the greater part of the gallery space at S12 at the former industrial fish packing area in Bergen, Norway. Thin neon tubes are attached to all columns, further connected through a network of electrical wires and transformers. Horizontally along the walls of the room, two parallel lines of light run past and delimits us.

The transparency of the columns invite us initially to ignore them. They should accordingly and in themselves not attract our interest, but be precisely as elusive as they pretend to be. Like air. We understand that our experience will not be connected *to*, or otherwise integrated *in*, but derive *from* the object. These pillars are thus conveyers. Although their translucent character suggests an absence, their optical rendering of the room defines their protagonism. They harbor as such an experienced presence. We see them, yet are eluded by the luminosity they generate through ambiance and fields of color.

Moving through the corridors that open up to us in this expanded architecture, from the outer entrances towards the inner core, the light changes character from warm to cold. We find ourselves surrounded by sensory stimuli in a constantly evolving experience of

space. The saturation of color is felt as a neurological impulse, and like a tangible presence in and around us.

We recognize this mood, and this environment from other commercial and urban environments we often seek towards and participate in. But in this particular state of art, we are not told what to buy, to do, to feel or what to aspire for. We are left to choose.

JG Thirlwell's accompanying music and similarly poignant soundscape offers a spherical dimension, in a composition of underlying white noise sequences, clicks, snaps, rumbles, barely audible harmonics and a bass line. This auditory environment both agrees to, and reaffirms, while it at the same time also reveals and articulates the conditioning of our experience.

Anne Katrine Senstad operates in the very interface between the alleged and the experienced, the misty, and the tangible. While initially allowing us a clear understanding of our surroundings by a facilitating a rhythmic architectural landscape, she expands our experience in the process by establishing a continuity of mood-saturated rooms, or mental frameworks, in the atmospheric neon light and monochrome color density.

In *Music for Plutocracy*, she therefore challenges both our cognitive, optical, and social conventions. We are not exclusively referred to a mood, a sentiment or a shallow argument, but find ourselves in a state of receptivity and in a specific place in time. We are within an experience, experiencing.

The American architects and theorists Robert Venturi and Denis Scott Brown debate in their book *Architecture, Signs and Systems* (from 2004) how the neon lights and the billboards in iconic places like Times Square in New York, or along The Strip in Las Vegas actually form the essential architecture on the place. Not only physically around us, but also mentally and within us, through its intense, appealing neon colors, its pulsating rhythms and through a continuous repetition of simple promotional messages. This is how we literally take in, and direct ourselves in a world that only exists through colors, light, in shorter or longer flashes and dually pulsating

through glass tubes. Senstad's art seems to draw out maps of color that guide us through our sensory stimuli, impulses and landscapes.

Through such work as *Music for Plutocracy*, as in individual neon sculptures, photography, video art, and text-based works, Anne Katrine Senstad develops insight on aspects of perceptual phenomenology, and questions how light, space and colors affect our senses and cognitive processes.

## **Anne Katrine Senstad**

Growing up in both Singapore and Norway, Anne Katrine today lives between New York and Oslo. Her formal training and art education came from institutions such as the University of California at Berkeley, the Parsons School of Design, New York, and the New School of Social Research, New York.

Of her many and exciting projects, a very few exhibitions can be highlighted as particularly remarkable:

- *Radical Light*, from 2020, at the Kai Art Center in Tallinn, Estonia. This work can be described as a monumental light environment, and was accompanied by JG Thirlwell's sound composition.
- *Elements II* from the *Seen Unseen*-Exhibition in 2018, at the He Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen, China, which Senstad describes as an immersive light sculpture.
- Her *Element* series was also launched in 2018 in connection with the exhibition 'Through the Spectrum', at the Athr Gallery in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The installation *Music for Plutocracy*, which we are pleased to show on S12s, is the fifth edition of this comprehensive series in its various thematic, visual and sculptural variations.
- During the Biennale in Venice in 2015, Anne Katrine Senstad was represented with the solo exhibition *The Vanity of the Vanities*, also accompanied by JG Thirlwell's specially composed music.
- The same year she also participated in the 'Art and Architecture Triennial' in Bruges, Belgium, with the site-specific, text-based LED installation *GOLD GUIDES ME – Capitalism in the Public Realm*.

- In 2012, Senstad also visited Bergen with the exhibition *Is Her Name Red?*, at the 'Foundation 3.14 Kunsthall'.
- Video works by Senstad have been shown at places such as the Center Pompidou, in Paris, the Haus Der Kultur Der Welt in Berlin, the Beirut Art Center, in Beirut, the Dallas Aurora, in Dallas and the Eva Peron Museum, in Buenos Aires, next to Gallery K4, Oslo, and at the Oslo Screen Festival in this country.
- She has also produced works of art for public buildings, amongst other a project commissioned by Snøhetta Architect's Office for the Wolfe Center for the Arts at Bowling Green State University, in Ohio, USA.

Anne Katrine Senstad has received work grants and other financial support for her work from organizations and associations such as the Norwegian Cultural Council, the Office for Contemporary Art Norway, the Association of Free Photographers, Norwegian Visual Artists, the Visual Artists' Aid Fund, Design and Architecture Norway, and the Foundation for Contemporary Art in New York, USA.

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**Text by Erik Meling, Gallery Manager, S12 in Bergen Norway. Meling holds a master's degree in art history, as well as a post graduate degree in stage direction and studies in Spanish.**