NORDIC ARTISTS' CENTRE DALE
THE SCANDINAVIAN SHOW

MAJA NILSEN

ANDERS KJELLESVIK

PATRICK NILSSON

BRISTOL BIENNIAL 2012

# nordisk kunstnarsenter dale nordic artists' centre dale



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NORDIC ARTISTS' CENTRE DALE 2012

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# THE SCANDINAVIAN SHOW BY ARILD H ERIKSEN, DIRECTOR

Nordic Artists' Centre Dales venue at the Bristol Biennial 2012:Storytelling, proudly presents three nordic artists from our alumni. Patrick Nilsson (S), Maja Nilsen (N) and Anders Kjellesvik (N) all stayed at NKD in 2011. They are excellent representatives of a scandinavian storytelling tradition within the visual arts. Their stories unfolds within different stratas such as nature, culture and social life.

A narrative of the figurative has always had a prominent position in the Nordic art tradition. These three artists are no exception. Their individual narratives certainly have a nordic resonance, but their individual use of form originates from the semantics of the common figurative form. The recognisable figuration seems to be the surest way to ascertain that the intact message reaches the recipient. (Or reduces loss of information during the reception process.) Not because figurative form limits or

excludes parallel ways of understanding, but through a common knowledge of the linguistic components, the figurative enables us to go beyond the obvious modes of understanding. The transparency of figurative form seems to be a relevant method for conveying and discussing meaning. Without a common understanding of communicative parameters of meaning, the possibilities of misunderstanding and misinterpretation are endless.

Ours is a time of vast riches of information, a continous variation through the social media and broadcast media. The prism may serve as a relevant metaphor of our globalized times. As a counterweight to cacophony, it becomes accordingly important to find independent voices; opinion providers and narrators that stand out to formulate and convey important statements about our times. These are voices of personal experience, but not of insular

privacy. A meaningful conversation where a common understanding of signals, gestures, words and statements exists in our shared community. Meaningful dialogue depends on mutual references.

The three artists presented by NKD at BB12 actively participate in this discourse. Their narratives do not disappear into the vagueness of private landscapes. They adress the world within the scope of our shared cultural references. The works of this exhibition deals with inter-human relationships. However, the boundaries of our understanding are not necessarily those of quiet acceptance, but also of conflict and dissension.

TRANSLATION BY LARS SKORPEN

## PATRICK NILSSON

## INTERVIEWED APRIL 2012 STOCKHOLM AND BERLIN BY KAROLIN TAMPERE

Karolin Tampere: During one of my visits to your studio at ISCP in New York in 2008, I remember noticing several newspaper cuttings on the wall; in particular a picture of Diego Maradona, a celebrity I hadn't thought about for a long time. Could you tell my about what presently preoccupies you as an artist, and what has changed since then?

Patrick Nilsson: The picture of Maradona is taken on Cuba in 2004, when he was there to get treatment for his cocaine addiction. It's amazing, he poses like he was the revolutionary Che Guevara. If you look closer, you will see that his back is covered by sand. This leads me to believe that before the photographer arrived, Maradona was sipping his Pina Colada and eying chicks.

I do think I'm attracted by contrast, contradictions and conflict. It's in me, in one way or other. My impulse and will to express myself does in no way origin in art. I see it as a terminal disease that I'm delighted to have contracted, without it I would have been miserable, I think. I feel very strongly that I have some-

thing as unfashionable as a need of expressing myself. There are no recipes for art, that's what makes it so exciting. There is nothing to solve, it's both intense and comforting.

**KT:** Let's talk about your drawing Conversation piece - light added by subtraction (2011). There is no escaping the depiction of explicit and implicit (?) violence. This may be a pointer to latent violence in society, but also surreal, bizarre, dream-like activities? We see men hitting each other on the head with hammers and other weapon-like objects. Some with cooking pots on their heads, others dressed in crocodile suits, another with a dish glove for a mohican. The playful intervention of everyday objects lends a comic expression to the assailants. The subject matter of your drawings may cause viewers to confront themselves, their attitudes. Why do I laugh at these seemingly violent practices? Would pictures from real life be viewed with the same distance?

**PN:** To begin with, distance is a word I do acknowledge in relation to my work; my art is almost exclusively about escapism. I don't want

to join in. I'd rather sit and watch- «sitting on a hillside, watching all the people die» as in the Arthur Lee song. The drastic humor spring up by itself. I probably become bored if nothing unexpected happens, but also because contrast is a narrative tool, not just a formal one. In general, I want there to be a complication, contrast and dialogue between figuration and abstraction. Story and formalia. When I'm working, I never think about the story. I have noticed that it comes alive on its own.

**KT:** On the whole, there is something threatening and absurd about your production, as if you want to get the better of the viewers, get them out on thin ice.

PN: I have realized that in my earlier work, as you observed, I unconsciously tried to make the viewer laugh. You think you know what's going on, but then I hit you in the back of the head. I see my art as belonging to fiction, there's a freedom there. I don't work with political statements, I play with my own prejudices and conceptions.

KT: If we look at Forest interior II/Skogsinteriör II (2011) we see trees in perspective. The underlying threat of rolling skies in the background is what gradually turn us toward anxiety. Interior usually refers to something inside, so this paradox may be another example of contrast?

**PN:** This has clearly grown out of the house and sky pictures. When I in 2006 started the se-

ries of large pictures with buildings, skies and people, there was a formal idea or question in the background. For my fourtieth birthday I got a book about David Hockney. It was one of those wonderful books with pictures from his entire career. Although I was very happy about the book, I had no particular opinion about his work. I guess I thought it was sort of torrid. However, I discovered the series of pictures he did in Los Angeles in the seventies. In the pool pictures I thought he worked very playfully with the eternal clash between material surface and pictorial depth. It caught my interest and curiosity. Combined with an ambition to work in a bigger format, I started a rather large drawing. This picture, The overflowing black, part of the series You don't have to be a weather girl to see where the wind is blowing, integrates these two contrasts in the same picture. A fairly long process, maybe 6-7 months followed, and only shortly before it was finished, maybe a week or two, did I know it would work.

KT: Presently, you are working on a sculpture project in a Gothenburg kindergarten. We talked earlier about your art production meant for a random audience outside the defined confines of art, as opposed to that of a specialized art audience. You mentioned there's a more confronting conversation in the exhibit space, more complex, and that you work with different subject matter in these various public contexts. Letting your art projects meet people who have not chosen to seek out the artwork themselves.

PN: To some extent, I like that public commissions give me the possibility to work with ideas that will not be represented in my exhibited work. I try to respect that the viewer has not chosen to see the art. Looking at my own public work, this seems to be possible without falling into timidity.

**KT:** What does your workday look like, what are you working on?

PN: Normally, I'm continuosly working on several pictures and sketches in the studio. are ambitious but rather pathetic attempts to make something good. In truth, as I never have any really good ideas, I trust and hope that my art will come into being through the practical work with pictures and sketches. I'm unable to think out my art. Several times a week, I believe I've thought out something clever. More often than not, this turns out to be wrong. Presently, I'm preparing several exhibitions, including a «retrospective» at Uppsala Museum of Fine Art in 2013. It will be built on my series Sensmoral or Death, with works from the Academy days and new pieces, too.

**KT:** What books are you reading at the moment?

PN: I read a lot, above all fiction. Before I go to sleep, I usually read a competent and suspensful thriller. On the weekend, I sometimes read something more fact-based or an essay, right now it's Bruce Chatwin's «Anatomy of

Restlessness» and maybe yet more fiction that catches my curiosity. Right now it's «Blood meridian or the evening redness in the West» by Cormac McCarthy.

KT: In Conversation piece - light added by subtraction there looms a flat, possibly impersonal building in the background; the only coloured motif in the drawing, but without much ornament. Over it, large, three dimensional skies roll in. Is there a particular architectural era that has interested you?

PN: As I mentioned, Hockney did something for me of which I had been unaware: the combination of flatness and volume. Conversation piece - light added by subtraction is a part of a series where I have drawn five different kind of buildings, apartment buildings, mansions and terraced houses. The violence is not characteristic of any particular class or area. You can say that I have invented somewhat new buildings, architecture remixed, if you like. However, the important thing is flatness. This is the subject matter I have been investigating since 2006, flatness and space, the conflict between surface and depth of picture. It's banal, but I think it's an incredibly interesting set of problems.

**KT:** Working on the drawings for Storytelling, the title of the Bristol Biennale 2012, was it music or a podcast that was sounding in the background in the studio?

**PN:** During all of this work between 2006 up till 2008-2009, I was continuously listening to «Ariodante», the Händel opera. Seeing these works, I sense a somewhat pathetic opera-like feel to them.

Just recently, I have discovered the vast amount of podcast there are about; vacuuming on Sundays, I usually listen to *Rock'n roll Football*. It's a podcast on Premier League, hosted by the lan Wright, the 90's hero. I keep tabs on whatever goes on with Arsenal.

**KT:** The titles of the drawings are little poems in their own right, where do these two come from? Conversation Piece - light added by subtraction and Forest interior II, both from 2011.

PN: Thank you! I put in a lot of time to get it right. Some I formulate myself, some are misrepresentations and some are quotes. These two titles have a slightly different history: In terms of art history, *Conversation piece* is a description of a group portrait. In addition comes the way it's executed. Volume and light is mainly created by erasing the pastel from the paper. It has a sibling picture named *«Conversation piece - light subtracted by addition»*. There, light and volume grows out of colour nuances.

The title *«Forest interior II/ Skogsinteriör II»* grew out of a conversation in the studio with curator Arild H. Eriksen. He pointed out some likenesses to pictures of woods by Edvard Munch.

Munch named these «forest interiors». The term has a nice implicit contradiction.

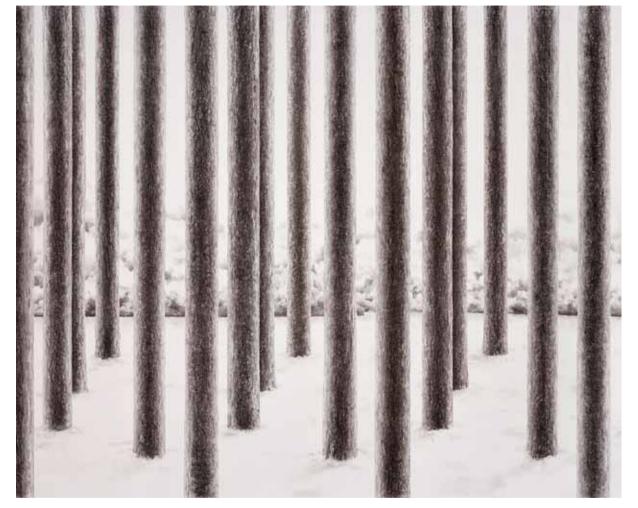
KT: In the nineties, you were actively collaborating with other artists running two artist-led initiatives in Stockholm; The mobile showing concept Av-mobil and Bildbar, the latter being a meeting place in the form of a bar where lectures were given. Both those initiatives where started up right out of the Royal Institute of Fine Art in Stockholm. I regard this as an important step for young art generations: not trusting the establishment, but discovering defining power and active participation in how to show your art.

PN: It was very important to me then. An artist's relationship to a gallery owner or curator is really that of being chosen. What do you do if no-one sees you? You have to take responsibility for your own art and not trust anyone else to take care of you.

TRANSLATION BY LARS SKORPEN



"Conversation Piece - light added by subtraction", 2011



"Forest interior II/ Skogsinteriör II", 2011

#### THE PROXY

ON MAJA NILSENS "ZOO, OR LETTERS NOT ABOUT LOVE (STILL IMAGES FROM A FILM NEVER MADE, LETTERS TO A PERSON WHO NEVER EXISTED, WORDS ABOUT FEELINGS NEVER FELT)"

By Stian Gabrielsen

A ring of pianos that conjures a sea between them, floating magically above an indistinct, darkened landscape; an abandoned theater stage in the woods with human legs dangling from behind the curtain; a dismembered hand holding a draped piece of cloth above a supine human figure; couples dancing on a frozen lake in the mountains, a large ominous shape covering the sky above them: a female torso with a window in her chest and a group of monkeys on a rocky landscape in the foreground. For all their eccentricity the compositions seem strikingly familiar, due likely to their semblance to the stylistic syntax of early twentieth century avant-garde. They even insist on this likeness to the point where they, by virtue of their delicate nostalgia, could be conceived as little more than fetishistic evocations of a specific visceral paradigm: a colorless, transparent visitation of dada or surrealism - a soft edged, melancholic variation on Man Ray or Max Ernst. The "methodical madness" (a coinage by Ernst) of collage signaled, at its historical inception, a turning

away from the notion of image making as a system where forms where developed via the hand of the painter to a wry staging of the pictorial surface as a site for the reconfiguration of images produced elsewhere. Perhaps realizing, as did Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, that art's primary concern is the arrangement of images, not the making of them.

Curiously Maja Nilsen's cycle of collages "Zoo, or Letters Not About Love" were originally conceived as storyboards for a filmadaptation of Shklovsky's epistolary novel of the same name. Exhibited without the prosaic structure of an ordered and lucid narrative, their associative kinship to film is still preserved as they have been printed on back-light foil and displayed in light boxes. This specific form of presentation seems to spring from a need to mitigate the betrayal of the original medium. The result is that the surface of these collages become less of a final destination, they are literally transparent, floating over an absent story. Even

if absent here, the story is still well known: While exiled in Berlin, the literary theorist Shklovsky (1893-1984) fell in love with the writer Elsa Triolet. His feelings were not reguited, but Triolet still indulged his desire to let him write to her, though on one condition: He was never to write about love. His primary incentive for writing to her, his infatuation, was to be eluded. What ensued was a torrent of letters that exhausted every other topic - from observations on everyday life to critical reflections on poetrv, but never mentioned his romantic feelings towards her. The predictable result was of course that the denied subject of love forced everything else to serve as its proxy. This exchange of letters between the two became the foundation for the novel that the title of Nilsen's work alludes to.

How exactly Nilsen's imagery relates to its literary source, excepting that of a historical approximation (dada and surrealism coinciding with Russian formalism, the movement with which Shklovsky was affiliated), is unclear. The unstable relationship between Nilsen's idiosyncratic compositions and the narrative that they supposedly relate but remain persistently silent about, becomes an overarching problem when approaching them. By what authority or logic are these instantiations of arbitrary juxtaposition acting on behalf of the original text? Who has issued the proxy? Issuing a proxy is an act of

resigning control over one's representation, you transfer your agency so to speak. You are there, but only in name. You have taken on a form that only the proxy informs is you. You, as such, is rendered abstract, featureless, a contractual figure. If love in the story of Shklovsky's correspondence with Triolet (or Alva, which is the name of her fictional alias) is mediated by proxy, recognizing its presence requires knowledge of that proxy, if not, his feelings would remain unmediated, and the drowning zoo animals that Viktor describes would be just that – drowning animals. As is the case with the relationship between the untold story and the collages in Nilsen's work, the title is the guarantor for this otherwise improbable correlation. It is not in the nature of these aleatoric compositions to illustrate or elucidate, they are rather an exemplification of the very technique by which the image becomes autonomous - the uncoupling of the pictorial element from the context that renders it intelligible. Or, as Shklovsky himself put it: "An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object -- it creates a 'vision' of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it." 1 So despite their literal transparency, Nilsen's letters not about love, are in fact not about love, challenging the title's ambiguous negation. Their function as proxy for the story of Shklovsky's unrequited love, challenging the title's ambiguous negation. Their function as proxy for the story of Shklovsky's unrequited love is only held in place by their contractual obligation to perform this function under the imposition of the allusive title. They are not fixed by virtue of some uncontestable, absolute bond, but only held in place by external authority, by contract. Nilsen's subjec-

tive renditions in "Zoo, or Letters Not About Love" comprise an inquiry into the essential vacuity of images and the shiftiness of their attachment to the world.

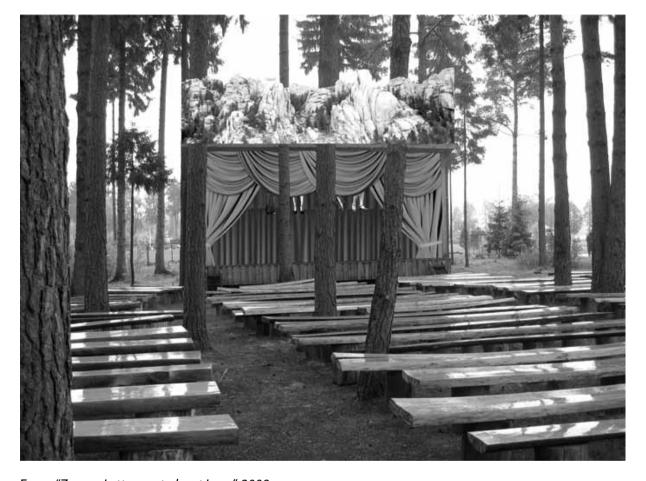


From "Zoo, or Letters not about Love", 2009

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Art as Technique, Viktor Shklovsky, 1917; translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis 1965; reprinted in David Lodge, ed., Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader (London: Longmans, 1988), pp. 16-30.



From "Zoo, or Letters not about Love", 2009



From "Zoo, or Letters not about Love", 2009



From "Zoo, or Letters not about Love", 2009



From "Zoo, or Letters not about Love", 2009

#### TRACES OF JOURNEYS

ON THE WORKS OF ANDERS KJELLESVIK
BY MARIE NERLAND

There is something about the coast. You go there and there is a line, there is a limit. "All is shattered" Virginia Woolf writes in her novel "The Waves". The rock being crushed into sand and stones, the broken landscape, the sea broken into waves and drops of water, the broken horizon, the broken journey.

The coast is closure. The coastline is the end of land. You can walk this far, but no further. The attraction of arriving at the limit, the pull of the end. The coastline is a point of no further. You stop. Here.

Maybe the urge to reach and be at physical borders is becoming increasingly important to us. The need for a limitation in our borderless lives. The liberating limit. A physical barrier we can't cross. Standing there, just there, at that physical marker in the land-scape.

The coastline is also a place for fiction. At the border you can fantasize what lies ahead. Adventures and journeys. The undis-

covered. Or you can reflect on what is left behind, what you couldn't take along, what you wish you could return to.

That same marker or point of departure we find in art. There is a similarity between reaching the coastline and being confronted with a work of art. Art hits you exactly at that shattered, broken *now*. André Lepecki writes on art in a text titled "Arts on the edge of moving": "Arts should poke our lazy eyes, trained to be blind, it should gesture towards the absent in the portrayed, that which is left out, in between. Art should initiate a certain form of movement; it should be inhabited by movement and by its own death".

Anders Kjellesvik works in many artistic genres. He works with installations, painting and sculpture, all connected with movement and journeys. He has an in-depth interest in site-specific work; sculptural intervention and installations that come into being through the production process.

His work is somehow about arranging bits and pieces. Collecting and stacking.

"Beacons and Cairns" presents a mosaic made of black and white Xerox prints with UV paint, forming a landscape on the wall. Also, a dark cairn-inspired sculpture made by found objects is built on site.

A cairn is a point to stop. It is the exact *here*. In his prints, Kjellesvik brings the landscape of the coast to the gallery space. His installation marks out the space.

The cairn marks the direction of a trail or the highest peak on the mountain. Cairns are the material of many stories. One of them I have known since growing up in western Norway; the old story of the cairn at the top of the mountain Romsdalshorn.

- Two young, local farmers decided a summer night they would climb the cliff-face to the top. They managed to do so, but no one believed they had actually reached the top. Several years later, in 1881, the first official ascent of the mountain arrived at the top only to discover the evidence of the farmer boys' heroic feat- a cairn.

With Xerox prints and the cairn Kjellesvik is creating a whole through fragments in which the broken and shattered material is kept visible. There are several thematic tensions in Kjellesvik's work. They can be

seen as the remains of a journey, but also as experimenting in uncharted territory; the staging of strange signals to trip over or run into. It 's a visualization of past and present journeys into landscapes, real, forgotten or lost. Experiencing the works, we become the wanderer ourselves.

What can these journeys mean? They show a perspective, a reflection of the world order that surrounds us, but through pictures that are different. The journeys are both adventurous and daring. It is imagining a world where one could get lost. The travels are quests, but also transgressions- the crossing of boundaries. The journeys accentuate the limits of our society. The vanishing of art. The vanishing of everything.

I also think of Kjellesvik's works in this exhibition as a kind of script. In the distinctive sharpness between black and white, calligraphy and graphic elements emerge. The dark dimension of the work creates a strong pull; into a darkness both immemorial and dystopian. For centuries, lit beacons were used as a signal, a way to warn and alert. To write in the air with fire, leaving only ash and charred remains in the landscape.

Kjellesvik's installation has many formalistic and aesthetic connotations to modernist compositions. It is made by a few props and everyday objects that are put in or taken out of its usual context. -Fragments of everyday life put into play. In his installations and art projects, he often uses readily available, cheap mass-produced materials: cardboard, stones, wood and found objects. The material selection is important – using universally known materials and accordingly, the reuse of materials that would otherwise be discarded or unnoticed.

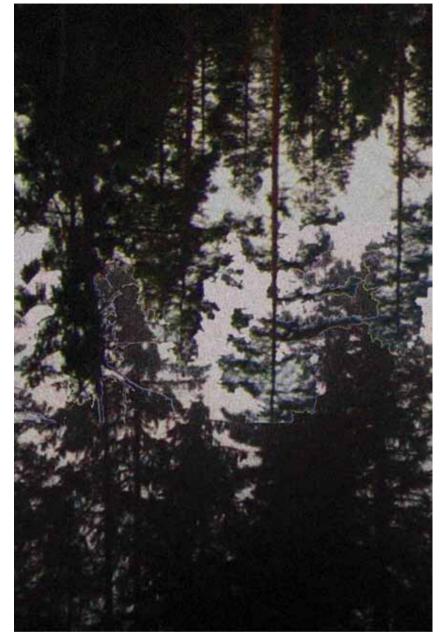
The artworks of Kjellesvik at the biennial have many references to art history: The symbolists' dreamscapes, the dark dimensions of black romance, the material of Arte Povera, the everyday objects and minimalism's repetition of geometric shapes. One of my favourite works by Kjellesvik is his installation "Charcoal" showed at the Drawing Biennial in Moss in Norway in 2010. In a white cube he installed a large charred tree trunk. The white space and the black

wood were impressive; the blackness and texture of burnt wood, something solid being transformed and torn apart, the traces of licking fire interrupted just before everything turns to ashes. The exquisite smell of charred wood in the gallery. The installation is a precise comment to the process of making charcoal, often used for drawing.

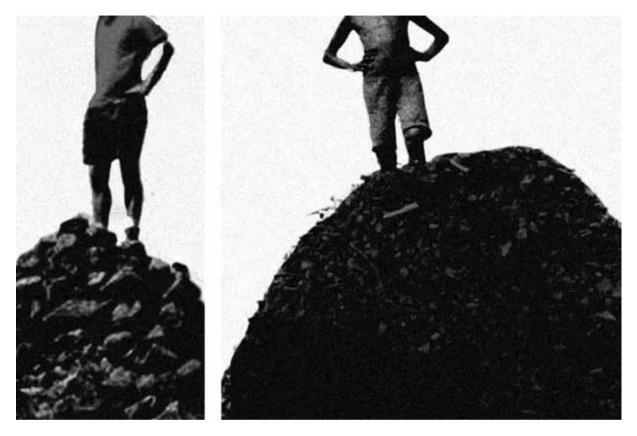
In his sculptures, prints and paintings, Kjellesvik is working in an intriguing and sublime way with actions, architecture and public space. They are artworks that seem sparse, but at the same time saturated with beauty and a complex layering of possible meanings. The works inspire a desire to play with the indefinable. -The almost literary expression of emphasized pictorial symbols, the intensified and basic colour scheme, and simplified, expressive lines.



01 - 04 "Untitled (sketch for Beacon and Cairn)", 2012, sketch



01 - 04 "Untitled (sketch for Beacon and Cairn)", 2012, sketch



01 - 04 "Untitled (sketch for Beacon and Cairn)", 2012, sketch



01 - 04 "Untitled (sketch for Beacon and Cairn)", 2012, sketch



05 "Ohne Titel (Waldblick Berlin)", 2011, sketch and detail from existing work

NKD wish to thank all who has contributed to the realization of the exhibition The Scandinavian Show at BB12, and The Scandinavian Show publication. First and foremost we want to thank the participating artists Maja Nilsen, Anders Kjellesvik and Patrick Nilsson for the good cooperation. Secondly we want to thank the writers Karolin Tampere, Stian Gabrielsen and

A special thanks goes to Catherine Bourne and Lina Lofstrand from the Bristol Biennial 2012 team.

Marie Nerland.

### NORDIC ARTISTS' CENTRE DALE NORDISK KUNSTNARSENTER DALE

NKD is an Artist-in-Residence center funded by Norwegian Ministry Of Culture. The A-I-R program encourages international contacts for artists and focuses on visual arts including design, architecture and locally rooted practice. Nordic Artists' Centre Dale is situated in the village of Dale, the administrative center of the Fjaler municipality on the West Coast of Norway.