

## **Moderne Ruiner**

### **HJEMLØSE GJENSTANDER**

March 13th - April 18th

During the last decade the artistic collaboration Moderne Ruiner (in English: Modern Ruins) has studied the remains of closed industrial plants, factories and abandoned buildings. The artists Elisabeth Engen, Astrid Findreng and Grethe Britt Fredriksen express a fondness for places in decay, closed production sites and other sites exposed to urban development and gentrification. These sites and their recognizable objects are transformed into the exhibition “Homeless Objects” - a comprehensive installation of 3D-animation, detailed architectural models, tableaus and sculptural objects.

The artists have observed and documented how parts of the city and certain places are subjected to rapid and comprehensive changes. The optimism surrounding the Norwegian industry, and what contributed to establishing the welfare state, is now over. Factories are shut down or transferred to less central locations (or outsourced to other countries), to be replaced by profitable apartment complexes, commercial premises and shopping malls. The exhibition specifically focuses on the two closed down industrial sites of Bergs Maskin (1947 - 2013) in the district Lilleby, east of Trondheim’s city centre, and the original Marnar Bruk (1976 - 2011) in Mandal, a small city at the southern tip of Norway. As these production sites were shut down, the artists were given the opportunity to study the empty premises up close.

By carefully photographing the places and objects they came across, the artists got their material to draw detailed 3D-models of the sites digitally. In this process, certain details are emphasized, abstracted and molded into something new, thus the modeling is not an accurate representation of reality, but the artists’ interpretation. The inner room of the gallery space has become an archive where a selection of physical models - small artworks of their own - are displayed. These models also work as sketches for new objects in larger formats.

Precisely how the artists use the concept of format is interesting in itself, from the minute details in a miniature tableau, to the almost four meters tall columns at gallery space’s entrance. The columns are inspired by the stripped down steel structure of the Bergs Maskin building that today houses the Michelin restaurant Credo. In Moderne Ruiner’s sculptures, the architectural structure is separated from its contents and has received some abstract technical devices. The other objects in this exhibition are also executed in a pronounced machine aesthetic, always carefully planned through detailed technical drawings. Separated from their original environment these objects seem almost identifiable as signs or symbols, with a recognizable geometry, but without any specific function. The modernist parole “Form follows function” has disintegrated and the objects have become abstract sculptures. They have become the “modern ruins” of our time, both sublime and picturesque, although in a very different way than the remains of a cathedral at dusk can be.

The environments we meet in this exhibition are also subjected to a similar process. The buildings and objects decay. When their context is lost, the abandoned sites transform into melancholic spaces and dystopian landscapes. In the filmatic animation “Expirator” we are drawn into the dark and mysterious world inside Marnar Bruks’ halls. The animation program lets the “camera” slide through the different rooms of the factory and it exposes a place that seems recently abandoned. Although the factory has been empty for several years, none of the workers came back to turn off the light or heating. Marnar Bruk is a symbol of how fast the downsizing of Norwegian factories happened. Just two years before the factory was established, the employment in industry was at its height. In 1974 40 % of the Norwegian labour force worked in the industry, whilst in 2008 this number was down to 11 %. *Moderne Ruiner* shows how rapidly time can change a place and how any changes close to us in time go by unnoticed. By removing the function of the form and negating the very rationality and function of the objects, we become attentive to how fast changes in our society also imply that our close history and knowledge might get lost in the process.

**Moderne Ruiner** was established in 2009 and consists of Astrid Findreng (f. 1964), Grethe Britt Fredriksen (f.1957) and Elisabeth Engen (f.1957). *Moderne Ruiner* is also a continuing artistic project where everything is produced collaboratively. All three artists live and work in Trondheim.

\* Ragnhild Rein Bore and Tor Skoglund (red.): *Fra håndkraft til høyteknologi: norsk industri siden 1829* (2008, SSB).