

Birgir Snæbjörn Birgisson
Heidi Lampenius
Miikka Vaskola
Curator: Mika Hannula

Louder Than Bombs
May 3 - June 15 2019

This artist group showing in *Louder than Bombs*, in BERG Contemporary, Reykjavík, was assembled and invited to collaborate by Heidi Lampenius (resident at Villa Snäcksund artist residency, Ekenäs, Finland), early in 2018, to further investigate the theme of silence and memories under the working title *Memories Treasured in Silence*.

Participating artists; Birgir Snæbjörn Birgisson (IS), Heidi Lampenius (FI), and Miikka Vaskola (FI), have all shown and collaborated with the gallery Helsinki Contemporary and therefore knew each other from before. They all share the common experience of channelling their creation through some sort of expression of silence though employing various media to that end. This collaboration is a long-term project and an artistic research, where ideas evolve with time.

The following text is a documentation of thoughts that have been shared, questions that have been asked and answered and last but not least memories created and treasured.

Silence. Where does it come from? Can we be in it, wear it even? Most likely we all experience silence differently. While for some silence can be hell on earth, for others it can be the joyful haven from loudness and even a privilege. While for some it means the fear of being alone, for others it can be a declaration or even an effective weapon.

Memories make us the unique individuals we are. They shape our own creativity and our ability to be receptive. We are nothing but memories, good or bad. Our behaviour and experiences instantly become memories, some strong, some not, some easier to steer away, some not. When trying to predict the future, we create the past.

Questions 1-7, (Birgir Snæbjörn Birgisson)

Q1. Do you see silence as a method or as a way of expression? Does it affect the process or is it more like an aftereffect? When did you if intentionally start thinking about silence?

Miikka: Silence is a part of the process, sitting with the work, silently to see where it is going. Also it is the subject, it is the strength in the paintings. Silence contains the story, for example in my painting, *Ask him why yelling doesn't reach his mind*. My exhibition in Turku Art museum was a lot about silence. Silence helps you listen better than screaming. In the army they say, always help the one who is not screaming first.

Heidi: I have thought about silence for as long as I can remember. Sometimes not enjoying it, straining to hear the absence of sounds. I am a listener. Then later as enjoyment, going into silence, walking in it, sitting in it, watching. Silence makes you see things better, more detailed, more concentrated. It is a way of living. In my work I try to resonate with my surroundings and then hope this shows in the work.

Birgir: First elaborating on what I mean by method? Guess for me, method is performing intentionally and consciously/knowingly. So the difference between the two, method and expression, is that the latter might allow an element of surprise. About when I started to think about silence, I guess from young age, somewhat relate it to manners even, as in keep quiet, or stand still etc. Thinking back in relation to my work, there has always been this border, between what is said (the meaning of the work) and how it is said (how it is done, presented). Sure it affects the process, wanting and intending to say something in a silent manner, though the content might be serious and loud.

Q2. Do you see your work as memories? Are they your memories? Do you relate to the process and the time spent doing the work as a memory or do you see the work as a memory in general? How much do you think of the work being an event, or something that can be called a memory in itself?

Heidi: yes. I strive for archetypes, or prototypes, of memory. Shared memory. I like to think about the history of mentality. Works are always personal as are memories but they can be part of the universal.

Miikka: yes and no. Landscapes are atmospheres of memories, it's always different than the actual, inseparable, lived, but different. Maybe my portraits have to do with memory. Paintings are the keys to memories.

Heidi: for me working is a performative event, but it is not important for the viewer to know this I think. I don't relate to the time spent working as a memory. It is more like no time.

Birgir: Quite often yes. Or perhaps rather that they represent memories. There might be this event or something that I hear or read about that triggers something that continues to pop up, even though I try to eliminate the thought. I see those thoughts as memories. Then again using the thoughts, is all about remembering them and making them real in a new form, be it paintings or photographs or sculptures. If the work itself is a memory? sure, for me, myself, the idea, the process, becomes a memory, for the viewer if he happens to relate to the work, the reading and understanding of the work becomes a memory.

Q3. Do you estimate or plan how the viewer sees your work and relates to your content/memories and if his involvement includes the viewer living/seeing your content/memories or pairing it with his own experience similar or not?

Miikka: I see myself as the viewer, the first viewer.

Heidi: the viewer always comes to the work with their own memories, I cannot impose mine on them. That is why it is important that there is space, air, undefined, silence if you will, in the work, so that the person seeing has that space to share with the work their own interpretation. I am always a bit wary when works leave the studio, I know what they say to me but I don't know what they are saying to the viewer. I think you can try to plan to a certain extent, but you can never control this. And the question is, is it interesting?

Birgir: Can't remember if somebody compared it to choreography or if it's just me that's seeing it that way now. We choreograph the whole scene, with the participation of the viewer in mind, even though the work might be very personal for ourselves. It's all about the moves on the dancefloor, the invitation to participate in the dance that we choose and to which tune. However unique we think we are and want to be, I think most viewers can well relate to our content or memories. What is important though is how they relate, as in if we are able to open their minds differently or making them remember or think differently, leaving the dent or mark intended.

Q4. How much does each work and the feeling it brings affect your ways of seeing your work or process as a whole? Do you feel the need to treasure that feeling somehow, store it or make it have an effect on other work?

Miikka: If it's good feeling, I bring it to the next work. Going back is also worthwhile sometimes.

Heidi: I tend to work in series and there is a natural sequence of things, feelings tagging along to the next work. I also like to return to things that work. Stuff that don't fit in I hide, sometimes it becomes interesting later.

Birgir: Continuation comes naturally, a certain dialect or a way to express an idea often gets transmitted onto the next. It's often hard to break up the thread though necessary every now and then. The idea to see the wholeness in what one does is satisfactory and reinforces the progress if anything.

Q5. How much consciousness do you feel needed when it comes to making the work or do you think too much awareness can affect the work?

Miikka: This does not interest me at all in art, or when I work.

Heidi: For me this is interesting, I need to find a flow every now and then and I have routines for getting there.

Birgir: Guess it's down to different ways of working. In my case the consciousness most often comes first in the creation process, the act of making the work itself is mostly manual labour, sounds boring and surely is sometimes, with exceptions though.

Q6. How much do you rely on the experience of the unexpected and how much do you allow it to affect, both in which direction the work is going, or do you try to steer it, control it based on experience and knowledge acquired from earlier work, experience?

Miikka: Both, the latter is skills, then you don't have to think about it.

Heidi: Skills can be used intuitively, helping the unexpected along. I love it if I can surprise myself.

Birgir: I kind of miss the flow and the surprise, though in general I'm satisfied and dependent on the way I work or the path I've chosen. There's always some enlightenment in doing and seeing the work appear, though one knowingly has given oneself an outcome, otherwise one would have given up long ago.

Q7. How important is sharing the work with others? How much of its contents do you see aimed at the viewer and how much towards yourself? How much of the content is personal and does that affect the way you present it?

Miikka: Everything is personal, I try to share only good work, end results. When the work is in an exhibition the context is so different from where the work was born that it cannot be presented as the same experience.

Heidi: I think it is very important to share the work. It is part of what we do, making visible. My thought is to resonate with my surroundings and present this to the viewer, it is always personal but I do make the choice of how I live and what I dwell on and I choose the work that works, as part of the process.

Birgir: The idea, being ours, and us making it, makes the work personal in itself. Someone said that sharing the work saves it from being just therapy. In the end it's all about having something to say and wanting to say it, though saying it to oneself is almost as fulfilling. I often feel that the work is some kind of a reminder of an idea, that ought to work just as well for the viewer as for myself.

Questions 8-12, Heidi Lampenius and Miikka Vaskola

Q8. How does colour relate to silence? Does it? Birgir, why white?

Birgir: It's hard to ignore or not take into account the learned colour theory, even what Goethe said. If colours relate to different emotions some must relate to silence better than others. Trying though to think and talk from one's own experience which palette is best? my quickest answer would be to say, the whiter and fainter, the more silent. It is not all that simple though. Clearness and simplicity have also a lot to do with it. The more complex mix of colours the more mixed soundscape, and therefore less silent or at least experienced differently. As for why white? Roman Opalka, who I admire a lot, said to me once, that mixing black and white, always gives a whiter outcome, than the black. An author I also cherish greatly, Audur Ava Olafsdottir, said in a recent interview that she was writing from darkness into the light. (similar to what Opalka could have said about his work), Audur also said that storytelling is never innocent. Wish her words were mine. We are taught that in due time, we set off on our final journey towards a white light, (at least us, the well behaved). White is often said to represent a beginning also, so I guess it's a beginning and an end. White can be taken as lack of colour, (the colour being diluted with white), meaning less determined or more silent.

Heidi: Having thought about this for a while I think any colour can be silent. It also depends on the viewer.

Miikka: Colors can scream.

Q9. How do you make room for silence in your life? Practically? If so, is it method?

Birgir: Concentration is the key I think, it's even enough by itself. Funnily enough though, listening to music can increase the concentration, though it sounds like a paradox, to what I said earlier. Being alone in the studio is most often enough to be in one's own silence. Apart from experiencing silence in the making of art, I'd say fishing comes closest to it. Being alone fishing, or should I say, one is always alone fishing, mentally. Yet again it's all about concentration. Sadly there seems to be a growing lack of concentration in today's society, high time to be on alert.

Heidi: I spend a lot of time in forests and in the archipelago. These are not completely silent places but they come close. They have a freer silence than a library. It's also about space. The horizon is silent. Deserts are lovely, In the winter the snow makes things more silent and if the sea is frozen, walking far out is the closest to complete silence I can find. I seek these places out and enjoy them.

Miikka: I work at night when most of the others sleep.

Q10. Do you regret being silent sometimes?

Birgir: If about me, as a character, I would rather like to reverse the question. I regret not being silent. The energy-draining need felt, to be talkative and participate is unjust. Yet again society demands something that we, or at least I'm not. The only way to reload the batteries is silence. The only way towards silence is trying to be, or at least make the work silent. Silence is more and more hard to get. If I regret the work being silent? no, not at all.

Heidi: There are always things that should have been said and things that should have been left unsaid. In works, I don't know, I can't really control what the paintings are saying after they leave the studio.

Miikka: No

Q11. List five words connected to silence.

Birgir: Snow, more snow, down (feathers), sleeping bag, solitude.

Miikka: alone, calm sea, fainting, frost, painting.

Q12. List five words connected to memory.

Birgir: Falling, apples (the smell), grandmother, loss, love.

Heidi: past, present, future.

Miikka: this would be a list of senses.

Questions 13-14, Birgir Snæbjörn Birgisson

Q13. If, as some say, we are the weather, can you trace the difference in weather/parts of the year, in your work?

Heidi: The seasons make a difference in the rhythm of working. I work best in the autumn. The spring is worst because I feel I have to be outside every time the sun looks out, it's a thirst for light, and then it is still cold and the wind is cold and I know I should work in preparation for summer when it is nice to take time off. In the summer I collect experiences. The autumn is returning, full of energy and breaking things down. The winter, is for hibernating and looking at the work, spending time. We are more isolated during winter, I don't know.

Miikka: The night is "nightier" in winter. Cycling home from the studio at night in the winter this darkness makes it a very different experience. I think it is obvious that the seasons have effect on the work. In the summer I can paint outside and this is good.

Birgir: Funnily enough, in Iceland we only have two seasons, summer and winter, at least we celebrate the last day of winter, and the day after the first day of summer. Then again after what hardly counts as summer for being so short, we celebrate the first day of winter. Winters used to be my favourite time for working. Now it's hard to say, all this darkness weighs more year by year and the energy is different. I agree with Heidi, when she says that one feels like one ought to be outside when it gets

brighter. Last few years I've felt early spring/summer being the most energetic time of the year to work. If there's difference in the works in regard to which season, I think it's more about us seeing and thinking about them differently if anything. In my case I tend to be more inward and serious during winter.

Q14. How much do you think our place of residence affects our work and our views to silence, memories etc.?

Heidi: I think it is important where one lives but it is easier to relate to this looking in the rear-view mirror. The effect of a place can be instant but I think you only see it with time. In a calmer place it is perhaps easier to relate to silence and memories when seeing/life is not so fragmented.

Miikka: This is not a quantitative quality, of course it has effect- Miikka says Ekenäs has effected him + 8 kgs.

Birgir: One's place of residence is one thing and can surely affect us, be it by it's nature, socially or politically. Nevertheless the studio, wherever it happens to be is also of great influence. One's studio residence is a universal residence. I once heard a saying that "All art is local. Local art is bad". Guess it affected me greatly in the sense that I've somewhat fought against becoming related to one particular place.