

People's Palace
2014-

Merete Røstad

About

Merete Røstad is a visual artist and curator working with publics, remembrance and archive. Her practice concerns the perception of our everyday exchange and experiences within our surroundings, one aspect of this being how we read the traces left behind. Frequently engaging within public space and communities, Røstad's process-based practice has developed out of a rigorous interdisciplinary practice in both, her academic and professional, life in Norway and Germany. This has included an on-going commitment to explore the potential of spatial and temporal constructs as a catalyst for engaging with history, identity and memory. Røstad lives and works in Berlin and Oslo and is currently an Artistic Research Fellow at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts.

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Merete Røstad's research project *Exercises in Consciousness – re | staging forgetting as Art practice in Public space*, investigates collective memory and remembrance through artistic research and practice in the public sphere. As a part of the project she examines how memory and forgetting transform into works of Art. Exploring how the relationship between consciousness and memory is crucial to our sense of self, community and society.

Commemorative art practices have been expanding for centuries and the academic discourse on commemoration has grown immensely in the past twenty years. Many scholars from such a variety of disciplines are joining the “memory boom” mapping a field that has become effectively inaccessible to the public. In response to this Røstad's artistic research, explores key methods within the field.

The *People's Palace* is part of the on-going investigation. Røstad engages with participants from various disciplines in critical reflection on cultural identity and collective memory, around the Folkets hus (People's Palace), a phenomenon within Scandinavian labour discourse. On the topic of remembrance as a form of forgetting Røstad asks for analytical and critical reflection and imagination regarding the past, the present and the very future of remembrance and forgetting as collective memory.

People's Palace started of by elaborating on the on-going debate on “performative monuments” and “temporary memorials.” Røstad argues that the discourse is in demand of a renewed historical, theoretical and artistic vocabulary with the aim and function to engage with commemorative methodology as well as the practice and materiality of monuments and memorial's position in society today.

In the city of Lillestrøm, Norway one could find the Folkets hus (people's palace) that in 2015, 100 years after it's opening, was demolished to give space for a new city development. Throughout its lifetime, the house had been the centre of a number of key events in people's lives. It was a place where human actions, dialogue and solidarity shaped a society and its culture as well as building a political identity. Witnessing the disappearance of Folkets hus (people's palace) in everyday life in Lillestrøm and Scandinavia, Røstad initiated the work *People's Palace* as part of her artistic research fellowship at The Oslo National Academy of the Arts.

The central thought behind *People's Palace* is the artist's role as one that activates and stages structures in society by means of thought, action and object.

People's Palace thus investigates Joseph Beuys' concept of “social sculpture” as a term to illustrate the

idea of Art's position to challenge society. Accordingly, the work is a social sculpture where people met across political and religious affiliation, exchanged memories and shared a common history as a central platform for reactivating the idea of Folkets hus (people's palace).

People's Palace also is Røstad's contribution to change the one-sided focus on monuments and memorials as object that have dominated the media in recent years. She argues that they merely have become symptoms of people's inability and willingness to actively participate in the process of remembrance within their time, weakening the ability to change the history writing from within. *People's Palace* explores and reflects the idea that even small collaborative actions and gestures can reactivate the forgotten past. How we remember, depends on how we engage with the world through our experience, our memory and our very presence. The project challenges people from different communities and the politics of remembrance to build relationships for the construction of a collective memory. We are the monuments.

























