

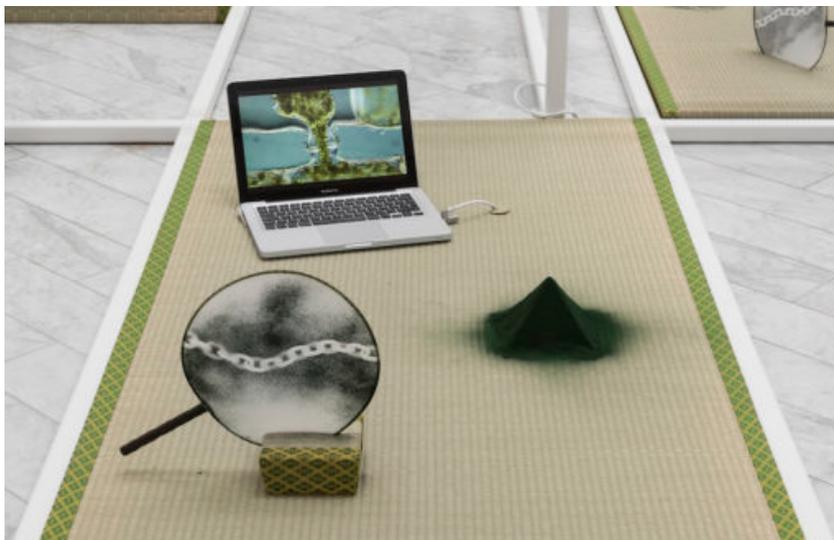
Spirulina Click

Av Maria Bordorff

Mana Stash

Astrid Myntekær

Tranen, Hellerup
15. oktober - 4. desember 2016



Astrid Myntekær, *Mana Stash*, installation view, Tranen, 2016. Photo: David Stjernholm.

The Sun it rises in the East – is the opening line of a popular Danish hymn with lyrics written by B. S. Ingemann in 1837, sung at morning assemblies at every folk high school in the country in celebration of the divine dawning of the new day. Soon, however, the sun will no longer rise in the East like before, for in many places the air is solidifying, becoming an increasingly dense wall of particles and gases – and sunrises are becoming something you watch on an LED screen. Having just returned from Taipei, this critic vividly recalls the sensation of having to make a bit of extra effort to pull enough oxygen down into the lungs.

In Astrid Myntekær's just-opened solo show at Tranen, *Mana Stash* – the result of a residency in Beijing last year – air pollution forms the starting point of a satellite-like platform of reflection where science meets mythology and spiritualism; a typical trait of Myntekær's practice.

A primitive algae reactor made out of a cola bottle, tatami mats shipped in from Japan, handheld fans, references to Neo-plasticism and to avant-garde architect Friedrich Kiesler's dreams of wall-less urban spaces where no architecture impedes the city's breathing: these are just some of the details incorporated in the white metal batten structure placed in the middle of the floor at Tranen's exhibition space. The form appears so light, so upward-reaching that it seems as if it might all take off with a single twisting turn, floating slowly upwards into the aether.

The exhibition text, written by artist-cum-writer Kristian Byskov, describes how a woman feels that the air is thickening, dulling the spontaneity of breathing as if we are all to suffocate at some point. Myntekær illustrates this ultimate suffocation by means of small, round fans that have been covered in algae dust and plunged into the mats like samurai swords. Chains emerge in the dust, as if the interconnectedness of all things reveals itself if we only wave a bit at some microscopic particles in the air. Algae produce oxygen, they are much hyped as health foods, and the tiny wet plants are being considered as candidates for climate-neutral biofuel. But in excessive quantities, prompted by human pollution, the algae cause toxic conditions in the sea. Clairvoyant-like, Myntekær reads the dust for us and shows us the cursed DNA of the Earth's climate in the Anthropocene.



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Eastern spiritualism has long served as inspiration for new lifestyles here in Denmark – and this is also evident in contemporary art, where mantra tea, togas and gongs have been popular items on lists of materials. Myntekær has worked comprehensibly and in depth with the mythical, mystical and extra-sensory ever since she graduated from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts just four years ago. Compared to her previous exhibitions, however, this one seems quite de-mystified. In the past, she has used light, but also sounds and scents to create densely atmospheric spaces where audiences were entirely enveloped by the flickering effect of the immersive work, but here the use of illusory devices has been pared back significantly.

One might briefly suspect that Myntekær has been slightly influenced by some of the criticism aimed at her most recent solo show here in Denmark, *Orgone*, at Overgaden in 2014, claiming that her immersive installation bordered rather closely on the empty fascination of experience culture. At any rate *Mana Stash* engages its audience's minds, remaining unconcerned with the body except for pulling it in close, allowing close-up scrutiny of the structure.

The many details come to serve as links, except that you cannot press them to learn more. Having such a feature would have come in handy, though, for there is plenty here that you want to google, and that you will almost have to google – unless you are omniscient – in order for the work to fully unfold itself. Spirulina – click. Tatami mat – click. “Make-your-own-algae-reactor” – click.

The mats are made to scale, 1:2, we are told, and they constitute the architectural principle behind the structure – as in traditional Japanese interiors where rooms are divided into fields. Viewed from this perspective, from the blank state of mind induced by meditation, the negative spaces formed by the beams of the structure are cleansed of all materialised action. With the links to Kiesler's anti-architecture and Neo-plasticism (the blue undersides of the mats refer to the fields of colour used in the Dutch De Stijl movement, an elegant detail) Myntekær establishes an interesting dialogue between ancient Eastern Asian culture and modern European utopias of Futurism. Bringing all this into a state of harmonious interplay is a somewhat promiscuous theoretical manoeuvre, effortlessly executed by Myntekær. And the whole thing is so heavily laden with coolness – the work is aesthetically pleasing in all its subtlety – that homemade algae reactors might well become next year's great hype.



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