

Kunsthåndverk

Nr 3. 2012 – 32. årgang, nr 125

Miljø for døende

Kunstnere og håndverkere gikk i Stockholm sammen for å utvikle nye tanker om hva slags miljø som er godt for pasienter som er døende og mottar smertelindring. Ble dermed «Dødens forværelse» et værene sted?

Stein på stein i grenseland

Arild Berg har utviklet keramisk kunst for en sykehusavdeling og så målt virkningen den har på pasienter og ansatte der. Dernest fikk han deler av arbeidet inn på Nasjonalmuseets årsutstilling, som plasserte det på sokkel.

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Stone on Stone in a Border Region

To take his studio ceramics out of the artworld's closed circuit and bring them into society – to see what use there might be for his knowledge of art – is but one of Arild Berg's motivations for putting art in a public hospital. He has found that combining his own artistic research with methods of research drawn from nursing makes an interesting pair that might do other people some good. For one project, he embellished a hospital ward for elderly people with undiagnosed mental disorders. Berg used a large team of consultants from the hospital in order to get a better picture of what might work in that particular environment. Once the results of his artistic research had been produced, he let the users and his fellow researchers have their say on where to hang the artworks. Thus he engaged with the employees and their supervisors, and they in turn tried to incorporate his ceramics into the hospital's therapies and patient care.

While visitors to this hospital ward will notice the 20 or more tiles adorning the walls of the main corridor, the artworks do not demand a whole lot of attention. Quite the contrary, as their colour scheme is rather tender and predominantly restricted to shades of blue and white. Some motifs are abstract while others are figurative representations of birds and insects. They are based on his own drawings which he has combined with abstract elements that look a bit like graffiti and unreadable text. This juxtaposition of pure shapes, colours and imagery was one of the criteria from the project's outset. In the early stage, Berg consulted with a focus group to discuss various ideas. The group consisted of some ten people, among them a nurse, a doctor, a physiotherapist and a designer, and they were all interviewed as part of Berg's artistic research. But even though the project came into being through a democratic process of sorts, the end result clearly shows Berg's signature. And as a result, it has also triggered some of the patients to talk about what they see and feel while looking at the works; this is indeed a result Berg and his fellow researchers were hoping for.

The patient group consists of elderly people with no record of mental disease. They have experienced mild to severe depressions and sometimes delusions, so cognitive therapy is readily at hand to treat most of them. When a patient arrives, if a dialogue can be established promptly, it can ease the process of communication. This is especially so for patients who might otherwise find it difficult to talk to the staff about their personal feelings and fears.

Although the tiles may at first seem ineffectual, they have actually helped the department's psychosocial nurses to improve their working methods. This is a finding of Mette Holme Ingeberg and Britt-Maj Wikstrøm, two health researchers Berg has collaborated with in order to produce data that could say something about the efficacy of his art after it was installed. The three have co-written an article now published in the U.S.-based *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*.¹ The peer-reviewed article presents and analyses data from a handful of surveys the researchers conducted on site. Having now become part of the curriculum for certain student groups specializing in psychosocial nursing, it documents that the porcelain tiles have helped several patients open up more readily to the staff, thus enabling the staff to improve the therapy and care. The article also says the tiles have helped the staff relate better to their workplace because it now has 'authentic art' rather than mass-produced prints. The art has affected the ward's identity inasmuch as public hospitals usually have no budget for buying original art.

Berg's artistic research in the hospital setting is part of a PhD project that also includes two other public decorations, one for a school and the other for a church. Also in these contexts Berg has established a close dialogue with the 'Local and social energies' is how he describes the responses to his ideas, and he has tried to include them in the 'palate' from which he works. The three projects make up the empirical material for the thesis Berg is about to hand in to Helsinki's Aalto University, which runs the doctor of arts programme in which he is enrolled.

But back to the hospital project: Berg did more than provide the hospital ward with ceramic wall pieces. He also made porcelain objects that could be held in

the hand. He refers to these as 'stones', and they were his own idea of a good object to introduce into the ward. The idea encountered some resistance at first but was later accepted, also by the staff. Kirsti Frøshaug, head of development at the department, relates that the 20 or so stones have been 'adopted' to the extent that none of them can now be found: the patients and staff must have taken them home!

Berg meanwhile saved one of the 'stones' and sent it in to the annual exhibition of the Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts, which is held at the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Oslo. The jury deemed the object worthy of inclusion in the exhibition and put it on a plinth, but Berg needed to supply a name for it. He called it *Arctic Border* and made no mention of the hospital project from which it derived. Later, when he was invited to give an artist's talk in connection with the exhibition, he related that *Arctic Border* had been 'developed to be placed in the corridor of a psychiatric ward for elderly patients'. The title, he said, was meant to reflect on 'being in a border region between that which is known and unknown'.

Berg's own attitude to art is adamant; art should always somehow be part of society and try to serve a cause. When talking about his student days at Oslo National Academy of the Arts, he says that he had to find out on his own what stance he would take and how he would work as a ceramicist and artist. An encounter with the works of Joseph Beuys was, he says, crucial for his orientation towards a Beuys-ish concept of 'social sculpture'. Later, after graduation, he participated in a workshop arranged by what was then called *Institutt for Romkunst* ('Institute for Spatial Art'). It was during this process of working with people from completely different disciplines that he forged a connection between his own ceramics and ideas derived from conceptual works like those of Beuys.

Berg continues reflecting in this vein when he discloses that he does not share the common attitude of grieving over the loss of industrial arenas, places where the knowledge he and others have of ceramics can be employed. The expressions of nostalgia permeating the field of arts and crafts do not interest him because alternative ways can be found for putting ceramic art in the service of society. Berg

is however not a stone thrower, nor does he sit in a glass house; actually he teaches design at an institution that encourages cross-disciplinary research.

ORIGINAL TEXT AND SYNOPSIS:

CHRISTER DYNNA

TRANSLATION: CHRISTER DYNNA

AND ARLYNE MOI

1: Ingeberg, M.H., Wikstrøm, B-M. & Berg, A. (2012) 'The Essential Dialogue: A Norwegian Study of Art Communication in Mental Health Care', in *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services* 50(8), 22-30.

Stein på stein i grenseland

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Arvid Berg i sin keramikkstudio i Oslo. Foto: Arvid Berg

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Illustrasjon av Arvid Berg. Foto: Arvid Berg



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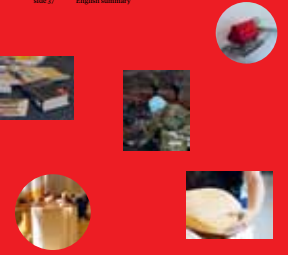
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