

31 Indicative Objects

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Marianne Bjørnmyr's analog-based photographic and installation practice examines notions of truth and certainty through selected narratives of scientific discovery. It asks the viewer to question the foundation of Truth as a method of relational facts used to understand the world. Knowledge holds its own temporality. "The content of learning is a result of someone's research," states Bjørnmyr. "It is true until it is proven otherwise." It exists within a specific moment tied closely to the methods and language of inquiry used at that time. Humanity dates its developments through milestones of discovery, both in our own lives and in collective experience. Measurement is a recent human invention, relative to our understanding of the history of our universe. In fact, time itself is a human invention, used as an instrument of categorization, an axis on which we track and schedule our existence. The exhibition at Babel tells stories of human error through measuring systems used to systematize an understanding of natural phenomena. Phenomena whose increasing complexity is observed through the mechanisms of photo-based technology.

Bjørnmyr uses the photographic method as a means to question the logic of certainty. Since its invention, photography has become a quintessential tool in the production of proof. It enables us to perceive phenomena outside of the body's natural scope of sensory perception. Photography gives us access to new data. And, in turn, this data is analysed to theorise about the nature of our universe. It is a process of compartmentalization, of classifying knowledge into categories for quicker and easier understanding. These categories form a reference point for increasingly complex understandings of our environment. To Bjørnmyr, photography is more a language than a form of strict representation. It is a way to describe experience, with all of the nuance and shades of certainty and doubt that comprise an existence in flux. We build on what we know, using the data of our priorities to develop new lines of thought. Aesthetics, here, are also a language. They are a series of conceptual descriptors that convey meaning at the surface, whose understandings or intentions flow in deep currents below.

In the exhibition *31 Indicative Objects*, each work stands in relation to the other. They form a series, of which a selection has been made specifically for Babel. They tell of narratives of the impacts of measurement and of failed interventions on established natural cycles. A clock marks the passing of measures of time, following the cycle of minutes lost within the annual delay of the earth's rotation. Bjørnmyr hopes to bring small bits of the unseen to the picture, the minutiae omitted in the annals of dominant history. "I have long been fascinated by the unseen, and subject matter that doesn't easily present itself to the camera," she explains.

Bjørnmyr puts to question the hierarchy of knowledge in her own quiet but assertive way. By using the methods and language of science, she casts doubt on the fine line between truth and fiction. Perhaps these tenuous connections resonating between each carefully selected piece serve to support each other's

message, their own truth, presented in objective silence. "I don't have a scientific background, and I don't expect my work to hold any credibility, perhaps almost quite the opposite," she states. Exhibiting narratives of data, Bjørnmyr reflects on why we experience things so differently. She poses questions about the role of photography as tool in the manipulation of understanding. She asks, within the process of recording, how much is changed? In what ways are we limited or liberated by each technological breakthrough? It is a relational analysis of the spectrum of differing perspectives that all have a voice in the construction of our reality. Artists are professional doubters. Their existential cynicism is equally buttressed by their unfading hope. There is a clear desire to return to a benevolent vision of progress, outlining that doubt is a process of unification rather than fragmentation. Bjørnmyr uses doubt as a means of activating agency. She relies on the viewer to question what they see and to insert themselves in the valorization of knowledge. She is "driven by a desire to disrupt our definitions and perceptions of reality." She puts to question the truth status of established fact.

Sensory experience can be understood as a collection of data interpreted by the brain as a system of messages and responsive cues. It is our way of not only passively understanding our world but also responding to it. Truths and facts can be understood as the prioritization of some forms of knowledge over others in an active mediation between structures of power. Information derived from sensory experience is interpreted by methods of reason and logic. Doubt exposes the armature of how truth is both constructed and supported. It is a negotiation in gaining a deeper understanding of how the world is constructed, forming a dialogue between many sources and relying on a responsive openness to challenge. Though Bjørnmyr states that any fact can be toppled in favour of new knowledge, we understand that there are powerful forces that lobby to control our perception of truth. "[Throughout this exhibition] we are reminded that truth is constructed and contingent, and only truth until new results are presented." She continues, "I would like the audience to reflect along with me, and to get amazed around the way in which what we consider to be knowledge, truth, and fact changes over time and place. Where does accepted truthful science begin, and where does it end?" It is in the power of collective agreement that we find this truth. It is more a question of fluctuating majority than a static point. It can change in response to shifts of priority and interest, as well as new information.

The stardust photograms, made from genuine stardust on photographic paper, are constructions of starscapes. Their materials signify their authority in representation. They are starscapes because they are made of stars. They are constructed at the same time as they are accepted as a presented truth. Bjørnmyr's works record not only the presentation of information through the medium of photography, but also our desires – our desires to know more: more thoroughly, more concretely, and more assuredly. "In this work, I have also included stories of how humans have tried to alter established scientific parameters, for example, by extending the day and hours of sun and light or by making a way to count time regardless of the earth and cosmos' behaviour," she states. Truth is a power structure. The works within this exhibition use this power structure to convey a sense of established fact. But the clear voice of the artist is conspicuously missing. There is no obvious support for the viewer's point of view, whatever it might be. They are on their own, faced with data with which they have to come to a certain balance of sense. There is something eerie about

being faced with a surety in a distanced way. Science has historically separated logic and reason from more corporeal methods of sensing and understanding our world. Bjørnmyr distances herself from the messy corporeal by the use of a mechanical tool – the apparatus of the camera. It becomes a cold and scientific vessel, extracting data and presenting it as an offer. But there lingers a presence here. Through the act of construction, the works exhibited are not objective. They have been influenced by presence, by the negotiation of the artist, the time, and the work. It is telling that this word, understanding, describes much of what these works are trying to elicit: acceptance, comprehension, appreciation, belief, and agreement, with subtexts of recognition, judgement, awareness, and knowing. Bjørnmyr's desire to explore curiosity hand-in-hand with a fixed scepticism and readiness to trade one truth for another, resonates within the temporally located narratives presented at Babel. She deconstructs through the physical creation of her works the human need to systematize and measure the phenomena of our world, and the worlds and universe around us. "All things we measure are so recent," she states. "What will we measure in the future? What haven't we yet measured?" This exposes a desire to see the unseen, to know the unknown, using terminology such as manipulation or invention as markers of that process.

Bjørnmyr's artistic constructions are almost poetic musings about artifice and deep intuitive meaning. Signification becomes almost as much an authority on knowledge as authenticity, only to be toppled or replaced by a new collective agreement. The exhibition at Babel perhaps then, asks the viewer to participate in a new agreement of truth, specifically tailored to the available data and reflection presented within it. It does not seek to establish Truth, but rather gives the opportunity to construct, through a filtered network of data, from a certain space, and during a certain time, what truth is to you.

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