

Barely audible sound creates images

(by Trond Borgen)

Snippets of long forgotten WW2 history are now being carefully exposed in the form of visual sounds.

If history is in the walls, can it be exposed? Per Platou makes an attempt; starting with the life of German soldiers at Obrestad Lighthouse he exposes daily life in the form of subtle and suggestive sound and objects. It is as if the sounds themselves, once sucked into the walls and stored there, are now being released at last. The exhibition is underexposed; the sounds are barely audible, the requisites are few - this is neither a reconstruction of what was actually here, nor a fiction about the lives of the German soldiers. In this way Platou avoids both the quasi-documentary and the sentimental trap. When I visited the exhibition it was all about sharpening my senses and to let myself catch the atmosphere of the place - then connecting this feeling to what I already knew about Festung Norwegen and the large number of German soldiers who were stuck in Norway until the peace in 1945.

"Jonny Winklers cannon" is the name of Platou's sound installation, named after a German soldier who was stationed here and who is to be found in a photo sitting on a large cannon, used more as a toy than as a weapon. Together with, among others, Willi Schneider, who painted his dream of beautiful women and palm islands in the southern seas in one of the rooms in the basement, Jonny must have had enough of the routine, boredom and conflict. So the history of all this is embedded deeply into the walls and is not easy to expose concretely and factually. Platou stages some of this rather as theatre or film; a few pieces of furniture, a radio and a drawing in one room, a few dismantled machine parts on a table in another; subtle sounds not easy to locate seem to be coming out from the walls themselves.

The effect is a strange, scarcely suggestive melancholia, not so as to re-experience those times, but more as a mental space for the forsaking of a peaceful world and a normal youth that these soldiers had to live through. What exactly were they doing for work and leisure? Platou does not attempt to provide any answers, his sounds are subtle and carefully suggestive. It is difficult to find artworks that are more discreet than this.

Winkler did not shoot with his cannon, bangs and booms were replaced by the sounds of much quieter activities. The exhibition does not let us experience such sounds - that would have been an absurd and futile project - instead, it leads us into a fiction where the props only suggest possibilities of the life here in the 1940s, while the sounds themselves are carefully suggestive in their way of making images, not necessarily corresponding to what we see, sometimes rather as a contrast. This is site-specific art at its best; art that creates a subtle dialogue not only with the rooms of the lighthouse and the near history, but also with the permanent exhibition in the building. Platou is a subtle artist; the images exist in our heads. In this way maybe it is the audience's own fantasy that is exhibited here.