

planer i endring  
(changing plans)

Stefan Klampfer

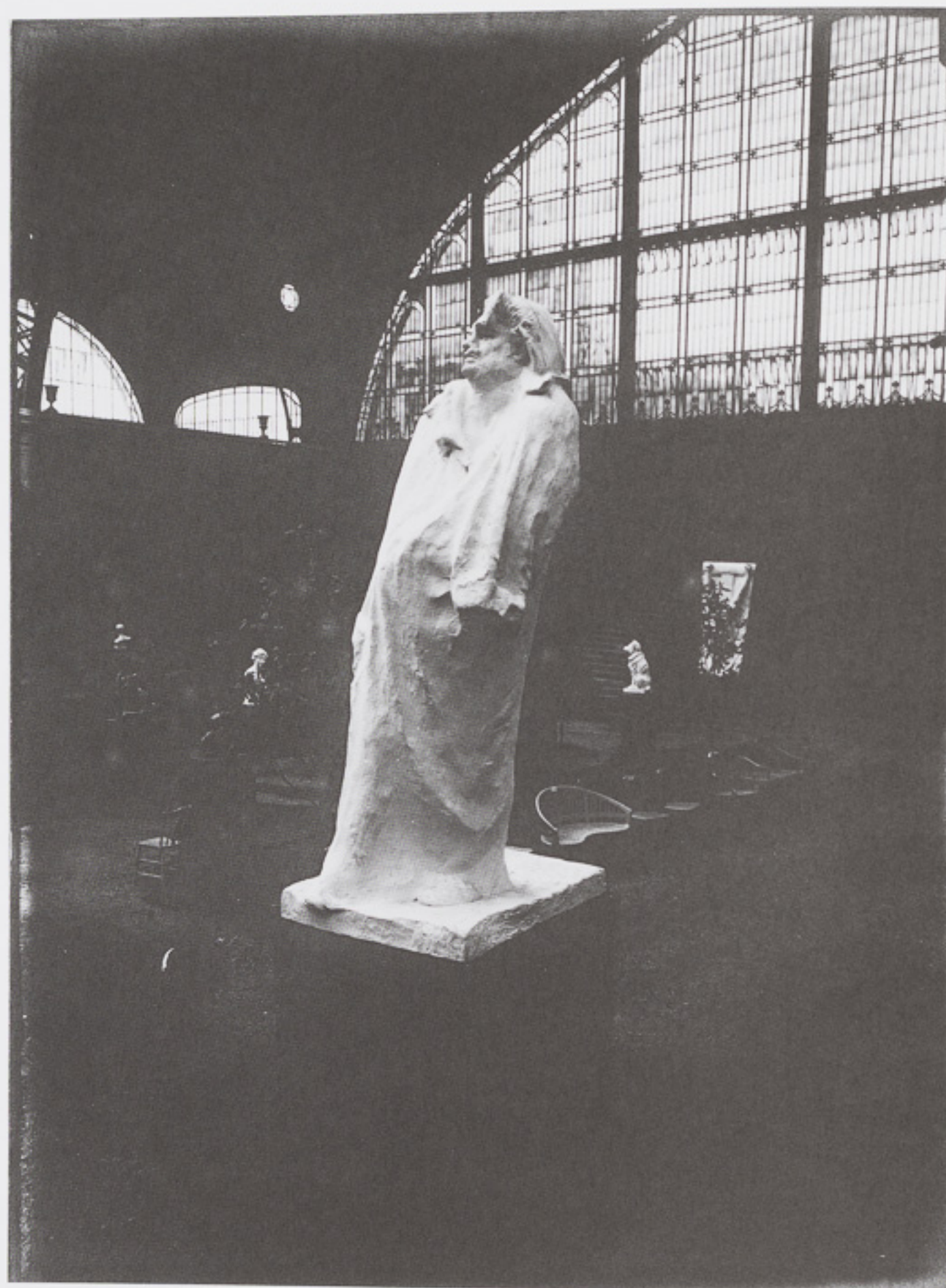


## Preface

It is quite common for contemporary artists to mystify their work by keeping quiet about it. With this documentation I would like to shed some light on the background of an artistic process to introduce an element of transparency and make the work more accessible. In spring 2015 I accepted an invitation to an artist residency in Trondheim, Norway, with an exhibition scheduled for six weeks after my arrival. I decided that I would not be taking already existing artworks with me.

chronicle





When I arrived in Trondheim I already had a rough idea for a project that I wanted to work on. The plan was to focus on a (sculptural) project that was related to the story of the creation of the "Monument to Balzac" by sculptor Auguste Rodin.

The presentation of the plaster model at the Salon in 1898 was a scandal and the sculpture was rejected by the jury. After the sculpture was returned to Rodin's house Edward Steichen was commissioned to take photographs of it.

My interest in the issue came up some years ago when I visited the Rodin museum in Paris — I have been fond of that story and also of the sculpture itself ever since. Some weeks before my flight to Norway I thought that perhaps now might be the time to reflect on it further and actually do something related to it.

Originally Rodin had begun to sculpt a nude model, later changing plans and covering it with his dressing gown after soaking it in plaster.

A short time after my arrival I started building something similar — a sort of "empty shell" — similar to the dressing gown that I had seen on pictures from the Rodin museum.

After two weeks of work I had finished two pieces. Even though they turned out to be not too bad, I have to admit that I was fairly uncertain about their whole appearance, their meaning and where all of this was actually going.

I had to face the fact that this might be a dead end — at least in the the way I had dealt with it thus far.

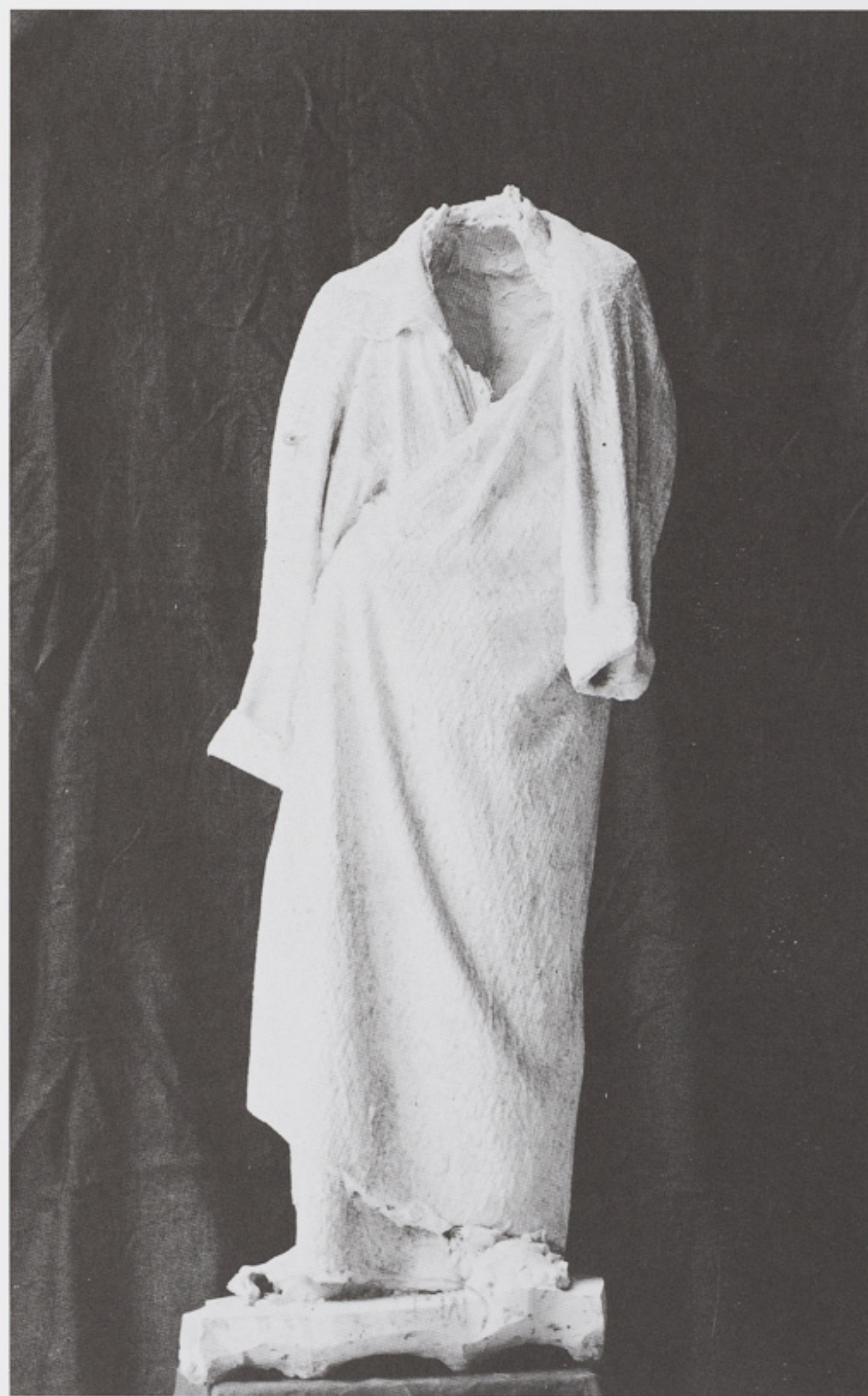
So I began going for long walks in the area and thought about what I was doing (here), as well as more generally. The place that struck me most was the harbour and the surrounding industrial park.

I had a feeling that bringing my own topics into this setting was not quite right and I thought I should rather allow myself to get slightly lost and create a situation where I was open enough to let new unexpected things happen. Thoughts cropped up on the international vs. the local, which could also be related to the sphere of the art world. I figured that even though places are very different from one other we always carry our individual package with us, no matter where we find ourselves. I also experienced this when I started to take my camera — the things that interested me were similar in other places too, they just looked different.

The world has been globalized and so too has the art world; just a handful of galleries dominate the art market. Collectors in Hong Kong, New York or Dubai — they are all interested in collecting similar stuff.

So when I felt I had finally arrived after two weeks in Trondheim, I knew it was time to change plans, and not only because the exhibition deadline was fast approaching.







So what would be my plan B one month before the opening?

While planning for the exhibition and the residency before my arrival, I also contacted a shipping company to find out how much potential future transport of artworks to my studio in Vienna would cost. I got the information. My applications for financial support from the arts council for shipping costs had been denied anyway.

So after two weeks of work I had no artworks and nothing to be delivered.

The financial support for production and travel costs from the Austrian embassy in Oslo (which I was very thankful for) had already been spent on flights, film material, photo chemicals, paper, plaster and other expenses.

When I started my walks I noticed that there was an almost endless amount of (good) material just lying around in different places. Norway is a rich country, which is nice for the people living there I realized. On the other hand, it made me think about countries of the so-called third world too — where everything has to be used and re-used until the very end — where there is literally nothing leftover.

I started to collect wood that I found during my walks — every day I would take some pieces back home and then return to spots every now and then where material seemed to accumulate. Once you develop an eye for what you are searching for, these things can literally be found anywhere. This might also work for ideas (the results would just have different faces.)

I decided that the circumstances I found myself in would constitute the topic of the exhibition.





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When I passed by an abandoned house a bit further out of the city I couldn't help noticing how the windows of the building were marked in a very obtrusive way. Each one was barricaded with wooden boards marked with a large X. In addition "NO ENTRANCE" had been written on the wall. It was obvious that someone had made great efforts to prevent people from entering the house, but also, and inconsistently, had emphasized potential entrances (with the cross marks). To me, the setting illustrated the fact that, metaphorically speaking, the entrance that I had been looking for with my initial idea for the piece was closed. The words "mark making" came to mind. Cy Twombly did it right.





I remembered that I had seen another X some time before; part of the construction of a wooden door. It was the first roll of film that I exposed and it was mainly supposed to be a test film as I had not developed film for quite some time. So I basically needed some negatives to see if my formula for the specific material was fine. Even if what was in the picture wasn't relevant for this purpose, I wanted something that I could relate to. A closed door became the subject for the test, that included the use of all the lenses that I had brought with me. It turned out that one of the lenses, a very old one from the 1950s that I had never used before, had incorrect shutter speeds.

And again, another closed entrance — no entry — but, at least a door!



Later on when I found this other place along the coast there was already a way to sneak in and check out what was there, in contrast to former locations. The X was still present, but it had lost its severity. A trend had already been set in taking wood from these constructions that actually had no function (somebody told me later that they were built for architectural training) I also took some to widen the opening.





I took this photo at the same house  
with the windows marked with an  
X. Somebody had tried to paint the  
drainpipe (green) but eventually  
lost interest and had gotten a bit  
expressive. I decided to give it the  
title "Abstract Expressionism".

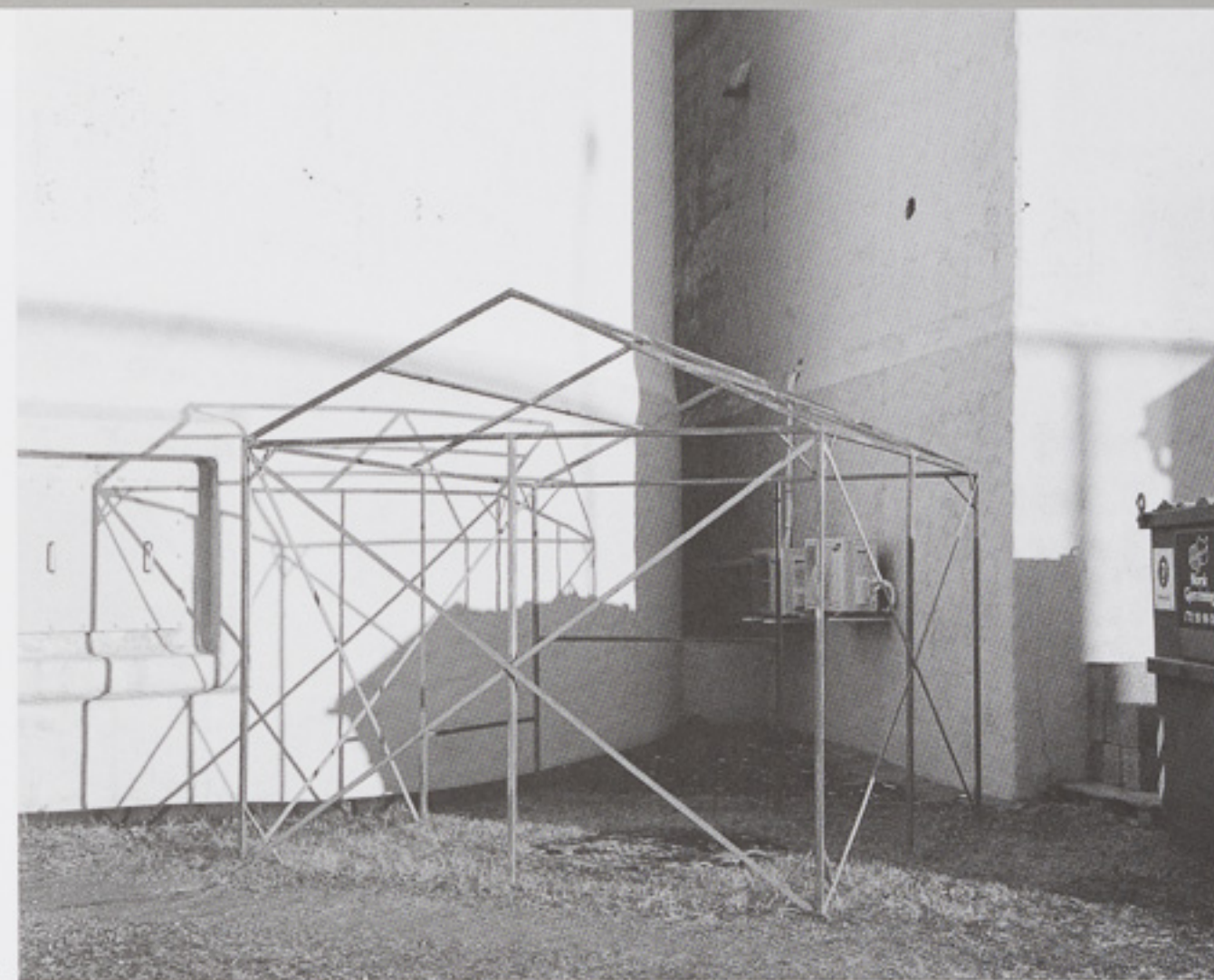




While walking near the commercial harbour I came across a car with flat tyres. Looking at it reminded me of the feeling I had when I gave up my initial idea. But things had changed for the better from the point that I decided to let it go. However, when I developed the film and printed the photograph I thought it was almost too photographic, too seductive. My impression was assured when I showed a couple of prints to other people and this one was especially well received. This observation made me even more suspicious. I decided to show it nevertheless, but to hang it very low on the wall of the exhibition space to visualize my mistrust of its visual power.



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This photograph was taken inside the compound of a company located in the harbour area. The sun was about to set and as I had previously noticed that the entrance door was kept locked outside of working hours, I knew there was a chance of getting locked in. I had spotted two cars in the yard though so I was also fairly optimistic regarding time. When, after a while, I saw one car leaving, I thought another one was still there, so I assumed that it would be fine, but that I shouldn't fool around for too long. In situations like this a large format camera may not be the best choice as it takes quite a while to set up. When I had taken the picture I returned to the entrance which of course was now locked. Adapting to the new situation, I parked my bike somewhere at the very rear, as it was obviously impossible to get it out of the fenced area. After evaluating different methods of escape, I climbed over a fence that was just behind a narrow passage that looks like a dark corner in the photograph.

I returned two days later and picked up the bike but as I was about to leave a worker from the cement company headed straight towards me. I didn't know what to expect. To my surprise there was no complaint about trespassing, no fear of industrial spying (as I had experienced in other countries), he simply asked, "did you forget your bike?". We had a very nice, long chat. I told him that I especially liked the harbour area and he informed me of future plans for it — the industry at the waterfront will be replaced by residential housing and hotels, like in other cities. When I asked about the metal construction in the image he explained that it was something like a tent, which is still being used for a specific task within the company's work. So in the end there was a positive side to being locked in as it led to a very nice conversation. If we look at the framework in a formal way the object of interest had become transparent and surprisingly the exit that I had to take to get out was right behind it.





During my stay a lot of improvisation was necessary to make things work (again). A hammer that I found in the guest studio had already undergone some repair by another artist some time before and was still functional (when handled with care). Due to its history and the casual repair attempt, the object had become somewhat iconic for me.

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The circumstances and conditions under which art is being made certainly do have a great impact on potential artworks, financial aspects included. During my stay I was lucky to have a good working situation in terms of time and space and had found ways to manage on a very tight budget too. I also started to take photographs of in-between situations within the work process. Things that normally wouldn't be visible or worth being documented. This was taken at the wood workshop.





I chose to build transport boxes from the wood that I had collected. The sizes of the boxes were determined according to the economic value of the pieces found.

The objects were stuck together (with indoor wood glue) without any mechanical connections, so not providing much long-term resilience against extraneous circumstances. In a way building them was somehow a transfer from the original idea of the "empty form" to a state that was more connected to my own situation and the issues related to it.

Now that I had figured out how the process would continue, I thought that, in the end, it is the mistakes that can be learned from most if there is room enough to let them happen.

The title "Planer i endring" (Changing Plans) that was chosen for the exhibition suggests that making changes is an ongoing process and not a one-time issue.





Curated by

I found a bunch of children's paintings in a waste container next to a church. Initially I had considered them as free canvas and planned to overpaint them, but I noticed that one was actually quite nice and somewhat different to the others. I didn't want to judge at first since they were just made out of joy (hopefully) and obviously by kids. Nevertheless I spotted my favourite immediately.

One could say that all of these paintings were not meant to be artworks per se — at least I am pretty sure there was no background of art history or theory on abstraction involved. What I liked about this particular one was the excitement and the fun that I assumed the author of it must have had during the process of making it.

If we would view the painting in another context, like in a museum or gallery, it would physically be the same, but it would be received differently as we would expect a professional to be the author.

Sometimes on the other hand, people not engaged in modern or contemporary art, when confronted with an abstract painting, can be heard saying: "a 5-year old could've done that". In this case it was true but generally it's not. So this is a bit inside out or flipped.

The ones that were not selected were placed on the painters' table that I used in the photograph and which was also meant to imply a professional background.









While walking I found a piece of copper piping that I had identified as a perfect walking stick or crook. The english word "crook" or "crooked" not only refers to a crutch or being bent — it also refers to a criminal. Since the art market is also a favoured method for money-laundering and financial speculation, I decided on the title "Arts and Crooks". Metaphorically speaking the object can serve as a support device in case of tiredness or meandering, and it can prolong a walk to a certain extent.

In the exhibition in Trondheim I showed a pre-version that I wasn't completely satisfied with, so I made a final attempt at it on the day before my departure. Arts and Crooks was later shown in a group exhibition at the Salzburger Kunstverein entitled "Concern".

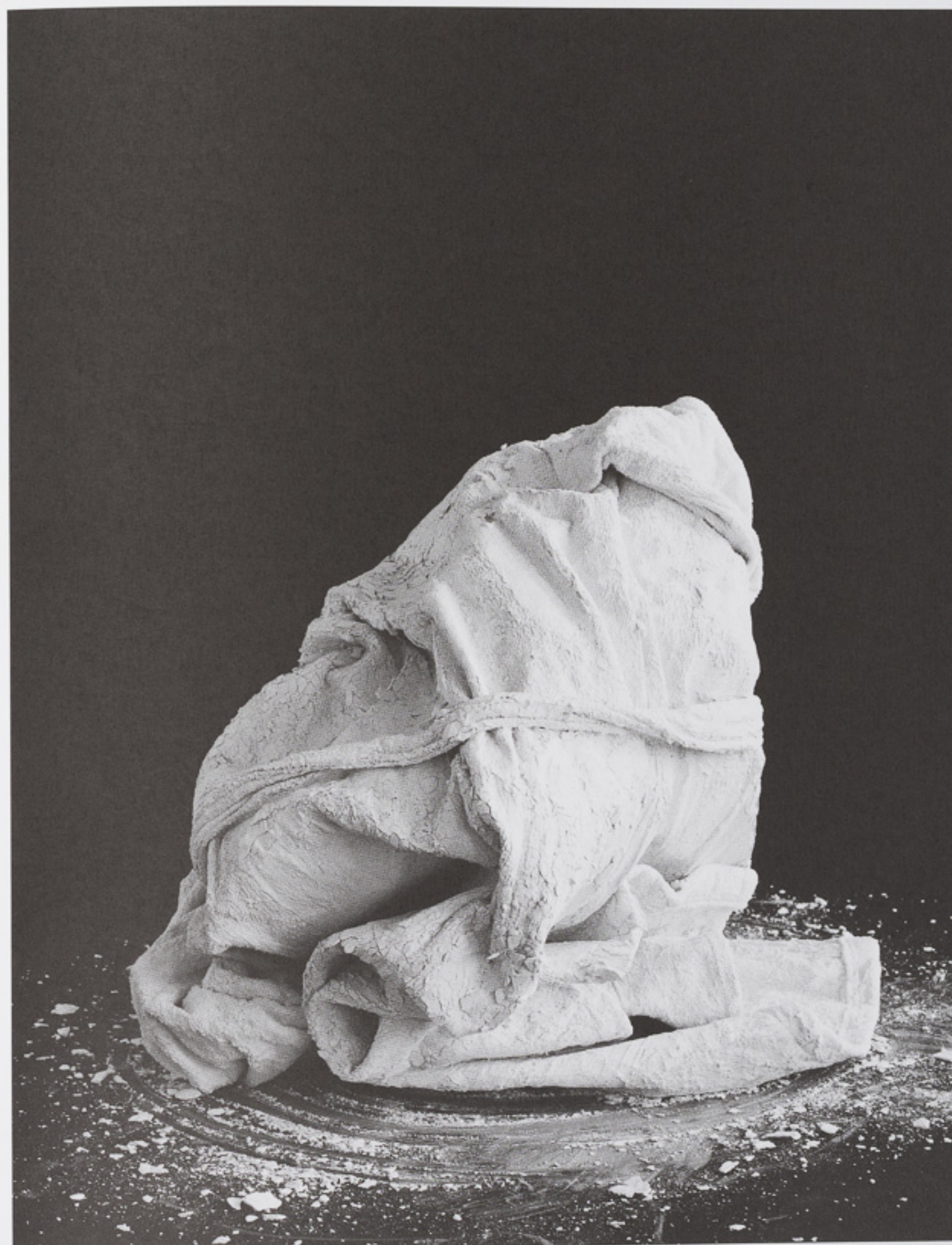




### Monument to Balzac

Now to get back to where it all started. The "dressing gown sculptures" had been sitting there in my studio for a month now. I was about to throw them out since I was no longer interested in them and considered them a failure. Of course to get rid of them I had to reduce their size to fit them into the waste container, so I started crushing them. To my surprise I liked the result. I started turning the object around, to have a look at it from different angles.

So, all of a sudden, there it was — my personal Monument to Balzac. Looking at it reminded me of the fact that Balzac was hiding from his creditors for most of his life and had found interesting strategies to deal with his debts. I remembered Rodin's Monument to Balzac was called a bag of plaster when it was first presented, and also a block of salt that had been left in the rain. The work was now done.





**Led Astray — Notes on Stefan Klampfer's exhibition *Planer i endring* at Babel Visningsrom for Kunst**

By Inger Marie Hahn Møller, MA in art history

When we enter the white cube of an exhibition space we only experience a tiny part of what happened. What we see seems definitive. What we normally don't see is the process, the dead ends, the failures and the changes in plans that the artist might have struggled with. In his exhibition *Planer i endring*, Austrian artist Stefan Klampfer makes a topsy-turvy on the concept of the art exhibition. Instead of presenting a determined set of truths his work is exposing the vulnerable aspects of the artistic process in an open dialogue that rather becomes a set of meta-reflections on the exhibition practice itself.

As his starting point Klampfer chose one of art history's biggest failures and successes, August Rodin's *Monument to Balzac* from 1898. Rodin was commissioned to make the monument and disappeared into 6 years of study and work. What started out as a portrait of a nude body ended up as an elimination of body, physicality and form in favour of a strong depiction of the writer's psychological persona. The body of the writer is wrapped up in a dressing gown that symbolically blurs the body into a pure focus on his mind or spirit. The sculpture was a scandal in its time but was later considered the first truly modern sculpture. What interests Klampfer is exactly this elimination of body and form — he is especially drawn towards some of Rodin's studies where the dressing gown literally stands as an empty shell — an empty sculpture open toward interpretation and signification.

During his process Klampfer is led astray. He is lost in a wilderness of dead ends and closed-off doors. Just as you might say Rodin was during his 6 years of working with the problematics of a body and a dressing gown. In the end, Klampfer appropriates the same artistic approach as Rodin. Just as Rodin eliminates the body of his subject in order to create a portrait of the personality and mind of Balzac, you could say that Klampfer is eliminating the "body" of the classic exhibition with his own set of "empty sculptures". Instead of an exhibition presenting the body or the materiality of sculpture, he aims at pointing out a number of considerations on the genealogy of the exhibition per se.

He lays bare his doubts, his questions, his failures — what is normally hidden underneath the smooth surface of the finished piece of art. As a mark of his failures he builds a series of empty crates or sculpture boxes out of found discarded wood. They are glued together — fragile and easily falling apart — they are a visualization of his own process and of the construction of art. This emblematic emptiness points towards the emptiness of the art institution and the concept of the exhibition space as a white cube. But in a more productive field the emptiness of the sculptures indicates an openness towards the spectator, a gap for dialogue and new insight.

*Planer i endring* — or "Changing Plans" is, on a pragmatic level, exactly what happened for Klampfer, as well as for many other artists during the history of art. What started out as a planned exhibition of Balzac's empty dressing gown ended up as a meta-exhibition exposing subtle considerations of what art and exhibition-making really are, and showing how art has a potential for being precisely a construction. Just like Rodin spent 6 years with physical processes exploring his subject, Klampfer has gone through a number of material experiments — building empty crates, observing his physical surroundings, documenting every sealed-off door he meets and registering the traces of the glue he uses — in order to end up with his conceptual meta-reflections. *Planer i endring* is a conglomerate letting the emptiness, the negations, the rejections and the changes in direction and plans be the content in itself. Being led astray might also be productive.





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Exhibition view at BABEL Visningsrom for Kunst, Trondheim



Images 3, 4, 5, 8 and 15 could be seen in a side room that was painted black (already from a former exhibition). There is no proper documentation of that. The three "Gluedrawings", as shown in images 9, 10 and 11, were shown in the room attached to the main room.







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When the exhibition was over I assembled the objects into a small group, in much the same way as one does for a (family) portrait. The size of each sculpture determined its position within the assembly for maximum visibility.





It was time to make a trip to the place that I had chosen as a final destination for the group of sculptures. The tallest and most fragile object — which had already been somewhat affected by the transportation in an open trailer and was therefore loosely reassembled at the destination — didn't last long due to winds.





The scenery was left as can be seen in the photograph. A local artist told me that when he passed by the place some weeks later everything had been destroyed by storms and probably also by people who enjoy smashing things.



During my stay I started to experiment with the use of glue. Ordinary indoor wood glue was applied in multiple layers directly from its container onto pieces of plywood. Parts of it were washed off again during the time it took to set. The process was later continued by adding some gouache colours, washing them off again, adding some more and repeating the steps several times. This way of working can be considered as an exploration that has no predetermined outcome. The result could, in a way, be seen as the documentation of its own making. I did a few of these, but only three made it into the exhibition.









When it was time to leave Trondheim I noticed that the physical object had lost something of its importance, and that, for me, the photographic documentation had taken on a greater significance. Consequently there was no need to take these works with me or to keep the originals. It was not too hard to find a suitable place to install them either.

What comes next? It's almost a year now since I was fortunate enough to make the worthwhile experiences documented in this publication. I am going back to a different part of Norway next month and I am curious as to how things will turn out this time.





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dimensions variable, silver-gelatine prints on baryta paper, 2015



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