

**Momentum Nordic Biennale  
Of Contemporary Art**

Galleri F 15, Moss, Norway

The world is burning, and the art world, as a mirroring microcosm, feels increasingly compelled to reflect the flames. It does so sometimes cynically, sometimes earnestly, often irrelevantly. Politics and ethics in art world discourse abound, and their weight frequently overrides the work itself. It can be exhausting to hear, to read, to watch – and to write about. Even the vaguely anti-political art world backlash is becoming a cliché in its own right.

Which is why the 13th edition of the Momentum Nordic Biennale in Moss, Norway, curated by Martin Somdegaard, was a much needed breath of fresh, briny air. It helps that the biennale is removed from the charged atmospheres of Venice and Kassel. But more important was the choice to focus on sound art – specifically the intersection of sound and ecology – encouraging visitors to engage more directly with the surrounding natural environments in which many of the works were embedded. While plenty of great works are shown inside the gallery, others are tucked into the woods, overlooking fields, or placed directly on the water amid the gently lapping tide. The context is, of course, the opposite of the white cube. To experience them is to pay special attention to the ecology in which they are embedded.

This is immediately apparent in Christian Skjødt Hasselstrøm's large-scale piece  $\mu$ ,

located on the lawn beside the gallery. Dozens of small copper domes emit a lively popcorn-popping sound when detecting secondary cosmic particles called muons. Children run slalom between the rows, dogs following, while the universe echoes. Some 50 metres away, on a field being tended by tractors, Maia Urstad's *In The Unlikely Event Of...* serves as a listening post overlooking the fjord. Two speakers play the sounds of air, rail and road travel, with safety announcements and emergency procedures juxtaposing with the surrounding calm. A more unsettling tension emerges in Jakob Kierkegaard's hidden multichannel installation in the woods, where the sound of a leaking roof dripping into an abandoned pool in Chernobyl resonates in consonance with the rainy afternoon.

Similarly consonant with the surrounding sonic environment is Jo Kazuhiro's *Stay With Others*, a listening post overlooking a wheat field. Binaural field recordings taken at the mossy plot and made during different seasons subtly blur composition and environment: sounds of living, breathing, rustling, dripping, hissing and tweeting ecology.

Inside the gallery, some of the best works revolve around ecologies of communication and circulation: AGF's speculative sounds of new species and poetry in dialogue with wavy files; Christian Marclay's brilliant 1995 video montage made entirely from telephone scenes in films; Arendse Krabbe's recording of Moss's sewer system, paired with a stark diagnosis of the Baltic Sea's deoxygenation collapse; and

Ralf Baecker's *The Collapse Of A Microcosm*, which translates light, visitor movement and its own recursive sonic system into shifting tones based on a tilted disc aligned with the Earth's axis, recording and redeploying them in layers.

Sonification can often veer into the didactic or clever. But here, much of the sensor based work is more a dialogue with the environment than a heavy-handed conversion of data into sound. That spirit carries into the opening performances. Two stand out for how they deal with voices – human and non-human – often ignored. *Svansang*, by Marie Højlund, Julian Toldahm Juhlin and Christian Albrechtsen, brilliantly explores the transition from childhood to adulthood using recordings of cracking voices from a Danish boys' church choir. A day later, in the same church, Louise Mackenzie's superb *Attractor* blends field recordings of local birds and insects – captured using microphone-equipped sound sculptures designed to attract wildlife – with simulations performed by the local Moss Ensemble Consensus choir. Eyes closed, it is nearly impossible to tell them apart.

With sound and ecology at its centre, Momentum avoids the pretentiousness and trend-hopping that plagues many art world events. Calling it refreshing doesn't quite do it justice. Jana Winderen's piece – a simple bench at the edge of the fjord – turns the environment itself into a readymade. An instruction on where and how to listen, but not on what to hear or why.

Alexander Samuels



Christian Skjødt Hasselstrøm,  $\mu$  (2022–25)



Ralf Baecker, *The Collapse Of A Microcosm* (2025)