

!

## Marte Eknæs

28 November 2020 - 30 January 2021

The exhibition ! centers around a series of bollards alongside maintenance tools, insulation materials and inflatables. Erected throughout the city, the uniform short posts act as a stoppage: to limit traffic or obstruct passage. Marte Eknæs' motley ensemble of bollards draws attention to their individual make-ups.

Marte Eknæs manipulates her materials to different degrees. Over time, she assembles different elements as much as she takes them apart. In the process, the material picks up information, the works become adaptable and take on many roles: activator, connector, occupant, vessel, communicator, body and material. The installation is in itself a system; the system is more than a collection of objects.

Like a pulled tooth, a displaced element refers to its place of origin and utility; there is a strong whiff of its intended purpose. The object's past life is evident in marks and traces. But while it retains its original meaning, it lacks the context to realize its function. Marte Eknæs stresses site-specificity's instability and in so doing, effectively, scrutinizes the idea of belonging. The author and art critic Kirsty Bell summed up this dynamic in conversation with the artist: "Despite the material specificity of your sculptures, they act like decoys that actually refer to other broader concerns or difficulties, which become visible through association," to which Eknæs added, "and also through exaggeration."

In 2008, Marte Eknæs wrote her first Temporary manifesto subtitled strategies for new work. Since then, the artist has repeatedly revised the text. The different versions outline the malleable morphology of her artistic ideas and trace their subsequent evolution. "Systems created will be corrupted." (2008), for instance, became "Systems established can be corrupted." (2009) and later turned into "The work is a system." (2010). Some ideas survived longer than others. What was originally "All the works will be reversible." (2008) underwent different stages: "The work is temporary. It can be changed, moved or removed when it has become an integral part of its environment." (2009), "The work creates situations that can be continuously transformed and translated, not awareness which is singular and shortsighted." (2012)—and, possibly, culminated in "Flexible ideas, like flexible materials will over time turn brittle." (2016).

While the manifesto initially served as a guideline to make new work, it later became a framework to ask critical questions around objecthood, politics and site-specificity. The manifesto's later subtitles Formlessness, Flexibility and isolation/absorption qualify the artist's ongoing commitment to reconfiguring ideas and objects. It reveals an artistic position that continuously throws itself into disbelief, examining the "unstable ground" on which contemporary life takes place. For an artist, who predominantly works in sculpture, it is no small feat to consistently let go of her objects' conceptual and sculptural stability.

Marte Eknæs couples the melancholy inherent to her insistence on impermanence with the optimism of immediate action. She molds, corrupts and displaces. The primary site of her ruminations is the urban landscape. Public space, as this artist sees it, is a stage for capitalism's advances: "Cities are occupied and become subject to the politics of occupation and with that, fundamentally, to a struggle for space."<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] Joseph Vogl interviewed by Michael Amstad & Marte Eknæs, 2017 <http://formsofflexibility.space/interview-with-joseph-vogl/>