

Toril Johannessen
The Festival Exhibition 2024
Deterrence and Reassurance
23. mai — 11. august 2024

Bergen Kunsthall is proud to present the Festival Exhibition 2024 by Toril Johannessen. The Festival Exhibition is considered the most important solo presentation for a Norwegian artist in the country and has been shown each summer since 1953, in parallel to the Bergen International Festival. Toril Johannessen presents a new installation across the four main galleries of Bergen Kunsthall, including a new large-scale woven carpet made from military textiles.

Information as material is central in many of Johannessen's projects, including the development of her own methods and datasets that form the basis for works. Past works have made links between historical contexts and recent technological developments, looking at how historical factors interact and shape how we perceive and create reality. Her approach highlights the relationship between art, knowledge production and technology, giving visibility to social structures and events that otherwise remain hidden or publicly inaccessible.

The exhibition at Bergen Kunsthall is based on the artist's current interest in military presence and the geopolitical situation in the High North. The conceptual framework for the exhibition is formed by a dual strategic foreign policy concept, deterrence and reassurance, that has been at the core of Norwegian security policies, with a border to Russia, previously the Soviet Union. With Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014 and the war against Ukraine starting in 2022, the security landscape has changed significantly, also in Norway. How do these changes affect everyday life, experiences of security and unrest, and – quite concretely – local communities, landscapes, and nature? How has foreign policy as reassurance intervened in civilian life, including cultural exchange? Johannessen's project documents and visualises the presence of military in the landscape and the social imaginary, which seemingly belonged to the past, but has, in fact, never disappeared.

The exhibition includes, amongst other works, an extensive series of silk-screen prints, titled *Presence*, for which a first part was created for the Evenes Air Station, commissioned by KORO, Norway's national agency for public art. *Presence* shows a series of maps detailing excerpts of the High North – an area that is not geographically defined, but serves as a concept in Norwegian foreign policy to describe international relations in the northern border areas. The series highlights ways in which political relations and military presence manifest themselves as traces in language and landscape. Each work in the series has its own theme and method, from personal observations to the collection of colloquial place names hinting at military presence and mappings of linguistic diversity.

The exhibition also presents documentation of a second – unrealized – public artwork, which was intended for a memorial for prisoners of war in Northern Norway. A discursive programme of

talks and conversations, in parts taking place within the exhibition, will explore and expand on the strands that run through the projects, as a way to engage with these political themes. A book with texts and materials will be published after the exhibition.

Gallery 2

This room is a transitional space, the entrance to the exhibition. Visitors are invited to take off their shoes and leave their coats before entering Gallery 1, which contains a large-scale floor installation. Besides these practicalities, the situation also changes the tone of the experience, from a public setting to a more personal encounter, similar to entering a private home. The galleries are painted in a green colour that alludes both to military and natural contexts, without symbolising anything specific. The change of colour highlights the effect that different colours have on the atmosphere and the reading of information.

A new series of stencil prints, titled *Reliability Diagrams*, is presented on the back wall, using information from military maps of various countries. The prints are based on so-called reliability diagrams from a series of maps known as Joint Operations Graphics (JOGs), produced to assist navigation in collaborative military operations by the US, NATO member countries and their allies. The reliability diagrams in the JOGs outline the accuracy of the information represented on the map and are as such meta-maps, typically in the form of geometrical line diagrams indicating different levels of precision for the geographic areas covered.

Maps are usually trusted as representations of geographic information; they seem to show the world as it is. But they also produce reality, they are never neutral; they are powerful tools that influence our perception and decision-making, showing some areas as centres and others as margins, highlighting or omitting details. On the one hand, maps convey complex information in an understandable way, which can include everything from topography to political boundaries. They can also reinforce territorial claims, shape national identities, and contribute to decisions from urban planning to emergency relief. The reliability diagrams highlight this aspect of instability, which in Johannessen's prints is transformed into seemingly abstract images that invite us to speculate on the fabrication and political reality of borders. The colours for the prints are chosen from various systems of mapmaking, including print and contemporary digital maps, in which colour gives contrast and recognisability.

The diagrams used by Johannessen are taken from charts of territories outside or on the borders of NATO member states, but are mapped by NATO-allies. Examples of maps used for the series include Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Bosnia, Serbia, Libya, Macedonia and Somalia, and in Kirkenes, Norway, on the border with Russia and Finland.

→ Please take your shoes off before entering Gallery 1. The gallery can be accessed by wheelchair. Please contact our staff for other accessibility questions.

Gallery 1

The floor of Gallery 1 is almost entirely covered by a series of large textile pieces, woven by the artist and

her team from old military clothing and textiles, such as tents and sleeping bags. Audiences are invited to walk and sit down on the works to discover details, labels, military badges, buttons or other remnants of their initial purpose.

The carpets are woven in a technique common in the Nordic countries, usually utilising old clothing as a way of recycling and reusing textiles. So-called rag rugs (filleryer) have been made since the Middle Ages and became increasingly popular since 1700, woven from linen and cotton rags with a warp of fishnet thread or linen yarn and used to retain heat or as undersheets. Since the interwar years, filleryer gained a new popularity to utilise leftover materials, and of creating soft colourful carpets that also trace family memories. Rag rugs became internationally known through the Swedish furniture chain Ikea who featured these distinctively striped carpets.

The materials used for the carpets in the exhibition were collected by Johannessen and include diverse garments, woollen underwear, trousers, t-shirts and other materials. These were cut into strips and hand-woven into panels of cloth, in total 328 meters long. In contrast to the classical striped rag rugs (filleryer), most of the carpets are monochrome and they change colour only when the resource of a specific material was finished, to highlight the specific materiality of these textiles in a new form. Uniforms are an important feature of the military – signifying authority and communicating rank and affiliation. Woven into carpets, the textiles retain some of this significance – we still recognise the colours and some visual elements, but they are now embedded in the space and we might only notice these elements when we look closely. In a way, this resembles our perception of the military in contemporary society, which is more discreet, while it is one of the largest state expenses and more powerful than ever. The carpets can be also seen as a result of the extensive production of the military industries and the waste they create. Making practical use of military surplus materials was also a common way of dealing with sparse resources in the post-war years. This influenced fashion trends, such as the popularity of military parkas in mod culture.

→ Gallery 1 is used for selected events during the exhibition duration, using the carpets as a platform for gathering.

Presented on one of the long walls of Gallery 1 is a series of five large-scale maps, titled *Stedsnavn på folkemunne med tilknytning til militær aktivitet* (Colloquial place names linked to military activity). The series presents a collection of nicknames for localities such as buildings, mountains, places, waters or roads, that indicate historical as well as contemporary use by armed forces, and thus tell a story of military presence across Norway. Where the textiles visualise a military language through a folk craft, the vernacular and informal language in the maps show an interest in the traces that the presence of the military has left and how it is

remembered and materialised in civil society. Listing names whose origin ranges from the Second World War to the present day, the series gives a sharp picture of long-lasting impact.

A place name that marked a starting point for the project is "NATO-fjellet" (NATO mountain), which is a small peak on Stø in Øksnes, close to Johannessen's hometown, referring to the coastal radar on top of the hill. Other hills, in Honningsvåg for example, have this name for different reasons, in this case through an Air Force station connected to NATO's NADGE system. Another example is "Kaninstasjonen" (Rabbit station), the Armed Forces Experimental Station in Vadsø in Finnmark county. This facility has historically been used for testing and evaluating military equipment and technology, especially for conditions in the Arctic. The nickname has several explanations, most realistically connected to the expression "forsøkskanin" ("research rabbit" equivalent to the expression "Guinea pig" in English), a nod to the testing activities. Many unofficial place names, such as "Fangeleiren", "Radiohula", "Peilaren" and "Blodvegen", refer to activities during the Second World War, and also frequently indicate dark chapters, such as the "Russergrava", the Soviet War Cemetery in the northern part of Oppdal town centre, where 104 Soviet prisoners of war from the prison camp at Furuly are buried.

Another category of place names in the maps refer to wars and conflicts in other parts of the world. Names such as "Golanhøyden" and "Korea", for instance, can be found across the country, as well as "Burmavegen" which is also an official name for roads in several places.

Gallery 3

Located in the centre of Gallery 3, a large table with a concrete top bears a display of information about an unrealised memorial project for the Bjørnelva Prison Camp on Saltfjellet between Bodø and Mo i Rana in Nordland. In addition to photographs, documents and text on the table, the installation titled *The Seedlings*. *Extracts from an unrealized memorial site project*, also contains a small field of Salix plants, placed under nourishing light to keep them alive indoors.

The Bjørnelva prison camp was part of a system of forced labour during the Second World War, installed by the German forces to facilitate major infrastructural projects such as the Nordland Railway (Nordlandsbanen) and the Polar Railway (Polarbanen), but also airports, roads, military fortification and industrial buildings that built on the strategic importance of the High North and its proximity to the Soviet border. Between 1943 and 1945, 57 work camps were set up in Nordland alone with approximately 26,000 prisoners of war working under conditions akin to slavery, and of whom more than 2,000 died as a result of mistreatment, malnutrition and exhaustion. Across the whole of Norway, 100,000 prisoners of war, mostly from the Soviet Union (and almost half of these from Ukraine) were interned, with approximately 13,700 dying in the camps. The Bjørnelva prison camp was one of the worst, with a third of the approximately 500 prisoners dying in the camp.

After the end of the war, surviving prisoners at Bjørnelva set up a memorial for their dead comrades before leaving, using materials from the camp for a simple structure with an inscription. Similar memorials were also created for many other prison camps. During

the 1950s, in the climate of the Cold War, many of these memorials were neglected or destroyed, despite the efforts of local populations and Norwegian institutions, culminating in the "Operation Asphalt" in 1951, when mass graves of the remains of camp inhabitants were moved by the Norwegian state to a common Soviet prisoner of war cemetery on the island of Tjøtta on the Helgeland coast. In retrospect often criticised, this removal of memorials was caused on the one hand by a fear of espionage, giving citizens of the Soviet Union as little as possible access to strategically important sites in Norway. It was also connected to a shift in the national narrative of the war, specifically on the status of victims and the fact that the war contributed significantly to the development of the Norwegian infrastructure and thus in the long term helped to modernise Norway. In the light of the post-war years, the Soviet prisoners of war were no longer considered victims of the Nazis, but victims of Stalinism.

Initiatives such as the creation of memorials can illuminate the significant intersection between art and diplomacy. War memorials serve not only as monuments to honour the fallen, but also as symbols of remembrance and reconciliation. Decisions about which events to commemorate, whose sacrifices to honour, and how to portray them reflect the perspectives and priorities of the nations involved. In this way, the art of commemoration becomes intertwined with diplomacy, shaping perceptions of history, identity, and relationships between people and countries. By engaging in collaborative efforts to establish memorials and negotiate their significance, one navigates the delicate balance of acknowledging past grievances, while working towards a mutual understanding and story for future generations. The presence or absence of certain memorials can itself become a point of conflict, sparking debates over whose stories are being told – and how – and whose voices are being silenced. Thus, the politics of remembering underscores the complex interplay between memory, identity, and power in the construction of collective historical consciousness through memorials.

With the changing climate of international relations since the late 1980s, Russia and Norway started collaborating on cultural heritage conservation. In 1988, the Soviet Union and Norway formalised cooperation on environmental protection in the northern regions, later expanding to include cultural heritage conservation in 1995. In 2016, the Directorate of cultural heritage initiated "Prosjekt Nordlandsbanen: Soviet forced labourers on the Polar-railroad during WWII" a project with the intention of shedding light on the story of war captivity and forced labour during the Second World War, and examining the fate of fallen soldiers and the preservation of their memory. In 2020 Toril Johannessen was contacted by curator Hilde Methi for one of these projects, an initiative by Riksantikvaren, Nordland Fylkeskommune and Narviksenteret to commemorate the Bjørnelva Prison Camp. For the memorial, planned in collaboration with architect Tatjana Gorbachewskaja, Johannessen suggested planting edible, nourishing plants. As a first step, seedlings were collected at the memorial site of Salix, a plant that plays an important role in ecosystems in tundra areas and along rivers and waterways. Salix is vital in the alpine ecosystem, making it possible for other plants and species to survive. The project never materialised due to the break in

collaboration with Russia after their invasion of Ukraine. The *Salix* seedlings collected for the project remained at a plant nursery, and a part has now been brought to Bergen for the exhibition.

The information presented on the table and the remaining *Salix* plants serve as a way to approach this long-standing history, starting from the trauma of the Second World War to contemporary shifts in international policies. Several days after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Russia was suspended from Barentssamarbeidet (Barents Cooperation), originally established in 1993 as a formalised collaboration between Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Norway, with the overarching goal of ensuring peace and stability in the northern regions. In September 2023, Russia withdrew from the cooperation.

At first glance, the series of five silkscreened maps with watercolour painting and handwriting, displayed on the wall of Gallery 3, are hard to identify. The series *Stedfesting av Nordområdene* (Locating the High North) takes the form of a circumpolar map of the Arctic and is an attempt to trace how the geographical delineation of the High North has changed over time. The High North in the Norwegian context is not a geographically defined place, but a concept in Norwegian foreign policy that deals with international relations in the northern border areas. The series traces these definitions within policy documents, social science publications and public debate. Each map represents a decade, from 1970 until 2020. Geographically, the High North refers to the vast and strategically significant Arctic region encompassing the northern territories of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Canada, Greenland and Iceland. The Arctic is often characterised by its extreme climate, sparse population, and rich natural resources, including oil, gas, and minerals. Additionally, it holds substantial strategic importance due to the vulnerability of borders in the North, as well as its potential for shipping routes, fisheries, and as a site for scientific research.

Sensorforbudsområder & artsobservasjoner (Sensor Prohibition Areas & Species Observations) depicts the landscape around the Evenes Air Base, for which some of the prints in the exhibition were initially produced. It presents this specific military site and points to the paradoxes of being a military space which is highly controlled but also rich in ecological diversity. The print maps the restricted zones for aerial filming and photography, demarcating access restrictions alongside dots representing species observations within the area. These observations encompass a diverse range of wildlife, including birds, insects, other animals, and plants.

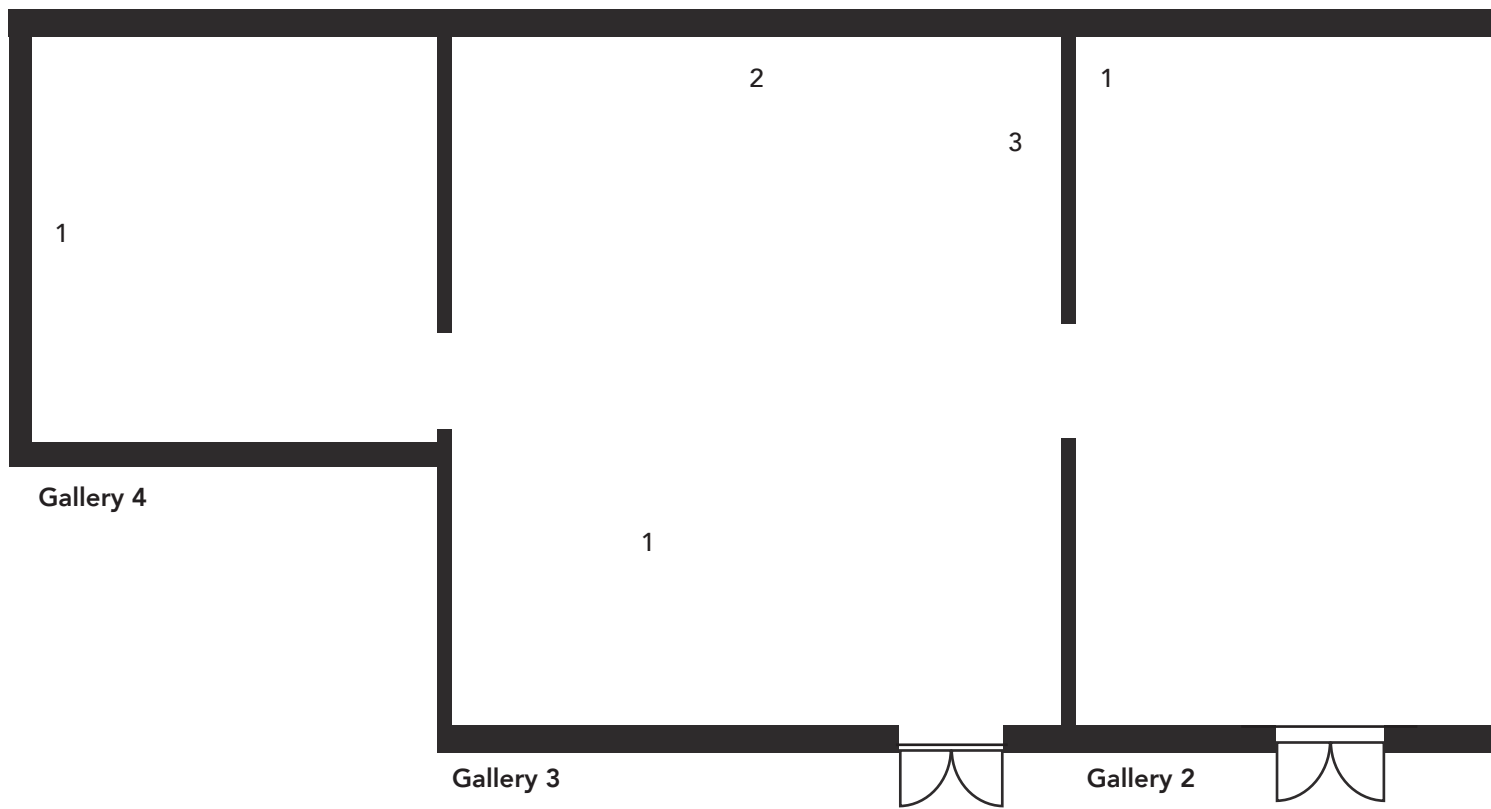
Gallery 4

Two works are on display in Gallery 4. The prints titled *JEG! (I!)* and *VI! (WE!)* are based on a map of Nordkalotten, a region geographically and politically defined to encompass the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and sometimes including the Kola Peninsula in Russia. This area also includes parts of Sápmi, the traditional homeland of the Indigenous Sámi peoples. The term Sápmi transcends conventional border discourse due to its transnational nature. When getting closer to the works one sees that the maps are packed with information. Johannessen's intricate

mapping of linguistic diversity in the region, as evidenced by the various ways of expressing the pronouns "I" and "we" in different languages and dialects, highlights how language usage extends beyond national borders and the diversity of different cultures that live together. For instance, multiple Finnish languages are spoken throughout the entire region, showcasing the rich linguistic tapestry that unites diverse communities across Nordkalotten.

Toril Johannessen

Johannessen grew up in Harstad, studied at the Bergen Academy of Art and Design and currently lives and works in Bergen. Internationally recognised for her work, Johannessen has shown in national and international exhibitions, including documenta 13 (2012) in Kassel, Munchmuseet on the Move (2018) and the Museum of Contemporary Art (2016), both in Oslo, as well as public art projects for the Bergen City Hall (2022) and the air station in Evenes (2023).



Gallery 2

1
Reliability Diagrams, 2024
 Stencil print
 31 x 41 cm (framed)
 Ed. 1/5 + AP
 Courtesy of the artist and OSL Contemporary

JOG 1501 Air NI42-4
JOG 1501 Air ND 38-14
JOG 1501 Air NC 38-7
JOG 1501 Air NL33-9
JOG 1501 Air NK 34-6
JOG 1501 Air NK 34-3
JOG 1501 Air NE 34-4
JOG 1501 Air NI 42-16
JOG 1501 Air NR 35, 36-38

Gallery 1

2
Deterrence and Reassurance, 2024
 18 rag rugs woven from military textiles. Cotton warp with tents, uniform pants, camouflage fabrics, sleeping bags, t-shirts, long underwear, field shirts, overalls, scarfs, thermal pants, personal clothings
 Variable dimensions
 Courtesy of the artist and OSL Contemporary

3
Colloquial place names linked to military activity, 2022/2024
 Silkscreen print with handwriting
 147 x 117,4 cm (framed)

Nord-Norge, 2022
 Ed 3/3 + AP
 Courtesy of the artist, KORO and OSL Contemporary

Vestlandet, 2024
 Ed 1/3 + AP
 Courtesy of the artist and OSL Contemporary

Trøndelag, 2024
 Ed 1/3 + AP
 Courtesy of the artist and OSL Contemporary

Østlandet, 2024
 Ed 1/3 + AP
 Courtesy of the artist and OSL Contemporary

Sørlandet, 2024
 Ed 1/3 + AP
 Courtesy of the artist and OSL Contemporary

1

2

Gallery 1



Gallery 3

1
The Seedlings. Extracts from an unrealized memorial site project, 2024

Willow seedlings from Bjørnelva, documents, photographs, table, plant lights

Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist

2
Locating the High North 1–5, 2023
Silkscreen print, watercolor painting, handwriting

73 x 57 cm (framed)
Ed. 1/3 + AP

Courtesy of the artist and OSL Contemporary

3
Sensor Prohibition Areas & species observations, 2023

Silkscreen print
67 x 82 cm (framed)
Ed. 2/3 + AP

Courtesy of the artist, KORO and OSL Contemporary

Gallery 4

1
II, 2022-2023
Silkscreen print with stamps
102,6 x 147,4 cm (framed)
Ed. 3/3 + AP

WE!, 2022-2023
Silkscreen print with stamps
102,6 x 147,4 cm (framed)
Ed. 3/3 + AP
Courtesy of the artist, KORO and OSL Contemporary

Events

Plattform

Toril Johannessen
Artist talk
Sat 25 May 14:00
Upstairs

Cross-border Cooperation

Pikene på Broen
Talk
Thu 30 May 18:00
Gallery I

Plattform

Radical Mapping:
A practice between art, science
and politics
Philippe Rekacewicz
Talk
Sat 8 Jun 14:00
Upstairs

Å møte seg selv i døra

Storytelling
Thu 8 Aug 18:00
In cooperation with Det
Vestnorske Teateret and Bergen
Bergerscene

Plattform

Aileen Aseron Espiritu:
Cultural Diplomacy —
Norwegian-Russian relations in
the High North
Talk
Sat 10 Aug 14:00
Upstairs

Omvisninger

Every Sunday
13:00 Tour and workshop for
families
14:00 Tour

Credits

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