

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Autumn 2019

In a mining village in Southern Norway, Knaben, the extraction of the metal Molybdenum has been the core activity since 1885. During World War I and World War II the demand for Molybdenum spiked; it was used both in armor plating and in the manufacture of heavy artillery. A constellation of villages and communities was growing around the twenty-one mines present in the area with their rising time during the two wars and disappeared shortly after. Shaped by the Molybdenum's fluctuations in value, Knaben's geography and geology was continually changing, and given the importance of the value of the metal itself, was in constant mutability. For hundreds of years, Norwegian mining villages and communities have risen and disappeared, in line with the rise and fall of the global value of local non-renewable natural resources.

This is Marianne Bjørnmyr starting point for her project, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. The work questions geography, landscape, and human societies. It comes as no surprise that *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* ventures into diverse landscapes of varying geopolitical significance. The artist has long been fascinated by the unseen, the subject matter that doesn't easily present itself to the camera. In contrast to the urge to capture a dramatic moment, Bjørnmyr's work attempts to photograph the invisible, to evoke a sense of the cycles of things and reflect upon the longer term reverberations of war and conflict minerals worldwide.

In the vision of this sort of a landscape awakening, Bjørnmyr's objects, made of marble, together with photographic prints, taken in a marble quarry, address issues such as the changeability of materials nature and value and human society. On looking more closely, an original Molybdenum mirror is placed in a marble frame; solid Molybdenum mirrors are simply most durable and longest lasting laser mirrors used in contemporary warfare for laser guns.

Other objects on display are five exact replicas of Norwegian coins from WW2 created with marble dust and resin. The coins were forced to be made of iron and brass during the war due to the restrictions in use of more valuable metals like copper. The coin replicas and the marble photographs act as a reminder of the paradox between use and value of different non-renewable materials.

Through *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, the artist is asking questions on the significance of the value of the different metals and minerals, and the effect that it has on the development of communities. In the light of the recent finding, the topic is particularly relevant as extreme amounts of the mineral Beryllium have been discovered in North Norway, a mineral widely used in modern warfare through infrared binoculars, supersonic aircrafts and nuclear weapons. Once again, communities in the area might face exposure to the paradox of wealth versus destruction. The boundary between us as human, and nature as other, dissolves. Being in these areas for that matter—one becomes aware of how vulnerable this

circumpolar geography is to climate change and industrial extraction of its natural resources. In *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* this invitation to connect with nature in a deeper, more sensitive way feels particularly urgent.

Few decades ago, artists found aesthetics of geology particularly fascinating for the challenge of its double invisibility: on one side, the idea to 'deep time' threatened the three classical temporal dimensions within which humans arrange life experience: past, present and future; on the other hand, the withdrawal of visibility made it a complex object to imagine and visualize. With its unyielding remoteness and inert temporality, geology has become today a model for the material conditions of our contemporary life.

Throughout history, geological conditions have shaped and influenced human communities, where the value and supply of minerals, metals, fossil fuels and favorable land conditions has driven society's development. Marianne Bjørnmyr's use of photography as documentation of this experience is a necessary concretisation of the specific experience even though the photographs and the objects constitute more a new language than a proof of reality, a tool to re-frame and resist capitalist exploitation of nature.

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